A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF NOVICE SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS'

EXPERIENCES UTILIZING JOB-RELATED SUPPORTS

by

Emily Ann Jones

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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Abstract

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore novice special education teachers' experiences identifying and utilizing job-related support sources. 12 novice special education teachers at a high school in the southeastern United States participated in this study. The theory guiding this study was the job characteristics theory developed by Richard Hackman and Greg Oldham. It is commonly used as a framework to study how job satisfaction and outcomes are affected by five core job characteristics: autonomy, feedback, skill variety, task significance, and task identity. The central research question for this study aimed at how novice special education teachers describe their experiences of utilizing job-related supports during their first three years of teaching. Data was collected through a combination of semi-structured interview sessions, focus groups, and physical artifacts. The data were analyzed using transcendental phenomenological data analysis, and four themes emerged: managing behaviors in the classroom, logistical barriers to support, collaboration in the workplace, and building connections with students. The findings revealed how novice special education teachers utilize job-related supports through collaboration in the workplace and building relationships with students. Findings also correlated to struggles managing behaviors in the classroom due to the implications from COVID-19. Further research is needed regarding (a) promoting the social-emotional learning of students and teachers, (b) effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on novice special education teachers utilizing support, and (c) enhancing professional development for novice special education teachers. The recommendations provided in this study might be used by school leaders to make informed decisions to retain special educators.

Keywords: retention, novice, supports, special education, teachers

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List of Abbreviations

Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19)

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

Individualized Education Plan (IEP)

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

Job Characteristics Theory (JCT)

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

Special Education Teacher (SET)

United States Department of Education (USDOE)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

In the United States, it is estimated that almost 50% of special education teachers (SETs) leave the profession within the first five years of their careers (Billingsley et al., 2020; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Hester et al., 2020; U.S. Department of Education, 2021). After conducting a systematic review, there was found to be a gap in the literature on identifying and utilizing job-related supports needed to foster special education teacher (SET) retention among novice teachers. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experiences identifying and utilizing job-related supports for novice SETs at a high school in the southeastern United States. This study allowed novice SETs to voice their subjective experiences on utilizing support in the classroom. This chapter begins with the background information, which probed into the history of federal and state regulations that have developed throughout the past fifty years and have shaped the working conditions of SETs. Next, the theoretical framework and philosophical assumptions guiding this work are discussed and the rationale for the research design is described. A statement of the problem grounded in the literature is detailed, and a clear purpose statement directing the study is included. Finally, the research questions are reviewed, grounded in Hackman and Oldham's Job Characteristics theory, and the definition of relevant key terms are identified.

Background

Retaining high-quality SETs is a long-standing policy issue and concern for schools and school districts throughout the country (Vagi et al., 2019). Teacher attrition is a barrier that negatively impacts student academic outcomes by disrupting instructional cohesion and poses a significant challenge to implementing effective educational programs (Gilmour & Wehby, 2020).

Recent research indicates that close to 90% of teacher shortages nationally result from the relatively high teacher attrition rate (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Research on teacher attrition in the United States shows many plausible reasons for the phenomenon's existence, including historical, social, and theoretical reasons (Newberry & Allsop, 2017).

Historical Context

For years, the federal government was absent from the nation's education system, deferring much of the responsibility for schooling to various state and local governments (Casalaspi, 2017). Students with disabilities were often segregated from their non-disabled peers until a wave of activism during the civil rights movement promoted equal access to education for students with disabilities. "The federal government established a set of minimum standards that must be followed by states and local education agencies regarding the education of handicapped children" (Zettel & Ballard, 1979, p. 2). The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), enacted in 1965 shows a commitment to equal opportunity for all students (Casalaspi, 2017). ESEA was the beginning of establishing professional requirements for SETs and paved the way for educational reform at the state and federal levels for years to come. In November of 1975, the Congress of the United States passed the Education for all Handicapped Children Act (PL 94-142), which "mandated that all school-aged, handicapped children in the United States were to have available to them a free, appropriate public education" (Zettel & Ballard, 1979, p. 1).

Evolving work contexts and increasing demands on SETs have emerged since the passage of PL 94-142 (Billingsley et al., 2020). Additional standards-based and state-level educational reforms have led to increased job demands and mounting pressures for SETs to meet an increasingly diverse student population (Billingsley et al., 2020). The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) enacted in 2002 mandated that "schools make adequate yearly progress in reading

and mathematics on state tests in order to continue to receive federal funding" (Powell et al., 2009, p. 2). The NCLB act was designed to hold schools accountable for student achievement regardless of disability or income levels. Additionally, teachers were required to be highly qualified in the subject areas they taught, which mandated additional certification and demonstration of subject-matter competency.

Changes in educational accountability policies at the federal and state level contribute to increased stress and adverse outcomes for teachers (Ryan et al., 2017). In 2015, congress passed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and replace NCLB. The ESSA reversed the federal role in education and returned nearly complete discretion to the states (Black, 2017). As a result, mandates from the state and the federal government have placed significant stress on teachers, particularly SETs.

In addition to federal reforms, a host of accountability reforms have changed the nature of teachers' working conditions and attrition (Billignsley et al., 2020). New initiatives from teacher training programs and administrator standpoints constitute what "good teaching" is and plagues the new era of teacher performance assessment and accountability reforms (Carter & Lochte, 2017). In the current educational climate, the stakes for teachers have significantly increased, inducing adverse outcomes and increased stress for teachers (Ryan et al., 2017).

Social Context

The field of special education at large has long been plagued by persistent shortages of teachers, in large part due to high attrition rates for beginning special educators (Ondrasek et al., 2020). The number of SETs nationally has dropped by more than 17% over the past decade, and almost one-half of new SETs leave the profession after three years in the field (Billingsley et al., 2020; Harmsen et al., 2018; Hester et al., 2020; Samuels & Harwin, 2018). These rates reflect

many variables new teachers face in adjusting to life on their own in the classroom. Special education teacher job satisfaction has various essential and far-reaching implications (Toropova et al., 2021). Research suggests that students are more likely to struggle socially, behaviorally, and emotionally and are less likely to meet their individualized education program (IEP) goals if they work with professionals who are not satisfied with their jobs (Garwood et al., 2018). According to data from the U.S. Department of Education (2017), the state of Georgia had continuous teacher shortages across all exceptionality areas from the school year 2018-2019 until 2020-2021. Attrition plays a major role in the persistent teacher shortage problem in the field of special education (Cancio et al., 2018; Hagaman & Casey, 2017).

According to the Alliance for Excellent Education (2014), teacher attrition costs the United States $2.2 billion annually. When a SET leaves the field, states and school districts are tasked with replacing that teacher with a qualified teacher. In most cases, this process requires time, money, and personnel to train or mentor the replacement. Research presented by Ryan et al. (2017) estimated the cost of a teacher leaving to be as high as $17,862 per teacher. In addition to fiscal costs, special education teacher attrition has academic consequences for students and districts. Repeated research suggests that staffing "high need" areas such as special education is exacerbated in urban schools and schools that serve high proportions of low-income students or students with behavior problems (Billingsley et al., 2020; Conley & You, 2017; Feng & Sass, 2018; Ryan et al., 2017). With so much pressure riding on the stakes of standardized testing, teachers typically flock to schools with high achievement scores (Feng & Sass, 2018).

Theoretical Context

In workplace psychology, job satisfaction is one of the most researched variables (Hassard et al., 2018). The literature presents multiple theories of job satisfaction, which have

been linked to theories explaining human motivation such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory, Herzberg's motivator-hygiene theory, and the job characteristics theory by Hackman and Oldham (Oldham, 2013). In addition, the quality of work-life is a theory that presents itself in multiple studies regarding teacher attrition (Sharplin et al., 2011). After reviewing the literature, multiple theories surfaced to inform the research design, data collection, and analysis in SET retention and job satisfaction. The majority of the theories present in the research field involve social support for teachers or job/workplace satisfaction. For these reasons, the job characteristics theory will be used to frame this study to describe novice SET's experiences in utilizing supports to promote teacher satisfaction and increase retention.

Problem Statement

The problem is that special education teacher attrition rates are increasing across the country, which negatively affects students with disabilities (Bettini et al., 2020; Fowler et al., 2019; Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Gilmour & Wehby, 2020; Newberry & Allsop, 2017). Data from Garcia and Weiss (2019) found that the share of schools trying to fill a vacant SET position in the United States tripled from the 2011-2012 to the 2015-2016 school year. In addition, data presented by the U.S. Department of Education (2021) indicated the state of Georgia reported consecutive SET shortages in all grades, pre-k-12, from the 2018-2021 school years. Furthermore, COVID-19 is likely to exacerbate the teacher shortage as teachers leave the profession altogether and others retire early (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). A dwindling pool of applicants paired with trying to find novice, credentialed teachers manifest in schools in many ways (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). Filling hard to staff special education positions represents the tip of the iceberg in the education system today.

A vast majority of the literature on attrition of SETs identifies stress, burnout, student misbehaviors, case workloads, and paperwork to be the main reasons for teachers deciding to leave the field (Bettini et al. 2018; Fitchett et al., 2018; Hester et al., 2020; Langher et al., 2017; Robinson et al., 2019). These findings suggest that the efforts addressing teacher attrition and retention must consider the shrinking pipeline of new potential teachers and teaching as a profession. The current literature contains limited data on the supports that attribute to the success and retention of novice SETs. Research suggests that teachers with more robust preparation, support, and experience promote more substantial student achievement gains than their less experienced peers (Billingsley et al., 2020; Ryan et al., 2017; Sweigart & Collins, 2017). This qualitative study aimed to gain insight into what factors contribute to the success and retention of novice SETs during their first three years of teaching.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experiences identifying and utilizing job-related supports for novice special education teachers at a high school in the southeastern United States. Job-related supports are generally defined as actions or activities that employers provide to assist employees with performing their jobs and job-related functions. In addition, novice teachers were considered as those having 0-3 years of teaching experience.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study was vital to the field of special education because it gathered information from lived experiences of SETs about their experiences as novice SETs and utilizing supports intended to retain novice teachers. This study adds to the field by identifying what job-related supports are working and what could be done to help retain novice SETs and promote retention for years to come.

Practical Significance

Identifying job-related support sources that influence novice SETs to remain in the field is crucial to resolving the problem of special education teacher attrition. Reduced student success is associated with teacher shortages, limiting students' access to highly qualified teachers (Reichardt et al., 2020). Garcia and Wiess (2019) mentioned that new teachers entering the profession do not have the same qualifications their peers in the past had due to changes in teacher certification requirements. Billingsley et al. (2020) found that SETs with more robust experience and preparation promote more substantial student achievement gains. Newberry and Allsop (2017) mention that "teacher attrition and turnover creates an environment in which it is difficult to foster learning" (p. 3). In addition, it may also impact the ability to develop solid connections or ties with teachers, students, or administrators (Newberry & Allsop, 2017).

Theoretical Significance

The researcher used the job characteristics framework to highlight the personal, lived experiences of novice SETs. The JCT has been applied to various settings and occupations in the workplace. The JCT explains how the characteristics of the jobs people perform affect their work behavior and attitudes (Oldham, 2013). The JCT encompasses five work characteristics linked with favorable work outcomes: skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback from the job (Hackman & Oldham, 1975). Subsequently, teacher job satisfaction contributes to well-being, as satisfied teachers are less susceptible to stress and burnout (Harmsen et al., 2018; Toropova et al., 2021). The researcher added to the theory by examining the lived experiences of novice SETs to see how their job satisfaction correlated with different job characteristics and utilizing job-related supports.

Empirical Significance

During the past two decades, substantial empirical research has focused on determining what characteristics of teachers contribute to attrition (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Ingersoll, 2001). Identifying factors that influence novice SETs to stay in the field may help reduce the current attrition rates by identifying ways school and district leaders can support beginning teachers. The two most cited seminal works in the area of job-related supports and SET attrition are the Ingersoll (2001) study, a meta-analysis and narrative review of the research on teacher attrition and retention by Borman and Dowling (2008). Ingersoll (2001) completed an analysis focusing on organizational characteristics and conditions of schools as they related to teacher turnover and attrition. He found large numbers of teachers departed their jobs for reasons other than retirement such as job dissatisfaction, pursuing other jobs, and working conditions in schools (Ingersoll, 2001).

Furthermore, Borman and Dowling (2008) analyzed 34 studies to understand why teacher attrition occurs and what factors moderate attrition outcomes. Results suggested that characteristics of teachers' working conditions and personal characteristics are important predictors of attrition. Similar studies focus primarily on teacher attrition in a general realm that encompasses teachers across content areas. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) released data from the Beginning Teacher Longitudinal Study (BTLS), which followed a cohort of beginning public school teachers for each school year 2007-08 through 2011-12. The BTLS examined the careers of beginning teachers as well as factors that influenced attrition (Gray & Taie, 2015). The most significant results from this study were that first-year teachers assigned a mentor were more likely to stay in the field than those not assigned a first-year mentor, higher first-year salaries were correlated with higher retention rates, and no differences were detected in

starting education levels (Gray & Taie, 2015). Moreover, Feng and Sass (2018) found that school staffing problems are typically concentrated in specific subject areas, such as SETs who work in challenging and stressful situations and are not receiving any differential wage compensation. New information garnered from this study may enrich the special education community by understanding what supports at the school and district level help sustain and retain novice SETs.

Research Questions

The following research questions were developed to guide this qualitative study:

Central Research Question

How do novice special education teachers describe their experiences of utilizing job-related supports during their first three years teaching?

Sub Question One

How do novice special education teachers describe their job satisfaction through their experiences utilizing job-related supports?

Sub Question Two

What experiences are the most influential on novice special education teachers during their first three years teaching?

Definitions

In order to offer a clear understanding of how particular terms are used in this study, definitions are provided below:

1. *Attrition* – Attrition is defined as the rate at which new teachers leave the profession (Newberry & Allsop, 2017).

2. *Retention* – The rate at which new teachers remain in the profession (Newberry & Allsop, 2017).

3. *Individualized Education Program (IEP)* – A written statement for each child with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised in a meeting and must include present levels of academic and functional performance and a statement of measurable annual goals (U.S. Department of Education, 2021).

4. *Special Education* – Specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability (U.S. Department of Education, 2021).

5. *Special Education Teacher (SET)*- Educators who work with students who have learning, mental, emotional, or physical disabilities. They adapt general education lessons and teach various subjects to students with mild, moderate, or severe disabilities (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021).

6. *Novice Special Education Teacher*— The literature identifies a novice SET as those teachers within their first three years of teaching (Bettini et al., 2018).

7. *Job Characteristics Theory (JCT)*— The JCT attempts to explain how characteristics of people's jobs affect their work behavior and attitudes (Oldham, 2013).

8. *Job Diagnostic Survey (JDS)*— The JDS is intended to diagnose existing jobs to determine if and how they might be redesigned to improve employee motivation and productivity and evaluate the effects of job changes on employees (Hackman & Oldham, 1975).

Summary

The problem is that SET attrition rates are increasing throughout the country, which is in turn negatively affecting students with disabilities. Identifying supports that are impactful to retaining novice SETs is critical to reducing the problem of SET attrition. Relevant literature reveals many causes of teacher attrition, such as personal, work-related experiences and federal

mandates/requirements (Billingsley et al., 2019; Hagaman & Casey, 2017; Hopkins et al., 2019; McCarthy et al., 2020). The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experiences identifying and utilizing job-related supports for novice SETs at a high school in the southeastern United States. This study aims to contribute to the field by providing perspectives on the support needed to retain novice SETs. This chapter included background on historical, social, and theoretical factors that have impacted SET attrition rates in the United States. A relevant problem was identified based on gaps in the literature and a clear purpose statement was presented along with the significance of the study. Research questions guiding the study were developed, and definitions of relevant key terms were provided.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The U.S. Department of Education reported that 46 states were drastically short special education teachers (SETs) in 2017, and that number jumped to 49 states in 2021 (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). In addition to the nationwide shortage of SETs, research suggests that approximately 30-50% of novice teachers quit teaching within the first five years (Billingsley et al., 2020; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Hester et al., 2020; U.S. Department of Education, 2021). SET attrition can negatively affect student achievement (Hopkins et al., 2019) as well as school climate and financial resources (Toropova et al., 2021). First-year and novice teachers are among the most vulnerable workers in the education sector (Fitchett et al., 2018). A systematic review of the literature was conducted to explore increasing SET attrition rates and factors that have historically influenced sustaining and retaining novice SETs. Previous literature explores why teachers leave the field, but there is a need to explore novice SETs who remain in the field to help identify what job-related supports they utilize. This chapter presents a review of current literature related to this topic of study. The first section discusses the theoretical framework of the Job Characteristics Theory related to utilizing job-related supports for beginning SETs. Next, a review of related literature on promoting novice special education teacher retention addresses current findings and identifies gaps in the literature. In conclusion, a summary addresses the need for this study.

Theoretical Framework

The Job Characteristics Theory was a model created in 1975 by two organizational psychologists, Hackman and Oldham (Hackman & Oldham, 1975). It is commonly used as a framework to study how particular job characteristics affect job outcomes. The job

characteristics theory suggests that by providing positive psychological states (experienced meaningfulness, experienced responsibility, and knowledge of results), positive outcomes will occur for individual employees and the organizations with which they work (Oxford University Press, 2021).

Job Characteristics Theory

This theory evaluates five job characteristics: autonomy, feedback, skill variety, task identity, and task significance (Hackman & Oldham, 1975). These five core job characteristics influence the three previously mentioned psychological states, and as a result, work outcomes (internal work motivation, growth satisfaction, overall job satisfaction, work effectiveness, and absenteeism) are affected (Fried & Ferris, 1987). Two psychologists, Greg Oldham and Richard Hackman introduced the Job Characteristics Theory (JCT) in 1975 (Hackman & Oldham, 1975). The JCT attempts to explain how characteristics of the jobs people perform affect their work behavior and attitudes (Oldham, 2013). The JCT proposes that five core job characteristics enhance the motivational potential of jobs and positively influence essential work outcomes such as job satisfaction and performance (Hackman & Oldham, 1975; Oerlemans & Bakker, 2018). Research has repeatedly shown that favorable work outcomes such as job satisfaction, job performance, and internal work motivation are prompted by the degree to which a job has high levels of the five characteristics (Oerlemans & Bakker, 2018; Oldham, 2013). In addition, the Job Diagnostic Survey (JDS) is "intended to diagnose existing jobs to determine if and how they might be redesigned to improve employee motivation and productivity and to evaluate the effects of job changes on employees" (Hackman & Oldham, 1975, p.1).

The JCT was chosen to frame this study to assist in examining the experiences of novice SETs utilizing job-related supports during their first three years of teaching. As the literature

conveys, SET attrition can be attributed to poor teacher working conditions and teacher burnout, which threatens the quality of education that students with disabilities receive (Billingsley et al., 2019; Fore et al., 2002). These characteristics of working conditions fit well within the JCT for the purposes of this inquiry. By addressing the perceived supports needed to increase retention rates within the job characteristics theory, district and school leaders may better be able to decrease attrition rates of novice SETs. The information garnered from this study may support the ideas within the JCT by adding to the literature within the framework of the JCT.

