ADDRESSING THE EFFECTS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION STAFF BURNOUT IN

BEHAVIORAL PLACEMENT SCHOOLS: A CASE STUDY

by

Katherine Taylor

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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Abstract

The purpose of this single instrumental case study was to understand the decreased self-efficacy that leads to burnout for special education staff in a Transitional Unit school in the suburbs of the Rust Belt. The theory guiding this study was Albert Bandura's self-efficacy theory as it relates to the relationship between special education staff in behavioral placement schools and burnout experienced throughout their tenure due to work demands and interactions from professional and personal relationships. The single instrumental case study was chosen to analyze the lives of staff members at Ohio Vale School and their experiences with burnout. The central research question that guided this study was Why do special education staff experience decreased self-efficacy that leads to burnout? Data were collected through individual interviews conducted at the start and end of the data collection process. The second data collection point was a pre-letter that participants wrote to themselves at the start of the data collection process outlining their expectations for the school year. A post-letter was written by participants at the end of the data collection process reflecting on the expectations they had set for themselves and how they will continue with the remainder of the school year. The final data collection point was weekly check-ins in the form of structured prompts presented to participants at the end of each week. Results of this study shared that a support structure focusing on administrative presence and staffing and compensation as well as a community effort focusing on influences with the staff and influences on students were crucial in shaping the decreased self-efficacy leading to burnout in special education staff in behavioral placement schools.

Keywords: burnout, attrition, behavior placement schools, anxiety, stress

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Dedication

To my parents, my dad who planted the seed of pursuing this journey, and my mom who supported me class by class. This is also dedicated to my youngest sister who, although 10 years apart, shared this final education path with me so that we could really "study like college kids" together. To my younger sister who challenged my determination to accept this adventure, and my youngest sister for starting her academic adventure as I finish mine. To my family and close circle of friends and especially my partner who collectively helped keep my motivation up and would not let me give up or accept ABD.

Thank you!

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List of Abbreviations

Comprehensive Crisis Management (CCM)

emotional and behavioral disabilities (EBD)

Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Transitional Unit (TU)

Personal Care Assistant (PCA)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Although educational staff, particularly special education staff, are associated with the academic development and growth of their students, the demands of the profession are often overlooked. Along with the demands of academic preparedness, special education staff face the emotional and physical demands of maintaining the basic needs of their students, regarding not only academics but also social-emotional development, and most importantly, an environment that is safe for students, staff, and administrators (Jeon et al., 2021). In this study, special education staff refers to all staff members in a school who are working with a special education population (i.e., special education teachers, paraprofessionals, social workers, intervention specialists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, speech and language pathologists, and personal care assistants [PCA]). The proposed qualitative dissertation research topic for this research is a case study of the effects of special education staff burnout in behavioral placement schools in the Rust Belt. Burnout among education staff has become a significant issue leading to the attrition of educators, particularly special education staff. Chapter One of this study aims to provide a background of the problem special education staff faces due to burnout syndrome, to share and elaborate upon the importance of this study through its purpose, and to discuss the significance of this study further. Historical, social, and theoretical contexts are discussed to help expound upon the effects of burnout syndrome on special education staff in behavioral placement schools in the suburbs of the Rust Belt.

Background

The World Health Organization stated that beginning in the year 2022 and moving forward, burnout would be considered a syndrome (Roloff et al., 2022). With this statement from

the World Health Organization, burnout became an issue that was often overlooked and underappreciated by working adults and the organization conceptualized it as resulting from chronic stress brought upon through the workplace setting. It is through the historical context, social context, and theoretical context that burnout, or burnout syndrome, can be better understood and generalized, making it more specific for various professions, such as the special education profession, as well as all special education staff involved in its various settings along with placement levels.

Historical Context

The phenomenon of the concept of burnout has been widely and more openly experienced since the 1970s (Moss, 2019). During this time, burnout was originally considered to be an issue faced on an individual basis by employees. This case study is found in real-life, authentic, contemporary settings or situations, and involves the examination of one or more cases (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Creswell and Poth's (2018) definition of case study research aligns with my vision for this qualitative research dissertation topic of special education staff burnout in behavioral placement schools. The indicators for the definition of special education teacher burnout is through the markers of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (Park & Shin, 2020).

A study was conducted in 2018 that took note of not only the levels of burnout experienced by educational staff but also the number of times burnout was mentioned during the 32 years from 1986 to 2018 (García-Carmona et al., 2018). García-Carmona et al. (2018) looked at an assortment of articles that mentioned burnout in educational professionals. The first span of years in the graph represented the years 1986 through 2000. During this span of years, burnout was mentioned in six published articles. The second bar on the graph spanned from 2001 to

2006. This bar reflected that during those five years, 18 published articles mentioned burnout. The 2001 through 2006 timeframe denoted the peak amount of mentions in the study. In the third span of years covering the years 2007 through 2012, a decrease in the number of mentions of burnout in published articles to 15 mentions was shown. Continuing to the final 5-year span, from 2013 through 2018, the mention of burnout in published articles decreased significantly to only five mentions. The 2013 through 2018 year span represented the least amount of mentions of burnout in published articles during the study.

The mention of burnout in articles about educators' experiences has been acknowledged and documented throughout the decades. However, it is indicated that the increase in attention and mention of the experience of educator burnout did not maintain a strong interest or momentum in research between the years of 2007 and 2018 (García-Carmona et al., 2018). It is also recognized that the topic of teacher burnout has been around for decades but is experienced at different levels and different rates for special education teachers compared to their general education counterparts (Park & Shin, 2020). However, over the previous 50 years, to gain professional status as part of an educational staff, especially special education staff, candidates and professionals must have a mastery over a wide variety of basic skills and competencies (Puertas-Molero et al., 2019). Because the world and societies are constantly evolving, the scope and demands on education staff, particularly special education staff, throughout each school year continue to evolve as well (Fabelico & Afalla, 2020).

Social Context

Although burnout has typically been addressed on a case-by-case basis for individual professionals, it has since broadened to become a social issue. Burnout is not experienced by individuals; rather, burnout in one professional holds influence over a group. In more recent

years, burnout has been considered a socially induced phenomenon that is not only accentuated in the workplace due to the demands of the job but also is considered a contagion among coworkers (Meredith et al., 2019). Education, more specifically special education, provides the appropriate atmosphere for burnout to take over as a contagion as early as the entrance exams to earn teaching credentials, as well as finding and being accepted to public teaching positions (Melguizo-Ibáñez et al., 2022; Meredith et al., 2019).

Theoretical Context

The theorist and theory that aligns most directly with burnout and its effect on attrition for special education staff working in behavioral placement schools is Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory. Bandura's self-efficacy theory aligns with the belief that people have the ability to determine the efficacy of their capabilities based on their perceptions and judgments of their abilities (Bhati & Sethy, 2022). It is through this theoretical context that special education staff burnout in behavioral placement schools has been observed in an attempt to better understand its effect on attrition. The phenomenon of burnout, though experienced uniquely by everyone, is often based on the collective self-efficacy of the larger group (Bandura, 2000) and has been addressed through the theoretical context.

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Problem Statement

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The problem is that special education staff experience decreased self-efficacy, which leads to burnout in behavioral placement schools. Because of the specific and demanding needs of the population of students that special education staff working in behavioral placement schools face daily, special education staff tends to have an increased vulnerability to experiencing burnout more easily than other educational professionals (Park & Shin, 2020). Burnout does not manifest itself in one aspect of life. Rather, burnout impacts professionals

physically, emotionally, and mentally (Agyapong et al., 2022). The psychologic syndrome of burnout is classified by three categories encompassing depersonalization (negative responses or detachment to an excessive extent), a diminished sense of accomplishment (the feeling of not being as productive and achieving less), and emotional exhaustion (an increased sense of fatigue and decreased physical energy; Gillet et al., 2022). Examining burnout on a personal level for special education staff rather than just as employees will provide further insight as to how to solve the issue of special education staff leaving their jobs and the field.

Special education staff are not the only ones to feel the effects of burnout. Students receiving services in behavioral placement schools indirectly experience the effects of the burnout that their special education staff face. For students, particularly special education students, motivation tends to show a decline when gradual and chronic burnout starts to show in their teachers (Park & Shin, 2020). This indirect impact on the students has caused greater concern when dealing with special education staff and, therefore, has created a need for extensive studies. Just as special education staff are impacted in more than one way by the effects of burnout, their experience impacts their students in multiple ways as well. The social behavior skills and academic achievements of students are negatively impacted by their staff's burnout (Zhao et al., 2022). Students are influenced by many factors in their lives both in and out of the classroom. Burnout imposes discontent in one's profession, disengagement with the teaching process, the educational community, and the classroom, and emotional distress upon special educational staff (Winding et al., 2022). Therefore, the students being serviced, particularly those in special education programs, are more prone to experiencing an increase in aggressive behaviors.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this case study is to understand the decreased self-efficacy that leads to burnout for special education staff at the Ohio Vale School in the Rust Belt. After having completed the research, the lack of self-efficacy that leads to burnout was principally defined as the lived experiences of special education staff's emotional fatigue, stress, and disassociation or depersonalization. Similarly to the literature reviewed, in this research, the burnout of special education staff in behavioral placement schools was generally identified as a diminished sense of accomplishment, depersonalization, and emotional exhaustion (Gillet et al., 2022). Although not officially recognized worldwide, research has shown a push for burnout to become a recognized and legitimate medical diagnosis for mental health (Nadon et al., 2022). The indirect impact of special education staff burnout is felt amongst the school's student population. Academic, social, and behavioral skills performance, as well as student motivation, are negatively impacted throughout the academic year (Roloff et al., 2022). Therefore, research was completed on the special education staff burnout phenomenon to truly understand the full scope of the effects on the special education staff working in behavioral placement schools.

Significance of the Study

By choosing to conduct a research study in a case study format, a description and identification of the precise case along with a thorough analysis must be the starting foundation for the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The qualitative study at hand is the single instrumental case study of special education staff burnout in behavioral placement schools in the suburbs of the Rust Belt. The phenomenon of the study is the burnout of the special education staff (i.e., special education teachers, paraprofessionals, social workers, intervention specialists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, speech and language pathologists, and personal care

assistants). The case study was focused on the behavioral placement school. The use of the behavioral placement school as the case falls under Yin's (2018) description of a case as an entity. Following Yin's five components of case study research design, the first component of this study would focus on why and how special education staff are experiencing burnout at the behavioral placement school. The second component of this study, the proposition, is the focus on the phenomenon of burnout experienced by the special education staff. The third component, the case, is the behavioral placement school in the southern suburbs of the Rust Belt. The fourth component, logically linking the data to the propositions, allows for the patterns that are formed within the data that are gathered to help with the explanation-building around the data. Finally, the fifth component, the criteria for interpreting the findings of this study, does not rely on statistical data but rather relies on the researcher interpreting the findings through alternate ways of thinking, as well as using rival explanations.

Theoretical Significance

To start the actual analysis, Yin (2018) recommended beginning with the questions rather than starting with the data that were collected. Completing tasks with a strategy is important. Yin provides four general strategies for interpreting data. The first is relying on theoretical propositions. These are the propositions and objectives that drove the case study. The second is working the data from the "ground up" (Yin, 2018, p. 243). This strategy has the researcher pouring through the data before considering adding the theoretical propositions. The third strategy Yin described was developing a case description. This strategy essentially puts together a framework for researchers who are struggling to identify any concepts in their data. Finally, Yin described the last strategy as examining plausible rival explanations. This strategy works in combination with the previous three strategies to help test any plausible rival explanations for the

data. All strategies used for the duration of this case study were successful in securing the relevant data.

Empirical Significance

For the analysis process, Yin (2018) listed five analytic techniques. The first is pattern matching. Through this technique, logic is used to compress and address any empirically based patterns found in the data. Second, Yin described explanation-building. Through this technique, the researcher analyzed the case by building an explanation of the case. For example, regarding this topic, Gillet et al.'s (2022) article discussing predictors, outcomes, and trajectories of teacher burnout over 7 years, the discussion arose that in those previous studies of burnout, teachers were viewed as more of a "chronic psychological state of resource depletion likely to impact a period of seven years" (Gillet et al., 2022, pp. 7-8). Using predictors, outcomes, trajectories, and the collected data, an explanation was built to help explain the phenomenon of burnout in special education staff. The third technique described by Yin (2018) was the time-series analysis. This analysis followed that of the analogous time-series analysis conducted by behavioral and clinical psychologists. Using logic models was the fourth technique that was meant for the researcher to stipulate and operationalize the complexity of a chain of events over time to show its complexity. Finally, Yin shared the last technique as the cross-case synthesis. This technique, according to Yin, is applied to the analysis of multiple case studies rather than individual case studies. For the case study topic at hand, the most appropriate techniques were the pattern-matching technique and the explanation-building technique.

Practical Significance

There is a level of appropriateness that must be reached for the case study design to be considered appropriate for the topic of special education staff burnout in a behavioral placement

school. The case study design for qualitative research assumes that the focus of the study is answering the questions of why and how (Yin, 2018). Yin further elaborated that when the aspiration to study events or sets of events persists, yet the behaviors cannot be affected, the use of the case study method is favored. In other words, the behaviors and experiences being studied, though authentic to each individual, are happening on a large enough scale to be considered events. Creswell and Poth (2018) warned researchers that there is no agreed-upon structure for the designing of a qualitative study. Therefore, with the components presented by Yin (2018) and the knowledge imparted by Creswell and Poth (2018), a case study design approach seems most appropriate. Yin (2018) managed to create a twofold definition of case study research design. The first part of the definition is that the case study design is a practical approach that examines contemporary phenomena within an authentic context of real-world experiences. The second part of Yin's definition was that case studies help researchers study and cope with distinct situations in which more variables are of interest to the research beyond one point of data. Multiple variables benefit from developments that have guided design, data collection, and analysis. Effective case studies rely heavily on the numerous sources of evidence that researchers permit data to triangulate and converge. In accordance with Yin, the case study topics being discussed follow the formation of seeking the answer to the questions of why and how does not require control over certain behavioral events and does focus on the contemporary events or issues of burnout amongst special education staff.

Research Questions

To truly understand the effects of burnout syndrome on special education staff in behavioral placement schools located in the suburbs of the Rust Belt, the centrality of the research must focus on the question of why. The proposed research questions were derived from

and were put into alignment with the purpose and problem of this case study. In addition to the central problem and purpose of this study, the theoretical framework focusing on Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory also played a part in molding the four supporting sub-questions.

Central Research Question

Why do special education staff experience decreased self-efficacy that leads to burnout?

Sub-Question One

What effects does burnout syndrome have on special education staff in behavioral placement schools?

Sub-Question Two

How does verbal persuasion from building-level and central office administrations affect the burnout of special education staff?

Sub-Question Three

How does burnout syndrome in one special education staff member affect their colleagues' performances?

Sub-Question Four

How does burnout syndrome in special education staff affect the performance outcomes of special education students?

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Definitions

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1. *Depersonalization*—Increasingly negative attitudes towards others paired with increased distancing (Roloff et al., 2022).

2. *Emotional exhaustion*—About feelings of lacking energy or finding oneself in a state of being overextended emotionally (Roloff et al., 2022).

3. *Reduced personal accomplishment*—Having the feeling of low confidence in one's

    abilities, leading to an increase in feelings of failure and inefficiency (Roloff et al., 2022).

4. *Verbal persuasion*—Verbal encouragement or discouragement that applies to an

    individual's performance ability and has some control over said individual's self-efficacy

    (Rudenko et al., 2021).