Autonomy

According to Hackman and Oldham (1975), autonomy is defined as "the degree to which the job provides substantial freedom, independence, and discretion to the employee in scheduling the work and in determining the procedures to be used in carrying it out" (p. 162). Research suggests that job satisfaction among teachers is higher when administrators have more open communication and allow flexible teaching strategies and methods (McCarthy et al., 2020; Robinson et al., 2019). Employees with significant independence are expected to experience vital personal responsibilities for their work outcomes (Blanz, 2017). This dimension of the job characteristics theory has been a significant point of debate in schools throughout the country.

Translated to the educational context, teachers have been advocating for greater autonomy by arguing that they possess the expertise and skills necessary to maintain independence and creativity in the classroom. In the classroom, Husband and Short (1994) associate autonomy with "the ability to control daily schedules, to teach as one chooses, to have the freedom to make decisions on instruction, and to generate ideas about curriculum" (p. 60). However, research from Vangrieken et al. (2017) argues that more aggressive evaluation policies, scripted curriculums, merit-based pay, and high-stakes testing policies are all factors

that have recently given rise to debates about teacher autonomy. Teachers are losing their freedom of autonomy in the classroom as the focus shifts away from students and more towards academic merits and scores.

Feedback

In their job characteristics model, Hackman and Oldham (1975) defined feedback as "the degree to which carrying out the work activities required by the job results in the employee obtaining direct and clear information about the effectiveness of his or her performance" (p. 162). Feedback is an essential ingredient in any organization's short and long-term success, business, and relationship. Further research suggests novice SETs need instantaneous, constructive feedback about their instruction to facilitate improvement over time (Billingsley et al., 2019; Conley & You, 2017; Cornelius et al., 2020). Effective communication skills stem from giving and receiving both positive and negative feedback in constructive ways.

In education, feedback is given through multiple modes, including professional evaluations, one-on-one conferencing, and direct feedback from supervisors and coworkers. Research suggests that when employees receive detailed and precise feedback about their performance, they are expected to better know the results of their work activities (Blanz, 2017). The feedback characteristic relates to beginning SETs because they should receive much feedback during their first few years of teaching that will help shape their teaching methodologies. This feedback ultimately results in a more positive influence in the lives of their students with disabilities.

Skill Variety

SETs are tasked with a wider variety of job duties, and responsibilities than those of their general education counterparts. Skill variety is defined as "the degree to which a job requires

various activities in carrying out the work, which involves using several different skills and talents of the employee" (Hackman & Oldham, 1975, p. 161). Research highlights that these additional responsibilities include paperwork, planning, and writing IEPs, and managing behaviors, to name a few (Hester et al., 2020).

Furthermore, special educators are tasked with ensuring content is differentiated and individualized to meet all levels of learners that make up their classroom to comply with legal requirements as outlined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). They must understand how to engage students with one or multiple disabilities, which supports the skill variety characteristic of the job characteristics theory.

Task Identity and Task Significance

According to Hackman and Oldham (1975), task identity is defined as "the degree to which the job requires completion of a whole and identifiable piece of work – that is, doing a job from beginning to end with a visible outcome" (p. 161). Purposeful collaboration between all stakeholders involves members of the IEP team working together to promote success for students with disabilities. In the self-contained setting, teachers often teach the same students for four or more years. They play an integral part in preparing each student for the future by being a part of each student's educational career from start to finish. In the inclusive, co-taught setting, successful collaboration requires general education teachers and SETs to efficiently work together by utilizing research-based strategies in order to promote all students' success.

Hackman and Oldham (1975) defined task significance as "the degree to which the job has a substantial impact on the lives or work of other people" (p. 161). If special educators positively impact the children they are teaching, district and school leaders should motivate them to continue working by discussing their impact. Having a positive impact on students relates to

Hackman and Oldham's job characteristic of task significance. Many special educators teaching high school-aged children get to see their students' progress from when they enter into high school until they graduate. They are involved in every meeting, social gathering, and sporting event. Increased social interaction might not seem like much, but to a student with special needs, this achievement will likely have a crucial impact on their adult life as they age out of high school.

While research attributes to factors that influence novice special educator attrition rates, there is a gap in the literature on what factors impact retaining novice special educators. Some intrinsic reasons people decide to become teachers are the desire and joy of working with children and the intellectual fulfillment that comes from imparting knowledge and making a valuable contribution to society. Bettini et al. (2020) also discussed the most common components of job satisfaction among teachers and identified them as having realistic workloads; manageable class sizes; accessible curriculum materials and teaching resources; acknowledgment of good performance; career pathways; reasonable salaries; and opportunities for professional development.

Psychological States

The three psychological states that mediate job attributes and outcomes are experienced meaningfulness, experienced responsibility, and knowledge of results (Psychology, 2021). Hackman and Oldham's theory is based on employees performing meaningful tasks, being responsible for completing the tasks, and being told they are doing well while performing the tasks. Experienced meaningfulness is how the individual views the work as inherently meaningful and counts in their system of values (Psychology, 2021).

Knowledge of results is how the individual employee has knowledge about how well he or she is performing at work (Psychology, 2021). SETs who are satisfied with their jobs show higher subjective well-being and are healthier than those less satisfied workers. So, the question remains, why are special education retention rates so low? Many leaders are looking at how they can improve their employees' overall happiness while on the job. Teacher satisfaction becomes even more intriguing for district and school leaders, particularly when it comes to SETs and retention rates.

Professional responsibility is how individuals feel personally accountable and responsible for their results (Psychology, 2021). Research suggests there have been long-standing chronic shortages and attrition in providing a qualified teacher to all students with disabilities (Mason-Williams, 2015). District and school leaders must look at ways to ensure students with disabilities have access to qualified teachers. They must also look at how to ensure these qualified teachers remain on the job and remain happy with the work they are doing for their students. For years, government officials and educational professionals have suggested higher pay for educators. However, as Hackman and Oldham's theory suggests, workplace happiness is highly dependent on intrinsic factors, such as work environment and working conditions. Using Hackman and Oldham's theory of job characteristics and apply it within the educational setting, there are ways district and school leaders can motivate these teachers to remain in their positions.

The JCT, developed by Hackman and Oldham (1975), was used to guide this inquiry. The JCT has traditionally been used to evaluate workplace satisfaction for employers to determine if any changes should be made to increase employee satisfaction. Employee satisfaction, as mentioned in the JCT, is directly related to employee retention rates. The more satisfied an employee is, the higher retention rate (Oldham, 2013). Based on the evidence that

employee satisfaction is a predictor of workplace satisfaction, the JCT served as an appropriate lens for investigating SET experiences of utilizing job-related supports. The phenomenon of novice SETs utilizing job-related supports is warranted based on recent research, which examines SET shortages and attrition rates. The JCT and JDS were used to guide this study in order to examine novice teachers' experiences of utilizing job-related supports to promote retention.

Related Literature

In the United States, all qualified persons with disabilities are entitled to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). A national shortage of SETs has made staffing a special education workforce to meet these requirements a problem for school districts across the country (Council for Exceptional Children, 2021). As of 2020, 98% of the nation's school districts reported shortages of SETs (U.S. Department of Education, 2020), and enrollment in teacher preparation programs is lower than at any point since the NCES began collecting these data (NCES, 2016). Furthermore, teacher attrition is increasing at a rate parallel to that of the national population of students with disabilities (National Education Association, 2021).

> According to the U.S. Department of Education (2017), special education is defined as specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, that meets the unique needs of a child with a disability, including- (i) instruction conducted in the classroom, in the home, in hospitals and institutions, and other settings; and (ii) instruction in physical education. (section 300.39)

SETs are responsible for using effective practices to provide students with disabilities opportunities to learn. Once new special educators begin teaching, they need guidance to apply

what they learned during their teacher preparation programs, expert assistance to address practice problems, and feedback about their instruction to facilitate improvement over time (Billingsley et al., 2019).

SETs are required to balance several roles to fulfill diverse teaching and nonteaching tasks compared to their general education peers (Robinson et al., 2019; Woolf, 2018). In addition, the role of SETs has evolved and continues to be identified as a highly stressful occupation (Bettini et al., 2017; Brittle, 2020; Fowler et al., 2019; McCarthy et al., 2020). Progressive federal and state regulations contribute to the stress of the SET occupation by implementing changes such as increasing diversity within student populations, fuller implementation of inclusive practices, a growing emphasis on access to the general education curriculum, and accountability for the learning of students with exceptionalities (Fowler et al., 2019; Mathews et al., 2017). Research suggests high stress levels can create burnout for SETs, ultimately resulting in them leaving the profession (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019).

After conducting a systematic review of the literature, new SETs reported the most frequently cited problems to be work overload, poor school climate, student behavior, problems with administrators, lack of support, excessive paperwork, and lack of planning time (Aldosiry, 2020; Bettini et al., 2018; Billingsley et al., 2020; Garwood et al., 2018; Hester et al., 2020; Sweigart & Collins, 2017). Conley and You (2017) mentioned that if policymakers and administrators could discover the workplace variables that influence teacher turnover intentions, school districts could develop a basis to make necessary changes to reduce intentions to leave. An extensive body of research has examined variables that influence turnover and attrition in special education. There is a gap in the research on supports that attribute to the successes and retention of novice SETs of students with disabilities.

Special Education Teacher Attrition

The field of special education at large has long been plagued by persistent shortages of teachers, in large part due to high attrition rates for beginning special educators (Ondrasek et al., 2020). The number of SETs nationally has dropped by more than 17% over the past decade, and almost one-half of new SETs leave the profession after three years in the field (Billingsley et al., 2020; Harmsen et al., 2018; Hester et al., 2020; Samuels & Harwin, 2018). According to the U.S. BLS (2018) projections, 34,800 SETs are projected to exit the field from 2016-2026. These rates reflect many variables new teachers face in adjusting to life on their own in the classroom. Furthermore, Feng and Sass (2018) mention that problems with staffing "high need" areas are exacerbated in urban districts and schools serving a high proportion of low-income students. In a review of the literature, teacher characteristics, student characteristics, and school characteristics were identified as the most prevalent extrinsic and intrinsic variables that influence turnover in the field of special education (Gilmour & Wehby, 2020; Sweigart & Collins, 2017).

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS; 2020), there were 443,700 special education teacher jobs in the United States in 2019. The current teacher workforce is less experienced, younger, more likely to turnover, and more diverse in preparation experiences (Toropova et al., 2021). According to empirical research conducted by Ingersoll (2001), studies began reporting in the early 1980s that there would be a coming teacher shortage because of a "graying" workforce and an increase in student enrollment. Furthermore, the United States Department of Education (USDOE; 2021) reported that in 2021 alone, the teacher shortage area report included special education teacher shortages in all 50 states.

In addition, there is a projected cumulative ten-year increase of 14,300 special education jobs from the BLS (2020), which only fuels the fire to try to retain highly qualified, novice

special educators. The projected increase is due to an increase in younger students referred to receive special education services as early intervention efforts gain momentum. Riser-Kositsky (2019) stated that the number of students with disabilities has grown 13.7% in the past decade. In addition, the NCES (2020) reported that in 2019, "the number of students ages 3-21 who received special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was 7.1 million, or 14% of all public school students" (para. 1).

SET job satisfaction has various essential and far-reaching implications (Toropova et al., 2021). Research suggests that students are more likely to struggle socially, behaviorally, and emotionally and are less likely to meet their Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals if they work with professionals who are not satisfied with their jobs (Garwood et al., 2018). The academic success of these students depends on well-prepared teachers who can deliver effective, high-quality instruction (Sindelar et al., 2014).

Qualifications of Special Education Teacher

Research has posited that well-prepared, knowledgeable special educators will find their work more satisfying, be more effective than less prepared teachers, and thus will be more likely to stay (Billingsley et al., 2019). In the United States, the nature of teacher preparation varies substantially.

According to federal law, a "highly qualified teacher" was required to hold at least a Bachelor's degree from a four-year institution, hold full state certification, and demonstrate competence in each core academic subject they teach (USDOE, 2021). Under the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, teachers are no longer required to be highly qualified (USDOE, 2021). Opponents argue that the number of unqualified SETs unable to meet the diverse needs of their

students will only increase due to lowering the standards for teacher certification (Shepherd et al., 2016).

As of date, state and local education agencies are responsible for ensuring that teachers meet applicable state certification requirements. In the state of Georgia, state teacher certification requirements are established by the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GaPSC) under the Official Code of Georgia Annotated (O.C.G.A.; n.d.). Certification requirements focus on recruiting, training, supporting, and retaining qualified teachers to ensure that all students have access to experienced, effective, qualified, and appropriately assigned teachers on an equitable basis (GaPSC, n.d.). The state of Georgia offers traditional or alternative pathways to certification, which depend on the teacher's educational background.

The traditional route to teacher certification in Georgia involves completing a GaPSC approved educator preparation program to obtain a Bachelor's degree that includes student teaching and field experiences and seeking a position (GaPSC, n.d.). Typically, teachers who know what they want to do when they enter college choose this route to certification. Research suggests that teachers who obtain certification through traditional preparation programs are more likely to stay in teaching than teachers who obtain certification through alternative preparation programs (Gilmour & Wehby, 2020). Awarded degrees in education and enrollment in or completion of teacher preparation programs has drastically declined from 2008-2016 (NCES, 2016). According to the NCES (2016), enrollment in teacher preparation programs has declined 37.8% from 2008-2016. Additionally, data from the Education Commission of the States (ECS, 2019) indicated that forty-five states reported a decrease in educator preparation program completion between 2008 and 2017.

The second route to obtaining teacher certification in Georgia is through the alternative pathway. The alternative pathway to certification is for candidates who already hold a Bachelor's degree and allows them to teach concurrently while enrolled in a certification program (GaPSC, n.d.). These candidates will be issued a provisional certificate until they have completed their approved certificate program requirements. According to the GaPSC (n.d.), "a provisional certificate allows individuals meeting entry requirements to teach up to three years while completing requirements for professional certification" (p. 1). In 2017, three states and the District of Columbia reported that more than 50% of their education preparation program graduates came from alternative preparation programs (ECS, 2017). According to the National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS) from the NCES (2018), "18% of public elementary and secondary SETs entered the profession through an alternative route to certification program" (para. 1).

One reason for attrition is SETs reported that they do not feel adequately prepared in their alternative route certification programs (Mason-Williams et al., 2020). In addition, due to national shortages, school districts are hiring new teachers with little to no experience in special education under a provisional teaching certificate. These candidates are faced with the daunting task of navigating their first three years in the special education classroom with little to no experience or education in teaching students with disabilities while maintaining full-time enrollment in a certification program. The first three years in the alternative pathway program can cause a special educator to succeed or fail.

Workplace Demands

Novice teachers enter the field with idealistic expectations and ambitious attitudes regarding their roles, usually acquired from personal experiences and induction programs.

McCarthy et al. (2020) mention that "once employed, teachers' initial expectations often deviate substantially from their actual experiences in the classroom" (p. 4). One factor cited in the literature that attributes to teacher attrition is the various job demands placed on SETs (Bettini et al., 2018; Billingsley et al., 2020; Ryan et al., 2017). Research has found workplace demands to include challenging and destructive behavior, paperwork, unmanageable workloads, limited planning and teaching time, and students with various needs across settings and grade levels (Aldosiry, 2020).

Rinke and Mawhinney (2017) indicated that the initial pull to enter teaching often ends up being at odds with the push of the numerous demands SETs face. An Individualized Education Program (IEP) is an inevitable part of education for children with special needs. Research from Kartika et al. (2018) stated, "teachers spend more time doing IEP paperwork than assessing student's assignments, communicating with parents, and sharing with colleagues" (p. 1). Kartika et al. (2018) found that teachers spend more than 10% of their working time doing IEP paperwork. In addition, federal and state legal requirements such as progress monitoring and data collection leave novice SETs feeling that their ability to effectively provide instruction is eclipsed by the amount of paperwork they are required to complete. This crude reality is often a shock to novice teachers, requiring time management skills and support to meet deadlines and legal requirements.

Working Conditions

Research consistently finds that working conditions are an important predictor of attrition and intent to leave (Bettini et al., 2020). The host of demands placed on novice special educators can turn into stress overload without proper support and training. Research has found several stress causes for teachers, but the most stressful causes were reported as student misbehavior and

high job demands (Billingsley et al., 2020; Harmsen et al., 2018; McCarthy et al., 2020).

According to Paquette and Reig (2016), "85% of novice teachers identified workloads as a major

contributor to work-related stress" (p. 4). For the purposes of this study, working conditions are

defined as "SET's roles and responsibilities which place particular demands on them and

supports, including school culture and leadership, interactions between colleagues, professional

development, and logistical supports that help SETs meet their demands for providing effective

instruction" (Billingsley et al., 2020, p. 8). In addition, a recent study by Fitchett et al. (2018)

found that one-quarter of beginning teachers are at risk for stress in their first year. Current

literature on SET attrition identifies stress related to poor SET working conditions as a

significant contributor to attrition rates because it interferes with their effectiveness and

ultimately contributes to their burnout (Bettini et al., 2018; Billingsley et al., 2020; Brittle, 2020;

Ryan et al., 2017; Toropova et al., 2021).

If not dealt with, stress can be detrimental to overall mental and physical health. Chronic

stress can lead to serious health complications such as fatigue, recurrent flu, infections, and

headaches (Brunsting et al., 2014). Furthermore, students working with teachers who are

experiencing burnout due to excessive stress are more likely to struggle emotionally,

behaviorally, and socially (Flook et al., 2013; Ruble & McGrew, 2013). Conversely, not all

teachers struggle when put in stressful working environments. Some teachers excel when faced

with deadlines and pressures. In addition, some school districts throughout the country have

provided resources to increase teachers' sense of personal efficacy and ability to manage stress

(Flook et al., 2013). Stress from home environments or outside factors may roll over into the

classroom, making it hard to determine precisely how much of a teacher's stress is contributed

solely to the school environment.

Inclusive Classrooms

According to federal mandates put forth by the IDEA (2004), students classified under one of the 13 disability categories are guaranteed education rights ensuring that they are educated with their peers in the general education classroom to the maximum extent possible with the necessary supports and services. There are explicit provisions that outline where, how and when children with disabilities receive their education such as FAPE and the least restrictive environment (LRE). State education agencies and local education agencies are responsible for ensuring these provisions are met in accordance with the law (Grant, 2018). According to the USDOE, NCES (2021), in Fall, 2018, 95 percent of 6-21 year-old students with disabilities were served in regular schools. Inclusive education gives all students opportunities to interact and a fair chance to go to school. Students with disabilities benefit both socially and educationally from receiving instruction with their nondisabled peers in a variety of community and school settings (GADOE, 2019).