Summary

The collective experienced decreased self-efficacy in special education staff leading to burnout in behavioral placement schools must be addressed. The purpose of understanding this decrease in self-efficacy that leads to burnout for special education staff in the Transitional Unit (TU) school in the suburbs of the Rust Belt could have both direct and indirect effects on the staff, as well as their students. Therefore, the importance of following the crucial central research question asking why special education staff are experiencing this phenomenon of burnout syndrome coupled with sub-questions derived from the problem, purpose, and theoretical framework of this case study will allow the opportunity to better understand special education staff's burnout and how burnout affects attrition in behavioral placement schools.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

A systematic review of the literature was conducted to explore the issue of burnout among special education staff in behavioral placement schools. Self-efficacy theory provides insight into the causes and impacts that burnout has on special education staff and how burnout impacts their physical and mental health, work performance, relationships, and the education field. A synthesis of recent literature regarding factors related to the burnout of special education staff in behavioral placement settings is presented. Then, the consequences of the burnout of special education staff are reviewed. Finally, a gap in the literature regarding the impact of special education staff burnout in behavioral placement schools is identified.

Theoretical Framework

The 1977 self-efficacy theory of Albert Bandura was explored regarding the connection with the burnout of special education staff in behavioral placement schools. The theoretical framework section of this literature review examines how Bandura's self-efficacy theory and self-efficacy's four components—performance outcomes, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological feedback (Rudenko et al., 2021)—relate to the burnout of special education staff in behavioral placement schools in the suburbs of the Rust Belt. For this study, the term staff will be used to encompass all staff members regardless of certifications or level of education. This section looks at how the self-efficacy theory not only influences but also helps to describe and define the effects of burnout for special education staff working in behavioral placement schools.

Albert Bandura is a widely known psychologist and educational theorist. Along with his social cognitive theory, Bandura (1977) is also known for his self-efficacy theory. The self-

efficacy theory is rooted in Bandura's social cognitive theory and is considered a subset of the social cognitive theory (Bhati & Sethy, 2022). Following social cognitive theory as the theory that people learn from observation and interaction with their daily environments, Bandura continued to expand upon his social cognitive theory, creating the self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977). The self-efficacy theory, as defined by Bandura, is the judgments people create based on what they feel are their true capabilities in order to establish and implement actions mandatory to achieve elected types of performances (Bhati & Sethy, 2022).

People's perceived personal efficacy will later determine their participation in and impact on their community's collective efficacy (Bandura, 2000). The self-efficacy theory takes the social cognitive approach one step further by questioning individuals on how their beliefs factor into their ability to execute tasks that are assigned or that arise daily (Bhati & Sethy, 2022). Bandura (2000) provided a progression of self-efficacy. Starting with the person, efficacy expectations are created. Following the creation of the expectations comes the behaviors and the outcome expectations. Finally, is the outcome of the behavior. Through self-efficacy coupled with social-emotional learning, behavior changes can occur in students resulting in fewer behavior incidents and behavior referrals. However, expectations and structure must be considered and applied with efficacy.

Self-efficacy theory is composed of four determining factors of judgment: performance outcomes, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and psychological feedback (Rudenko et al., 2021). These four determining factors influenced the path of this research and the development of the research questions. Each determining factor of judgment provides a crucial explanation for the configuration of self-efficacy. Self-appraisals of employees' abilities will often determine how they behave and how their thought process is influenced (Bandura, 1982). Performance

outcomes as a determining factor of self-efficacy focuses on how both the positive and negative encounters throughout a person's career would influence their ability to perform that specific given task again or a given task in a similar capacity (Rudenko et al., 2021). These self-referent thoughts cross various situational circumstances and activities in either a positive or negative manner (Bandura, 2001). Although performance outcomes typically affect employees on an individual basis, self-efficacy can also impact coworkers through vicarious experiences (Rudenko et al., 2021).

The positive or negative effects on an employee's self-efficacy can also come from the observation of their coworkers' performances and experiences, which they then compare to their own (Rudenko et al., 2021). Therefore, one must have an accurate judgment of their self-efficacy so that no misjudgments are made when influences from others' performances are considered (Bandura, 1982). Individual mindsets and coworkers' experiences are not the only influences on employees' self-efficacy. Verbal persuasion from coworkers and administrations will influence employees' self-efficacy through discouraging or encouraging comments that relate to an employee's ability or performance of their job (Rudenko et al., 2021). The internal psychological feedback that one feels also influences their self-efficacy. It is through the perception of the sensations of emotional experiences that people receive involuntary psychological feedback from their bodies. This psychological feedback of employees' self-judgment regarding their abilities holds influence over the emotional reactions and patterns, both present and future, in all environments (Bandura, 1982).

Although the self-efficacy theory is crucial to staff servicing students in special education behavioral placement schools, it is imperative to know and understand that a one-size-fits-all approach cannot be taken for the special education behavioral student population (Bandura,

2006). As a placement school for students whose districts could not service them due to their behaviors, what was considered Tier 3 services at the district level are now considered to be Tier 1 services in a behavioral placement. Therefore, an emphasis on self-efficacy theory can be differentiated to be meaningful for all special education staff in an environment where their students' least restrictive environment is not the general education setting (Bandura, 2001). Self-efficacy, one's perceived capability of what one can do, must be distinguished from other constructs within the social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2006).

Characteristics and attributes of quality educational staff lend themselves to one of three elements that ultimately factor into educational staff's performance: grit, self-efficacy, and burnout (Fabelico & Afalla, 2020). A hypothesis created by Fabelico and Afalla (2020) was made visually to capture the relationships between teachers' characteristics and how they are not strictly linear when following through with teacher performance. Teacher characteristics are designated as the origin. From there, the three characteristics of grit, self-efficacy, and burnout are placed in a stack on top of each other to signify that they do not happen linearly; rather, they play off each other. Should teacher characteristics focus on grit, then grit and self-efficacy may support each other leading to a certain standard of teacher performance. Should teacher characteristics focus on burnout, self-efficacy may support or combat burnout. However, burnout may also hold an influence on self-efficacy, which in turn will hold an influence over grit. Grit and burnout are also connected and may influence each other. From grit and burnout, teacher performance is encapsulated.

Although burnout encompasses the negative aspects of educational staff positions, grit is the determination experienced by education staff that combats the burnout and, coupled with self-efficacy, continues the drive for high-performance levels (Fabelico & Afalla, 2020). This

sense of determination and its maintenance can be attributed to what Bandura considered the two fundamental ingredients of striving for goals: outcome expectations and efficacy expectations (Vaughan-Johnston & Jacobson, 2020). The outcome expectations, or what people believe to be adequate performances that will lead to their desired outcomes, and the efficacy expectations, or people's beliefs that behaviors can be employed to attain the desired outcomes, must be accurately defined and acknowledged as independent ingredients as Bandura identified them. Although the distinction of outcome expectancy can be held as independent from the concept of self-efficacy (Marsh et al., 2019), efficacy expectations prove to be the driving force in forging the connection between these two independents.

The long-term impact of the self-efficacy theory is that when the sense of self-efficacy becomes strong in people, they can manage the circumstances in their lives that change and grow from personal efficacy into the collective efficacy of their community (Bandura, 2000). Thus, after having reached the level of collective efficacy, people are able to have a hand in contributing to societal change. As special education staff of a behavioral placement school, the experience of burnout is prevalent and can be better understood with the help of Bandura's self-efficacy theory. The understanding of Bandura's theory will impact the special education staff's perceived capability to continue to accomplish their daily demands in a very demanding setting by first being able to comprehend the demands of their position and implement strategies to effectively maintain a healthy work-life balance.

Related Literature

The importance of understanding burnout in special education staff in behavioral placement schools has become more prevalent throughout recent years (Zhao et al., 2022). The long hours coupled with the high intensity naturally found in the daily obligations that teachers

have to perform are said to be the leading causes of teacher exhaustion. Although the staff is affected directly by the burnout experience, students, coworkers, and the families of staff experiencing burnout are also affected, although indirectly. The first theme presented is the direct effects of burnout on special education staff. The second central theme presented through the research is the indirect impact of burnout. The self-efficacy levels of the special education teachers in Park and Shin's (2020) study on burnout as well as their support systems were brought into question as the leading variables for the burnout being experienced. The purpose of a behavioral placement school is for staff to provide opportunities for the growth and development of students so they become functional members of society after graduation, and therefore often set aside or do not take into consideration the emotional needs or need for emotional regulation among the staff who serve their students (Burić et al., 2019).

Burnout as a Syndrome

Due to the changing work environments in the late 1990s and early 2000s, a rise in interest and attention was focused on the concept of burnout (Weber & Jaekel-Reinhard, 2000). In recent years, burnout rates among educational staff have fluctuated in the range of 11% to 35.5% (Llorca-Pellicer et al., 2021). Burnout, though gaining attention among the general workforce population, was a term coined in the early 1980s (Nadon et al., 2022; Weber & Jaekel-Reinhard, 2000) with the initial definition of burnout established by Herbert Freudenberger years in the 1970s, who had played a significant role in the recognition and development of burnout, though he refused acknowledgment of coining the term (Fontes, 2020; Gabassi et al., 2002; Nadon et al., 2022). Freudenberger developed his views of burnout as a syndrome to the point of including social work services while challenging the existence of medical interventions, thus prompting communities to change (Fontes, 2020). Through the early

stages of rigorous concentration on burnout, the main factors that were acknowledged as key factors of burnout were from society, the work environment, and the economy (Weber & Jaekel-Reinhard, 2000). It is through these three factors that an increase in stress is referred to as only a higher risk for burnout. Although burnout is experienced by many people in various professions, it is felt the strongest by those people whose jobs are in service-based professions that involve rigorous interactions with others (Gabassi et al., 2002).

The evolution of burnout in current times now shows signs of presenting itself as an issue on a larger social scale rather than simply on an individual basis (Bocheliuk et al., 2020). Attention to the growing issue of burnout has gained attention from the World Health Organization as an imbalance that is created due to increasing or persistent stress in the workplace. Typically, burnout would present itself as impacting individuals' physical health as well as their mental health, but now with increased cases of professional burnout, organizations employing workers experiencing burnout are starting to experience difficulties, such as decreased employee performance in higher levels (Bernales-Turpo et al., 2022). With the influence of the 2020 pandemic, the popularity of self-diagnosing burnout increased (Tavella et al., 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic and shutdowns starting in March 2020 served as a catalyst to amplify and magnify the focus on burnout in education due to the change in networks of support changing from physical to electronic (Rubilar & Oros, 2021). In many cases, the separation between work and home environments for many educational staff was a catalyst for workaholism practices because greater time and access to work presented itself (Barreto et al., 2022) now that the classroom occupied personal space. With the escalation of burnout symptoms from the pandemic, a sense of urgency has increased the need to know and understand burnout more thoroughly in educational professionals (Rubilar & Oros, 2021).

Employees experience the imbalance of increasing work demands with significant effort to accomplish and limited time in which to complete them, while also struggling with the need for rest and the desire to be rewarded and recognized for efforts performed (Bocheliuk et al., 2020). This imbalance may become extreme to the point of workaholism where employees develop behavioral dependences or addictions to their work (Barreto et al., 2022). Among the numerous external reasons for burnout in special education staff, their ability to adequately practice coping skills and self-efficacy greatly influences the amount of additional work that special education staff are willing to take on, the compensating for insufficient resources for work duties and responsibilities, and conflicts with expectations of their job positions as practiced as opposed to their contractual obligations (Llorca-Pellicer et al., 2021).

In combination with working with insufficient resources, conflicting expectations and obligations, and additional responsibilities, the perceived failure special education staff may experience adds to their levels of mental, physical, and emotional stress (Smetackova et al., 2019). Because of the long-term exposure to stress experienced by special education staff ultimately ending in a diagnosis of burnout syndrome, many direct and indirect impacts of burnout will hold bearing over the lives and basic daily functions of this group of people. Although burnout is a phenomenon experienced by employees in all professions, the rise in special education staff attrition in addition to an employee shortage (Robinson et al., 2019) in special education is the focus of this study.

Direct Impacts of Burnout

It is common knowledge that burnout directly impacts the life and quality of life of the person or people experiencing it. Maintaining a healthy balance between professional and personal lives in educational staff, predominantly special education staff can become a difficult

task with the occupational stressors that staff are exposed to daily leading to increased risk of psychological and mental health disorders (Wu, 2020). Health changes that have become prolonged due to an individual's complete reaction to work stress that progressively becomes persistent and unyielding leads to the mental and physical condition of burnout (Edú-Valsania et al, 2022).

Focus on the effects of burnout and stress have typically been centered on students, but it was not until more recently that the focus on stress and burnout has been shifted to that of the staff who service students (Wu, 2020). It is through this acknowledgment that burnout does indeed pose health risks to employees in stressful job situations. Because of the environments that educational professionals are exposed to on a consistent basis, educational staff, particularly special education staff, are at higher risk of diseases or accidents that are work-related (González-Valero et al., 2022). The gradual process of experiencing fatigue, cynicism, and reduced commitment in later years was added to the definition of burnout (Edú-Valsania et al., 2022). With increasing feelings of depression, anxiety, failure, and achievement, the level of resilience that educational staff must attain and maintain continues to increase (González-Valero et al., 2022). It is therefore important to note the direct consequences of burnout as the personal consequences experienced by the person suffering from burnout, and the turnover rates for those experiencing burnout.

Personal Consequences of Burnout

With an uptick in attention to and discussion of burnout among educational staff, the emotions of the staff and the relevance of these emotions have also become part of the discussion (Atmaca et al., 2020). In order for special education staff to avoid mental, somatic, and physical illnesses as consequences of work-induced stress, early identification of burnout in special

education staff is crucial (Mahmoodi-Shahrebabaki, 2019). Bringing special education staff's emotional status to the forefront of their attention allows for them to recognize the reality of the situations that they are in and focus on utilizing their coping techniques better (Atmaca et al., 2020). For special education staff experiencing burnout, self-efficacy is greatly affected. Female staff tend to feel burnout in their position through exhaustion at higher rates than their male coworkers (Saloviita & Pakarinen, 2021). Teachers have also reported that their levels of personal accomplishments have decreased. In these situations, self-efficacy is greatly affected because special education staff start to experience a decrease in confidence in their abilities to influence student progress and growth either individually or collectively.

Teachers will often take on more than what they are contractually obligated to do, leading them becoming overloaded with their work demands (Ikhwan Nasir et al., 2021). Anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and a reduction of personal achievements (Duyan, 2022; Melguizo-Ibáñez et al., 2022) have all been linked to higher rates of burnout symptoms experienced by special education teachers and staff (Kryshtanovych et al., 2022). By taking on more responsibilities beyond contractual obligations, special education staff of all ages and levels of experience are at a higher risk of being subjected to chronic stress and decreased feelings of having their needs at work met (Puertas-Molero et al., 2019). Although burnout is considered a to be a work-specific phenomenon, some educators and medical professionals have started to consider burnout to be a mental disorder (Nadon et al., 2022).

An increase in burnout was experienced by teachers with the start of the 2019 global pandemic (Pereira et al., 2021). Educational staff experienced the consequences of increased levels of stress and distress during the 2020 COVID-19 shutdown that began to manifest themselves through various forms of psychological and physical symptoms (Rubilar & Oros,

2021). Education is a profession in which staff members are responsible not only for the physical and cognitive labors throughout each day but also for the emotional labors of ensuring the successful growth, development, and success of their students (Atmaca et al., 2020). The change from brick-and-mortar classroom settings to virtual classrooms has led to an increase in eating and sleeping disorders, headaches, anxiety, dizziness, and fatigue (Rubilar & Oros, 2021). Because the pandemic was a catastrophic event, students' emotional needs increased in their virtual settings, and therefore special education staff experienced the feeling of being overstrained while trying to cope with the event personally as well as respond to their students' new needs (Weißenfels et al., 2021).