Within the special education process, the role of the general education teacher is well established within the context of the law. Inclusion of the general education teacher as part of the multidisciplinary team in the special education process is outlined in the IDEA (2004). Special education and general education teachers must work together to teach students with and without learning disabilities using research-based strategies, supports, and differentiated instruction in an inclusive classroom. By having two teachers in the classroom, co-teaching provides a framework to increase access to the general curriculum, provides a multi-tiered system of supports, and provides students access to effective behavior and academic instructional practices (GADOE, 2021).

The literature identifies challenges and tensions in the evolving definitions of teacher autonomy paired with inclusive classrooms and co-teaching (Johnson & King-Sears, 2020; Vangrieken et al., 2017). With a push toward more inclusive classrooms, the focus has changed from non-reliance and independence to collaborative decision-making (Vangrieken et al., 2017) which opens a new understanding of the relationship and tension between collaboration and autonomy. Bettini et al. (2018) found that when novice SETs worked with experienced colleagues who took no responsibility for supporting them or their students, they felt overwhelmed. Novice SETs are more likely to continue teaching when they experience more supportive working conditions and collective responsibility within the school environment (Bettini et al., 2018; Billingsley et al., 2020, Conley & You, 2017).

Autonomy is perceived as a central condition for successful teacher collaboration (Vangrieken et al., 2017). Collaboration is critical between GETs and SETs as they plan, coordinate instruction, and co-teach together (Billingsley et al., 2020). Positive experiences with collaboration in inclusive environments are related to positive outcomes for novice SETs (Conley & You, 2017; Billingsley et al., 2020). In addition to collaborating with general education teachers, there is new evidence that SET caseloads are growing (Dewey et al., 2017). SETs are regularly assigned large caseloads of students with diverse needs across varied settings. SETs are responsible for teaching multiple content areas, addressing challenging behaviors, supporting paraprofessionals, managing legal requirements and paperwork, and collaborating across multiple teachers and grade levels (Billingsley et al., 2020). Research suggests physical proximity to general educators, schedules, and time influences opportunities for collaboration (Bettini et al., 2018; Billingsley et al., 2020; Conley & You, 2017). In addition, novice SETs indicated that some GETs did not share a sense of ownership for their students' learning, which

impeded their efforts to collaborate in helping students access the curriculum (Billingsley et al., 2020). Co-teaching and collaboration in the inclusive classroom can be both challenging and rewarding for student and teacher success.

Teacher Characteristics

Several significant studies between job satisfaction and teacher retention in the field of education have focused on the associations between teacher personal characteristics and teacher professional characteristics (Toropova et al., 2021). Teacher personal characteristics include factors such as age and gender (Gilmour & Wehby, 2020) and have been consistently found to influence teachers' decisions whether to stay or leave the teaching profession (Camacho & Parham, 2019; Gilmour & Wehby, 2020; Ingersoll, 2001; Toropova et al., 2021). According to seminal work conducted by Ingersoll (2001), the relationship between teachers' age and their turnover follows a U-shape curve, suggesting younger teachers have very high rates of attrition. Moreover, research suggests that these results may be mainly attributed to the fact that younger female teachers leave schools for reasons of family rearing (Toropova et al., 2021). In contrast, since older teachers significantly outnumber younger teachers, retirement has been found to be the most significant factor behind teacher attrition in terms of age (Ingersoll, 2001).

Teacher professional characteristics include factors such as years of experience, degree level and type, participation in professional development programs, and teacher motivational beliefs (Toropova et al., 2021). One of the most influential professional factors predicted to influence teacher attrition is a teachers' sense of confidence in effectively resolving the challenges they face, or self-efficacy (Camacho & Parham, 2019). Autonomous teachers display confidence and high self-efficacy when confronted with challenges in the workplace. Often, this self-efficacy is developed through effective teacher preparation programs implemented in the

classroom, and reinforced through various professional development courses. Research by Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2019) found teachers' preparation pathway did influence attrition rates, finding that those who entered the profession through an alternative certification were 25% more likely to leave the profession than those who entered through a regular certification program.

After a review of the literature, data suggests that associations between teacher characteristics and teacher attrition demonstrate weak and inconsistent correlations (Camacho & Parham, 2019; Toropova et al., 2021). Data suggests age and self-efficacy were found to be the most significant factors of teacher characteristics that influence turnover and attrition rates (Camacho & Parham, 2019; Gilmour & Wehby, 2020; Ingersoll, 2001; Toropova et al., 2021). While there are some data that suggest there are relationships between teacher characteristics and attrition, they were not a significant factor that influenced teachers' decisions to stay in the field.

Student Behavior

Research suggests that novice SETs are rarely prepared to meet the academic and behavioral needs of students with disabilities (SWD) (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Gilmour & Wehby, 2020). Harmsen et al, (2018) found a moderate correlation between student misbehavior and negative emotional responses in beginning teachers. The most cited behavioral challenges which led to SET burnout and attrition came from SETs serving students with emotional behavioral disorders (EBD), which were more likely to leave than those who did not teach students with EBD (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Gilmour & Wehby, 2020). Students with EBD require the intervention and instruction of well-trained and qualified SETs to work with them in the classroom. In contrast, SETs who planned to stay were significantly more likely to report

using positive behavioral interventions and supports to manage student behavior (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019).

Task identity, as mentioned in the JCT, is an important job characteristic that influences new teachers' confidence to influence events in their environment. Task identity and autonomy correlates with novice SETs' perceptions of their abilities to shape their own professional behaviors addressing and dealing with challenging and/or aggressive behaviors (Garwood et al., 2018). Further research is needed to examine if relationships between behavior and attrition may be mitigated by factors such as training in behavior management, effective classroom management practices, or school-wide positive behavior systems (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019).

Title I Schools

Title I schools are those with high percentages of low-income students that receive federal funds under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to help students meet academic standards (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). SETs in urban schools experience higher levels of stress and burnout, and lower levels of job satisfaction compared to colleagues working in suburban and rural contexts in the United States (Bettini et al., 2018; Camacho & Parham, 2019; Dunn & Downey, 2018; Ouellette et al., 2018). Turnover rates are 50% higher for teachers in Title I schools, which serve more low-income students (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Research revealed the most prevalent types of teacher challenges in urban schools were student misbehavior and aggressive student behavior (Camacho & Parham, 2019). In addition, SETs in urban schools face highly stressful challenges such as limited resources, overcrowding, chronic disruptive student behavior, and high-pressure accountability policies (Lee et al., 2020; Ouellette et al., 2018).

Job-Related Supports

One of the most potent factors shaping the future is teachers' support of students and the lifelong effects of that support. School districts across the country face bouts of pressures, priorities, reforms, and various resources and must be able to support all teachers who help foster the future. Job-related supports directly facilitate teachers' efforts to enact their knowledge by creating conditions that support effective instruction (Billingsley et al., 2020). Novice SETs require extensive training both in their educator preparation programs and once they enter the teaching workforce. Extensive training and mentoring are often challenging in a field with high turnover and limited numbers of teachers. Based on the literature, six research-based supports positively influence teacher knowledge and student learning (Aldosiry, 2020; Bettini et al., 2018; Billingsley et al., 2020; Conley & You; 2017; Cornelius et al., 2020). The job-related supports discussed below include mentoring, administrative support, collaboration with colleagues, workplace environment, professional development, and logistical support.

Mentoring

Mentor teachers have been found to play the most influential role in preservice teachers' learning to teach in their program (Cornelius et al., 2020; Orland-Barak & Wang, 2021). To assist novice teachers, it is essential to support their performance in the classroom from the very beginning. Seminal works on mentoring from Head et al. (1992) write that the heart and soul of mentoring grows out of belief in the value and worth of people and an attitude toward education that focuses on passing the torch to the next generation of educators.

In education, mentoring is a complex, multi-dimensional process of guiding, teaching, influencing, and supporting a beginning or new teacher (Koki, 1997). Policies concerning mentoring new teachers vary from state to state. According to the Education Commission of the States (ECS) (2019), thirty-one states require induction and mentoring support for new teachers.

Mentoring can play a critical role in continually improving special educators' skills and professional knowledge to prepare students with disabilities. An essential factor to consider when assigning mentors to novice special educators is the experience and expertise that the mentors possess. Novice special educators have improved their instructional practices after being mentored by mentors who receive professional development and specialized coaching (Cornelius et al., 2020).

While research suggests mentoring positively impacts novice SETs (Bettini et al., 2018; Cornelius et al., 2020), each state has different requirements regarding how their mentor programs are designed. There are no systematic requirements or mandates on qualifications that a mentor must possess. Each state and school district has policies and procedures for assigning mentors to new teachers. In addition, some new teachers reported that if not monitored by administrative staff, mentorship for new teachers can elevate stress (Hester et al., 2020).

Previous research found novice SETs are less likely than their novice general education teacher (GET) counterparts to have access to mentorship and collegial interactions (Bettini et al., 2018). In addition, SET mentors reported having less release time than GETs to provide mentorship to their mentees (Bettini et al., 2018). SETs are often tasked with more workload manageability, and collective responsibilities than their GET counterparts are and are not always afforded a free planning or lunch period. Currently, only twenty-two states require or reduce teaching loads for new or mentor teachers (ECS, 2019). According to Hopkins et al. (2019), "what happens in the first few years of a teacher's career is critical for determining their longevity in the profession" (p. 1).

Administrative Support

Insufficient administrator support is one of the most frequently cited reasons that influence special educators' decisions to leave the field (Conley & You, 2017; Hagaman & Casey, 2017; Harmsen et al., 2018; Hester et al., 2020). In addition, research on teacher attrition found administrative support to directly influence teachers' intent to leave (Billingsley et al., 2020; McCarthy et al., 2020; Robinson et al., 2019). Further studies support the relationship between administrative support and intent to stay, citing that those who stayed showed a greater likelihood by four times to perceive administrative support as encouraging and supporting (Aldosiry, 2020; Conley & You, 2017). Administrative support, as defined by Billingsley et al. (2020) is the extent to which principals and other school leaders make teachers' work easier and help them to improve their teaching. Research suggests effective school leadership demonstrates consistent enforcement of school policies, support for student behavior management, communication and constructive feedback, flexibility for teacher autonomy, teacher inclusion in school-wide decision making, allocation of necessary resources, and mentorships for novice teachers (Ansley et al., 2019; Conley & You, 2017; McCarthy et al., 2020).

One primary responsibility of administrators is to conduct teacher-performance evaluations. Teacher-performance evaluation refers to the formal process a school uses to rate and review teachers' performance and effectiveness in the classroom (Finster & Milanowski, 2018). Feedback from teacher-performance evaluations is designed to increase teacher effectiveness and student learning (Finster & Milanowski, 2018). Results from several studies indicates that merit programs have positive effects on teacher attrition by retaining effective teachers (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Feng & Sass, 2018; Shifrer et al., 2017). However, critics argue that new education initiatives such as pay-for-performance evaluation systems are biased,

play favorites, and devalue the role of teachers (Hagaman & Casey, 2017). The literature suggests that higher-performing teachers receive recognition and rewards, which improves their retention, and signals lower-performing teachers to improve, consider changing careers, or be terminated (Finster & Milanowski, 2018). Bent Creek High School currently uses a performance-based compensation system for teachers who meet expectations on their performance evaluations and rewards top performers with additional financial rewards (GCPS, n.d.).

The National Teacher and Principal Teacher Survey (NTPS) is a nationwide sample survey and related questionnaire that provides descriptive data on the context of public and private elementary and secondary education in the United States (NCES, 2020). Information garnered from this survey is generally used to give local, state, and national policymakers various statistics on the condition of education in the United States (NCES, 2020). Data from the most recent survey from the NTPS in 2018 indicated that 72% of public school teachers agreed that the teacher-performance evaluation process helped them determine their success with students, 73% of teachers agreed that the teacher-performance evaluation process positively affected their teaching, and 69% indicated that the teacher-performance evaluation process led to improved student learning (NCES, 2020).

Administrative support is a multifaceted role that encompasses many different responsibilities. It encompasses how teachers rate an administrator's ability to acknowledge and encourage staff, communicate a clear vision, and generally run a school well (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Teachers feel supported by administrators who enforce consequences on student behaviors, make their teachers feel respected and appreciated, and encourage relationships among GETs and SETs (Hester et al., 2020; Robinson et al., 2019). A supportive

working environment correlates with better quality instruction and lower burnout among SETs, leading to an improved ability to deal with students with disabilities (Aldosiry, 2020).

The workplace condition that is most predictive of teacher attrition is a perceived lack of administrative support (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Recent literature suggests that administrators rarely receive adequate training on effectively supporting special educators (Hester et al., 2020; Robinson et al., 2019). In contrast, some administrators have provided efforts to strengthen interpersonal administrator-teacher relationships such as team building initiatives, retreats, culture building, administrator training, and modeling (Harris et al., 2019). While these initiatives have not made a dent on teacher attrition rates on a national scale, they have been successful at the local school level (Harris et al., 2019).

Collaboration with Colleagues

While research on administrative support has been widely acknowledged in special education teacher attrition (Aldosiry, 2020; Conley & You, 2017), studies suggest that support from the general education teachers in a school is similarly conceived as a critical factor that allows SETs to feel part of the school environment (Langher et al., 2017). Due to the various job demands, research indicates that many SETs feel isolated and lonely, which may lead to higher levels of burnout if not provided with high-quality support (Aldosiry, 2020; Conley & You, 2017; Langher et al., 2017, Robinson et al., 2019). Collaborative relationships and exchanging ideas with other special educators reduce stress and increases teachers' job satisfaction (Billingsley et al., 2020; Conley & You, 2017). Positive experiences with collaboration are related to positive outcomes for new SETs (Hopkins et al., 2019). Billingsley et al. (2020) mentioned that strong collegial support between general and special educators is not always easy.

Schedules, time, and physical proximity are all factors that hinder deep and meaningful collaboration (Fowler et al., 2019).

Social network support and relational trust are two factors that have been associated with retention among novice SETs (Hopkins et al., 2019). Novice SETs who reported higher trust in their colleagues are less likely to leave the profession (Hopkins et al., 2019). Higher levels of job satisfaction have been observed when a team approach is implemented where general educators, related service providers, administrators, and special educators work together to provide services (Aldosiry, 2020).

Workplace Environment

Schools are social institutions where students and teachers alike long to feel a sense of acceptance and belonging. In any working environment, schools included, a positive work environment can ward off potential power imbalances and competition between employees. Creating a positive culture enables employees to feel accepted and part of something bigger than themselves. Studies suggest that teachers will stay in high need schools when the school climate is positive and working conditions are satisfactory (Ansley et al., 2019). Promoting a positive workplace is a shared responsibility between school and district leaders, SET's, and teacher educators (Billingsley et al., 2020). Research suggests that administrators who cultivate satisfactory working conditions promote high-quality work experiences (Aldosiry, 2020; Ansley et al., 2019).

Professional Development

Teaching is a profession that requires ongoing professional development. Professional development has been studied to act as a powerful measure against work-related stress and attrition for SETs (Hester et al., 2020). Professional development should positively influence

teacher knowledge and, in turn, student learning (Bates & Morgan, 2018; Cornelius et al., 2020). Research suggests that the amount of participation in professional development was positively related to teacher perceptions of job satisfaction (Cornelius et al., 2020; Toropova et al., 2021). However, conflicting research suggests that not all professional development effectively promotes student learning and changes teacher habits and teaching methods (Billingsley et al., 2019). In a recent national study, Stelitano et al, (2019) indicated that 66% of SETs reported their access to training and information was somewhat or completely efficient, leaving 34% in need of professional development.

Seven widely shared features of effective professional development demonstrate a positive link between teacher professional development, teaching practices, and student learning (Bates & Morgan, 2018; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Effective professional development is content-focused, incorporates active learning, supports collaboration, uses models of effective practice, provides coaching and expert support, offers feedback and reflection, and is of sustained duration (Bates & Morgan, 2018; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

In contrast, a positive association between teacher professional development and job satisfaction has been found (Toropova et al., 2021). The amount of professional development and teacher self-efficacy beliefs were related to job satisfaction (Toropova et al., 2021). Novice SETs can increase their task identity and autonomy in the classroom by using research-based strategies offered through professional development courses. Furthermore, Cornelius et al, (2020) found that novice SETs improved their instructional practices after being mentored by those who received specialized coaching and professional development in the areas in which their mentees teach.

Logistical Supports

Changing contexts and educational reform has led to increasing demands on SET's throughout the years. Working conditions may directly facilitate teachers' efforts to enact their knowledge by supporting teachers' mental health, creating conditions that support effective instruction, and providing teachers with opportunities to learn more effective practices (Billingsley et al., 2020). With the increased pressures of accomplishing a wide variety of job-related tasks, SETs are often left with little to no planning time (Aldosiry, 2020; Hester et al., 2020). Administration at the local level can work together with SETs to find time for SETs to plan and collaborate.

In addition to planning and collaborating, SETs are tasked with complying with legal requirements through the development and administration of IEP paperwork for all students on their caseload. Kartika et al. (2018) found that the average SET spends five hours per week on IEP administrative tasks and paperwork. Furthermore, data suggests SETs spend more time on IEP paperwork than assessing assignments, communicating with parents, collaborating with other teachers, and attending IEP meetings (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Kartika et al., 2018; Langher et al., 2017). Santoro (2018) explained unprecedented expectations of SETs to collect, analyze, and maintain voluminous amounts of data and information. These expectations are often coupled with increased professional demands, which can lead to increased feelings of job dissatisfaction and burnout (Santoro, 2018).

Studies have documented that teachers' instruction improves with access to high-quality instructional materials (Billingsley et al., 2020); however, novice SETs often report having limited access to appropriate curricular and instructional resources (Billingsley et al., 2019). Ultimately, the lack of providing instrumental support such as materials and resources can

indirectly affect student outcome and engagement through influencing teacher effectiveness and instructional quality (Aldosiry, 2020; Billingsley et al., 2020). SETs in less affluent school districts have been found to cite limited access to instructional materials more often than those in more affluent districts (Aldosiry, 2020).

Large caseloads appear to be cited as factors for SET attrition; however, the size of caseload appeared to be non-significant predictors of attrition (Aldosiry, 2020; Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Hagaman & Casey, 2017). In contrast, research suggests that caseload complexity contributes to SET attrition, indicating serving students with a wide range of behavioral, medical, and academic needs challenged their capacity to effectively serve students (Aldosiry, 2020; Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Gee & Gonsier-Gerdin, 2018). More specifically, caseload complexity refers to the form of managing the range of abilities, ages, and grade levels in which SETs teach (Gee & Gonsier-Gerdin, 2018).

Research suggests that SETs enter the teaching profession because they have a passion for teaching and view the profession as a valuable and important profession that makes a difference in society (Bergmark et al., 2018). Compensation for teachers is determined at the district level, which is why teachers of neighboring counties can make very different salaries (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Feng & Sass, 2018). Teacher salary schedules are typically determined by a combination of educational attainment and years of experience (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019). Research has found a variety of differential wage compensation systems designed to attract and retain teachers in hard-to-staff subject areas (Feng & Sass, 2018). Incentives such as pay-for-performance, loan forgiveness programs, and service scholarships have been found to have an influence on recruiting and retaining in the teaching profession (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019).

Job Satisfaction

Low job satisfaction is one of the leading indicators attributed to burnout and attrition of SETs (Robinson et al., 2019). Research suggests that employees exhibit high work performance and experience high job satisfaction when they work on jobs characterized by high levels of autonomy, skill variety, task identity, task significance, and job-based feedback (Oldham, 2013). The Job Characteristics Theory provides measures of a number of personal feelings or reactions a person obtains from performing their job as "personal outcomes" related to job satisfaction (Hackman & Oldham, 1975). General satisfaction is defined as "an overall measure of the degree to which the employee is satisfied and happy with the job" (Hackman & Oldham, 1975, p. 4). According to the JCT, general job satisfaction is broken down into a number of short scales that provide separate measures of specific satisfactions on the job (Oldham, 2013).

Internal work motivation is the degree to which the employee is self-motivated to perform effectively on the job and experiences positive internal feelings when working effectively on the job and negative internal feelings when doing poorly (Hackman & Oldham, 1975). Internal work motivation can be increased by making employees feel competent and giving them autonomy while performing job duties. In addition, task identity and task significance can also increase this intrinsic motivation in employees by giving them a sense of accomplishment and feelings of importance. One of the psychological states mentioned in the JCT is experienced meaningfulness, which is achieved when work takes on a personal meaning and how the work accomplishes something.

Specific satisfactions include measures such as job security, pay and other compensation, peers and co-workers, supervision, and opportunities for personal growth and development on the job (Hackman & Oldham, 1975). Specific job satisfactions are typically dependent on the

employer and the work ethic of the individual employee. Job security for SETs can come by taking on more roles in the school, increasing productivity, or becoming a mentor. Pay and other compensation can be increased by advancing one's educational degree. Overall, job satisfaction is important in the field of education, as it is one of the leading indicators of attrition in SETs (Robinson et al., 2019, Oerlemans & Bakker, 2018).

Summary

Teacher shortage in the field of special education has become a problem that many school districts across the country face. On top of that, students referred for special education services continues to rise, while the number of qualified SETs continues to fall (National Education Association, 2021). This equation leads to a disservice to students with disabilities who deserve competent, qualified, and caring teachers. In the field of special education, there is a severe need to address the shortage of educators. Recent literature has identified problem areas that novice SETs struggle with, which has resulted in new mentorship initiatives and monetary incentives for beginning teachers. In addition, beginning SETs require experienced guidance and support to feel confident and comfortable in their new role (Cornelius et al., 2020; Harmsen et al., 2018). Retaining novice SETs requires a comprehensive approach that ensures teachers are compensated adequately for their labor, are well prepared for the challenges of teaching, and provides the learning and teaching environments that help them to be effective and support their growth (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019).

This study sought to describe how the characteristics of the JCT tie into novice SETs utilizing supports. Much of the current literature focuses on the causes of SET attrition, and current information regarding the experiences of novice SETs utilizing job-related supports is limited. The present study describes how extrinsic and intrinsic experiences related to utilizing

job-related supports shape new teachers' perspectives and describes if they contribute to overall workplace satisfaction. By identifying what job-related supports are working to retain new SETs, these strategies and input can be implemented into retaining future, novice SETs.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of identifying and utilizing job-related supports for novice special education teachers (SETs) at a high school in the southeastern United States. There is a gap in the literature on identifying and utilizing job-related supports needed to foster SET retention among novice teachers. This study allowed novice SETs to voice their subjective experiences on utilizing support in the classroom. The following sections detail the study's design, setting, participants, procedures, data collection and analysis strategies, and methods for increasing the trustworthiness of the findings.

Research Design

This study examined novice SETs' experiences of identifying and utilizing job-related supports through a transcendental phenomenological approach to qualitative research. Qualitative researchers study aspects in their natural environments, attempting to interpret phenomena regarding the meanings people bring to them (Denzen & Lincoln, 1994). There was a need to examine the perceptions of supports needed to retain novice SETs, which was possible through qualitative research. "Qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.8).

For the purposes of this study, four qualitative design inquiries were considered: ethnography, hermeneutics, heuristics, and phenomenology. Ethnography was an approach considered that involved extensive fieldwork and required direct observations of the group's activities being studied (Moustakas, 1994). Direct observations would not allow me to capture

the phenomena of lived experiences of novice SETs utilizing job-related supports. Hermeneutics focuses on consciousness and experience; however, this approach also considers the history and emphasizes that studies of experience are dependent on historical groundings (Moustakas, 1994). The heuristic inquiry focuses on understanding human experience, and verification is enhanced by returning to the research participants (Moustakas, 1994).

The research design most appropriate for this study was the phenomenological research design. Husserl was the principal founder of phenomenology, and the origins of this research design date back to the 20th century (Dowling, 2007; Van Manen, 2014). "Phenomenology is a form of inquiry that seeks to understand human experience to explore the phenomena and how it is perceived and experienced by individuals in the phenomenological event" (Sheehan, 2014, p. 1). Phenomenology requires understanding the experiences of others so that we can glean new insights about a particular phenomenon (Neubauer et al., 2019).

Based on the multiple roles of SETs, transcendental phenomenology was selected as the research design type for this study's purpose to understand the human experience (Sheehan, 2014) of the novice teachers' experiences and challenges as they navigate and live early in their career. Transcendental phenomenology allows the phenomena to naturally emerge by setting aside all preconceived ideas or epoché (Sheehan, 2014). Epoché is a Greek word meaning to refrain from judgment or a commonplace way of perceiving things (Dowling, 2007; Sheehan, 2014). Creswell and Poth (2018) found that transcendental phenomenology is focused more on a description of the participant's experiences and less on my own interpretations. Husserl claimed that we bracket our naïve beliefs in the externality of the world, thereby refraining from making any judgment as to its objective existence or non-existence (Emanuel Gros, 2017). The transcendental phenomenology design type aligns with this study because I set aside

prejudgments regarding the phenomenon being investigated and relied on intuition and imagination to obtain a picture of the experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

A research design is a blueprint used to answer specific research questions (Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019). A quantitative method was not appropriate for this study because quantitative research is typically a formal, objective, systematic process used to describe variables and test relationships between them to examine their cause and effect (Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019). Quantitative research generates numerical data and seeks to find answers by testing hypotheses using statistical analyses (Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019). A qualitative approach seeks meaning from understanding individuals' lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, a qualitative approach was best suited for this study to explore novice SETs' experiences utilizing job-related supports.

Research Questions

The following research questions were developed to guide this qualitative study:

CRQ: How do novice special education teachers describe their experiences of utilizing job-related supports during their first three years teaching?

SQ1: How do novice special education teachers describe their job satisfaction through their experiences utilizing job-related supports?

SQ2: What experiences are the most influential on novice special education teachers during their first three years teaching?

Setting and Participants

In order to adequately address the research questions, the setting and participants are outlined in the following sections. The participants and setting align with the research design as well as the research questions. The setting and participants are described below, and all

identifying information were written using pseudonyms. In addition, educational facilities were identified using pseudonyms and vague geographical details.

Setting

For the purposes of this study, the name of the high school was identified using a pseudonym and a general geographic location was used. The setting for this study was Bent Creek High School in the southeastern United States. According to the local school data report from the school website (2021), Bent Creek High School had a total enrollment count of 3,848 students, with 560 students enrolled in a special education program. According to the accountability report issued for the 2019-20 school year, Bent Creek had 218 teachers, with 40 having zero to five years of teaching experience. The school district won the Broad Prize for Urban Education in 2010 and 2014 for being the top urban school in the nation (GCPS, 2021). The one million dollar Broad Prize honors large, urban school districts with outstanding academic performance and improvement while reducing achievement gaps among poor and minority students. The school district had developed an accountability system for improving schools called the Results-Based Evaluation System (RBES). RBES relatively and systematically measures a school's progress, providing a process for clearly communicating expectations, and reviewing, monitoring, and evaluating school performance.

For the 2020-21 school year, the school district served 180,055 students and was ranked the 14th largest school district in the United States. The school district had a budget of $2.346 billion for the fiscal year 2021. Students from this school district come from 181 different countries and speak more than 100 different languages. The demographics of the student body breakdown as follows: Hispanic/Latino 33%, African American 32%, Caucasian 20%, Asian 11%, and Multiracial 4% (GCPS, 2021). While these numbers do not display a huge diversity in

culture, the numbers since 2004 have continued to increase in student diversity at the high school each year. 50% of students in the school district were eligible for free/reduced meals. Ten percent of the student body was made up of students with disabilities, and ten percent comprised students with limited English proficiency.

The school district provided special education services on a continuum from the least restrictive to more restrictive environments, contingent upon the students' educational needs. The special education department provided a full array of assessment and special education interventions for students requiring such services. The special education department worked collaboratively with students, schools, families, and the community to increase student achievement and promote post-secondary success for all students with disabilities. The school district is identified using a pseudonym in order to protect any identifying information. At the time of this study, the Alexander County school district had 175 vacant teacher positions at the start of the 2021 school year, making it an appropriate setting for this study by having a shortage of teacher positions. In addition to the vacant positions, the school district hired over 400 new teachers for the 2020-2021 school year (GCPS, 2021), making the county an appropriate setting for this study.

Participants

For this study, 12 novice SETs were used. The term "novice teacher" for selecting research participants was defined as ensuring they had 0-3 years of teaching experience in special education (Bettini et al., 2018; Hagaman & Casey, 2017), held a valid or provisional teaching license, and were actively working in a special education teaching position at Bent Creek High School. The background of participants outlined relevant demographic information about all participants who volunteered for the study (see Appendix E). Participants were

identified using pseudonyms and asked to list their years of experience and what grade level each participant taught. Participants were also asked to disclose what type of teaching certificate they held, a provisional or induction certificate, as current research supports more teachers are electing alternative pathways into the field of teaching (Fowler et al., 2019).

Researcher Positionality

This qualitative research aimed to explore novice SETs' experiences identifying and utilizing job-related support sources. I work with students with low-incidence disabilities in a self-contained setting. I would like to understand better what support novice SETs have and what they need to remain in the classroom while supporting autonomy, feedback, social support, task interdependence, and task significance. I aimed to understand what it takes to be a long-serving SET to offer guidance and support for novice SETs for years to come.

The public education system in America is in a constant state of evolution, and teachers need to be able to adapt to the system. Students with disabilities thrive on routines and schedules, which are often disrupted when teacher turnover strikes. Without adequate support and guidance, the frequently changing context of teaching only adds to teacher attrition (Rowe, 2020). The essence of novice SETs utilizing job-related supports may provide opportunities for further research and opportunities for enhancing mentoring and teacher preparation programs.

Interpretive Framework

Guba and Lincoln (1994) define a research paradigm as a "basic set of beliefs or worldview that guides research action or an investigation" (p. 1). In qualitative research, the researcher needs to identify their position in the process as a researcher. In completing this study, I did so with a social constructivist worldview. A worldview is a "perspective, or thinking, or school of thought, or shared beliefs, that informs the meaning or interpretation of research data"

(Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017, p.1). Social constructivism was developed in Russia in the 1930s by Lev Vygotsky (Overall, 2007). Social constructivists seek to understand the world in which they live and work and develop subjective meanings of their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In the educational context, social constructivism "emphasizes the impact of social and cultural influences on students, the ways their varied backgrounds and experiences shape student's learning and the ways students understand and interpret concepts" (Schreiber & Valle, 2013, p. 2).

Ultimately, this research was guided by the assumptions, beliefs, and values of the social constructivist worldview to discover the multiple realities of novice SETs through detailed accounts of their experiences. In completing this study, I sought to obtain information on other SETs' lived experiences and to gather perspectives from their realities. In addition, I used the phenomenology methodology as it focuses on the social constructivist principle and supports the theory that how people define their world is a product of what people say and do (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

Philosophical Assumptions

Philosophical assumptions constitute the abstract beliefs and principles that shape how the researcher views the world and interprets and acts within that world (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). My positionality on each philosophical assumption is explained below. I convey the assumptions, provide definitions, and discuss how they are illustrated in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The following assumptions are folded into the interpretive framework used throughout this study.

Ontological Assumption

The first philosophical assumption used to guide this study was the ontological

assumption. Creswell and Poth (2018) mention that ontological assumptions relate to capturing reality through multiple views or perspectives. This inquiry sought to better understand 12 novice SETs on their experiences and lived realities of supports utilized to retain SETs. Husserl believed that to understand the reality of a phenomenon is to understand the phenomenon as it is lived by a person (Neubauer et al., 2019). Through triangulation of multiple data collection techniques, I gathered data and developed themes from the multiple realities. I acknowledge that each reality is individually constructed (Creswell & Poth, 2018) and contributed to the study in its own ways.

Epistemological Assumption

The epistemological assumption requires researchers to become fully immersed in the field where participants live and work to obtain firsthand information through participants' subjective, lived realities (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For Husserl, phenomenology was rooted in an epistemological attitude. He questioned what it was for an individual to know or be conscious of a phenomenon (Neubauer et al., 2019). I conducted this study on participants who held the same job as myself. Throughout the research process, I used bracketing to set aside my own opinions and experiences in order to give me a better lens to see their experiences and lived-realities on a blank slate (Moustakas, 1994; Neubauer et al., 2019). By conducting individual interviews to collect subjective information from each participant, I considered the phenomena from different perspectives, identified units of meaning and clustered them into themes to form textural descriptions (Neubauer et al., 2019).

Axiological Assumption

The axiological assumption is a branch of philosophy that studies values and focuses on what values should guide our research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My personal values and beliefs

are shaped by the experiences I endured while being a novice SET. For this study, I bracketed out my personal experiences using an epoché journal prior to data collection and analysis in order to focus on the lived, subjective experiences of each of the research participants (see Appendix M). By identifying my positionality about the research context, I bracketed out my previous understandings, past knowledge, and assumptions about the phenomenon of interest to make them known (Neubauer et al., 2019).

Researcher's Role

I acted as the human instrument during this transcendental phenomenological study. All writing was in my own words, and I collected my data through interviews, focus groups, and physical artifacts. At the time of this research study, I was a special education teacher for students with low-incidence disabilities. Working in the self-contained setting, I get to know many of the other self-contained SETs throughout the years. For the purposes of this study and to eliminate potential bias, I selected participants with whom I did not have any authoritative role. In addition, I was a novice SET teacher only a few years ago, and my experience was enriching. However, I have witnessed novice teachers struggle and ultimately leave the profession for various reasons. Moustakas (1994) stated it is essential that the researcher has experienced the same phenomenon to connect the researcher's experience with the participants' experiences. I also work in the same school district chosen for this study, as it fits my study's criteria as having shortages of SETs. When analyzing the data, I relinquished biases and looked at the data with a clean slate. It is assumed that all participants answered with accuracy during their interviews, focus groups, and physical artifacts.

<div align="center">

Procedures

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This section outlines necessary site permissions, information about securing Institutional

Review Board (IRB) approval, soliciting participants, the data collection and analysis plans by data source. Trustworthiness refers to the degree of confidence in data, interpretation, and methods used to ensure the quality of this study. I will outline the protocols and procedures I used for this study to assess the accuracy of my findings as best described by myself as the researcher, the participants, and the reviewers.

Permissions

Prior to collecting data, I obtained site permission from the principal of Bent Creek High School in order to grant permission to conduct this study, collect, and analyze data (see Appendix A). Once site approval from the school district was obtained, I obtained IRB approval (see Appendix B). All research participants were assured that their participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained (see Appendix C).

Recruitment Plan

For the purposes of this study, the sample pool was made up of novice teachers who had 0-3 years of teaching experience in special education (Billingsley et al., 2019), held a valid or provisional teaching license, and were actively working in a special education teaching position at Bent Creek High School. Once site approval and IRB approval were granted, I began pooling the sample pool of novice teachers to secure a target sample size of 12-15 research participants.

After the criterion for participants were identified, the purposeful sampling approach was implemented to decide whom to select as participants, the specific type of sampling strategy, and the sample size to be studied (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Purposeful sampling strategies align with phenomenology in qualitative research by identifying and selecting the information-rich cases about the parameters being studied in the population of interest (Palinkas et al., 2015). Criterion sampling ensured each participant had experienced the phenomenon and met the criteria of being

a novice SET for this study. The criteria of being a novice SET included having 0-3 years of

teaching experience in special education, holding a valid or provisional teaching license, and

were actively working in a special education teaching position at Bent Creek High School.

In order to recruit participants, I sent an email to the special education department at Bent

Creek High School using the email recruitment template from Liberty University's website (see

Appendix D). The recruitment email explained the general purposes of the study and described

specific criteria needed in order to participate in the study. Participants were assured that their

participation in the study was voluntary (Creswell & Poth, 2018), and informed consent was

obtained from those participants selected to participate. Participants were asked to review and

sign the informed consent form attached to the recruitment email if they agreed to participate in

the study (see Appendix C). After consent forms were received, the researcher emailed a link to a

demographic survey for participants who agreed to participate in the study to fill out (see

Appendix E). The demographic survey collected demographic information about each participant

relevant to the study.

Data Collection Plan

I corroborated evidence through triangulation of multiple data sources in order to provide

validity to their findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data was collected through a combination of

semi-structured interview sessions, focus groups, and physical artifacts using a meme that

represented the perspectives of novice SETs. Before each data collection session, I reiterated to

participants that participation was voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw at any time.

Individual Interviews

Qualitative interviewing provides an in-depth, open-ended exploration of an aspect of life

about which the interviewee has considerable insight, often combined with substantial

experience (Charmaz, 2014). All interviews were semi-structured, open-ended, and one-on-one. The job diagnostic survey (JDS) was used in the development of interview questions and is a self-report instrument formulated from the job characteristics theory (JCT) in which employees' answers are used to score a job in terms of five core dimensions that are held to determine employee motivation (Oldham, 2013). In addition to being aligned with the research questions, the interview questions are also aligned with the goal and purpose of this study (see Appendix G).

Individual Interview Questions

Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions:

Please introduce yourself to me as if we just met each other.

1. Describe your role of autonomy in your classroom. SQ1

2. Could you describe in detail your relationship with your supervisor? SQ1

3. On a scale of 1-10 with 1 being extremely dissatisfied and 10 being extremely satisfied, how satisfied are you with your performance at this job? Could you explain why you rated your performance this number? SQ2

4. Within your teaching role, what type of experiences have made you feel successful at work? CRQ

5. What do you feel attributes the most to your success as a beginning teacher? SQ1

6. What workplace relationships do you believe have been the most positive in your teaching career? CRQ

7. What are some changes either county or district-wide that could be made to help other special education teachers be successful? CRQ

8. If you could look into the future, do you see your older self remaining in your current role? Explain. CRQ

9. Tell me about your picture that represents what being a novice SET means to you and the ideas that it represents. CRQ

10. Thank you for the valuable information, is there anything else you would like to add before we end? CRQ

The first question was designed to allow the participants to open up and build rapport with me. It gave the participant a chance to describe their background and where they were currently in their professional and nonprofessional role.