Due to the working conditions changing for several special education staff from in-person teaching to virtual teaching with the new challenge of figuring out how to remain in legal compliance by adjusting how services were provided to special education students, special education staff experienced increased vulnerability to stress, overtiredness, and burnout (Pereira et al., 2021). Being able to possess strong individual traits that lead to a durable sense of self-efficacy, such as self-esteem and assertiveness, provides a solid foundation for resistance against the stressors dealt with during the day-to-day happenings of educational staff's demands and increases the resilience to continue in their profession in following years (Jovanović et al., 2021). A note of importance in educational staff showing resilience is that staff are able to resume their original degree of performance and can resist any undesired effects that negative stressors might cause once those stressors have been removed. The maintenance of self-efficacy among special education staff became a struggle as the time provided for self-regulating and self-reflecting while balancing work and home life in one location decreased (Weißenfels et al., 2021).

Any professional working in an educational setting, especially a special education setting, is expected to have mastered problem-solving skills and emotional reactions at a certain level (Poluektova et al., 2023). In a map created by Poluektova et al. (2023), the balance and codependence between the outcome expectations and the efficacy expectations for educators and educational staff are mapped out in a cyclical rather than a linear fashion. Poluektova et al. (2023) showed in their problem-focused coping model that there are three starting points: (a) individual values, control beliefs, and beliefs about how to achieve certain outcomes; (b) self-efficacy beliefs; and (c) event (parameters of the situation; p. 6). From these three sources, there are two factors: outcome expectancy and self-efficacy judgment. Although event may lead to either of the two factors, individual values, control beliefs, and beliefs about how to achieve certain outcomes lead only to outcome expectancy and self-efficacy beliefs lead only to self-efficacy judgment. Both factors, however, lead to the appraisal of problem-focused coping potential. This potential then has two paths: other components of emotional experience or behavior. Each of these paths will lead to an outcome and its interpretation. It is at this stage that the problem-focused model becomes cyclical. Outcomes and their interpretation circle back to self-efficacy beliefs.

Through the effects of burnout in special education staff, the sense of stress, unease, and frustration have an impact on the self-efficacy beliefs of the staff. Most importantly, these factors, especially at the start of a special education staff member's careers, causes an unstable foundation for establishing positive mental health practices (Pellerone et al., 2020).

It is important to note that though cognitive symptoms of burnout such as an increased challenge with the ability to focus are serious, the physical health ramifications of burnout are just as serious (Llorca-Pellicer et al., 2021). Cardiovascular issues and physiological hurt are just

two of the physical health repercussions of burnout caused by chronic stress. Increased physical activity helps to decrease stress and boost mental health levels, and, in response, the levels of emotional fatigue, stress, and depersonalization decrease (Duyan, 2022; Melguizo-Ibáñez et al., 2022). Physical and mental health symptoms influence the rate at which special education staff experiences burnout (Burić et al., 2019). As physical symptoms such as stomach issues, migraines, and heart palpitations increase, the mental health symptoms such as anxiety, depression, and heightened sense of irritability also increase.

Teaching in the 21st century requires that educators spend an increasing amount of time using technological resources. With the increasing demands of the education field, increasing stress from professional situations, and the need to keep current with the evolution of technology and its use in the classroom and for special needs, a common issue experienced among many special education staff is insomnia (Pohl et al., 2021). Symptoms of insomnia in educational staff are brought on by the pressures and anxieties developed from the workplace (Martínez-Monteagudo et al., 2019). Although the immediate result of insomnia is tiredness from the lack of sleep, the quality of life of those suffering from it is also diminished (Pohl et al., 2021).

Turnover Rates

According to the United States Department of Education, as of June 2017, 46 of the 50 states reported that they were suffering through a severe shortage and decline in special education staff (Hester et al., 2020). Within the first 5 years of employment in special education, 50% of the special education staff left their position with the attrition rate in special education being two and a half times higher than for first-year professionals in other educational positions (Robinson et al., 2019). The challenging increase of a teacher shortage spanning almost every state is particularly more prevalent in schools with student populations with higher needs

(Ansley et al., 2019). The National Center for Educational Statistics has cited and warned of decreasing enrollment numbers in teacher preparation programs around the United States (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019). Teacher candidates, when provided with the opportunity to observe or participate in a class with students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD), have shown that the experience negatively impacted their judgment of the population and job position (Krämer & Zimmermann, 2021). Although a decrease in enrollment for teacher preparation programs can be cited as part of the contribution to the educational staff shortage, approximately 90% of yearly attrition contributes to that shortage (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Since the passing of the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act in 1975 requiring services to be more available for special education students, the number of qualified special education staff available to support students effectively and successfully with special needs has not been able to meet the level of the demand (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019).

Educational staff have echoed that though the conditions in which they work are changing, resources, such as financial supports, have remained stagnant or decreased (Räsänen et al., 2020). With an increase in work-related stress and a decrease in productivity and job satisfaction, turnover rates in special education staff have been affected by attrition (Mahmoodi-Shahrebabaki, 2019). Turnover rates as well as job satisfaction have also experienced an impact due to the burnout of educators and school staff. Although special education is viewed by many as a noble profession where teachers are there to make a difference in their students' lives, job dissatisfaction rooted in burnout has been cited as a main, if not leading, cause of special education staff attrition (Hester et al., 2020). Studies have shown that as reported burnout rates increased, so did the staff turnover rate increase (Itzchakov et al., 2022). Stress caused by the workplace can account for about 40% of the turnover rate in employment (Onuigbo et al., 2020).

Although burnout puts staff in physically and emotionally draining situations, the choice by staff to leave the profession is not made without having been thought through and the consequences, motive, and risks weighed carefully (Räsänen et al., 2020).

Job satisfaction can be felt or observed as a satisfying and emotionally positive condition due to the personal evaluation of the employee's career and opportunities experienced while in their employment (Peng et al., 2022). Job demands that increase or do not match the initial job description of the position are often leading factors to a level of burnout that causes educators to leave the profession (Rajendran et al., 2020). Even though job demands have been increasing or changing, resources and supports provided to special education staff do not parallel or reflect these changes (Robinson et al., 2019). The special education staff who have higher levels of self-efficacy show a stronger commitment to their job and the coworkers with whom they work, as well as the other members of their student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams (Fabelico & Afalla, 2020). Autonomy provided to special education staff by their administrations and school officials will influence job satisfaction and burnout (Peng et al., 2022).

With adequate support from administration and school officials, resourceful special education staff are able to perform their jobs with more accuracy, thus supporting higher levels of self-efficacy and lower levels of burnout, resulting in lower turnover rates (Fabelico & Afalla, 2020). Decreases in job satisfaction can negatively influence attendance of special education staff and, consequently, lead to less effective services for their students (Safari, 2020). Job satisfaction can influence not only the effectiveness of services provided to students but also the satisfaction of day-to-day life and the promotion of personal health (Safari, 2020).

It has been noted that the increase in student misbehavior has also become a determining factor in the turnover rates of educators (Rajendran et al., 2020). Working conditions for special

education staff provide them with the opportunity to draw energy, comfort, and support from their environments (Brunsting et al., 2022). Employees desire the social exchange of tangible and intangible goods between them and their employers (Wang et al., 2022). Therefore, addressing attrition must remain the school administration and officials' responsibility to discuss and communicate the increasing turnover rate of their special education staff to help plateau or decrease the turnover rates (Dye, 2023). In these instances, the employment of special education staff must be considered as goods being exchanged for monetary compensation from the hiring districts or organizations (Homans, 1958). In other words, employees desire a balanced process of reciprocity, an exchange of their goods or services for the equitable exchange of fair monetary compensation from their employers (Cropanzano et al., 2017). Therefore, the economic influence of monetary compensation and gradual increase of the compensation will hold an influence on burnout in employees. As schools are considered businesses and teachers and other staff the employees, reciprocity must be addressed as a key factor of social exchange theory (Cloarec et al., 2021).

Indirect Impacts of Burnout

Burnout does not have only direct implications and consequences but also indirect implications and consequences on the relationships that educators experience. The impact of burnout on the special education staff is not limited to them but affects their family and friends, the organization for which they work, and the progress of education as a whole (Llorca-Pellicer et al., 2021). Special education staff who experience burnout are at risk of providing decreased-quality services to their students (Hester et al., 2020). Cultures both in and out of the school are impacted by the burnout rate of educators (Gillet et al., 2022). The consequences for teachers' burnout can be indirectly felt by their students (Roloff et al., 2022). Due to the 2020 pandemic,

the emotional health and the quality of life experienced by special education staff were made more volatile and unpredictable than in previous years (Gómez-Domínguez et al., 2022). In a consistently evolving world, burnout in special education staff can be attributed to a decreasing ability to cope with new expectations and demands or an increase in the workload of those demands (Brittle, 2020).

Researchers cannot overlook that professional and social interactions are influenced by burnout and have an influence on burnout in educational professionals (Martínez-Monteagudo et al., 2019). A certain level of resilience must be adhered to avoid burnout (Yun et al., 2022). Educational staff are expected to be able to provide quality services to their students without any interference from their negative emotions or the negative emotions of others (Martínez-Monteagudo et al., 2019). There must be a mastery of self-regulation to prevent these feelings from adversely influencing professional relationships and performances. Without resilience in special education staff, engagement in the profession that provides healthy challenges and meaning to the lives of the staff has been diminished (Brittle, 2020). The focal point is the input for high-performance work systems, leading to the new outputs thriving at work or experiencing job burnout (Yun et al., 2022).

Consequences of Burnout on Relationships

Relationships with others often start with individuals' relationships and their views of themselves. Educational staff, particularly special education staff, are required to exercise and maintain a high degree of emotional labor in order to build rapport and forge positive relationships with administration, colleagues, students, and students' families (Bodenheimer & Shuster, 2019). Having strong support systems is significant in alleviating the psychological symptoms of burnout such as anxiety (Jovanović et al., 2021). To promote cognitive gains and

continued mastery of content knowledge through undergraduate and continuing education programs, teacher candidates historically ensure that their emotions are suppressed in order to ensure their skill gains (Mahmoodi-Shahrebabaki, 2019). Relationships with family, coworkers, and the organization of employment must also be taken into consideration. Higher levels of burnout can lead to the feeling of or diagnosis of depression, which can interfere with personal relationships (Capone et al., 2019). Experiencing depression through burnout has the potential to lead to maladaptive responses to other stressors found in daily life. Teacher burnout can also manifest itself in the form of high absenteeism, early retirement, lower quality of job performance, and higher turnover rates (Saloviita & Pakarinen, 2021). Within the first 5 years of a special education career, staff will leave due to burnout (Dye, 2023). Depersonalization produces a barrier between relationship with educators and their families and friends (Shakeel et al., 2021).

Depersonalization is not strictly limited to the professional setting. Stress incurred through the work environment can also cause declines in social interaction with all parties involved in a person's personal life (Llorca-Pellicer et al., 2021). With growing demands in the school environments, moreover, the additional demands incurred from parents and guardians of their students, special education staff must maintain a strategic balance between encouraging and nurturing empathy to foster growth and engagement in their students and an emotionally objective impartiality regarding student growth in assessments, thus creating an imbalance that can lead to depersonalization (Bodenheimer & Shuster, 2019). Special education staff are not simply employees: They are typical humans with lives outside of their careers. Personal relationships have influenced the work experience of special education staff (Jovanović et al., 2019). The balance between personal relationships and work life for special education staff may

also be impacted, as it becomes difficult for some staff to cope with the experiences of their students. They are not able to forget the problems of their students and, therefore, take that piece of work home with them in search of someone in whom to confide (Brittle, 2020). With a healthy balance between work and life, exhaustion and burnout have been proven to diminish (Mulyani et al., 2021).

A healthy work-life balance provides the opportunity for a strengthened support system from personal relationships and therefore can lead to decreased levels of depression. Exhaustion and depersonalization are not left in the work environment. These symptoms of burnout can also interfere with personal relationships with friends and family (Robinson et al., 2019). The additional stress that special education staff face can negatively impact their lives in personal settings due to the feeling of not being valued in their place of work (Mulyani et al., 2021). Through long-term experiences of anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues that burnout can cause, special education staff may experience the symptoms of burnout directed toward their relationships and friendships at home (Dye, 2023). This experience will most commonly express itself as increased irritability in addition to increased negative attitudes. Special education staff who are single, divorced, or separated do not have access to a thorough support system compared to their married counterparts, thus allowing the situation of increased stages of burnout and decreased feelings of individual accomplishment and validation (Jovanović et al., 2019).

Through social exchanges, rewards are always sought (Redmond, 2015). However, these rewards are not always found in the form of monetary compensation. Rather, these rewards can be found in the form of having one's opinions valued and accepted by others, being accepted socially in groups at work or in one's personal life, being respected, and feeling loved by others

(Redmond, 2015). Relationships with coworkers in the school environment, or even an educator's children in the school environment, can be at an increased risk of creating problems due to the workload and having an impact on relationships (Söderholm et al., 2022). Working as a special education staff member, developing, and maintaining an inclusive environment for students and teachers remains a high priority (Soini et al., 2019). In a profession where communication, teamwork, and a sense of cohesion are crucial for student growth and success, it is imperative that a support system for and amongst the special education staff has a strong foundation to lessen the chances of cynicism toward other staff and the profession as a whole (Soini et al., 2019).

Employee-employer relationships should also be considered. To successfully grow a professional community, such as a school, burnout in special education staff must be considered one of the greatest hindrances (Llorca-Pellicer et al., 2021). Indicators of effectiveness play a large role in the interpersonal relationships built between special education staff and their administrations (Carlotto & Câmara, 2019). A crucial start in the employee-employer relationship with high-need or behavioral placement schools is the atmosphere and working conditions that administrations and building leadership create and maintain (Ansley et al., 2019). Special education schools specifically servicing students with EBD are responsible for creating working conditions in which students' and staff's safety are optimized so that needs can be addressed adequately (Gilmour & Sandilos, 2023). Although the administration as a team makes decisions regarding policies and practices to implement to maximize and promote safety within school grounds, it is the building administration's responsibility to ensure these practices are adhered to. The most important of these indicators is the positive feedback that staff receive at a minimum of once a year on their professional performances (Carlotto & Câmara, 2019).

A higher level of self-efficacy must be maintained by special education staff who do not receive positive feedback or any feedback from their administration to continue believing that they can carry out their responsibilities effectively (Cruz et al., 2019). School administration and school officials hold the authority and, therefore, the responsibility to provide and maintain positive environments in the schools. Through positive feedback, administrators open the lines of communication with their special education staff that lays a foundation for their support (Gilmour & Sandilos, 2023). Through these positive environments, special education staff can participate in a supportive school culture and community with positive professional relationships (Sun et al., 2019). With positive outcomes from positive feedback, special education staff tend to show higher levels of self-efficacy (Cruz et al., 2019).

However, with the increasing demands of a constantly evolving education system, educational staff feel a sense of guilt for not providing enough for their students due to their roles and purpose for their positions becoming more ambiguous along with a deficit in the supports that they require (Carlotto & Câmara, 2019). Part of the changing educational system is the increase in the number of students in the classroom (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). When special education staff perceive little support or appreciation from their administration at all levels, feelings of loss of control, for example, continuances or increases in student behavior, negatively influence levels of burnout (Abós et al., 2019). With the changing student-to-teacher ratios, teacher preparation programs, and increasing demands, attrition rates have reached a level of largely impacting the teacher shortage in a negative manner (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019).

Often, administrations and school officials put into place preventive activities, such as workshops, to avoid burnout and to promote wellness for individuals, but it is increasingly

observed that though these attempts might make a difference in some individual employees, administrations and school officials should focus on supporting well-being in their workplace as well to help with the efficacy of the wellness practices across the organizations (Kolomitro et al., 2019). What appears to be an oversight is that although administrators have provided classes and trainings on recognizing burnout and personal mental health awareness in the workplace, these trainings also serve as an extension of working hours (Baeriswyl et al., 2021). However, these trainings do not consider the lack of access to work that staff perceive to be more crucial due to deadlines leading to staff feeling. Staff feel as though they have to prolong their working hours to cope with a perceived decreased lack of control during their contracted time. This lack of control blurs the lines between problem-focused motivation to complete tasks and emotion-focused motivation to complete tasks leading to an increase in stress.