Questions one and two were designed using open-ended questions, allowing participants to share their experiences in-depth and giving them the freedom to express their thoughts. Open-ended questions are "broad, nonjudgmental, open to unique interpretations of experience, and invite the participant to provide a detailed description of the topic being explored" (Roberts, 2020, p.8). The first two questions touched on the role of autonomy and relationships with administrators, which is a hot topic in the current literature as well as in the JCT as factors that attribute to novice teacher retention and workplace satisfaction (Conley & You, 2017; Hackman & Oldham, 2018; Hagaman & Casey, 2017; Harmsen et al., 2018).

Question three utilized a rating scale and asked participants to describe how satisfied they were with their performance on the job. This question was designed to elicit responses about what the participants would like to improve and then ask what they needed in order to help them improve their performance. According to Hackman and Oldham (1975), the JCT proposed that five core job characteristics enhance the motivational potential of jobs and positively influence

important work outcomes such as job satisfaction and performance. This question was developed to see if any responses correlated with the five characteristics mentioned in the JCT.

Questions four and five pertained to what the participants contributed to their success and what experiences they viewed as successful within the roles and responsibilities of the job. Recent research attributes novice SET success to "induction programs that show the highest satisfaction rates of their novice teachers are those that provide the most rigorous mentor selection process, in-depth professional development, and ongoing support of their mentors" (Cornelius et al., 2020, p.3).

Question six provided an opportunity for participants to discuss their workplace relationships and their impacts on their professional experiences. Research suggests that new teachers are more likely to leave the profession when they do not feel supported by their administration or colleagues (Bettini et al., 2018; Hopkins et al., 2019).

Questions seven and eight focused on changes that participants felt could be made at the county or district levels to help novice SETs succeed. Question eight aimed to get participants to look into the future and predict whether they saw themselves staying in the field of special education. This question allowed participants to open up about whether they were currently happy in their roles and discuss plans for their future which may include career advancement, starting a family, or even leaving the profession altogether.

Question nine provided an opportunity for participants to discuss the meaning behind the artifact they chose that represents what being a novice SET meant to them. Question ten gave participants a chance to add any information they felt was essential to share that may contribute to the research study that we did not discuss during the interview. It allowed the participants to

speak freely about topics or experiences they may have encountered throughout their novice years.

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

Data was analyzed by performing Husserl's transcendental phenomenological reduction, which uses a series of phenomenological reductions to put aside the natural world to see the phenomenon in its essence (Finlay, 2008). In addition, the reduction helps us to "free ourselves from our prejudices and previous understandings, securing a level of detachment such that we can encounter the things themselves in their appearing" (Finlay, 2008, p.4). To begin, I audio-recorded all interviews using the ZOOM audio feature and made field notes on my interview protocol template (see Appendix K). After each interview session, all interviews were uploaded onto a computer and stored, labeled, and saved to ensure they stay secured and organized. At the conclusion of all interviews, I transcribed all interviews verbatim using the NVivo transcription software (see Appendix L). Data transcription is the process of rendering data into a new representational form for researchers to represent the data they have gathered (Gibson & Brown, 2009). To ensure reliability and validity, I reviewed the audio files to ensure that verbatim representations of the interviews were recorded and represented (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In addition, member checking was done after transcribing each interview, and the transcript was emailed to the corresponding participant to ensure their answers were conveyed appropriately (see Appendix I). Next, I printed and labeled with corresponding pseudonyms each interview to help stay organized. As mentioned earlier, I bracketed out all previous biases and judgments prior to analyzing the data using an epoché journal (see Appendix M). Next, I used horizontalization by giving each statement equal value as I read and reread each interview. I scanned each transcript and took notes of first impressions (Moustakas, 1994). From here I

eliminated any statements that were redundant or did not relate to my research questions. Next, I carefully reread each transcript while annotating relevant words, phrases, or sections with codes to help identify data types and patterns. Finally, I developed a thematic framework within the NVivo software in order to organize relevant words and phrases to help organize recurring themes.

Physical Artifacts

Images allow participants to create photographic evidence and symbolic representations to offer insight, teach others about their experiences, and help others see the world through their eyes (Winton, 2016). In addition, using images in qualitative research facilitates communication, enhances rapport building, enables the expression of emotions and tacit knowledge, and encourages reflection (Glaw et al., 2017). The visual image provides a site of learning that contributes to how we see ourselves, how we define and relate to the world, and what we perceive as significant or different (Wang, 1999). Furthermore, the lesson an image teaches does not reside in its physical structure, but rather in how people interpret the image (Wang, 1999). Photographs have been found to give extra depth to the interview content by adding depth and richness to generate verbal discussion (Glaw et al., 2017).

Prior to their 1:1 interviews, participants were asked to email a meme that represented their experience as a novice SET. The 9th question of the 1:1 interview asked the participants to describe their picture and why they chose it (see Appendix F). In addition to this discussion, I asked clarifying questions that focused on my research questions and the lived experiences of each novice SET. I stored a digital picture of each meme in a separate folder on my password-protected computer in order to have it on file for this study. In addition, I stored the printed

picture of each meme in a locked filing cabinet. The artifacts were kept confidential, and identifying information was blurred out.

Physical Artifacts Data Analysis Plan

I transcribed the one-on-one interviews and examined the question that discussed the meme the participants were asked to submit. I obtained meaning from the horizonalized statements and clustered them into common themes (Moustakas, 1994). In addition, I visually examined each artifact (meme) to look for recurring themes that may have appeared between participants. From there, I developed structural descriptions into the meanings and essences of the phenomenon.

Focus Groups

I conducted two focus group interview sessions. I divided participants based on convenience into two separate groups to ensure that every participant could speak up without feeling overwhelmed by the number of people in the group. Prior to the focus group interviews, I reminded participants that participation was voluntary and that all information would be kept confidential. I mediated the focus groups by asking relevant and probing questions, but the participants drove the conversation. Both focus group interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed. Both focus groups were asked the same questions (see Appendix H), but each group elicited different answers. The interaction among participants in the focus groups yielded additional richness to the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Audio recordings were stored on a password-protected computer.

Focus Group Questions

I used the data from the one-on-one interviews to drive additional content for the focus group questions. In addition, I used the JDS, developed by Hackman and Oldham (1975), to

guide questions.

    1. Why did you choose to be a special education teacher? CRQ

    2. Describe some of the biggest challenges you face within your teaching roles. SQ1

    3. What supports have helped you manage the challenges within your teaching roles?
SQ1

    4. Are there any additional supports you believe could help increase job satisfaction rates
for special education teachers? SQ2

    5. What advice would you give a novice special education teacher? CRQ

Question one was designed to elicit certain job characteristics that fostered job satisfaction in each participant. This question set the stage for what job-related supports were utilized in order to promote job satisfaction in novice SETs. Question two was designed to look for commonalities between the research and the subjective, lived experiences of participants at Bent Creek High School. Data show common challenges SETs face which may lead to job dissatisfaction and ultimately attrition out of the field (Billingsley et al., 2020). Questions three and four were guided by the JCT to see which supports novice SETs were utilizing and how they related to the job characteristics that promoted retention. Question five aimed to get a feel for each participant's overall job satisfaction by examining what advice they would give a novice SET.

Focus Group Data Analysis Plan

Focus group audio recordings were stored on a password-protected computer. I transcribed verbatim audio recordings from each focus group using the NVivo software. Next, I printed out all transcribed focus group sessions to help facilitate data organization. I reviewed and studied the transcriptions of each focus group through the procedures and methods of

phenomenal analysis (Moustakas, 1994) to develop essences of the phenomenon. I looked for common themes between focus groups and one-on-one interviews, then merged the data.

Data Synthesis

I used triangulation of multiple data sources to shed light on the central research questions to find themes and create thick descriptions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data from all three collection methods were analyzed in the same manner, and I merged the data so that each type contributed to the emergence of themes. I began each data analysis session by describing my own experiences with the phenomenon and bracketed out my views before proceeding with the experiences of others (see Appendix M). Bracketing or epoché is used to take a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I began preliminary coding by labeling and organizing my data into different codes using the thematic framework within the NVivo software. Using horizonalization, I then analyzed the data by reducing the information to significant statements or quotes and combined the statements into themes (Moustakas, 1994). Following that, I developed a composite textural description of the participants' experiences and a composite structural description of their experiences to convey an overall essence of the experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I then reported the synthesis of the experience in written form.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to the degree of confidence in data, interpretation, and methods (Polit & Beck, 2014). Among the many roles a qualitative researcher assumes, validation attempts to assess the accuracy of the findings, as best described by the researcher, the participants, and the reviewers (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Conducting and reporting research is a significant challenge for qualitative researchers striving for the highest possible quality (Cope,

2014). In order to establish trustworthiness throughout the investigative process, I intentionally addressed the following criteria: credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability.

Credibility

"Credibility entails an accurate description of the phenomenon of interest and generation of believable research claims" (Liao & Hitchcock, 2018, p.1). In addition, consistency throughout the inquiry enhances the overall credibility (Newman & Houchins, 2018). This inquiry's research questions were developed to guide and frame this study and contribute to the data collected and analyzed throughout.

Triangulation is one method of promoting credibility. Triangulation involves using several sources of information or procedure from the field to repeatedly establish identifiable patterns (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stahl & King, 2020). For this transcendental phenomenological study, I used methodological triangulation. Methodological triangulation involves using one or more methods of collecting or analyzing data (Stahl & King, 2020). I used three methods of collecting data to elicit themes and patterns: focus groups, interviews, and artifacts. To further enhance credibility, I included an epoché journal to bracket out any personal or professional information that may have influenced the data analysis (see Appendix M), (Moustakas, 1994).

Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which findings are helpful and can be generalized to persons in other settings or contexts (Stahl & King, 2020). Thick descriptions supported the transferability of the findings of this study. According to Mills et al. (2010), thick descriptions characterize the process of paying attention to contextual detail in observing and interpreting social meaning.

Dependability

It is essential to establish the research study's findings as consistent and repeatable to ensure trustworthiness. Dependability refers to the stability of data over time and the conditions of the study, and confirmability is the degree findings or neutrality are consistent and could be repeated (Polit & Beck, 2014). In order to establish dependability, I included details in the Methods section of this dissertation that made the study easy to replicate.

Confirmability

An inquiry audit can be used in the qualitative research realm to ensure findings are supported by the raw data collected to establish confirmability (Stahl & King, 2020). In addition, member checking was used to establish confirmability, and member checking was utilized after interview sessions were transcribed and analyzed in order to share a summary of the findings with the research participants (see Appendix I). An email was sent to participants to review their verbatim transcripts in order to ensure accuracy.

Ethical Considerations

This transcendental phenomenological study allowed participants to express their perspectives and experiences on the supports given to them as novice SETs. Although there are no known risks to this study, several ethical considerations were employed since human subjects were involved. After gaining approval from the IRB, informed consent forms were sent via e-mail to ensure participants were fully informed about the interviews being conducted and their consent to participate (see Appendix C). Participation in the study was voluntary, and participants were informed that they were free to withdraw their participation at any time. In addition, identifying information was excluded from all reports, and pseudonyms were used for all participants, their geographical locations, and schools where they worked.

In order to safeguard data collected throughout the research process, all field notes were secured in a locked filing cabinet with the addition of a locked classroom door. Data collected through online resources were always stored on a password-protected computer in a locked classroom.

Summary

This chapter provided details on the research methods used in this transcendental phenomenological study which sought to describe the experiences of utilized supports provided to help retain novice SETs. The need to understand the perceptions and experiences of novice SETs is both pressing and necessary. The results of this study could influence novice teacher retention and provide valuable information to school leaders and districts throughout the county. This chapter provided a transparent, detailed description of the methods used that aligned with the purpose of this study. Interviews, questionnaires, and memes were used as data collection methods to support triangulation and promote the study's credibility. This chapter included a clear description of the transcendental phenomenological design of the study, a re-statement of the research questions, a description of the setting and procedures using pseudonyms, my role as the researcher, data collection, and analysis strategies that aligned with the design. This chapter concluded with a summary of ethical considerations that were sought to enhance the trustworthiness of the inquiry.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of identifying and utilizing job-related supports for novice special education teachers (SETs). To develop this description, data were collected from 12 novice SETs using interviews, physical artifacts, and focus groups. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to give participants opportunities to tell their own stories and share their experiences. Physical artifacts were self-selected memes that prompted participants to generate verbal discussion by using images to evoke emotion. The memes gave participants an opportunity to relate their experiences to an image and ultimately initiate conversation. Focus groups were conducted in order to allow participants to connect with other novice SETs and participate in a collaborative discussion about a common phenomenon.

The phenomenological reduction was used to put aside the natural world in order to see the phenomenon in its essence (Moustakas, 1994). From the data collected, the following themes emerged: Managing Behaviors in the Classroom, Logistical Barriers to Success, Collaboration in the Workplace, and Building Connections with Students. This chapter presents a description of each participant, results of data collected using textural and structural descriptions that detail each theme and research question responses. This chapter concludes with a composite description of novice SETs experiences utilizing job-related supports.

Participants

To describe the experiences of novice SETs utilizing job-related supports, purposeful and criterion sampling methods were used to gather study participants. Prior to contacting participants and seeking participation, permission was obtained from the principal of the high

school used in this study. Following this, a recruitment email was sent out to the special

education staff of the high school used in this study in order to gather study participants (see

Appendix D). All participants signed and returned their consent forms by hand to the researcher,

then completed the demographic survey to ensure they met the criteria required for this study

(see Appendix C). Overall, 12 teachers participated throughout the duration of this study.

All communication with participants occurred via in-person, password-protected ZOOM

meetings, and email. All 12 participants completed the consent form, demographic survey, each

method of data collection, and member checking (see Appendix J). All participants submitted

their meme by email, which was printed and stored in a locked filing cabinet. Individual

interviews were conducted in a private room and arranged with each participant in order to

accommodate their schedules. Only the researcher and participants were given access to the

interviews. Two focus groups were held on a password-protected ZOOM meeting to ensure only

the participants were granted access to the meetings.

All participants held teaching licenses in the state of Georgia, but their diverse

backgrounds and instructional settings varied tremendously. These settings included self-

contained, resource, and cotaught. The participants' ages ranged from 22 to 46 years old, while

eight were female and four were male. Pseudonyms were selected for each participant by the

researcher and used throughout this manuscript in order to protect their anonymity. Table 1

displays the demographic information of all 12 participants.

Table 1

Background of Participants

Name	Teaching Experience	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Setting	Grade Level	Certification Route
AUDREY	1	37	Female	White	Self-Contained	9, 10, 11, 12	Alternative/Provisional
REMI	2	24	Female	White	Self-Contained	9, 10	Traditional/Bachelor's
LUKE	2	23	Male	White	Self-Contained	11, 12	Traditional/Bachelor's
RHETT	1	39	Male	Black	Self-Contained	9, 10	Traditional/Bachelor's
CARRIE	1	22	Female	White	Self-Contained	9, 10, 11, 12	Traditional/Bachelor's
RYAN	3	37	Male	White	Resource	9	Alternative/Provisional
WHITNEY	2	31	Female	White	Cotaught	11, 12	Alternative/Provisional
DREW	1	23	Female	White	Cotaught	9	Alternative/Provisional
PAIGE	1	46	Female	White	Resource	10	Alternative/Provisional
BRITNEY	3	30	Female	White	Resource	11, 12	Alternative/Provisional
CHRISTINA	3	33	Female	White	Resource	10	Alternative/Provisional
FORD	2	28	Male	White	Resource	9	Traditional/Bachelor's

Ryan

Ryan was a 37-year-old with three years of special education teaching experience. At the time of the study, Ryan taught resource and co-taught classes in Biology. Ryan presented himself professionally, was well-spoken, and was eager to start his interview. Upon starting his interview, he mentioned, with a smile on his face that he was expecting his fourth child early next month. Ryan appeared to be struggling the most with his professional role, specifically managing behaviors in his classroom, which he noted stemmed from the lack of support he received county-wide and school-wide in holding students accountable. Ryan stated, "We're doing them a disservice by not holding them accountable. And it will become ingrained in them. And so, when they get to that next level there is going to be some fallout. The bar is so low." Ryan felt that the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) pandemic correlated with the increase in behaviors he saw in his classroom. He mentioned the lack of motivation and complacency the students acquired in the digital learning environment had carried over into the school setting.

Ryan went on to further express that his professional struggles were manifesting at home. He stated, "So it affects all my family. And yeah, so they don't look forward to me coming home. And that's a bad thing. So it wears on me so much. You can only do that for so long." When asked if he could see his future self remaining in his current role, he stated:

If I don't see a change coming, I cannot see myself staying here because it is a fight every day, and it's with so many students. You have so many negative interactions constantly every day and you can't enforce discipline. There's only so much I can do.

Audrey

Audrey was a 37-year-old first-year special education teacher. Audrey had hopes of becoming a speech-language pathologist, but after years of failed attempts to get into a graduate program, she decided to make a career change to support her family. Audrey was a mid-year, new teacher hire who was placed in a classroom of students with mild intellectual disabilities. She had previously completed work in the high school special education setting as a speech-language pathologist aide, which she felt helped influence her decision to make the switch. Audrey stated, "But as I went through my speech career, I was like, I want to do more with these kids and get them job ready, teach them those job skills to be successful members in our community."

Throughout our interview, Audrey spoke with such vulnerability. She had not been assigned a mentor from the county or school and was tasked with fending for herself. Throughout her individual interview, focus group, and meme, she mentioned that not having a curriculum to go by had been her biggest struggle. She revealed that she spent countless uncontracted hours making her own lessons. Audrey stated:

> Well, there's absolutely no curriculum for my class. I mean, when you're told to pick something you're interested in and teach that to your students. They're supposed to have access to their grade level curriculum, but when you have four plus grade levels in your class, it's kind of hard getting to touch on all of those.

Carrie

Carrie was a 22-year-old first-year special education teacher. She taught students with level two autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in the self-contained setting. Carrie described that her love for special education began when she was in high school. She was a peer-leader in a class with students with moderate intellectual disabilities and fell in love with making a difference in their lives and the joy they brought her. Carrie's passion for working with students with disabilities was evident throughout her interview. She regularly attended events for students with special needs outside of work with her friends and family.

Carrie revealed in her interview that she had been struggling with various behaviors that ranged from physical aggression, noncompliance, and disruptive behaviors. When describing her student teaching placement, she stated,

> When I was in my teaching placements, they put you in these perfect places and they're like it's going to be great. And then you get into your first job, and you're like okay, this kid is literally punching me in the face.