The relationships between job stressors in the forms of concern for their students and a work overload do not have one option for possible strategies (Pogere et al., 2019). Pogere et al.'s (2019) hypothesized relationship between job stressors, coping strategies, burnout, and autonomy support provides a more linear structure (p. 273). Although subsections within each category provide movement options, the movement always follows the progression to the next section. Under job stressors, two major distresses are concerns for students and work overload. Both stressors lead to one of two options under coping strategies. These strategies are problem-focused or emotion-focused. Here, the path merges with emotional exhaustion under the category of burnout. However, in the final stage of autonomy support, emotional exhaustion leads to one of three subcategories: choice, relevance, and control. Both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies can lead to the emotional exhaustion of burnout. One such way of special education staff's workload leading to emotion-focused responses is by extending work

hours either as requirements by administrations or as personal impositions due to a sense of loss of control, which triggers consequences such as a lack of adequate and negative physical health symptoms that start a cyclical pattern of negative coping skills (Baeriswyl et al., 2021).

The autonomous supports alleviate some of the emotional exhaustion from special education staff by providing students the responsibility of choice when it comes to topics of interest, and relevance by explaining the whys of why certain topics are taught or different behavioral expectations in schools, and control regarding the level of authority that must be applied when providing direction and guidance for students (Pogere et al., 2019). In the professional setting of a behavioral placement school, the special education staff's relationship with the organization must examine the socio-emotional benefits exchanged between the special education staff and the organization that employs them (Lee et al., 2021). Through the concept of social exchange, a sense of stability can be provided to the educational process and the educational organization's sustainability (Yoopetch, 2022). As burnout is not always felt individually, social support provided to the special education staff by the administration and school officials will influence the atmosphere of the school community (Sun et al., 2019).

Consequences of Staff Burnout on Students

When discussing burnout in educational staff, student burnout must also be considered. Education, particularly special education, is compared to the caring professions, such as nursing, because of the high emotional demands it places on the staff due to its perceived impact on behavioral, social, and academic consequences in the classroom (Wink et al., 2021). Educational staff's self-efficacy is a cyclical pattern of expectations, processing, beliefs, performance, and outcomes that lead back to expectations (Bourne et al., 2021). Compassion fatigue brought on by

the increased emotional burdens and increased empathy without supports lead to burned-out special education staff providing services to their students less effectively (Wink et al., 2021).

A perceived starting point in Wink et al.'s (2021) conceptual model is efficacy expectation, which encompasses experiences, observations, and feedback from other educators. Efficacy expectations lead to cognitive processing encompassing the teaching of tasks within a certain context and the educators' competence. Cognitive processing is followed by clinical teacher efficacy beliefs, which are then followed by clinical teacher performance. Clinical teacher performance includes the goals, motivations, efforts, choices, persistence, and resilience of the educators. Outcomes follow teachers' performances. Outcomes encompass the knowledge gained by the students, skills and attitudes, student safety, satisfaction and quality of the teaching, and the continuance of teacher commitment and job satisfaction. Because this conceptual model is cyclical, the outcomes lead back to efficacy expectations. It is through the impact of special education staff's efficacy expectation's, indirect influence on the outcomes, and the outcome's direct influence on the future efficacy expectations that students, particularly special education students, are impacted by their staff's sense of self-efficacy and burnout (Bourne et al., 2021).

Working with students, particularly in special education, provides staff with value emotionally that helps to form the foundation between them and their students leading to either job satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Corbin et al., 2019). Characteristics and behaviors of students at school can lead to increased stress levels in educational staff, particularly in special education, and therefore may lead to staff experiencing emotional exhaustion and a decreased ability to present and provide quality lessons, accommodations, and services to meet all students' needs (Hemati Alamdarloo & Moradi, 2021). The value of the relationships established between staff

and students is crucial in the determination of developing either empathy and a positive rapport

or conflict and a negative rapport (Corbin et al., 2019). Challenging behaviors by students,

particularly those with an IEP, can negatively sway staff's attitudes toward their responsibilities

to their schools, students, and families (Gilmour & Wehby, 2020). For special education staff

who are servicing students who face more struggles, particularly those in behavioral placement

schools, higher levels of self-efficacy are more difficult to maintain regardless of the years of

service (Bourne et al., 2021).

Attrition in educational staff, especially special education staff, tends to create an

imbalance in access to quality services and the number of advocates for students (Gilmour &

Wehby, 2020). Because the demand for special education staff is so high, causing the staffing

shortage to be intensified, administrations and school boards are faced with hiring a staff that is

underqualified to work with the special education student population (Billingsley & Bettini,

2019). In addition to the underqualified staff, access to an appropriate amount of quality

resources is limited because funding is directed toward the recruitment of more staff rather than

the retention of current staff. These high turnover rates among special education staff have

created instability and decreased the quality of services for students with special needs,

especially students with behavioral needs.

When working with the special education population, special education staff are faced

with the need to increase their focus and efforts on outcome and efficacy expectations, their

planning and processing, and their beliefs and performances so that interventions with special

education students, particularly those with behaviors, are implemented effectively (Granger et

al., 2023). Due to a recent increase in attention to childhood trauma, a need for more trauma-

informed practices has arisen (Kim et al., 2021). Special education staff plays a crucial role in

addressing trauma faced by students, and though trauma-informed approaches are gaining in popularity as a resource for special education staff, they have not been implemented in all schools or with efficacy (Christian-Brandt et al., 2020). Trauma-informed practices that would benefit all students, especially special education students with behaviors, have not been made readily available to staff attempting to support students (Kim et al., 2021). With a drastic increase in physical and emotional demands for servicing special education students with behaviors, special education staff are left trying to continue their cycle of efficacy expectations through to their outcomes with high levels of effective teaching to help their students further their educational progress without succumbing to burnout and attrition (Granger et al., 2023).

Regarding addressing students' trauma, educational staff may be susceptible to a secondary trauma identified as a cost for their caring (Christian-Brandt et al., 2020). This secondary traumatic stress is brought about when educational staff listen to the traumatic stories of their students and colleagues and react to or mirror the symptoms of their post-traumatic stress disorder. Secondary traumatic stress, considered a form or symptom of burnout, causes compassion fatigue in educational staff, particularly in the special education field, and leads to attrition. This in turn decreases the number of qualified staff available for servicing students with EBD. Although the trend in education has been staff becoming more supportive of inclusion for students with disabilities, students with EBD have not been met with the same level of acceptance (Gilmour et al., 2021). The main reason for this lack of acceptance can be found in the under-preparedness and lack of supports for staff working with these students, and consequently, not providing them with quality services. The level of support provided by staff may also be dependent upon the staff's willingness to help students through their challenging behaviors on a day-to-day basis.

Due to the persistence of burnout syndrome in educators, indirect effects are felt by students, which can be seen through classroom atmospheres, students' well-being, and their academic achievements and performances (Oliveira et al., 2021). Increased levels of exhaustion and burnout in special education teachers mean that some special education students are not receiving the services they require because there is a decreased amount of time spent providing direct instruction or other services (Hemati Alamdarloo & Moradi, 2021). Although burnout has been proven to have negative consequences for special education staff with the ultimate consequence being attrition, the decreased motivation that special education staff portrays can exacerbate the decreased motivation of their students as well (Ghasemi et al., 2022). The effect of special education staff burnout on students can have somewhat of a cyclical relationship. When supporting students who exhibit behaviors or are labeled with EBD, educational staff begin to exhibit emotional exhaustion with prolonged exposure to students' behaviors, which in turn, creates friction and negative emotions within the dynamic of the staff-student relationship (Corbin et al., 2019).

When working with students with special education staff has a history of training and adequate qualifications to work with the population of students with more severe needs, such as social and emotional or behavioral needs, it is the intensity of these more demanding needs of students on a staff member's caseload that will affect the burnout felt in the staff members (Jovanović et al., 2019). Even with extensive training, qualification and credentials, special education staff experiencing burnout will likely experience a decrease in desirable classroom behavior, which can be reflected in students' academic performances in addition to a negative reflection on the staff (Weißenfels et al., 2021). Students with behavioral disorders and the disability categories of autism spectrum disorder and emotional disturbance tend to have stronger

influences on the levels of burnout in the special education staff members who work with them (Brittle, 2020). In addition to the type of student population being worked with and the severity of students' disabilities, class sizes can also have a significant influence on burnout in the special education staff (Jovanović et al., 2019).

Although student burnout is not the focus of this study, student burnout can be an indirect consequence of educator and educational staff burnout (Jagodics & Szabó, 2022). In the initial stages, the effects of special education staff burnout on students can be observed as depersonalization, detachment, decreased idealism, increased sense of irritability, and withdrawal from their students (Oliveira et al., 2021). Special education staff may start to slowly decrease their involvement in their relationships with their students, and consequently, cannot provide the necessary supports and services for their students (Brittle, 2020). With the perceived notion by students that teachers are withdrawing from their education, holding them back, and putting less effort into helping them learn and grow, students will start behaving and interacting with the learning process in a diminished manner and feeling less satisfied with their educational experience (Ghasemi et al., 2022). Because burnout in special education staff influences their performance levels at work, it is understandable that the ability of staff to provide specialized testing and accurate analysis of the results will also be negatively influenced (McLean et al., 2019). It is through this negative influence of burnout on special education staff's performance that special education students' self-efficacy is also negatively affected.

Because burnout in special education staff affects them physically, behaviorally, and psychologically, they have diminished mental and professional capacities to provide their students with the academic, behavioral, and social supports needed in addition to the student-teacher relationship and mentorship to grow (García-Carmona et al., 2018). Burnout in both

teachers and students overlaps when focusing on test scores, especially for high-stakes testing or in higher education (Jagodics & Szabó, 2022). Without proper mindfulness or trauma-informed training for students facing adversity and exhibiting moderate to severe behaviors, special education staff enter the cycle of control-focused responses, discipline, and repeat behaviors (Kim et al., 2021). Indirect consequences of burnout with students also fall particularly hard on students with emotional and behavioral needs (Brunsting et al., 2021). Students with EBD are at a much higher risk compared to students without the EBD labelof negative long-term mental health challenges and risks should they not be provided with best-practice coping skills from a highly qualified special education team (Bettini et al., 2019).

Special education students and their parents or guardians can observe the indirect impact of special education staff burnout through the progress special education students make on their IEP annual goals (Jeon et al., 2021). More trainings and supports should be provided to special education staff because though they are praised for their efforts and passions when working with students with EBD, they are not provided with the proper training and preparation (Bettini et al., 2019). Students with EBDs have been categorized as at higher risk of experiencing burnout while in school (Brunsting et al., 2021). For students who exhibit aggressive behaviors, burnout is statistically significant and has led to educators leaving their job positions within a year of being hired (Winding et al., 2022). For some schools, social emotional learning programs or curricula are available for the special education staff to use. For special education staff to accurately provide social emotional learning interventions and have their students master the skills, the staff themselves must have a certain level of mastery and competency in these skills (Oliveira et al., 2021).

Implications

Burnout has been a topic of research for decades, but there is still much to learn about it. Implications of burnout show that there are strong negative impacts on both that special education staff experience in both their personal and professional lives (Smetackova et al., 2019). Although many direct and indirect effects of burnout have been noted, the overall quality of life of special education staff is what is being affected (Alves et al., 2019). The two themes present throughout the literature—the direct impacts of burnout and indirect effects of burnout—show that a strong foundation for a deeper understanding of burnout in special education staff working at behavioral placement schools is necessary to help special education staff cope with the direct and indirect impacts that are consequences of burnout. With increasing levels of burnout, there will continue to be psychological implications for the special education staff and a continued need for intervention, including help with psychological disorders (Agyapong et al., 2022).

The concept of social exchange provides the premises of social behaviors being exchanged for rewards. It is important to note that maximizing the rewards or reciprocity is the goal of individuals (Cuesta et al., 2022). Focusing on increasing or maintaining a strong quality of life in special education staff through healthy social interaction between themselves and their administration, colleagues, students, and personal relationships will help decrease the rate at which special education staff burnout (Alves et al., 2019).

With burnout syndrome becoming more prevalent in special education staff, and an increase in awareness of childhood trauma in students, it is vital that mindful trainings and trauma-informed practices also be utilized as supports for the special education staff (Kim et al., 2021). The positive effects of practicing the mindfulness techniques and skills that are taught to students also benefit the special education staff who are engaged in modeling the skills presented

in social emotion learning programs. It is through the functions and dysfunctions of the behavioral placement schools that the fundamentals of social exchange theory can be applied (Homans, 1964). Although burnout can be similar from case to case, it is important to take into consideration that some studies can be limited because the demographics of studies can be so diverse (Karuna et al., 2021).

Summary

Through Bandura's (1977) advances in psychology and the behavioral development of his self-efficacy theory, the theoretical framework of this literature review of special education staff burnout in behavioral placements was set. The causes of burnout among the special education staff population in behavioral placement schools must be addressed to help this population of staff continue to provide services for their students with efficacy, but also while maintaining healthy relationships with their families, friends, and co-workers, but also maintaining their health. Self-efficacy theory with the concept of social exchange reviewed the expectations for a responsive framework for better understanding the causes and impacts of special education staff burnout in behavioral placements. Special education staff burnout has long been considered a cause for the unfortunate turnover for the profession that many did not know how to slow down or reverse (Itzchakov et al., 2022).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of Chapter Three is to present the research design, procedures, and data collection and analysis plans that are relevant to the study of burnout in special education staff in behavioral placement schools in the suburbs of the Rust Belt. Past and current researchers have not agreed on a structure for the design of a qualitative study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Creswell and Poth also shared that case studies find their beginning once a specific case to be analyzed and described has been identified. This study followed the lives of the special education teachers, paraprofessionals, occupational therapists, intervention specialists, social workers, and other staff who are working in a behavioral placement school. Some of the staff were experienced in working with students with behavioral needs, and some staff were new to these experiences. Burnout was felt by all the staff from their unique perspectives. The location of this case study took place in a TU building, whose enrolled student population was made up of students from public school districts who exhibited behaviors for which their home districts did not have the resources to manage and support in-house. Within the Ohio Vale School building, there were autistic support classrooms, life skills classrooms, and emotional support classrooms, ranging from elementary ages to 21 years old. Vocational classes were also available in the school. Support staff who serviced the building included speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists, behavior intervention specialists, social workers, and physical therapists. It is important to note that this study focused on the special education staff as a whole rather than just the special education teachers and paraprofessionals. Vocational teachers who did not have homeroom classes, social workers, intervention specialists, and speech and language pathologists played just as crucial a role in the daily functioning of the school environment and the growth of

the students. Having the different perspectives of staff members in all these positions was crucial for understanding more about burnout collectively.

Research Design

A single instrumental case study was used as the research design for this topic (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The issue of focus in this study was special education staff's experience of decreased self-efficacy leading to burnout, and the bounded case is the Ohio Vale School run by the TU. A single instrumental case study was the clear choice as it focused on the need for a general understanding that may provide further insight into the burnout of special education staff due to decreased self-efficacy. Throughout this single instrumental case study, I was curious to see if any hypocrisies presented themselves. One of the driving forces behind this study and the design format was to get to know the special education staff members better as their unique whole person, and not just the staff members. One trap that special education staff tend to fall into is that they advocate for their students to take care of themselves both physically and mentally. However, the special education staff do not necessarily practice this same self-care.

> Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, "Let me take the speck out of your eye," when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. (*New International Version Bible*, 2011, Matthew 7:3-5)

Special education staff can be blinded to how the judgment they pass on their students for things as harmless as requesting that they take care of themselves applies to them as well. Previous studies of burnout in teachers were viewed as more of a "chronic psychological state of resource depletion likely to impact a period of seven years" (Gillet et al., 2022, p. 7-8). Gillet et

al. (2022) explored the negative leadership from administrations as a cause and sleeping pills as a method of care. It is through the lived experiences and the stories of the staff from an intermediate unit school designed to address behaviors that special education staff burnout can become more understood.

Research Questions

Questions that drove this single instrumental case study were framed with the utmost care. It was the goal to understand the impact of burnout on special education staff. Therefore, the following questions were the driving force behind this case study.

Central Research Question

Why does special education staff experience decreased self-efficacy that leads to burnout?

Sub-Question One

What effect does burnout syndrome have on special education staff in behavioral placement schools?

Sub-Question Two

How does verbal persuasion from building-level and central office administrations affect the burnout of special education staff?

Sub-Question Three

How does burnout syndrome in one special education staff member affect their colleagues' performances?

Sub-Question Four

How does burnout syndrome in special education staff affect the performance outcomes of special education students?

Setting and Participants

The definition and elaboration of the site, or setting, of this study was addressed initially. The site of this study was centered in a placement school in the suburbs of the Rust Belt. The second purpose addressed was the explanation and description of the participants who took part in this single instrumental case study. The following sections go into further detail about the site of this study and the environment that the staff work in, including the participants of the study and their unique lived experiences.

Site

This single instrumental case study took place in a TU behavioral placement school in the suburbs of the Rust Belt. For the ethical considerations of confidentiality, the name of the site and its overarching entities have been changed. Ohio Vale School, one of the TU's special education buildings, was chosen as the site for this study because of its status as the only behavioral placement public-school in the county that serves multiple school districts. The TU, located in the suburbs of the Rust Belt, was not its district and therefore must abide by the federal and state laws, as well as respond to the districts it serves. Because Ohio Vale School is considered a public school, the TU also must work closely with the local chapter of the educator's union and bargaining unit. Private behavioral-based schools do not have to work with the local chapter of the educator's union. The TU's purpose is to provide special education services for most of the public-school districts throughout Mountain County. Related services, such as occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech and language therapy, and vision, and hearing services through the TU will push into school districts as the least restrictive environment for students participating in special education programs in their home school districts. The TU has three school buildings for students receiving special education services who

require a more structured environment and more extensive supports than what their district can provide. Ohio Vale School, the behavioral-based building, is structured as a typical public school with a principal, assistant principal, teachers, paraprofessionals, and support staff. Although the TU is considered a public-school entity, it is run by an executive director rather than a superintendent.

Participants

The 12 participants in this study are special education staff members in the Ohio Vale School. Their staffing roles include special education classroom teachers, classroom paraprofessionals, paraprofessionals at large, vocational teachers, vocational paraprofessionals, behavioral specialists, social workers, personal care assistants (PCAs), and speech and language therapists. Participants in this study are as young as 24 years of age starting their careers or first-time jobs to retirement-age participants with 20 or more years of experience in Ohio Vale School. The youngest staff members of Ohio Vale School are 24 years of age and working on their associate or bachelor's degrees in education while working full-time. Most of the core teaching staff and support staff at Ohio Vale School are White females. White males are more prevalent in vocational programs and various paraprofessional roles. African American staff are more prevalent in the roles of paraprofessionals. Participants in the Ohio Vale School single instrumental case study will be extended to the highest level and regard for ethical considerations of anonymity and confidentiality.

<center>**Researcher's Positionality**</center>

The purpose of this single instrumental case study is to understand the decreased self-efficacy that leads to burnout for special education staff in the TU's Ohio Vale School in the suburbs of the Rust Belt. At this stage in the research, the burnout of special education staff in

behavioral placement schools is generally defined as a diminished sense of accomplishment, emotional exhaustion, and depersonalization (Gillet et al., 2022). As this research design is a case study, it was natural that pragmatism is my chosen research paradigm. Pragmatism is the guiding force behind the interpretive framework of this study.

Interpretive Framework

Using pragmatism for an interpretive framework, the actions, situations, and consequences of the inquiry are the focus of this study rather than the antecedent conditions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Pragmatism was the natural choice for the interpretive framework because pragmatic researchers have agreed that social, historical, political, and other contexts influence the topic where the concerns occur. Interpretive frameworks are the methods utilized by researchers to understand and analyze information that is gathered from a particular question or subject (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Throughout my educational tenure, I have always been involved with problem-solving in situations that affect the staff directly, and consequently, the students indirectly. The interpretive framework that spoke to me the most was pragmatism. Pragmatism is the "reality of what is useful, is practical, and works" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 75). This interpretive framework aligns with my topic of special education staff burnout in placement settings. This approach allows me to look at the reality of how burnout is occurring in special education teachers in placement schools, as well as why they are burning out as quickly as they are. Through pragmatism, I can look closely at the experiences of the special education staff who are experiencing burnout.

Through Matthew 7:3-5 (*New International Version Bible*, 2011), a reminder was provided that to take care of others, one must first take care of ourselves. This is true for special education staff and their students. To provide students with what they deserve, special education

staff must first take care of themselves. Therefore, it is important for special education staff to not participate in the hypocrisy of preaching to their students about taking care of themselves, when teachers acknowledge that they need to do the same, but do not.

Philosophical Assumptions

This case can be broken down into three assumptions: the ontological assumption, the epistemological assumption, and the axiological assumption. Each assumption offers a unique perspective to this single instrumental case study. Through the ontological assumptions, the nature of reality is addressed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This research relies on epistemological assumptions to gain a better understanding of the relationship between the researcher and the topic of burnout in special education staff in behavioral placement schools. The axiological assumptions provide a deeper understanding of the role that values play within the research.

Ontological Assumptions

Ontological assumptions are focused on the nature of reality (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Reality is considered through many points of view and, therefore, offers multiple perspectives of what reality is. It is the researcher's task to report the multiple perspectives of the findings as themes develop. In conjunction with pragmatism, ontological assumptions focus on what is useful and what works. Ontological assumptions help researchers perceive the nature of reality of situations from multiple perspectives and multiple realities of the participants in the research. Within the topic of teacher burnout in special education placement schools, the different realities and perspectives differ from department to department and room to room. The realities of teacher burnout in the Autistic Support Department differ from the realities in the Life Skills Department, the Emotional Support Department, and where applicable, the Vocational Skills Department. Although these departments function in the one reality of the school building, their

realities of burnout rely on the perspective of their department and their classrooms.

Epistemological Assumptions

The epistemological assumptions, according to Creswell and Poth (2018), are centered around the idea of what is considered knowledge and how the knowledge claims are justified. Epistemological assumptions deal with subjective evidence obtained from the participants, and therefore, must have attempts made by the researcher to distance him or herself from what is being researched. Through the epistemological assumptions, the researcher enters the inner circle of the participants to become an insider. This allows the researcher to utilize quotes and evidence and collaborate closely with the participants in the field. As a researcher using epistemological assumptions, I must be able to reflect on both the objective evidence and the subjective evidence that is presented. Although teacher burnout may seem like a very subjective topic, and it can be, there is always objective evidence to be gathered. As a special education teacher in a placement school, I must distance myself from my topic so that my biases do not influence my research to the extent of skewing the data. Although I am an insider at a placement school in an emotional support department, I am not an insider with the other departments or other buildings that function the same as mine and are run by the same organization.

Axiological Assumptions

Finally, the axiological focuses on the role that values play in the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Values are openly discussed to help shape the narrative with the interpretations of the researcher. The researcher also must acknowledge his or her biases in the value-laden research about their role in the study. In conjunction with pragmatism, axiological assumptions discuss values because the knowledge reflects the views of both the research and the participants. Through axiological assumptions and as the researcher, my biases are brought to the forefront of

my thought process. Because of this, I am put into a position of being able to better understand my biases, values, and the values of others in the study. I also have the opportunity to better understand and appreciate the impact of the values shaping my narrative of teacher burnout.

Researcher's Role

The role of the researcher in this study is that of a coworker, but also a listener and confidant for the participants in the study. Although I interacted with the participants regularly for incidents that occurred throughout the workday or work week, for this study, I was completely transparent as a learner looking to understand the burnout with special education staff in behavioral placement schools. Making my intentions clear of the desire to understand the causes and effects of burnout within the staff allowed for a level of comfort and support for the participants. As the researcher in this study, I have assumed the role of the human instrument. I am a secondary emotional support teacher for the Ohio Vale School and a colleague of the participants of this study. Because of my professional position, I had to temper any biases that I might have had from my personal experiences working for the TU.

Procedures

The procedures of this study were laid out clearly for the participants before the start of the study. Explanations of the permissions process, the data collection process, and the analysis process were discussed. Full transparency of the study was provided to the participants to encourage communication, as well as foster a feeling of safety and security in their choice and continued efforts to participate.

Permissions

Permission for this study had three layers. Permission to complete this study was through Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). A letter of approval was gained. The

second level of permission was gathered through TU's administration. This was permission from the organization's Institutional Review Board to complete the study in one of their buildings with their staff. Organizational permission was gained by setting up a one-on-one meeting with the building principal who then provided me with the paperwork necessary to file for permission with the TU central office. Finally, the last and most important level of permission was with the participants in the study. Their consent to participate was noted and valued throughout the study rather than simply at the onset of the study.

Recruitment Plan

Participants for this study were selected strategically so that multiple staff positions were represented. This sampling of participants was convenience sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A list of ideal participants was created, and the staff members on the list were approached individually in private situations and questioned about their willingness to participate in a study. The study topic, along with the participant responsibilities and time frame, were provided to the prospective participants. In addition to the specifics of the study, confidentiality and ethical considerations were addressed. Any questions that prospective participants might have had were also addressed at the time. The prospective participants were informed that an answer was not required immediately and that a participation intent and contract would be written up and distributed upon IRB approval. There were 12 participants in this study. Following IRB approval, prospective participants who provided positive responses about participation during the initial recruitment were provided with a written intent contract to participate. The intent to participate contract was contact information so that any additional questions and concerns were addressed at the prospective participants' convenience.

Data Collection Plan

The data collection plan for this qualitative study was determined with great

consideration. Positive aspects as well as drawbacks of each data collection method were

weighed by the researcher. To represent the participants of this study and the data that they

provide most accurately, an instrumental case study approach was utilized. Special education

staff burnout was examined through the individual cases of staff members in the TU. The result

of the data collection plan consideration was that interviews, document analysis in the form of

participant structured prompts, and letter writing were utilized as the three data collection

methods throughout the study. Interviews played a large role in understanding this case and the

participants. However, other means of data collection, such as collections of documents and

structured prompts for response, were also considered beneficial tools for the data collection

process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, the data collection process for my study included

interviews, letter writing, and prompted response questions.

Individual Interviews Data Collection Approach

Participants in this single instrumental case study participated in two interviews during

the study. The first interview occurred at the beginning of the school year and the study.

Interviews were an important data collection method for this research, as social interaction

through conversation provided knowledge that was constructed between the interviewer and the

participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Interviews provided the opportunity for the participants in

the study to help researchers and others better understand the phenomenon or situation from their

unique perspective. Interviews also offered the benefits of insightful explanations and personal

perspectives of the participants being interviewed (Yin, 2018). One-on-one interviews took place

two times over 9 weeks. Because participants participated in two interviews throughout the year,

the interviews followed the model of shorter case study interviews. Shorter duration interviews occurring multiple times throughout the year allowed more open-ended conversations over a longer time.

The first interview took place at the beginning of the second quarter of the school year. Participants were introduced and elaborated upon their educational background, their position in the school, and their duties. Participants were also asked about work experience and what they did to cope with their work experience. The second and final interview took place at the end of the second quarter of the school year. This interview covered the same questions about coping and expectations as of the first 9-week period and also addressed the participants' expectations for the remainder of the school year. Participants were also asked about the prompted response weekly check-in process and how it impacted their weekly schedules. Questions about preparing for the remainder of the year, summer, and how they plan to utilize their break time were also addressed.

Individual Interview Questions

The questions for the initial interview at the beginning of the school year were as follows:

1. Introduction: What is your educational background?

2. Describe your history with the Transitional Unit.

3. How would you say your job description aligns with the job that you interviewed for? With the job you have performed for the TU on a day-to-day basis? (SQ-1)

4. How would you define burnout? (SQ-1)

5. Do you feel as if you have or are experiencing burnout with your career at TU? (SQ-1)

6. If yes, please elaborate on these experiences. (SQ-1)

7. If no, how do you manage to keep yourself in a position for handling the demands presented to you? (SQ-1)

8. What comments, if any, have you heard from building or central administration that have influenced or affected your job performance or the way that you feel about and view your position here? (SQ-2)

9. When thinking about burnout, we typically think of it as a unique experience on an individual basis. Do you feel as though it is possible for a colleague's burnout to affect other staff members in the building? Have you seen this? If so, could you elaborate on the experience? (SQ-3)

10. Do you feel as though it is possible for the staff's burnout to affect their students and their growth? Have you witnessed this? If yes, could you elaborate on the experience? (SQ-4)

11. How did you prepare for this school year? Did you have any expectations going into this school year? (SQ-1)

The questions for the final interview halfway through the school year were as follows:

1. How is your year going so far?

2. How have your preparations and expectations at the beginning of the year measured up to your experiences so far this year? (SQ-1)

3. In what ways, if any, have you witnessed burnout throughout the building so far this year? (SQ-1)

4. In what ways, if any, have the building-level and central office administrations involved themselves in your experiences thus far this school year? (SQ-2)

5. How have their interactions affected your experiences thus far this year? (SQ-2)

6. At the beginning of the year, we spoke about how burnout in one staff member affects their colleagues. How, if at all, has this been prevalent this year? (SQ-3)

7. We also spoke about staff burnout affecting the students whom we serve. In what ways, if any, has this been prevalent so far this year? (SQ-4)

8. Looking back at the first half of the school year, how are you planning, preparing, and managing expectations for the remainder of the school year? (SQ-1)

Questions for both interviews were aligned with the sub-questions under the central research question. The questions were designed in a manner of pre-assessment and growth with follow-up interviews. A limitation of this study is the timeframe in which the data collection process took place. The associated data analysis approach used for interpreting the data from the individual interview was the case study approach of naturalistic generalizations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Experiences, although unique to each individual, can be similar to others. With the use of naturalistic generalizations, the interpretations from the collected data from the individual interviews can be applied not only to each other but also generalized so that readers can relate to the information and the presented situations. Naturalistic generalizations provide the opportunity for the situations and experiences of the participants in the case study to be generalized in a meaningful way so that readers will be able to understand and relate to the data.

Document Analysis Data Collection Approach

Participants were asked to complete an electronic weekly structured reflection based on provided questions throughout a 9-week data collection period. These weekly reflections, as a form of documentation for data collection, provided further insight into the experiences and perspectives of the participants. Creswell and Poth (2018) considered documentation analysis through structured prompts as a popular process for data collection for case study research.

Documentation, such as structured prompts questions, is not free from bias (Yin, 2018). Although bias is not something that is desired in research studies, in the form of journaling, the bias leads to an elaboration on the real experiences of the participants. This documentation provided data and helped to corroborate the data collected in the participant interviews, the letter writing, and the findings in the related literature. Although it was ideal that the participants completed their weekly structured response questions thoroughly, the act of a participant not completing responses thoroughly in a consistent manner was data itself.

Because the participants had easy access to their devices throughout each week, the prompted questions were designed to be electronic. The electronic format allowed participants to access the weekly prompts from multiple devices. This alleviated the need for participants to keep track of a physical notebook and writing utensils. The structured prompts allowed participants to have a concrete documentation method of their weekly experiences, accomplishments, and needs. Sometimes it can be intimidating to stare at an empty page after a long day at work. Therefore, having weekly prompts to respond to provided structure and guidance that helped alleviate the possibilities of intimidation from looking at a blank page. Not only are weekly prompts excellent sources of experiences and data collection, but the frequency of responses and the depth of the answers to the prompts also provided data. Structured prompt responses are stable and consistent, and therefore, can be reviewed by the participants and the researcher as many times as desired or needed, effectively covering a long period (Yin, 2018).