Carrie also mentioned that the behavioral trainings provided by the county fell short of preparing her for the reality of being in the classroom as a novice teacher.

Whitney

Whitney was a 31-year-old first-year teacher who taught history and government in the resource and co-taught settings. Whitney was soft-spoken and appeared anxious at the start of our interview. As we progressed throughout the interview and connected on an emotional level, her body language relaxed, and she started to open up about her experiences. In fact, Whitney had more to say when asked about her meme than any other interview question. She opened up about her experiences and struggles she had not previously mentioned. When describing her meme, she laughed, was vulnerable, and completely honest about defiant behaviors from her

students, which she felt were attributed to COVID-19. She stated, "But it's almost impossible, you know, and I didn't realize like coming into the profession that that's probably one of our biggest battles is just getting them to do, just to do anything."

Whitney described that the positive relationships she had formed with the parents of her students had helped keep her morale up while at work, especially when she was having a bad day. In addition, she appreciated words of affirmation from parents, her peers, and administrators. She stated, "So to hear that I'm doing a good job and I didn't realize that it was like words of affirmation was my love language, but it definitely is. But it is nice to hear it." Whitney had struggled the most with the paperwork and learning how to use the online platform for writing IEPs. Whitney stated, "IEPs, inputting grades, registration, and all the other logistical things that come with this job is definitely a struggle and overwhelming." Whitney attributed her success of having survived so far to a veteran teacher and mentor with whom she shared her classroom.

Rhett

Rhett was a 39-year-old first-year teacher who taught students with mild intellectual disabilities. He had a background in management in the corporate industry, which he expressed did not fulfill him. With his love for basketball and kids, he decided to make a career change and enter the special education teaching profession. Rhett was a basketball coach at the school and enjoyed giving his students opportunities to go play basketball with him after lunch. He was also a Special Olympics sponsor and took the boys' special education team to participate in the state games last fall. Rhett displayed a calm, caring demeanor throughout our interview and spoke with a carefree attitude.

When asked about his role of autonomy in the classroom, Rhett described that he felt free to do what he wanted, but felt he needed more direction in order to be successful. He stated, "I feel

like I have 100% freedom to kind of do what I want to do, sometimes even to the point where it's like you want some direction." When asked to rate on a scale of one to ten how satisfied he was with his performance so far, Rhett stated, "I just don't know how well I'm doing or what I need to work on. That's kind of one of my biggest things is trying to understand the role and what the expectations are."

Remi

Remi was a 24-year-old second-year teacher who taught students with level one ASD in the self-contained setting. She was currently in a master's program advancing her degree and loved the volatility of the level one autism setting. Remi began teaching last year with a paraprofessional who had been in the level one unit for nine years. She credited his knowledge and experience as one of her biggest supports as a novice special education teacher (SET). Remi mentioned that most of her day was spent dealing with behaviors such as physical aggression, elopement, and noncompliance, which had made it hard to find the time to fit collecting data for IEP goals and objectives into her day. When asked what changes could be made either county or district-wide that would help other novice SETs be successful, she stated:

> I think that like more training on like behaviors and like having to transport students. I guess you do get trained like one time, but you don't use it very often, and then you don't really know how to do it. Like, we got training in August and never again.

Luke

Luke was a 23-year-old second-year teacher who taught students with ASD level three in the self-contained setting. He had an eclectic style and presented himself with a happy-go-lucky attitude. Luke received his bachelor's degree in special education and had always had a passion

for working with students with disabilities. He stated, "I think I have formed really good relationships with the kids. I know that they trust me and want to do well for me and themselves."

When asked about his meme, Luke described how difficult his first-year teaching in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic was. He stated, "Oh, COVID has messed them up. Last year was horrible switching from online to in-person so many times. I didn't know how to do that. There was no consistency." Luke worried about his students' mental health dealing with the inconsistency and isolation that came with COVID-19.

Drew

Drew was a 23-year-old first-year teacher who taught 9th-grade students in the resource and cotaught settings. In addition to teaching, Drew also coached the women's basketball team. Drew did not know what career path she wanted to take in college, but reminisced on her childhood playing "school" in her basement during our interview. She recently graduated college and knew she wanted to coach. Through a referral at her alma mater, she applied to an open special education teaching position and received the job.

Her individual interview was conducted in her classroom, which was immaculate. Upon entering, she appeared to be very organized, and everything had its place. Drew mentioned during her interview while describing her meme that she struggled with the paperwork and time management skills because she was a perfectionist. She stated, "Yesterday I was up working until 10:00 at night because of scheduling, and I had to call some parents. Just because I wanted everything on my list to be done, so just managing my time has been hard."

Paige

Paige was a 46-year-old second-year teacher who taught 10th-grade students in the resource and co-taught settings. Last year, she taught students with mild intellectual disabilities in the self-

contained setting. Paige came from a background of 20 years in the healthcare industry. Through experiencing different patients and learning something new from each of them, she thought special education would give her the same opportunity for lifelong learning. Due to her previous experience in the healthcare industry, Paige had strong feelings when it came to COVID-19 in the school setting. She stated, "I would like for all of the masks to end. I feel like they can't hear me, and I can't hear them. Oh my gosh, we didn't even do all this for patients in the hospital."

Britney

Britney was a 30-year-old third-year teacher who taught 11th and 12th-grade students in the resource and cotaught settings. She had children at home and made a career-switch in order to spend more time with her children and family. Britney prided herself on having a learning disability and being able to complete her master's degree in special education last year. She used her disability as an example for her students to look toward as an encouragement. When asked about what experiences have made her feel successful at work, she stated:

> The relationships I've built with the kids makes me happy. A big part of why I came to teaching is because I have a learning disability. I grew up with that and got told so many times that I couldn't do things. I went back, I have a master's degree, and I have a learning disability. There's nothing stopping you.

Christina

Christina was a 33-year-old third-year teacher who taught 10th-grade students in the resource and co-taught settings. Trying to schedule an interview with Christina was a bit challenging. The first interview we had scheduled got interrupted by a student who came in crying over familial issues, so we had to reschedule. Upon entering her classroom for her individual interview, Christina's room exuded a bright ambiance with hot pink, life-sized flamingos on one

side and beach decorations on the other. Chairs were turned over on the ground, papers were scattered across her desk, and her whiteboard was full of brightly colored, positive affirmations written by her students.

Throughout her interview and during the focus group, Christina fixated on the behavior and mental health of the students as one of her biggest challenges as a novice SET. She was not shy when she quickly revealed that she suffered from a lifelong battle of different levels of mental illness. During the focus group Christina stated:

> I am not a certified counselor in any way. I am not a psychologist. I have a history of mental illness that allows me to have a lot of tools to help students, to make connections, and to strategize with the students. That said, the blatant lack of concern for school is multilayered and it is what it is. But I can't solve that problem in the classroom by myself.

Christina attributed her previous work experience to her success during her first three years in the classroom. She was a self-identified workaholic in event management and production prior to becoming a teacher. She stated, "It was a really cool job that gave me nothing and a really cool job. I was working all the time just to avoid spending time with myself."

Ford

Ford was a 28-year-old second-year teacher who taught students in 9th-grade in the resource and co-taught settings. Upon entering his classroom for our individual interview, Ford's classroom was desolate, except for the stacks of papers scattered across his desk. Ford always knew he wanted to be in the field of education, but it was not until the advice of a peer who suggested that he shadow a special education classroom that he realized that was where he wanted to be. He had a one-year-old at home, was in a master's program advancing his degree in special education, and was a football coach for the school.

When asked what had attributed the most to his success as a novice SET, Ford stated, "The fact that our faculty and staff operates on such a platform that the collaborative piece is so prominent, I can collaborate with somebody so easily without ever seeing their face." He felt the newly implemented digital learning days, where teachers were given time to "catch up" have tremendously helped him. Time management had been an area of weakness for Ford. He jokingly stated, "I feel like kind of running off the road sometimes, just to get a day."

Results

To address the central research question and sub questions, each participant was asked to email a physical artifact in the form of a meme that represented their experience as a novice special education teacher (SET) and answer ten open-ended questions during individual interviews. At the conclusion of the interview, participants were asked to explain what their meme meant to them and the idea it represented. Once all participants were interviewed, they signed up for a focus group to attend based on convenience. Each of the 12 participants completed and fully participated in each method of data collection. Triangulation of three data sources was used to obtain informative information and shed light on the central research question and sub-questions.

Managing Behaviors in the Classroom

The most evident theme detected throughout the data centered on the lack of motivation in students and noncompliance in the classroom. Throughout all three data sources, managing behaviors in the classroom was cited by all 12 participants as a barrier to success as a novice SET. Behaviors were consistently referenced as a source of negative emotions. When listening to their experiences with student behaviors, there was a sense of fatigue and frustration from the participants. Ryan stated:

I don't think what I'm doing most of the time is teaching. I'm simply herding behavior.

So I spend most of my time trying to help those who don't want to be there in the first

place do what they're supposed to do.

Similarly, Ford stated, "All I can do is try to differentiate between who wants to be here and who

doesn't." Participants described that behaviors such as noncompliance, disrespect, skipping class,

work completion, distractions from cell phones, physical aggression, and verbal aggression have

all made it difficult to just teach. During his focus group, Ford stated, "I want to do so many

different things and groups and differentiation, but the behavior is so wildly inappropriate that I

can't even trust a small group of students to do something while I work with another group."

COVID-19 and Student Mental Health

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the lives of students and their

education. Participants attributed COVID-19 to the exacerbation of behaviors in the classroom.

They felt the lack of structure and consistency while in the digital learning environment

negatively impacted students, and it carried over into the classroom. During his individual

interview, Ford stated:

The digital environment permanently changed this generation. There were so many days

where they didn't have to turn their cameras on, and they could just sit there and do

whatever. So, they could impulsively get on social media or impulsively play a video

game, and they were bought out and saved by the county.

In addition, a decline in student mental health has been evident in the classroom and has

progressively gotten worse the past few years, according to participants. While describing

behaviors in his classroom, Ryan stated, "I think COVID exacerbated the situation. It's gotten

worse over those three years." According to participants, depression, increased anxiety, and

social withdrawal are a few mental illnesses that had started to manifest in the classroom.

Whitney stated, "I mean I've heard so many times, can we just shut down so we can be at home

again?" Christina mentioned, "I'm amazed with the level of like, counselor I have to be all the

time, really." Most participants mentioned they struggled with trying to balance counseling with

teaching. Drew stated, "I feel successful when they just want to come in here, and just want to

talk. Which is so important because a lot of them need it." Christina stated:

> I would love to have some kind of certificate in counseling because of the amount of
>
> work that I do. And if I wasn't really mentally ill, I don't know how I would know how
>
> to help. I've had students who will FaceTime just to be with us. It's been really hard on
>
> the kids.

Lack of School-Wide Accountability

Novice SETs felt they could be better supported if they were able to hold students

accountable for their learning and actions. More specifically, novice SETs did not feel supported

by the administration when it came to consequences and grades. They described a focus from the

administration on making sure the students passed contributed to bouts of anxiety, especially

around the end of each semester. Ryan stated:

> I'm going to get this message from up high to say, hey, look at these students, they're not
>
> doing well, what are you doing about them? Well, it's like, I'm trying, but they're not. So
>
> I spend most of my time trying to help those who don't want to be there in the first place.

Teachers felt frustrated and that they were doing the students a huge disservice by not holding

them accountable for their actions and grades. Ford stated:

> It is not necessarily my job to make sure my kids pass my class. It is my job to teach
>
> them. And it's not fair to ask teachers, well what are you doing to make sure they pass

your class, you know? If that is the case, I'll just delete all the assignments from the

gradebook, and everyone will end with an A.

Participants also felt frustrated with the lack of accountability the administration had exuded

since returning from the digital learning environment. They expressed feeling helpless because

they could not enforce discipline in their own classroom. Ford stated:

I have no late work policy, that doesn't exist. If you simply turn something in, I am going

to give you a grade, and it's probably going to be much higher than you thought. We're

actually reinforcing bad practices and behavior, that we're taught in college that we

shouldn't do.

 Ryan stated:

Expectations have changed, not just what's expected of us, but what's expected of the

students and what the students expect. This year when they came in, what they expected

to have to do is way different than that first group of students I got my first year of

teaching. This is very common for a student to look at me and say, I have to do this? I

have to do classwork? And to look at me surprised when I tell them to wake up and stop

sleeping, as though this is my norm, what's wrong with you?

Similarly, Whitney stated, "I'm just trying to hear their side of it, but they knew what it was like

when they left and when you come back into the building you kind of have to have those same

expectations."

Teacher Mental Health

It was very clear that being a novice SET and managing behaviors to have a functioning

classroom in the middle of a pandemic had been exhausting and frustrating. Audrey stated, "Just

dealing with behaviors makes you tired, like, I don't get anything, I don't know anything." It is

important to note that these teachers began their careers at a time in history that was

unprecedented. Nobody really knew what they were doing, and as a result, there was very little

guidance. Feeling tired and overwhelmed were mentioned often, while Britney stated, "You feel

like you're drowning." Whitney stated, "But it's almost impossible, you know, and I didn't

realize like coming into the profession that that's probably one of our biggest battles is just

getting them to do, just to do anything."

When asked whether or not he could see his older self remaining in his current role, Ryan stated:

> So it's no wonder some teachers are depressed, because it's so negative all day. So it all
>
> affects my family. And yeah, so they don't look forward to me coming home. And that's
>
> a bad thing. So it wears on me so much. You can only do that for so long.

Teachers who were seeing more physically aggressive behavior in the self-contained setting

recommended more frequent training on how to deal with students who were physically

aggressive from behavior specialists within the county. When discussing dealing with behaviors,

teachers almost seemed as if they were ready to give up. Christina stated,

> So there's just the challenge of that strain. I think as like a human who loves these
>
> students, to want to help them. To know that's not my entire job. My job is to help them
>
> but help them with school. It feels like, just hopeless. And so, every time you get a win, it
>
> feels like there's another three losses.

Logistical Barriers to Success

11 out of 12 novice SETs mentioned that there were various logistical barriers to

attaining success by utilizing supports within the roles and responsibilities of being a special

educator. Most of these barriers were depicted in the form of logistical supports that fell within

the umbrella of being a SET. Special educators are tasked with additional responsibilities

compared to their general education counterparts. Participants highlighted recommended changes they felt would help novice SETs navigate these logistical barriers.

Paperwork

SETs agreed that one barrier they all struggled with was learning how to manage and complete paperwork, specifically the Individualized Education Plan (IEP). When speaking to her preparation through her teacher preparation program, Whitney stated, "My teacher-prep program prepared me more for the aspect of teaching, but the paperwork side, not so much. IEPs and all the other things that come along with that was definitely a struggle and overwhelming." Rhett added, "The paperwork is overwhelming." Drew agreed, stating, "I think, in the beginning, the hardest thing for me was the IEP stuff, definitely not having any of that knowledge." Participants who completed a traditional pathway to certification supported them in knowing what to include in an IEP, whereas those who completed an alternative pathway to certification struggled more.

When speaking about paperwork, most participants mentioned that creating a checklist that could help guide them through the process to ensure they met all legal requirements when it came to paperwork and writing IEPs would help. Paige added, "A collaborating effort on a checklist would really help make the transition a lot easier."

Curriculum and Standardized Testing

A common thread among SETs in various classroom settings was the lack of curriculum and pressure on their students to participate in standardized testing. SETs in the self-contained setting described having the autonomy to build and plan lessons to a point where they wished they had more structure and guidance from the county. Rhett stated, "I feel like I have 100 percent freedom to kind of do what I want to do, sometimes even to the point where you want some direction." Audrey added, "I mean, when you're told to pick something you're interested in

and teach that to your students. But when you have four plus grade levels in your class, it's kind of hard getting to touch on all of those." Most teachers were spending countless hours outside of their contracted hours creating materials and lesson planning.

SETs in the resource and co-taught settings described a pressure on their students to participate in standardized testing, which ultimately does not determine if they graduate or not. Ryan stated, "Don't make the sped kids take the same tests. If you want us to teach differently, we need to be able to test differently." Whitney added, "So when I'm teaching, I'm expected to differentiate and adjust my teaching. But I still have to give the same test that everyone else is taking, and that seems incongruent." Participants recommended removing the standardized testing for students in special education and shifting the focus of their education on life skills and vocational skills that would better prepare them for life after high school. Audrey stated, "I honestly could care less about the academic portion of it. I want to focus on independence, job skills, and life skills." Whitney agreed, stating:

> One of the biggest things I try to incorporate in them is life skills. I think the subjects we teach are very important, but the life skills are so much more. Meeting deadlines, being on time, cooperating and being a team player are really a struggle for them so we address those skills every day.

Professional Development

Training and professional development were a common source of support that participants attributed as barriers to their overall success as novice SETs. Overall, participants recommended more frequent, district-wide training that was applicable to each position that would help promote success among novice SETs. Audrey mentioned, "Specific training for each position would be super helpful, I haven't received any training in this position." Britney

mentioned she would like more applicable training from the county in regards to the platform the county uses for writing IEPs. She stated, "We sat through two hours of a ZOOM training and then like four hours of them telling educators how to operate basic technology. I had one teacher in my group who couldn't even figure out how to right-click." Remi added, "I got trained one time in August on transporting students who are physically aggressive and not again."

Time Management

Managing time as a novice SET was a barrier that hindered success in all participants. The county has added asynchronous learning days in order to provide teachers days throughout the calendar year to catch up on work. Two participants mentioned that pushing for more digital learning days so teachers could get more work done while at school would help with their time management. Participants in the self-contained settings described that not having a planning period or lunch period made it difficult to try to get all of their responsibilities done. Remi stated, "I feel like there's stuff that I don't really have time to do right now just because I haven't figured out how to fit it in my day yet." Drew described having to bring work home because she did not have time to fit it into her day. She stated, "Yesterday I was up until 10:00 P.M. because of scheduling, and I had to call some parents. So just managing my time has been hard." Audrey also mentioned, "Sundays I usually spend three to four hours in the morning planning, I just need more planning days because I don't have any." When describing her meme, Paige stated:

> The most overwhelming thing is trying to be in all these places at one time. It's like you have an IEP meeting, then trying to get parents to call back and respond to you, then oh wait, a department meeting, but you also have a special ed. meeting. It's like I need to clone myself so I can be in all these places at one time.

Collaboration in the Workplace

Collaborative workplace relationships mentioned by participants throughout all three sources of data attributed the most to success as a novice SET. Collaboration between novice SETs, co-workers, mentors, and administrators was the most widely used source of support. Ford stated, "The fact that our faculty and staff operates on such a platform that the collaboration piece is so prominent, I can collaborate with someone so easily without ever seeing their face."