The structured prompt response questions were presented on a Google Form and are as follows:

1. Were you able to follow your lesson plans with your students as submitted for the start of the week? Why or why not?

2. What would you describe as your greatest source of stress this week?

3. Were you provided with all of your prep periods throughout the week?

4. If yes, were you able to use your prep period efficiently?

5. If no, what took the place of your prep period?

6. How were you compensated for your missed prep period?

7. Were you provided with all of your lunch periods throughout the week?

8. If yes, how did you choose to spend your lunch period?

9. If no, what took the place of your lunch period?

10. How were you compensated for your missed lunch period?

11. Did you take work home with you?

12. If yes, what made you take work home with you?

13. If no, what was the defining factor in not taking work home?

14. What methods to minimize stress and burnout have you taken this week?

15. Were these methods effective in maintaining healthy levels of work-related stress?

16. How have the events of this week impacted your preparations professionally and personally for next week?

The associated data analysis method used for analyzing the participant journals was naturalistic generalizations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Responding to prompts, essentially structured journaling, is an experience shared by many people. The use of structured prompts in this study was to provide the participants a method of expressing their thoughts, feelings, and experiences throughout the study without the additional stress and uncertainty of what to write as a debrief or response to their weekly experiences. This allows the analyzed data from the objective position for similar experiences from each participant's responses to be compared.

Through the generalizations of experiences from the collected data, the ability for the

participants to relate to each other or for the reader to relate to the participants is made more

meaningful. The similarities between the different cases of the participants, though their lived

experiences are unique, could be applied to the populations reading the study and therefore can

be generalized.

Letter-Writing Data Collection Approach

Letter-writing was a valuable addition to the structured responses, especially when

coordinated to bookend them. As a bookended activity, participants wrote a letter at the start of

the data collection process to their future selves stating what their plans and expectations are

professionally and personally throughout the study. Participants dictated their plans to take care

of themselves to help avoid experiencing anxiety, stress, and burnout throughout each workday

and the school year. The last data collection point was a second and final letter written by the

participants. This letter addressed their reactions to their expectations from the letter at the

beginning of the study and any new plans or adjustments for the remainder of the school year.

Letters, as a form of data collection in qualitative research, provide a means to understand

participants' feelings and expectations because letters do not follow rigid guidelines in their

collection (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Providing the participants with the written tasks of a pre-letter to set their expectations

and a post-letter as a personal debrief held each participant accountable for their expectations,

plans, and accomplishments. The purpose of both the pre-letter and the post-letter was for the

participants and researchers to gauge how self-efficacy was viewed, along with the determination

to follow through with it throughout the study rather than weekly increments as seen with the

structured responses. Although letter writing is typically limited to one instance in a study, it was

crucial for this study that letter writing be completed twice so that reflections and adjustments could be made for the remainder of the school year. A higher level of accountability, honesty, and respect was also recognized and valued with written reflections directed at oneself.

Letter-Writing Data Analysis Plan

Pre-letters were written by the participants at the start of the data collection process. Through the pre-letter, participants set personal and professional expectations and balances for themselves. At the end of the data collection process, participants were provided with a copy of their pre-letter and were asked to reflect on and respond to their personal and professional expectations. The reflection took the form of a second letter acknowledging their progress and realities from the first letter and focused on adapting for the remainder of the school year. The full scope of the analysis took place after the post-letter submission through the realization of the reflections from each participant.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness for any research study must be held with the highest regard. In a review of Lincoln and Guba's (1985) groundbreaking research, information provided a separation from the scientific method for qualitative research, allowing for more and different methods of evaluation (Adler, 2022). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), trustworthiness is established through the terms "credibility, authenticity, transferability, dependability, and conformability" (p. 335). An additional review of Lincoln and Guba's (1985) research reflecting upon how they were driving forces in understanding trustworthiness's role in qualitative research, introduced a parallel term for trustworthiness: rigor (Enworo, 2023). With the parallel to the term rigor, a sense of authenticity was added to the criteria for trustworthiness. Although the trustworthiness of qualitative research has been questioned, measures can be taken to prove the reliability and

trustworthiness of these studies (Shenton, 2004). The first step in having this study be considered

trustworthy is to have the interpretation chain of the data documented thoroughly through the end

of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Although trustworthiness is more subjective in a research

process, it lends itself to allowing the authors and readers of the research to find a commonality

throughout their process (Stahl & King, 2020). Throughout this study, great lengths were taken

to ensure that the parameters mentioned above were addressed and followed through with

fidelity.

Credibility

A major question posed when dealing with the credibility of qualitative research is how

reality and the findings are congruent with each other (Shenton, 2004). Addressing this question

provides further strength to the purpose of the study in the first place. To promote credibility in

this research study, iterative questioning was used. Utilizing semi-structured individual

interviews that allowed the participants to express themselves and fully relate their experiences

allowed for the data to be authentic to each participant (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). This also

provided a safe space in which answering each question was not mandatory to avoid forced

responses. Triangulation was also utilized between the weekly prompted responses, the letter

writing, and the individual interviews. Finally, for credibility, the use of "the development of an

early familiarity with the culture of participating organizations" to establish the atmosphere of

the environment of the location (Shenton, 2004, p. 65) was incorporated.

Dependability

Dependability addresses the issue of reliability (Shenton, 2004). It is not enough for the

data and the research to be considered credible; the research and the data also must be

dependable. To create and maintain dependability, this case study utilized "the research design

and its implementation" (Shenton, 2004, p. 71). Through the detailed description of the research plan, the case study provided a dependable foundation for the study. "Reflective appraisal of the project" was also utilized (Shenton, 2004, p. 72). The reflective process helped to allow the researcher to question the effectiveness of the chosen process for the study at hand.

Confirmability

Shenton (2004) shared that the objectivity of the study was difficult to ensure. Because qualitative research does not rely on hard statistics in the same manner that quantitative research studies use, confirmability falls on the researcher's comparable concern for objectivity. Confirmability played hand-in-hand with triangulation. It was using the triangulation methods mentioned previously that the confirmability of this study was emphasized (Shenton, 2004). An important factor in confirmability, according to Shenton, is the extent to which the researcher of this study admitted to predispositions. Reflective commentary helped to confirm the results through the recall and reflection of the researcher (Shenton, 2004).

Ethical Considerations

The ethics of a study are always taken into consideration. To maintain the required standard of ethical consideration for research, the IRB must be involved in the research process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Obtaining permission from the IRB to conduct the research with the plan that had been laid out was the first crucial step in conducting an ethically sound case study. The proposal for the IRB contained a detailed description of the data collection plan. Through the permission to proceed with the study by the IRB, the research started on a solid foundation of ethical practices. No matter the approach to qualitative research that I might have taken, I had to face different ethical issues that arose during the data collection process. Ethical issues typically fall under three guiding principles: respect for persons, consent for welfare, and justice. In

preparation for my research, these important ethical issues needed to remain at the forefront of my thinking and process. This helped to yield valid results. First, obtaining site approval was a must. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the site is the location where the participants experience their issue at hand or the problem that is at the heart of the study. Without site approval, an issue that presents itself is an invasion of privacy for the entirety of the site. Obtaining informed consent from all participants was also crucial. The data that were collected could have been skewed and tainted had participants not participated with a thorough knowledge of what their role was and why. Full transparency was provided completely to the participants to develop the rapport and trust to gather and represent the data participants accurately. This led to the next ethical obligation of informing the participants that their participation was 100% voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw themselves from the study at any time. People cannot be forced to participate in situations that they are not comfortable with. Forced participation or the feeling as if being forced to participate could not only skew the data but also harm the participants in some way. As the researcher and data collector, it was my responsibility to provide a safe and healthy environment for the participants. Part of ensuring their safety was also ensuring that there was a respected level of confidentiality. Participants might have felt uncomfortable about voicing their opinions and providing their stories, but they did agree to do so if the data would remain confidential. Out of respect for confidentiality and more importantly, the safety of all the participants, it was crucial that I honored their confidentiality. The participants were also made aware of how seriously their confidentiality was being taken. Part of ensuring their confidentiality was having a secure organization system for my electronic and paper notes. This required a designated space on my computer and in my house where the notes and information were secured, whether it was an external hard drive or a locked file cabinet. The

participants' data and stories had to be treated with the utmost care and respect. The risks and benefits also had to be addressed and were somewhat addressed through the ethical obligations of the researcher. For my research, I was considering a topic that could upset a decently sized employer in my city and state. The benefits were that the experiences of the employees were being spoken about. The potential participants in my research had to weigh for themselves the benefits of telling about their experiences or remaining quiet and continuing with their day-to-day lives on their own. I graciously respected both choices and supported their decisions regardless. Ethical considerations always remained at the forefront of my research so I could ensure the health and safety of the participants, as well as the validity of the research.

Summary

Chapter Three of this study has provided the permissions, interpretive framework, and data collection and analysis processes. Thanks to the participants in this study, the information gathered has provided a deeper understanding of burnout in special education staff in behavioral placement schools. A pragmatic approach to this single instrumental case study has allowed a more thorough examination of the data that were collected to provide a better understanding of the causes and effects of burnout on these participants.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this single instrumental case study was to understand the decreased self-efficacy that leads to burnout for special education staff in the Steel City TU in the Rust Belt. Chapter Four of this study serves the purpose of presenting the data collected from the participants and the findings of this case study. Data collected for this study was drawn from three data collection points: individual interviews, weekly structured reflections, and participant letter writing. Individual participant interviews occurred once at the beginning of the data collection process and a final time at the end of the data collection process. The initial interview was comprised of 11 interview questions, and the final interview was comprised of eight interview questions. Letters were written by participants to themselves at the start of the data collection process to set their expectations for the school year, and a final letter was written to themselves to address their initial letter and reflect upon how to continue with the remainder of their school year. Finally, participants completed a weekly 16-question yes or no and short answer reflection. Chapter Four begins with a description of the demographics of the participants and is followed by the results of the study, the responses to the research questions, and a summary of the presented information.

Participants

The participants chosen for this study were 12 special education staff members working at the TU. Participants for this study were petitioned for participation using a convenience sampling method. The number of years of work experience in an education setting for all participants ranges from 1 year to 30 years. The participants in this study, though working in the same building, had various job titles and responsibilities. All participants completed the

interviews, letters, and weekly check-ins throughout the data collection process. Confidentiality

of participants was maintained using pseudonyms. The demographics of the participants are

listed in Table 1.

Table 1

Staff Participants

Participant	Years employed by TU (including current Year)	Highest degree earned	Content area	Grade level
Participant A	4	high school diploma	paraprofessional at large	elementary
Participant B	20	master's degree	intervention specialist	K-12
Participant C	5	master's degree	social work	K-12
Participant D	19	master's degree	transition	secondary
Participant E	6	master's degree	emotional support teacher	elementary
Participant F	7	master's degree	speech and language pathologist	secondary
Participant G	30	master's degree	vocational teacher	secondary
Participant H	16	high school diploma	classroom paraprofessional	secondary
Participant I	>1	high school diploma	personal care assistant	secondary
Participant J	6	postsecondary certificates	paraprofessional at large	secondary
Participant K	4	bachelor's degree	autistic support teacher	secondary
Participant L	4	master's degree	emotional support teacher	elementary

Participant A

Participant A was a compassionate young woman who had been working directly with the TU for Ohio Vale School for the past two school years. Although she had been directly employed through the TU for only 2 years, she worked in the Ohio Vale School in a different capacity 2 years previously. Participant A was a personal care assistant through a third-party entity that contracts with the TU. She has experience working one-on-one with students and in small groups as a paraprofessional-at-large with her home base position in an elementary emotional support classroom. Participant A had some college credits but never finished a degree program. She helped students with their academics and social skills and helped them through any behavioral struggles.

Participant B

Participant B was an energetic and positive staff member who had been employed by TU for 20 years. Although she held the position of intervention specialist, she held two previous positions throughout her tenure with TU: first as a substitute and then as a contracted secondary special education teacher. Participant B had a master's degree as well as an autism certificate. Participant B worked in all the classrooms and interacted with all the students in attendance at Ohio Vale School from elementary through secondary. She was also an active member of the School Wide Positive Behavior Supports committee and helped to facilitate Ukeru training, a trauma-informed care that is meant to be a restraint-free approach for behavioral interventions, as well as helps to facilitate staff crisis trainings for the Comprehensive Crisis Management (CCM) Program that involves restraints when all de-escalation attempts do not work and students are in immediate risk of hurting themselves or others.

Participant C

Participant C was a positive woman who had been working with the TU for 5 years. She has seen the Social Work Department within Ohio Vale school grow and develop. Participant C visited all the classrooms within the school and worked with students individually and in small groups. Participant C was an active member of the School Wide Positive Behavior Supports committee and also facilitated staff crisis trainings for the CCM program that involves restraints when all de-escalation attempts do not work and students are at immediate risk of hurting themselves or others, as well as helped facilitate Ukeru training, a trauma-informed care that is meant to be a restraint free approach for behavioral interventions.

Participant D

Participant D was a determined professional who encouraged and focused on preparing students for life after graduation. She was the transition consultant for Ohio Vale School. Participant D starts working with students during the school year when they turn 14, which is the transition age for students with an IEP. She has been working with the TU for 19 years and has held previous positions as a substitute teacher and as a contracted teacher in two departments. Participant D has worked with services and employers in the community to provide internship, postsecondary employment, postsecondary education opportunities, and postsecondary living goals and has helped students and their families navigate transportation options.

Participant E

Participant E was a positive contracted teacher who had been with the TU for 6 years. She holds two master's degrees. Although Participant E at the time of this study was a contracted special education teacher, she started at the Ohio Vale School as a paraprofessional for 2 years, became a building substitute for 6 months, and then became contracted. She worked with older

elementary and younger middle school students in the Emotional Support Department. Participant E was an active member of the School Wide Positive Behavior Supports committee.

Participant F

Participant F was a caring and supportive speech and language pathologist who worked with secondary students with speech and language needs throughout the Ohio Vale School. She also had experience working with the elementary students at Ohio Vale School. She provided services individually and in small groups and full-class groups. Participant F's highest degree is a master's degree in speech and language pathology. She was an active member of the School Wide Positive Behavior Supports committee and had attended conferences for positive behavior intervention supports. She has been employed by the TU for 7 years. However, she had prior experience with the TU and Ohio Vale School due to her master's program clinical placements.

Participant G

Participant G was a positive veteran teacher who offered help to all students who passed his door. He was a vocational teacher. Vocational classes were offered to secondary students who were enrolled full-time at Ohio Vale School, and some part-time students who came from their respective school districts to participate in his vocational class. Participant G has been employed by the TU for 30 years. He has held positions in every department throughout his tenure with the TU. Participant G has helped with writing grants for his department and is a co-author on some published books.

Participant H

Participant H was a classroom paraprofessional who had been employed through the TU for 16 years. He previously worked as a personal care assistant. Participant H was a classroom paraprofessional for secondary students in the Emotional Support Department. His education

formed his values for his current position as a classroom paraprofessional and was exemplified by his determination to build positive rapport with students as well as help those students build and maintain positive relationships and rapport with other staff members.

Participant I

Participant I was a positive and caring staff member. At the beginning of the 2023-2024 school year, he held the position of personal care assistant in a secondary emotional support classroom. He has some college credits but does not hold a degree. However, he has considered finishing his degree once he feels established in his job. Part way through the data collection process, Participant I shared that his position with TU would be changing. He shared that he received news from building-level administration that he would be hired by the TU as a paraprofessional at large just after the data collection process of this study. Participant I had worked at Ohio Vale School for just under 1 year. He worked in many classrooms and with various students.

Participant J

Participant J has a total of 6 years of working experience at Ohio Vale School. She worked at Ohio Vale School for 3 years, left for approximately 5 years, then returned to Ohio Vale School and has been back for 3 years. Participant J has worked at Ohio Vale School first as a personal care assistant and when she returned as a paraprofessional at large. Although she does not have a degree, she holds postsecondary certificates. Participant J shares her time with two secondary education classrooms in the Emotional Support Department. She was proactive in the day-to-day lives of all students with whom she worked and focused on helping the students become the best version of themselves they could be.

Participant K

Participant K had been employed by the TU and had been working at Ohio Vale School for 4 years. Although still working on his bachelor's degree, he was provided with the opportunity to gain experience at Ohio Vale School. At the time of this study, he was the teacher in the secondary Autistic Support department classroom where he had started his experiences. Participant K was a positive, upbeat person who went out of his way to help students and staff in the building. He has developed a weekly drink service for staff to provide functions math, communication, and social skills for his students while they get ready for postsecondary life.

Participant L

Participant L was an enthusiastic elementary teacher in the Emotional Support Department. She started her tenure of 4 years at Ohio Vale School with the TU as a building-based substitute and then as a long-term substitute teacher. She was then contracted for an elementary emotional support classroom. Participant L earned her master's degree in education. As a building-based substitute, Participant L was able to engage with students and gain experience in all the classrooms throughout Ohio Vale School. Participant L worked closely with her students on appropriate behaviors in a school setting in addition to their academics.

Results

This section of Chapter Four presents the results and findings of the data collection process. Over the 9-week data collection period, two main themes emerged from the information presented by the participants through their responses to the individual interview questions, the weekly check-ins, and the letter-writing activities. Within each theme, two sub-themes became present. The first theme that emerged was the support structure that the staff at Ohio Vale School experienced. Their responses to the presented questions revealed two sub-themes: (a)

administrative presence and (b) staffing and compensation. The second theme that emerged

through the data collection process was community effort. Through the information that

participants provided in their responses, the theme of community effort had two sub-themes: (a)

influences on staff and (b) influences on students. Elements of each theme and sub-theme

appeared across all three sources of data for most of the participants. Themes and sub-themes are

represented in Table 2. The special education staff members shared about their weekly

experiences and how these experiences impacted them both professionally and personally.

Table 2

Themes and Sub-Themes

Themes	Sub-Themes
Support structure	Administrative presence
	Staffing and compensation
Community effort	Influences within the staff
	Influences on students

Support Structure

The need to feel supported was a theme that immediately arose from the participants

throughout the interview, letters, and weekly check-ins. Participants placed a large emphasis on

the need for various supports throughout the data collection period. Although supporting

themselves through the use of sick days to ensure that they are physically and mentally healthy,

the participants placed a heavy emphasis on the need to be supported by both building level and

office administrations. There is a need for utilizing supports provided by the contracts that

represent, and the staffing throughout the building.

Administrative Presence

Administrative presence was the first sub-theme addressed by the participants at two different levels: building-level administration and central office administration. Levels of confidence for the two different groups of administration varied. A change in personnel at the beginning of the current school year was noted. Participants showed a generally favorable mindset toward the building-level administration with the note that building-level administration is in the building daily and witnessing the daily happenings, successes, and struggles of the staff. The influence of administration that worked closely with the participants had a strong influence over their view of their positions. Participant B stated during the initial interview,

> If I didn't have good building administration, I don't think I would have stayed. I've had a lot of different administrations over my 20 years here. I've had good bosses and bad ones. It makes a huge difference in what we're doing. … We have supportive people right now and that has definitely influenced how I feel about my position and how positively I feel like we can move forward.

Although staffing has changed and Participant E has shared mixed but generally positive experiences with the current building-level administration, she shared,

> Two years ago, maybe 3 years ago, there was a point of time when our principal was out and our vice principal at the time was awful, like she was absolutely awful. The whole entire building had very low morale. I mean, like it was a struggle just for us to make it through the day. A lot of people went to drinking adult-style beverages (alcohol), a lot of adult-style beverages and never stopped…people were finding it hard to even say hi and goodbye to other people.

Participant E's concern about staff turning to alcoholic beverages was brought to light by three participants who shared in their weekly responses that part of a weekend's coping and recovering from the work week included indulging in alcoholic beverages.

As a special education placement school that focuses on helping students learn to manage their behaviors just as much as progressing through academics, sometimes preconceived notions of students can be made based on hearsay from their districts and the IEP paperwork that they bring with them. Participant H shared that even though building-level administration is supportive of staff and students, sometimes their preconceived notions of students' likeability might sway staff positively toward or negatively against that new student. A participant related that, for him, these comments were taken as meaning that these students needed a "champion" and building-level administration was supportive of him to be the support to champion new students in ways that would help each of them be most successful. Multiple participants expressed that after the physical, mental, and emotional demands of their daily jobs, basic acknowledgment from the building-level administration is significant to them. However, it was noted by multiple participants that because of dealing with student behaviors, building administration was not always around to support everyone: "I think building level, they're doing what they can" (Participant B). This led to other staff members expressing that they did not feel supported because they were only able to have a building-level administrator in their room for supports once in the first semester of the school year.

The building for the central office administration of the TU is in a different part of the city. Multiple participants noted this physical separation as the basis for a less favorable view of central office administration. The presence of central office administration in the Ohio Vale School building and acknowledgment of building conditions and safety concerns were topics

brought up by multiple participants throughout the data collection process. Participant D shared during the initial interview,

They [central administration] have no idea what happens in this building. They have no idea how hard it is, how often we get hurt. And I think they care, but they don't do anything…I think they're afraid of these buildings…They don't want to be in them. They want to put their head in the sand and say "OK, we sent you more people, that'll fix it." And that doesn't fix it.

This perspective was backed up by another participant in the final interview when Participant F said, "I would say that Central Office is pretty much nonexistent…I mean, there have been teachers who have emailed about support, and nothing has been done." Safety as a concern in the Ohio Vale School building was addressed when Participant B conveyed,

I think they [central administration] don't feel safe, and I don't think they care. So, if they don't feel [safe], I think they more care about appearances, numbers outside districts getting, you know, attention and "Look at all the great things we do" and in this [Ohio Vale School] isn't it? So, I don't think they care about our program because we're not going to get them recognition and glory and news attention media stuff and all that.

Participant K expressed frustration with videos sent periodically from the central office: "To be completely honest, ah, I hate getting all those stupid email videos. I don't think they do jack shit for me from higher administration." Although presenting themselves in a video format, multiple participants expressed that the videos sent out had no holding on to them because they were videos and not the central administration themselves. He and another participant also expressed that a lack of care was shown by a continued misspelling of their names, and that while acknowledged that there are other things going on at Central Office, attention to

employees' names being spelled correctly shows a basic level of respect, attention, and care.

Among the individual feedback from participants about administrative presence from building-level and central office administrations, an increase in paperwork demands was expressed, as well as a lack of clarity and time provided during contracted hours to complete the demands effectively. Demands for lesson plans, yearly teacher data collection, and goals were expressed to be unclear. Participant G raised the concern about consistency between the two levels of administration stating, "I think that if the administration, both upper and building-level, were able to be more consistent with what they were saying is one goal this year is going to be, and for them to actually see it through for the entire year, then that's the only goal that should have been tracked." He went on to share that the goals for the TU were being presented in one manner by the central office and differently by building-level administration. This lack of consistency and clarification for a demand that factors into yearly performance reviews was cited as a cause for the increase in anxiety for this participant.

Staffing and Compensation

Staffing was a concern brought up by nine of the 12 participants throughout the data collection process. Although many participants acknowledged that the school year started with higher staffing numbers, they also acknowledged that these numbers were increased for one staff population only. An increase in classroom PCAs was noted, but this did not apply to professional staff. When discussing staffing at the TU level, Participant D felt that central administration's attitude toward staffing came off as strictly numbers, to which her response was, "We need more people that are trained. We need more people that are physically able to help us." This same participant also expressed that in her department it is now she and one other person compared to the four people they started the year with: "I have been understaffed for all but 2 months." She

explained that her staff falls under the paraprofessional union and that the financial compensation offered is never enough to keep an applicant if they accept the position. When speaking about having time to complete lesson plans during the day, Participant K commented "When do I have time? If I get my full lunch, it's lucky if I get a prep here." With Ohio Vale School's struggle to remain fully staffed, one participant reflected on her inability to adequately provide students with the experiences they needed due to her department being affected greatly by the staffing shortage.

Ten of the interviewees from the professional participants (i.e., participants in the teachers' union) shared that they were losing their contractually guaranteed preparation periods (i.e., 42 minutes per day) multiple days a week so that they could cover the classes with absent teachers. Absences were defined by the participants as sick days for themselves or their families, mental health days, personal days, and sick days due to being injured at work. Five participants shared in their weekly reflections that being called for coverage regularly was a major stressor during the weeks but reminded themselves that they would be compensated monetarily or with an early out on a day of their choice. To rectify this break in contract, professional participants were allowed to choose between an "early out," or a "work order." However, this did not apply to the paraprofessionals or the PCAs, as they do not have preparation periods written into their contracts. In addition, PCAs are contracted through a third party company and can only take advantage of early outs for missed lunch periods. Early outs provided the staff, with permission from the building administration, the opportunity to leave 30 minutes before the end of their contracted day. This left 12 minutes that the professional staff member had to choose to claim or ignore. Work orders are documents that are filled out with the missed contractually obligated times and submitted to request financial compensation. Financial concerns were addressed in a

reflection letter by one participant who was balancing two jobs and needed to remind herself that the financial obligations started at home and that she needed to pay more consideration to how much of her money she was spending on supplying her classroom with various items. This compensation is a predetermined rate for professional staff and a per diem rate for paraprofessionals. Although the personal care assistants could only benefit from early outs, the weekly check-ins showed that professional staff and paraprofessionals varied in claiming their time through the financial compensation of work orders or the time compensation of early outs. It was not consistent from week to week what option was favored by the group or by each person. With coverages and perceived shortages in staff and student behaviors interfering with contractually obligated time, multiple participants cited having to take work home with them as a stressor and part of their feeling of burnout each week. Three participants who took work home some weeks cited through their weekly reflections that their contractual obligations ended at 3:30p.m., that the TU was not paying them to work at home, and that they needed that time to recover and prepare for the next school day. Participant K boldly shared in his initial letter to himself that he intended to honor the boundaries of his contracted time by relying on his loved ones and his group of friends. He expressed that "life is too short" and that "school stuff won't go anywhere if you step away to live a little bit." Although this sentiment was shared by each of the other seven professional participants, they all shared in multiple weekly responses that they had to take work home with them to complete their weekly duties.

Community Effort

Comparing a school to a community concerning the support it provides is not uncommon. The theme of Ohio Vale School being a community or family that feeds off of each other was the second theme that presented itself throughout the data collection period. Most of the participants

had comments and expressed feelings about how they each uniquely viewed and felt about the impact the staff had on each other throughout the day. Most participants also continued with the community support with the common belief that in addition to one staff member's burnout impacting other staff members, staff burnout will also influence the students attending Ohio Vale School.

Influences Within the Staff

All the participants expressed anticipation of stress and burnout in their initial letter to themselves. Although they all shared how they planned to cope with the stress and their unique ways of remaining positive and healthy as the school year progressed, the fact that they would be facing burnout and increased levels of stress was acknowledged. Having a positive environment to work helps alleviate and can help eliminate some of the stress and anxiety of work. These positive or negative energies were, as described by Participant I, "infectious." He also stated, "I think it [attitude] definitely really infects a room positively or negatively. Depending on your attitude, and when people are burnt out, they really don't have the best attitude. Myself included." Participant J shared the sentiment that negativity spreads throughout the staff: "If someone else is totally burned out, they're gonna become negative. And when you're surrounded by or around a negative environment, you become negative listening to all the negativity." Participant E shared that she witnessed burnout among the staff by not hearing laughing and excitement from the classrooms as she walked by them: "There's not as much like, if you passed the rooms, you'll see a couple of rooms where there might be some laughing, but it's not even the same laughing." For this participant and others, the burnout in other staff members was witnessed both visually and auditorily.

Participant A noted that she witnessed burnout throughout the building increase because the communication between the staff changed: "With everyone just the communications in the hallway…people are exhausted and tired. In the hallways just like calling for codes…like we're all interacting with each other and the students. Not that anybody is being rude or yelling." She went on to explain that fewer and fewer staff were attending assistance calls because of the possibility of them resulting in a restraint. Two other participants shared in their weekly responses that their sources of stress during multiple weeks were that fewer staff members were choosing to show up to help at assistance calls, which left a core group of staff members to respond each time. They shared that this lack of support from colleagues had put them in the position of having to accept the burnout so that safety could be maintained as much as possible. An observation was made by Participant I that relationships that were built surrounding more difficult behaviors from students, assistance calls, and restraints were built by what he referred to as "trauma bonding": "When we're all in this hellhole, that burnout causes trauma bonding [between staff members]." He explained his belief that when staff members are together in physically dangerous situations with aggressive students, sometimes regularly, the resulting relationship is developed on a foundation of trauma, thus, trauma bonding. Participant I shared experiences with two state investigations into the use of restraints. He shared that the first state investigation was because a student's parents did not accept the findings of the TU's initial investigation into her student's restraint or the secondary investigation by the police. She then took it to the state. The other investigation, he clarified, was triggered automatically because of the number of times they had used restraints: "They told me we were at 38 for the year, and at 25 it auto triggers an investigation." He continued by sharing that he did feel as though the presence of the state in the building for two investigations did feed into the level of burnout felt by the

staff. Participant I and Participant K shared in their weekly responses that during the weeks of each of the investigations, the questions of themselves and their security in their positions decreased and that they were now questioning their every move as well as whether to attend assistance calls. Multiple participants who were involved in one or both investigations noted that they felt less comfortable responding to assistance calls and participating in restraints because it made them feel uneasy about maintaining their positions and certifications even though they were told that they were complying with the central office training as they were trained to do so. Participant A noted, "I could just tell that everybody's at that point. Even like codes, not that people don't show up, a lot less people show." The feeling expressed by multiple participants was that the lack of staff at assistance calls fed into the cycle of injury, call-offs, coverages, more negativity, and, ultimately, increased burnout.

Influences on Students

Staff were not the only people in the building impacted by the burnout. All participants noted that Ohio Vale's student population also felt the impact of staff burnout. With increased frequency, aggression, and duration of assistance calls, Participant I shared in his reflection letter that even though he thought he had "seen it all" regarding student behaviors, the "building will always find a way to surprise you." Participant B and Participant C both shared the sentiment multiple weeks in a row that they were not only concerned about the physical safety of the students but also the staff during the assistance calls, although not specifically witnessed. Participant H provided a hypothetical example as to how seriously he believed that staff burnout could affect student growth and safety:

> You have a PCA working with a student that is very high need, and you know, maybe
> they have feeding problems. Maybe they have various problems like that. If you're

distracted, that's going to, you know, create a very dangerous situation…generally, be present and connect with our situation or it will affect the students and it will affect other people around us.

This participant relayed concern for the physical growth and well-being of students who rely upon staff that may be exhibiting burnout. He clarified that although Ohio Vale School focuses on behaviors, several students require attention due to the physical aspects of their disabilities. Participant J noted that she witnessed staff who were burned out coming into school sick because they were worried about what might happen in their classroom if they were to take a day off.

Like even if you were sick, you know, like COVID, when all of us had COVID [this year]. And if we were definitely sick that time, all the kids, especially like autistic support, were nervous. If they heard you cough, if they heard you sneeze, if they saw you rubbing your nose or whatnot, and then if you were miserable and negative, they're gonna become negative. And then, they're not gonna feel like they can trust you and they're going to shut off towards you.