Co-workers

All 12 participants mentioned that the positive relationships they had formed with their co-workers provided them with a positive workplace environment. The ease of collaborating with co-workers gave novice SETs direct, specific feedback when they needed it the most. Whitney stated, "I share my room with a veteran teacher, and she's kind of the shoulder to lean on because she's right there. I don't know what I would have done if I didn't share my room with her." Similarly, Rhett added, "My relationships with people have helped me become successful. I think if I didn't have the relationships I have with each individual co-worker, I couldn't be as successful as I am."

Mentors

Having a knowledgeable mentor was mentioned as a support that was utilized by five out of 12 participants. Paige described her mentors as, "They are kind of on these pedestals for me, especially this year. I would be downing without the two of them." Carrie stated, "I feel like if I would have went into somewhere and not had anybody, I would have been like, so lost and it would have been so much worse." While these participants felt their mentor was invaluable to their success, the other seven participants utilized their peers and co-workers more as a means for support because they were more readily accessible.

Administration

Supportive administration in relation to teacher identity and autonomy was a common support mentioned by participants. Participants felt trusted and supported in a way that made them confident enough to build their own identities as teachers. Christina mentioned, "I don't ever feel like I'm being questioned for my decisions. I think they know that I am here for a reason." Participants felt like the administration provided effective and specific feedback, and that was not one-sided. Ryan stated, "She's not just one way or the other. She's been supportive in both aspects, and she has given me the freedom to do what I feel I need to do."

Building Connections with Students

Positive student-teacher relationships were credited as the most influential experiences for novice SETs. All participants revealed their love for helping students with disabilities, both on an educational and personal level. While discussing their experiences with students, faces lit up, smiles and laughs were shared, and a genuine feeling of love was depicted. Students are the reason these SETs continue to show up day in and day out and put their heart, time, and energy into making the best of every day. When asked if she could see her future self remaining in her current role, Carrie stated:

> Even if I do get punched in the face most days, these kids are so sweet, and they have
>
> such big hearts. I think everyone needs to experience that in their lives at some point
>
> because it's such an eye-opening experience that it changes your life, it really does.

Building relationships and connecting with the students was a common thread described by participants that helped them succeed. Britney stated, "The relationships I've built with the kids is what makes me happy." Luke also mentioned, "I think I have formed really good relationships with the kids. I know that they trust me and want to do well for me and themselves." Christina added:

The level of trust from the students is really important. I think the biggest honor of my

life is to be able to be a safe place for them and for them to tell me something true about

themselves. I really am like, wow, I hope they remember me.

Research Question Responses

This study was directed by one central research question and two sub-questions. This

section provides a narrative to the central research questions and additional sub-questions.

Overlapping within the themes is evident, as they did not address one specific sub-question.

Additionally, this section provides the coding process that informed each theme as they related to

the research questions and sub-questions in tabular form.

Central Research Question

The central research question guiding this study was: How do novice special education

teachers describe their experiences utilizing job-related supports during their first three years

teaching? Throughout this investigation, it was discovered that there were several role-related

barriers inherent to novice special educators utilizing job-related supports. Most of these barriers

were representative of typical practice for a SET; however, this investigation revealed that there

were long-lasting barriers brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic and digital learning

environment. Ultimately, participants discussed barriers brought on by the evolving nature of

education throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, what job-related supports they had effectively

utilized, and offered insight into how they could be better supported in order to remain in the

field.

Overall, participants described their first three years of teaching as simply having

survived. All participants started their careers at various stages during the COVID-19 pandemic,

which they felt contributed to added stress and a lack of guidance. The most prominent element

of utilizing job-related supports was managing behaviors in the classroom. It was evident that the

participants' experience as novice SETs during a pandemic was clouded by misbehaviors which

led to fatigue and exhaustion. Three participants self-selected a meme associated with

misbehavior to describe their experience as a novice SET. In addition, participants described a

lack of motivation from students and administration not holding students accountable for

misbehavior and grades as the biggest barriers. Ryan stated:

> The only thing I can do to make them do what they need to do is pick up their hand and
>
> make them do the work. There is nothing else. They know, the kids know they have
>
> control. Because at the most, you get a referral and you go to in-school suspension, and
>
> nothing happens to them. They're like OK, whatever. Not that big of a deal because I'm
>
> not being held accountable for my schoolwork anyways.

When asked what they felt attributed the most to their success as a novice SET during individual

interviews, participants were hesitant to use the word *success*. Ryan stated, "Success having

survived. So just being able to survive is a way you can measure your success because a lot of

people aren't. You see thousands who are just not making it." In addition, Ford stated, "The only

other time I've bragged about my success was during my interview for this job."

Participants also discussed job-related supports they had effectively utilized that they

attributed to their survival as novice SETs, including relationships in the workplace,

collaborating with co-workers, mentors, and administrative support. Table 2 displays the open

coding and corresponding themes addressing the central research question.

Table 2

Open Coding and Resulting Themes for the Central Research Question

Open Codes	Frequency of Codes Across Data Points	Resulting Theme
COVID-19: presence of misbehaviors acquired through the digital learning environment	55	Managing Behaviors in the Classroom
COVID-19: decline in student mental health	15	
Lack of accountability from administrators: grades	4	
Lack of accountability from administrators: enforcing discipline	8	
Decline of mental health in teachers	33	
Success attributes: co-workers	27	Collaboration in the Workplace
Success attributes: mentors	6	
Success attributes: administration	8	

Sub Question One

Sub-question one was: How do novice special education teachers describe their job satisfaction through their experiences utilizing job-related supports? The participants discussed job satisfaction with both positive and negative attributes. Participants felt successful when their students performed well on assignments, received verbal praise from administrators, and received positive feedback from parents. Most participants did not feel scared to ask for help if they felt they needed it.

Participants used words such as exhausted, frustrating, overwhelming, lost, lack of student motivation, misbehaviors, and no support when describing experiences that contributed to their job dissatisfaction. 11 out of 12 participant-selected memes included images that were associated with negative emotions related to job dissatisfaction. Only one participant revealed they could not see themselves staying in their current role if things did not change. Participants

revealed logistical barriers that contributed to their job dissatisfaction and highlighted ways to be

better supported in those aspects. Logistical barriers attributed to job dissatisfaction included

paperwork, lack of time, no curriculum to follow, standardized testing for students in special

education, and professional development that was not applicable to their position and was poorly

run. When describing their memes, four participants chose images that included the words "I

have no idea what I'm doing." Table 3 displays the open coding and corresponding themes

addressing sub-question 1.

Table 3

Open Coding and Resulting Themes for Sub-Question 1

Open Codes	Frequency of Codes Across Data Points	Resulting Theme
Lack of training and guidance on IEP paperwork	15	Logistical Barriers to Success
Lack of planning time	6	
Challenges with professional development	9	
Need for curriculum and materials	24	
Standardized testing as a barrier for students in special education	11	
Verbal praise from administrators, co-workers, or parents	4	Collaboration in the Workplace
Academic student success	8	Building Relationships with Students

Sub Question Two

Sub-question two was: What experiences are the most influential on novice special

education teachers during their first three years of teaching? The participants revealed that the

most influential experiences as novice SETs were the relationships they had built with their

students and the ease of collaborating with co-workers for support. It was evident that students were at the heart of practice and the reason participants entered the field. Forming relationships and building trust with students elicited positive emotions among all participants. Britney stated, "Because I feel like I'm doing something good for these kids, and that's kind of always been the reason I started." Luke also stated:

I think just caring about the kids, just people, instead of just like finding it as a job. I spend a good amount of time at the beginning of the year, I know everybody says it too, but forming relationships, talking every morning. I tell them stop and listen. Just being completely open and honest with them.

SETs who took the time to connect on an emotional level to their students and earn their trust, yielded more participation and less misbehaviors during class. Christina mentioned, "I'm so grateful that they're like, all right, whatever you say, you're the teacher. I trust you."

Forming collaborative relationships in the workplace was another influential job-related support for novice SETs. Participants described the collaboration with colleagues in the forms of people-sharing, department meetings, asking for help, shared Google drives, and sharing created materials. When discussing relationships in the workplace, Rhett stated:

I would say my peers and being able to communicate and ask for help with lesson plans and behavior management strategies. You know, just having that support around you, knowing you're in a bubble, but knowing you're not in a bubble by yourself. You have a lot of people around you with a whole lot of experiences that can help you become a better person, become a better teacher.

Table 4 displays the open coding and corresponding themes addressing sub-question 2.

Table 4

Open Coding and Resulting Themes for Sub-Question 2

Open Codes	Frequency of Codes Across Data Points	Resulting Theme
Positive emotions elicited from working with students	21	Building Relationships with Students
Attributes to academic success	6	
Supportive relationships between co-workers	30	Collaboration in the Workplace

Summary

This chapter provided a review of the study's purpose to describe the experiences of novice SETs utilizing job-related supports. The study's data collection methods were reviewed, and resulting themes were presented through structural and textural descriptions. In addition, a connection of the themes to the research questions was provided. Themes revealed from the data included: Managing Behaviors in the Classroom, Logistical Barriers to Success, Collaboration in the Workplace, and Building Connections with Students. In conclusion, the codes and resulting themes for the central research question and additional sub-questions were provided in tabular form.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of identifying and utilizing job-related supports for novice special education teachers (SETs). This chapter begins with a discussion of the interpretations of findings to include a summary of thematic findings. Next, these findings are positioned within the theoretical framework and current literature. Following this, policy and practice, theoretical, and methodological implications are addressed. Finally, the limitations and delimitations of the study are then addressed, and this chapter concludes with recommendations for future research.

Discussion

I conducted a phenomenological study to uncover the essence of the lived experiences of 12 novice special education teachers utilizing job-related supports during their first three years of teaching. I selected a transcendental phenomenology research approach because it focused more on a description of the participants' experiences and less on my own interpretations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The theoretical framework that guided this study was the Job Characteristics Theory (JCT). The JCT attempts to explain how characteristics of the jobs people perform affect their work behavior and attitudes (Oldham, 2013). Two organizational psychologists, Hackman and Oldham, posited that a high level of five work characteristics positively influenced three critical psychological states in employees, which led to increased performance and personal outcomes (Hackman and Oldham, 1975). The five core job dimensions are skill variety, task variety, autonomy, feedback, and task significance. This study utilized a central research question and two sub-research questions. Through coding and analysis of data collected from 12 participants,

four themes emerged: (a) managing behaviors in the classroom, (b) logistical barriers to success, (c) collaboration in the workplace, and (d) building connections with students.

Interpretation of Findings

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of identifying and utilizing job-related supports for novice special education teachers (SETs). Data collection methods included individual interviews, a physical artifact/meme, and focus group meetings. The data was then analyzed using phenomenological reduction and coding, and four themes emerged: managing behaviors in the classroom, logistical barriers to success, collaboration in the workplace, and building connections with students. Subthemes developed from three out of four themes. The theme of managing behaviors in the classroom had subthemes of COVID-19 and student mental health, lack of school-wide accountability, and teacher mental health. The theme of logistical barriers to success had subthemes of paperwork, curriculum and standardized testing, time management, and professional development. The theme of collaboration in the workplace had subthemes of co-workers, mentors, and administration.

Summary of Thematic Findings

The openness and honesty of research participants to describe and share their personal experiences of being novice SETs enabled the research to have rich, thick data on this phenomenon. Sub-question one sought to identify how novice SETs describe their job satisfaction through their experiences utilizing job-related supports. The first theme to emerge from data analysis was managing behaviors in the classroom. The shared experiences of the 12 participants confirmed that managing behaviors in the classroom was the biggest barrier to success as a novice SET. Task identity, as mentioned in the JCT, is an important job

characteristic that influences new teachers' confidence to influence events in their environment. Task identity and autonomy correlate with novice SETs' perceptions of their abilities to shape their professional behaviors addressing and dealing with challenging and/or aggressive behaviors (Garwood et al., 2018). Three subthemes emerged from managing behaviors in the classroom: COVID-19 and student mental health, lack of school-wide accountability, and teacher mental health. Participants felt COVID-19 and the digital learning environment exacerbated non-compliant behaviors in the classroom, which led to teacher frustration and fatigue. When asked about the behaviors in his classroom, Ryan said he thought COVID-19 exacerbated the situation. Participants noted being unprepared to deal with the noncompliance and aggressive behaviors that students with disabilities often exhibit. Participants felt supported on an emotional level by their administrators; however, they revealed they did not feel decisions regarding discipline and grades being made by administrators were in the best interest of their students.

The second theme to emerge from data analysis was logistical barriers to success. Four subthemes developed from logistical barriers to success: curriculum and standardized testing, paperwork, time management, and professional development. The central research question sought to describe how novice SETs describe their experiences of utilizing job-related supports. Participants agreed there were demanding logistical roles and responsibilities that SETs are required to fulfill in addition to their roles in the classroom. Overall, participants negatively associated logistical supports within their teaching roles with their overall job satisfaction. The lack of time within the school day was not enough to get all their paperwork done. Multiple participants reported working outside their contracted hours on paperwork, lesson planning, and grading.

The third theme to emerge from data analysis was collaboration in the workplace. Three subthemes developed from collaboration in the workplace: co-workers, mentors, and administrators. Sub-question two sought to identify which experiences were the most influential on novice SETs. All 12 participants attributed their workplace relationships as the most influential support on their success as a novice SET. In addition, the fourth theme to emerge from data analysis was building connections with students. It was clear that participants all had a passion for working with students with disabilities. One participant had a learning disability, while another suffered from various levels of mental illness. Participants agreed that forming relationships and connecting with students played an integral role in the classroom. The following interpretations were derived from this study.

Assimilating Students back into the Classroom

Establishing an identity and professional role as a novice SET in the middle of a pandemic was a challenge most research participants felt sub-par in accomplishing. Participants felt discouraged by the students' lack of willingness and motivation displayed to complete their schoolwork since returning from the digital learning environment. Participants had spent a majority of their first three years teaching getting students accustomed to the routines and responsibilities of the in-person learning environment again. One participant described her childhood playing school in her basement with students who loved to learn and be at school; however, this was not the reality of students in the classroom today. Participants struggled to establish an authoritative role and build connections with their students, leading to frustration and exhaustion.

Needs of the Students

The research participants described the changes in educational accountability policies at the federal and state levels as falling short of preparing students with disabilities for life after high school. In particular, participants felt the pressure of mandated standardized testing on their students with disabilities was incongruent with the realities of their future. Participants described that focusing on functional life and vocational skills were overshadowed in the classroom by focusing on high-level academics and standardized testing. In addition, participants who taught students with low-incidence disabilities felt the lack of curriculum contributed to added stress and confusion for teachers, which ultimately negatively impacted the students.

Building Relationships for Success

Research participants agreed that building relationships with students and co-workers was the most influential support for success as a novice SET. Building trusting and open relationships with students provides SETs opportunities to make a significant impact on their students. The research participants all described receiving support from co-workers, mentors, and administrators as positively impacting their performance and happiness in the workplace. Three participants advised others not to be afraid of asking for help during our focus group. Collaboration in the workplace was a common support that was most often referred to when asked what they attributed the most to their success. Building relationships in the workplace and classroom not only creates a safe and inclusive school environment, but enables SETs to forge a strong bond that yields powerful results for students with disabilities and teachers in the classroom.

Implications for Policy or Practice

This study highlights the need to make several changes in policy and practice. These changes can be applied to the federal, state, district, and school levels. Considering that as of

2020, 98% of the nation's school districts reported shortages of SETs, the cost of implementing these changes in policy and practice far outweigh the financial burden of hiring, training, and retaining the influx of new teachers needed (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). The results and recommendations described in this study might begin to pave a way to further understand the perceived supports needed for special educators. The field of special education is often identified as a high-stress and low-recognition job. Special educators are a vital part of the school system who provide support to students socially, academically, and behaviorally.

Implications for Policy

Implications for policy are highlighted within this study. Equitable learning opportunities for students with disabilities are threatened by the ongoing SET shortage. The latest reauthorization of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESEA) in 2015 made an effort to increase the number of SETs by eliminating the requirement that teachers be "highly qualified" (USDOE, 2021). Lowering the standards for teacher certification is one route to attract new teachers. However, this study revealed that more short-term and long-term solutions need to be addressed at the federal and state levels to mitigate shortages and retain SETs. This study reveals a focus from participants on improving systematic factors associated with teacher attrition, such as professional development and training, new teacher support, and eliminating standardized testing for students with disabilities. Novice SETs felt ill-prepared to handle the noncompliance and physical aggression often displayed in the classroom through their teacher preparation programs. Recommendations on improving teacher preparation programs to increase the amount of behavior modification courses might help better support novice SETs.

Implications for Practice

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) and American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) III were signed into law on March 11, 2021, to speed up the recovery from the economic and health effects of the COVID-19 pandemic (GCPS, 2022). The CARES/ARPA act provided funds to help safely reopen schools while addressing the impact of the pandemic on students. Alexander County school district spent this money addressing learning loss, the achievement gap, and teacher recruitment and retention. Items recommended in recruitment and retention included professional development for teachers, training material and supplies, stipends for personnel, and strategies to support the recruitment of personnel for critical positions (GCPS, 2022). Findings from this study suggest that compensation was not a barrier mentioned by participants, but did corroborate with the plan for the county to revamp professional development and training materials and supplies. Another implication for practice at the school level was giving special educators time within the school day to complete various tasks or collaborate with colleagues. Providing time for SETs can be addressed by not assigning any duties throughout the day or having an administrator eat lunch with their class while they have some time to themselves. This study also recommended creating and implementing a social-emotional learning model that focuses on student mental health as it might help address the social-emotional needs of the students and teachers.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

This study is based on the job characteristics theory by Greg Hackman and Richard Oldham (Hackman and Oldham, 1975). The JCT attempts to explain how characteristics of the jobs people perform affect their work behavior and attitudes (Oldham, 2013). The five core job characteristics are skill variety, task variety, task significance, autonomy, and feedback. The JCT

proposes that these five core job characteristics enhance the motivational potential of jobs and positively influence essential work outcomes such as job satisfaction and performance (Hackman & Oldham, 1975; Oerlemans & Bakker, 2018). The more secure an employee feels within aspects of the JCT, the more willing they are to remain in their job. This research study confirms this theory.

Theoretical Implications

The findings from this study confirmed that participants who exhibited higher levels of the five core job characteristics within the JCT displayed higher levels of job satisfaction and performance. Within the JCT, specific feedback on their work performance was found to be a job-related support that participants felt they needed in order to improve instruction provided to their students and encourage reflection. Research suggests novice SETs need instantaneous, constructive feedback about their instruction to facilitate improvement over time (Billingsley et al., 2019; Conley & You, 2017; Cornelius et al., 2020). In addition, high levels of task significance were found to be a major contributor as to why novice SETs in this study continued to stay in this field. Participants felt like they were making a difference in the lives of students with disabilities and experienced joy from seeing them succeed. Skill and task variety were found to influence novice SET job satisfaction through co-teaching. Findings from this study suggested that SETs who were not satisfied with their co-teaching pairs were not given opportunities to differentiate or fully participate in the co-teaching environment.

Based on the perspectives of participants, this study extends the knowledge that special educators have high autonomy. Participants felt autonomy to plan lessons and engage with their students with disabilities. However, the findings within this study revealed that too much autonomy poses challenges within certain aspects of the job. Husband and Short (1994) associate

autonomy with the freedom to make instructional decisions, and to generate ideas about the curriculum. Research from Vangrieken et al. (2017) argues that high-stakes testing policies are a factor that has recently given rise to debates about teacher autonomy. This study confirms that teachers are losing their freedom of autonomy in the classroom as the focus shifts away from students and more towards academic merits and scores. In addition to extending the knowledge that current literature in the field presents, teachers feel supported by administrators who enforce consequences on student behaviors and make their teachers feel respected and appreciated (Hester et al., 2020; Robinson et al., 2019). Findings from this study corroborate this theory, revealing that little support from administrators when dealing with student behaviors poses challenges to a functioning and cohesive learning environment for novice SETs.

Empirical Implications

The shared experiences of the 12 participants confirmed previous research regarding job-related supports. To begin with, all 12 participants described how utilizing job-related supports fell into three main categories: teacher characteristics, student characteristics, and school characteristics, just as most of the research present in this field suggested (Bettini et al., 2018; Conley & You, 2017; Hester et al., 2020). Literature in the field has found workplace demands to include challenging and destructive behavior, paperwork, unmanageable workloads, limited planning and teaching time, and students with various needs across settings and grade levels (Aldosiry, 2020). Findings from this study confirmed these workplace demands as challenges in which they needed additional support. Furthermore, participants described various job-related supports that had helped them and recommended supports present in the literature that they identified as being able to help other novice SETs.

Research by Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2019) found that teachers' preparation pathway influenced attrition rates, finding that those who entered the profession through an alternative certification were 25% more likely to leave the profession than those who entered through a regular certification program. However, the findings from this study suggest that teachers who did not enter the profession through a traditional certification route felt better prepared for the demands of being a SET than those who did not. Participants attributed their prior professional and life experiences to their success more than their teacher preparation programs. In addition, participants who completed traditional certification programs felt they were ill-prepared by their student teaching assignments and required courses. They described that a lack of training in behavior management techniques and lack of rigorous placements in student teaching assignments painted a glamorous picture of a reality that was far from that.

Current literature present in the field suggests new mentorship initiatives for beginning teachers (Cornelius et al., 2020; Harmsen et al., 2018). Findings from this study diverge from this theory, revealing more reliance on co-workers and collaboration in the workplace in times of immediate need rather than reliance on their mentors. Beginning SETs require experienced guidance and support to feel confident and comfortable in their new role. This study suggested this guidance and expertise was often found within their home school, through co-workers, shared Google drives, or administrative support. While mentors were noted as invaluable by two participants, the most significant support for novice SETs was co-workers.

Limitations and Delimitations

This study was designed to investigate the experiences of novice SETs utilizing job-related supports. However, data was collected at a time when students were being assimilated back into the classroom after returning from the COVID-19 pandemic and the digital learning

environment. While the data was undoubtedly influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic, the design of the study was not purposed to incorporate the effects the pandemic had on teachers.

Additional limitations of the study included a sample of the 12 participants. Although the sample represented a range of ages from 22 to 46 years old, there was less diversity in gender and ethnicity. Four out of 12 participants were male, and 91.67% identified as Caucasian. In addition, this study was conducted at a time when masks were still required. During all interviews, participants and I wore a mask. This may have hindered my observation of participants' body language. At the time this study was conducted, this researcher was a SET. While all efforts to ensure epoché were achieved, it is likely the perfect epoché was not achieved. The researcher put in a conscious effort and energy to ensure personal bias and any preconceived notions were reduced (Moustakas, 1994). Another limitation can be that participants may have felt reluctant to be honest with their answers related to supervisors because they were being recorded and may have feared repercussions.

Delimitations of this study were selected in order to define the scope of the study. A transcendental phenomenological study was conducted because the researcher was interested in the lived experiences of participants rather than through a hermeneutical interpretation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In order to participate in this study, participants had to have 0-3 years of teaching experience, hold a valid or provisional teaching license, and be actively teaching in a special education position at Bent Creek High School. Moreover, participants were selected from the school where the researcher was currently working. The experiences of novice SETs utilizing job-related supports at other schools may differ from those in this study.

Recommendations for Future Research

The first recommendation for future research is to conduct a phenomenological study of novice SETs utilizing job-related supports who have left the profession. A phenomenological study of novice SETs who have left the profession may gain valuable insight into this phenomenon. In addition, a case study on mentors who mentor novice SETs is warranted in order to identify supports with which they see novice SETs struggling. In addition, COVID-19 was identified as a barrier to success across all participants. Further studies are warranted to determine the specific effects the pandemic had on novice SETs and their experiences utilizing supports among study participants.

The lack of diversity in this study is a limitation that warrants further research. Purposeful sampling to include a more diverse ethnic group of participants and those from multiple school sites would be beneficial to capturing the essence of novice SETs' experiences utilizing job-related supports. Additionally, as described by the participants in this study, the workload demands placed on SETs was a barrier to success in all participants. Future studies on individualized training and ongoing professional development within the field are warranted.

Conclusion

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experiences identifying and utilizing job-related supports for novice special education teachers at a high school in the southeastern United States. 12 participants participated in this study. The study consisted of one central research question and two sub-research questions. Data collected through individual interviews, a physical artifact/meme, and focus groups developed the themes of Managing Behaviors in the Classroom, Logistical Barriers to Success, Collaboration in the Workplace, and Building Connections with Students. Through analysis of the responses and artifacts of the 12 participants, the study revealed novice SETs struggled with assimilating students back into the

classroom post-pandemic and various workplace demands. It also revealed that novice SETs

utilized support of collaborating with their co-workers, mentors, and administrators the most.

SET attrition is the leading cause for SET shortages when considering the field of special

education (Cancio et al., 2018). Therefore, it is imperative to understand the needed supports for

novice SETs in order to increase retention rates within the field. Through this study, experiences

of special educators utilizing job-related supports were explored through the JCT framework.

This study confirmed the findings of the JCT that high levels of the five core characteristics

ultimately influenced job satisfaction and work performance in novice SETs. As professionals

continue to navigate the roles and responsibilities of being a teacher during the pandemic and

post-pandemic, it is imperative to continue to identify ways they can better be supported in times

of uncertainty. SETs are an influential part of the educational system, and this study revealed that

SETs stay in large part due to the impact they have on the lives of students with disabilities.

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Appendix A

Site Approval Letter

24 August 2021

Emily A. Jones
Special Education Teacher

Dear Emily Jones;

After careful review of your research proposal entitled, "A Phenomenological Study of Novice
Special Education Teachers' Experiences Utilizing Job Related Supports,"
I have decided to grant you permission to conduct your study a

Check the following boxes, as applicable:

☒ I grant permission for Emily Jones to contact novice special education teachers to invite them
to participate in her research study.

Sincerely,

Principal, Mill Creek High School

Appendix B

Liberty University IRB Exempt Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

January 25, 2022

Emily Jones
Ellen Ziegler

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY21-22-429 A Phenomenological Study of Novice Special Education Teachers' Experiences Utilizing Job-Related Supports

Dear Emily Jones, Ellen Ziegler,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:
The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please em███████████████

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

Appendix C

Participant Consent Form

Consent

Title of the Project: A Phenomenological Study of Novice Special Education Teachers' Experiences Utilizing Job-Related Supports
Principal Investigator: Emily A. Jones, Doctoral Student, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must (1) have 0-3 years of teaching experience working in special education, (2) hold a valid or provisional teaching license, and (3) be actively working in a special education teaching position. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe the experiences of novice SETs at a high school in the southeastern United States identifying and utilizing job-related supports.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

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

1. Participants will be asked to complete a demographic survey via email (5 minutes).
2. Participants will be asked to email me a photograph or meme that represents what being a novice special education teacher means to them (10 minutes).
3. Participants will be asked to participate in an audio recorded, one-on-one interview session consisting of 10 questions related to your experiences utilizing job-related supports as a novice special education teacher. One-on-one interviews can take place in-person or online via ZOOM. This should take no longer than 60 minutes to complete.
4. Participants will participate in one video and audio recorded, online focus group discussion about their experiences utilizing supports as a novice special education teacher. This should take no longer than 60 minutes to complete.
5. Participants will review their interview transcripts to confirm their accuracy. This should take no longer than 30 minutes.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include increased awareness on what job-related supports are being utilized to help novice teachers in the field of special education.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Publish reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. I may share the data I collect from you for use in future research studies or with other researchers; if I share the data that I collect about you, I will remove any information that could identify you, if applicable, before I share the data.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. I will conduct interviews in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-protected computer and filing cabinet. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted, and paper copies will be shredded.
- Interviews and focus groups will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password-protected computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will be compensated for participating in this study with a $10 Starbucks gift card upon completion of this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

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

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Emily Jones. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at ███████████. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Ellen Ziegler, at ███████████

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

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 Institutional Review Board, 1971 ▓▓

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the researcher using the information provided above.

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

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

_____

Printed Subject Name

_____

Signature & Date

Appendix D

Recruitment Email sent to Potential Participants

Dear Special Education Teachers:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to explore novice special education teachers' experiences identifying and utilizing job-related support sources. I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be 18 years of age or older, have 0-3 years of teaching experience in special education, hold a valid or provisional teaching certificate, and be actively working in a special education teaching position. Participants, if willing, will be asked to complete a demographic survey via email (5 minutes). Next, participants will be asked to email me a photograph/meme that represents their experience as a novice special education teacher (10 minutes). Following that, participants will be asked to participate in an audio-recorded interview session consisting of 10 questions related to their experiences utilizing job-related supports as a novice special education teacher. This should take no longer than 60 minutes to complete. Next, participants will participate in a video-and-audio recorded online focus group discussion on their experiences utilizing supports as a novice special education teacher. This should take 60 minutes to complete. Finally, participants will review their interview transcripts to confirm their accuracy after the conclusion of their one-on-one interviews. This should take no more than 30 minutes. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

A consent document is attached to this email. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to sign the consent document and return it to me in room D.115. Once I receive your signed consent form, I will email you a link to the demographic screening survey.

Participants will be compensated with a $10 Starbucks gift card. Compensation will be provided directly to the participant after the procedures have been completed.

Sincerely,

Emily Jones
Special Education Teacher, Ed.S
███████████████████████████

Appendix E

Participant Demographic Survey

Participant Demographics
All answers will remain confidential

1. Are you a special education teacher?

    Mark only one oval.

    ◯ Yes

    ◯ No

2. How many years of teaching have you completed already?

    Mark only one oval.

    ◯ 0-3

    ◯ 4 or more

3. Please type your first and last name

    _____

4. How old are you?

    _____

5. Gender

    Mark only one oval.

    ◯ Male

    ◯ Female

6. What is your ethnicity?

Mark only one oval.

- ( ) Black or African American
- ( ) White
- ( ) Hispanic or Latino
- ( ) American Indian or Alaska Native
- ( ) Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- ( ) Asian
- ( ) Two or more races
- ( ) Other

7. What setting do you currently teach in?

Mark only one oval.

- ( ) Self-Contained
- ( ) Interrelated
- ( ) Resource
- ( ) Co-Taught

_____

8. What grade level(s) do you teach? (Check all that apply)

Check all that apply.

- [ ] 9
- [ ] 10
- [ ] 11
- [ ] 12

9. Choose your certification route

Mark only one oval.

- ( ) Traditional Certificate/Bachelor's Degree
- ( ) Alternative Pathway/Provisional Certificate

Appendix F

Physical Artifacts Protocol

Prior to the 1:1 interview, participants will be asked to email a picture or meme to the researcher that they feel represents their experience as a novice special education teacher. The researcher will print out each picture and bring them to the 1:1 interview to discuss. The researcher will initiate a conversation by closing the interview with the following statement: "Tell me about your picture that represents what being a novice special education teacher means to you and the ideas that it represents."

Appendix G

Open-Ended Interview Protocol

Open-Ended Interview Questions

Start Time:	End Time:
Participant Name:	Date:
Please introduce yourself to me as if we just met each other.	
1. Describe your role of autonomy in your classroom.	
2. Could you describe in detail your relationship with your supervisor?	
3. On a scale of 1-10 with 1 being extremely dissatisfied and 10 being extremely satisfied, how satisfied are you with your performance at this job? Could you explain why you rated your performance with this number?	
4. Within your teaching role, what type of experiences have made you feel successful at work?	
5. What do you feel attributes the most to your success as a beginning teacher?	
6. What workplace relationships do you believe have been the most positive in your teaching career?	
7. What are some changes either county- or district-wide that could be made to help other special education teachers be successful?	
8. If you could look into the future, do you see your older self remaining in your current role? Explain.	
9. Tell me about your picture that represents what being a novice SET means to you and the ideas that it represents.	
10. Thank you for the valuable information, is there anything else you would like to add before we end?	

Appendix H

Focus Group Protocol

Open-Ended Focus Group Questions

Start Time: **End Time:**	
Participant Name: **Date:**	
1. Why did you choose the special education teaching profession?	
2. What are some of the challenges that exist within your teaching role?	
3. What supports do you believe have assisted you in handling those challenges in your teaching role?	
4. Is there anything you feel would have better prepared you for your career in special education?	
5. What advice would you offer a novice special education teacher?	

Appendix I

Invitation for Member Check and Email of Gratitude for Participants

DATE
Dear [Participant's Full Name],

Thank you for completing the participant demographic survey, submitting your meme, and meeting with me during our individual interview and focus group meeting. I greatly appreciate your willingness to share your experience utilizing job-related supports as a novice special education teacher.

I would like to ask you to participate in one final step in the research process. That is to review your transcribed individual and focus group interviews to ensure accuracy and confirm your thoughts are as described.

I sincerely appreciate your participation in this research study and willingness to share by being open and honest. Please review the attached document and provide your feedback via email. Upon receipt of your feedback, I will deliver your $10 Starbucks to your classroom for your participation in this study.

I enjoyed spending time with you and greatly appreciate your input and time. Please let me know if you ever need anything!

Emily Jones

Appendix J

Research Study Log

Research Study Log						
Participant Pseudonym	**Consent Form**	**Demographic Survey**	**Meme**	**1:1 Interview**	**Focus Group**	**Member Checking**
1. Ryan	☑	☑	1/27/2022	01/31/2022	☑	☑
2. Audrey	☑	☑	1/27/2022	02/01/2022	☑	☑
3. Whitney	☑	☑	02/04/2022	02/04/2022	☑	☑
4. Drew	☑	☑	02/01/2022	02/02/2022	☑	☑
5. Paige	☑	☑	02/03/2022	02/03/2022	☑	☑
6. Britney	☑	☑	02/07/2022	02/07/2022	☑	☑
7. Christina	☑	☑	02/08/2022	02/08/2022	☑	☑
8. Rhett	☑	☑	1/27/2022	02/08/2022	☑	☑
9. Luke	☑	☑	02/07/2022	02/07/2022	☑	☑
10. Carrie	☑	☑	1/27/2022	02/03/2022	☑	☑
11. Remi	☑	☑	1/27/2022	02/04/2022	☑	☑
12. Ford	☑	☑	02/08/2022	2/10/2022	☑	☑

Appendix K

Sample Interview Protocol

Open-Ended Interview Questions

Start Time: 12:20	End Time: 12:55
Participant Name: ▓▓▓▓▓▓	Date: 1/31/2022

Please introduce yourself to me as if we just met each other.

well spoken

1. Describe your role of autonomy in your classroom.
   no autonomy giving tests

2. Could you describe in detail your relationship with your supervisor?

3. On a scale of 1-10 with 1 being extremely dissatisfied and 10 being extremely satisfied, how satisfied are you with your performance at this job? Could you explain why you rated your performance with this number? *covid -students*

4. Within your teaching role, what type of experiences have made you feel successful at work? *Survival*

5. What do you feel attributes the most to your success as a beginning teacher? *Pauses to think - wants to come back*

6. What workplace relationships do you believe have been the most positive in your teaching career? *Other teachers*

7. What are some changes either county- or district-wide that could be made to help other special education teachers be successful? *testing sped kids*

8. If you could look into the future, do you see your older self remaining in your current role? Explain. *+ sadness family*

9. Tell me about your picture that represents what being a novice SET means to you and the ideas that it represents. *Expectations of the kids*

10. Thank you for the valuable information, is there anything else you would like to add before we end? *accountability*

Appendix L

Sample of Interview Transcript

Research Participant 1: Ryan

3. On a scale of one to 10, with one being extremely dissatisfied and 10 being extremely satisfied. How satisfied are you with your performance at this job?

Satisfied with my own performance, let's give it a 7.

OK, could you explain why you rated your performance this number?

So here's the reason. Seven because I know my stuff and I know how to do it. Not more than a seven, because it's imperfect and I have yet to refine it. So third year, I mean, you're still learning. And when I first got here, it was the year everything blew up. And there hasn't been one year that's been like the other. There hasn't been one semester that's been like the other.

What do you mean?

Blew up everybody who when we were in school and then like everyone in the lockdown

So I don't know what school was like. I don't know what teaching was like before that. Although they say over the last two or three decades, it has progressively changed faster and faster. So this is all I know of it, so also not giving more than a seven because I really don't know what would it be like if things went back to normal.

Because that's your normal?

Yes. That is my normal and it hasn't been good.

Yeah

But. Some of it is just a learning curve. That's a huge learning curve to start with, right?

Moreover, there's been a huge change in students even in those in three years. And perhaps

necessarily, but adjusting to the students when I first started and even two years later, it's a huge change.

What's the biggest change?

Expectations have changed, not just what's expected of us, but what's expected from the students and what the students expect. This year when they came in, what they expected to have to do is way different than that first group of students I got the first year of teaching. And I don't know how to describe it, except. This is very common, for a student to look at me and say, I have to do this? I have to do classwork? And to look at me surprised when I tell them to wake up to stop sleeping as though this is my norm. What's wrong with you?

Appendix M

Epoché Journal

Personal Experience with the Phenomenon	Points of Epoche
Personal experience with the teachers	I am familiar with 5/12 research participants. I have never met the other 7 participants before. I am bracketing out my interactions, perceptions, and assumptions as I collect and analyze data.
Personal experience with the high school	I teach at the high school in which this study is going to be conducted in. I am bracketing out my personal experience and affiliation with the school. I am bracketing our school mission and vision statements. I am bracketing my personal relationships and interactions with administrators and the principal.
Personal experience with the profession	I am also a special education teacher in the self-contained setting. I am setting aside all prejudgments and pushing aside all of my prior experience to be able to consider the experience of the participants. I am bracketing my relationships with students and own personal experiences utilizing job-related supports. I am bracketing my own experiences as a novice special education teacher at one point.