Other participants shared their beliefs that the energy brought each day by the staff was reflected and mimicked by their students. This reflection of energy through extended assistance calls happening multiple times a day was cited by five participants throughout their weekly structured responses as their greatest sources of stress, leading them to have less patience with colleagues and students during the calls. "I do think that definitely just like we feed off of each other, our students feed off of us and we feed off of them." The sentiment that attitude and energy level were not exclusive to one party was shared. Participant K answered immediately with him and his students' social-emotional lessons as an example: "I don't want to show them a

weakness…Like we do talk about emotions like everyone has to go through stuff, but I don't want what I'm dealing with to affect them." Participant G shared a personal reflection of how his feelings of burnout impact the growth and development of his students:

> I know on days when I come in, and let's say I have an 8:00 meeting and something is said in that meeting that immediately triggers me. This is exactly why I feel burned out. This is exactly why I don't understand things. This is exactly what pisses me off, right? Then I have to come into the classroom and I'm just like, the energy is gone. The students immediately pick up on that.

The general sentiment expressed and shared by multiple participants in their interviews was that the students at Ohio Vale School feed off the staff's energy levels and attitudes regardless of them being positive or negative. Building upon that, the same participants also believed that the staff energy levels could be impacted by the students, but in either direction of the impact, it becomes a cycle that escalates the burnout.

Research Question Responses

The following section responds to the central research question as well as each of the sub-questions. The responses to each of the questions were acquired, analyzed, and synthesized through the data collection process across the three different methods of data collection. Each participant had their unique definition of burnout and corresponding experiences of burnout throughout their time with the TU that they graciously shared to help illuminate better the decrease in self-efficacy leading to burnout for special education staff in behavioral placement schools. Their responses to the data collection methods allowed for further understanding and insight into the guiding questions of this case study.

Central Research Question

The central question presented for this case study was "Why do special education staff experience decreased self-efficacy that leads to burnout?"

During the initial interview during the data collection period, all the participants were asked to provide their definition of burnout. Although each participant worded their definitions uniquely, all the participants touched on the same or very similar topics. "Going home with an empty bucket" (Participant F).

It's a saturation of the ability to do one's job. It is when the load becomes so heavy that you are no longer able to focus on what the job really was, and you feel burdened by all of the external things that affect your ability to do the job. (Participant G)

"I think it's what happens when you do your job or whatever, but in this case, our jobs drive us to exhaustion and failure and wanting to potentially quit, or contemplating [quitting]" (Participant L). Each participant's unique definition of burnout touched on the various aspects of their jobs and lives that they deemed most important. Throughout the data collection process, each participant recognized and expressed that the burnout, though affecting each staff member uniquely, also had influences on other staff members and on the students for whom they provide daily services.

Throughout the study, participants shared that they were not provided enough time to complete their daily and weekly responsibilities due to responding to assistance calls for student behaviors or coverages for absent staff members. For some staff members, this lack of time put them in the position of having to decide to take work home or save it for the following day. Many participants, through the weekly check-in, shared that because of behaviors and coverages, they had to take work home with them so that they could finish completing the work that they

did not have time to do while in assistance calls or covering other classes. Increases in assistance calls and the aggression of the students during these crises were also mentioned numerous times as sources of stress and burnout. A sentiment among multiple participants was that they did not feel that the building situation, in general, was safe because of some of the behaviors, and they did not feel supported because of a lack of presence from central office administration. A few of the participants shared that feeling and expressed that the lack of presence from central office administration was because they were afraid of being in the school with students who could become aggressive. Participant F shared that she was recovering from her third on-the-job concussion she got while attempting to help staff and students during assistance calls. The lack of administrative presence as well as staffing and compensation issues were cited frequently as factors in each participant's unique experience of burnout.

Sub-Question One

What effects does burnout syndrome have on special education staff in behavioral placement schools?

At the beginning of the data collection process, each participant was asked to write a letter to their future selves with their expectations for themselves throughout the year. Most of the participants included in their letters that they wanted to have self-care practices of various sorts to help maintain a healthy work-life balance. At the end of the data collection process in their reflection letter, some participants admitted to not having followed through with their desired self-care practices and that they would attempt to try again with self-care practices so that they could successfully make it through the remainder of the school year without too much decline in their mental health. This sub-question drew from both themes and their subthemes that emerged throughout the data collection process: support structure and community effort.

Participant G shared "I believe that this unit is a very toxic unit, very much so. And that's part of the burnout." However, the effect of burnout did not remain within the walls of Ohio Vale School. Participant H shared that finances were a factor in leading to the increased burnout due to the low pay, especially for some staff members. Because of their position, they make "far below living wage, and they have to worry about keeping their heat on and their water running." Sentiments of this financial stressor factoring into burnout were shared by Participant K who shared that he works two additional jobs throughout the year to make ends meet. Three participants shared through their letters that they felt the financial strains and pressures influencing their burnout to the point of requiring multiple jobs. The physical, social, and emotional tolls expressed throughout the data collection led to staff expressing that, even though they still show up to work for the students that they serve, they could not help feeling like they did not want to. Participant I went as far as to express in a weekly check-in that an attempt at alleviating the stress and burnout one week was to attempt "dissociation." He followed this comment by sharing that this method of coping was not effective for him.

Sub-Question Two

How does verbal persuasion from building-level and central office administrations affect the burnout of special education staff?

Verbal persuasion of both building-level administration and central office administration fell under the sub-theme of administrative presence within the theme of support structure. Praises were provided to one building-level administrator who participants shared were calling them rock stars verbally in meetings as well as through emails. "He has built a lot of confidence and kind of more of a family unit that we used to have when I first started," Participant F shared. However, even with all of the praise, Participant C shared that this particular administrator "was

chastised [by central office administration] for enabling the staff." Participant D shared her experiences with her department being understaffed and that another building-level administrator "is empathetic and trying to help me come up with a plan to make it work for as many students as possible…he's been very supportive and understands how awful it is to have one job coach." However, Participant E noted that although building-level administration is great with attending assistance calls, she has only had one building-level administrator spend time in her room to help with the increase in physical aggression.

The feelings toward central office administration were not as positive. Participant L noted, "As far as central, I don't know them. Couldn't tell you a thing about them." Participant C shared that one of the central office administrators was her direct supervisor, and if she needed anything she could go to him: "He will answer what I need. So like, from a social work perspective, I feel like I get the answers that I need…but I feel like for us, as a whole, that doesn't happen." Participant G, a veteran educator with the TU, shared,

> I think it's more of an action. I think that if the Transitional Unit is very concerned about communication and improving communication, and surveys come out every day, at surface level, it looks like they're trying to solve problems. But in reality, behind it, nothing changes. So, it's a lot of smoke and mirrors… "Hey, we're going to gather all this information and then make informed decisions," but then when they're confronted with the reality, then it makes administration have to look in the mirror.

The consensus amongst the participants about central office administration was that they were never around to know what was truly happening in the building and how safety was an issue. Multiple participants shared that aside from the one central office administrator who had made more regular appearances in the building, believed by some participants to be because of

the investigations, they did not care enough about the staff at Ohio Vale School and their wellbeing.

Sub-Question Three

How does burnout syndrome in one special education staff member affect their colleagues' performances?

Without hesitation, each participant in this study expressed that the burnout in one staff member could affect their colleagues' performances. All the participants shared through both of their letters that they knew that there would be physical and mental effects to the stress that their positions held, but that there were coping techniques they wanted to implement to combat the toxicity that was created throughout the shared experiences of burnout. Participant H shared, "When people have a lot of excess stress in their life, whether it's from work or home, whatever, they often make really bad choices and are not necessarily reasonable, and that can make it much harder for everybody." Participant K elaborated on this sentiment by sharing, "I think everyone feeds off each other." Participant G shared this feeling but chose to compare it to systems theory thinking:

> Systems work through three main things: input, throughput, and output. That's the understanding of how you take a system from where it is and continue to move it towards a goal that you're trying to work towards. The idea behind any one individual being able to bring a system down is completely true.

The comparison to systems and machines was expressed by Participant F: "It's like a machine. If one part of the machine is broken, the rest of the machine isn't gonna work." Many participants shared that this is through what they viewed as the negative and toxic environment that is within Ohio Vale School. Although Participant F and Participant G shared their

comparison of an effective staff to systems theory and machines, the other 10 participants used the comparison to a healthy family structure in their letters when sharing how they wanted to be present to support their colleagues.

All participants also expressed that, although they support their colleagues taking mental health days, the understaffing and coverages perpetuates the cycle of burnout. "We are going through some difficult times here," Participant B shared, "and it increases your own personal [burnout] when those around you are also burning out." This participant took the feeling a step further by assigning responsibility to fixing the burnout:

> Once you start to feel responsible for trying to life them, and then you know, it kind of spirals because you pushed to do that. It's an avalanche effect, I guess. But yeah, it almost creates its own cycle…When you feel the negativity around you, it's just really hard to kind of do anything to fix or help the culture.

Multiple participants shared that they witnessed burnout in their colleagues visually. Participant A shared,

> You can just tell [by] looking at people how tired they are. I don't think we all work as a team here, but it's, especially this year, has been a different kind of culture overall. Just from being so tired and not having enough staff.

The expressed overall lack of energy by participants about the Ohio Vale staff as a whole increased the level of stress, anxiety, and, ultimately, burnout.

Sub-Question Four

How does burnout syndrome in special education staff affect the performance outcomes of special education students?

Similar to asking about how one staff member's burnout impacted their colleagues, all participants unanimously expressed that they believed that staff burnout at Ohio Vale School did have an impact on their students. "I do think that definitely just like we feed off each other, our students feed off of us and we feed off of them" (Participant D). Although all participants expressed that they do not intentionally bring negative feelings to work, they do acknowledge that sometimes their exhaustion and burnout do show. Some staff members went as far as to call the negative environment "toxic." Participant G shared his belief that there is a "symbiotic relationship" that is formed regarding the energy levels and attitudes of the staff and the students:

> They work together. If you are a toxic person, if you are a person that is at their wit's end, at the end of the day the rope burned out, don't wanna be here anymore, students recognize that as well. And they mimic that behavior.

With staff burnout influencing students' growth, the participants shared two different but critical thoughts. The first was that the negativity and toxicity from the energy and environment created by the burnout in staff would transfer to the students, and they would take on that negativity, thus impacting their social and emotional growth and their ability to practice their coping skills effectively. The second is that because of burnout, there is not enough energy from the staff to provide the students with what they need to have a successful day or education:

> If you're burning out, you can't give what you don't have. And students need a lot from you. These kiddos especially. And if you don't have it to give to yourself, you can't give it to the kids, and they deserve that. (Participant B)

The topic was noted that some teachers who are experiencing higher levels of burnout and have a lot of sick days saved will call off more often. Using the weekly responses and the letters to herself, Participant F shared that she felt some guilt having to call off work to take care

of her children when they were sick because the burnout from her efforts in both personal and professional environments took her time and energy away from the students on her caseload:

> If a teacher doesn't even show up because you'll see those teachers that are burned out, and they'll just use their sick days if they have a lot of sick days. So, now you have a classroom who has a different sub every single period. And how does a student learn if they have a sub every single period, and now they have to learn from a new teacher?

Participants shared their concerns that students' growth will also be hindered because of the lack of presence of some teachers experiencing burnout. This lack of presence not only perpetuates the feeling that some students have expressed as another adult in their lives giving up on them or abandoning them but also the inconsistency of supports when their assigned teacher is replaced with a different substitute each period of the day. This inconsistency does not provide a solid foundation for academic, social, or emotional growth for special education students in behavioral placement schools.

Summary

This chapter presents the findings and results from the data collection process. Each participant was introduced with a brief background of their position and experiences. Through their participation and responses throughout the data collection process, two themes and two sub-themes for each theme became apparent. The findings of the data collected formed two themes: support structure and community effort. From there, the participants' responses helped to flush out two sub-themes for each theme. The theme of support structure led to sub-themes of administrative presence and staffing and compensation, and for the theme of community effort, the two sub-themes that emerged were influences on staff and influences on students. The central research question as well as the four sub-questions were addressed from the analyzed and

synthesized responses of each participant in this study. With all the responses provided by the

participants and an analysis of the data, the driving questions behind this case study were

answered with unique perspectives.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this case study was to understand the decrease in self-efficacy that leads to burnout for special education staff in the Ohio Vale School in the Rust Belt. This chapter comprises a discussion and the findings of the data collection process within five subsections. The first of these subsections is the interpretation of the findings from the data collection process. The second of these subsections consists of the implications for policy or practice. The third of these subsections comprises the theoretical and empirical implications. The fourth subsection presents the limitations and delimitations of this study. The final subsection presents recommendations for future research. Following the five subsections of the discussion portion is the conclusion to this case study.

Discussion

The purpose of this instrumental case study was to address the decreased self-efficacy that leads to burnout in special education staff in behavioral placement schools. The data collected through individual interviews, letter writing, and weekly structured responses were analyzed and synthesized to describe the experiences of burnout through decreased self-efficacy of special education staff in behavioral placement schools. The themes that became apparent throughout this process were support structure and community effort. Support structure, as a theme, was addressed through two sub-themes. These sub-themes included administrative presence and staffing and compensation. Community effort as a theme was also addressed through two sub-themes. These sub-themes were influences within staff and influences on students.

Interpretation of Findings

 This section of Chapter Five includes a summary of the material found in Chapter Four. Two themes were developed through the data of this research: support structure and community effort. Each theme had two sub-themes. For the theme support structure, the sub-themes that emerged were administrative presence and staffing and compensation. For the community effort theme, the sub-themes that emerged were influences within staff and influences on students. These findings elaborate upon the decreased self-efficacy of special education staff in behavioral placement schools which leads to burnout.

Summary of Thematic Findings

 Throughout this case study, two themes and four sub-themes emerged from the data. These themes were support structure and community effort. The first theme, support structure, included the two sub-themes administrative presence and staffing and compensation. The second theme included the two sub-themes influences within staff and influences on students. Through analysis of each participant's responses, the following interpretations were made.

Being Present Matters

 Participants in this case study were asked to share their experiences and perspectives of building-level administration and central office administration, and if or how the administrations influenced the participants' view of their positions. Although some administrators working more directly with staff received some level of praise, the overall feel was that the regular presence of central office administration in the Ohio Vale School building is what held a significant amount of influence on the participants' self-efficacy and ultimately their feelings of burnout. Although it was crucial for the administrative teams to ensure that the candidates they had hired showed a level of commitment, enthusiasm, and engagement with their jobs (Ansley et al., 2019), they, as

the administrators, were also responsible for ensuring support to their employees, especially when the school was a high needs school behaviorally. The participants, overall, struggled to feel this support from both administrations, but mostly central office administration. Previous research has shown that the perceptions school staff hold of their administration's influence over staff's feeling of satisfaction in their job (Ansley et al., 2019) led to their feelings of self-efficacy and burnout. Through comments, actions, and inactions of administrations, participants shared that their sense of purpose in their positions and their self-efficacy was inconsistent. This wavering feeling of self-efficacy and burnout, they shared, would have an impact on their students, which was not as much a concern but rather a fear.

Participants also shared an acknowledgment that their presence was an important factor in decreased self-efficacy and burnout. Previous research shared that burnout was a central component factored into staff's involvement and effectiveness when performing their jobs (Safari, 2020). Each participant, in their unique way, expressed that they acknowledged that their attendance and the attendance of other staff fed into the cycle of burnout, which led to uniquely experienced feelings of decreased self-efficacy. Sick days were provided to participants who had a contract with TU. The participants who were employed through third-party companies were hourly employees and were not afforded paid sick days. For all participants, regardless of contract status, the need to take mental health days was shared. However, each participant shared that there was a sense of awareness that in their absence, other staff would be pulled for coverages, meaning they would lose valuable time to complete their work, and some participants acknowledged that if they took mental health days, their students would not receive their services. Because of the level of awareness that their absence would impact their colleagues, mental health days were viewed as important, and promoted within the staff, but seldom taken.

This would perpetuate an already negative and, as observed by some participants, toxic work environment.

Burnout is Not Experienced Alone

Although each participant in this study shared their own unique experiences with burnout, all participants acknowledged that burnout would impact the entire staff and would also impact the students they served. One person's experience with burnout and a decrease in their self-efficacy can infect their colleagues and the students whom they serve. The increase in work demands coupled with the decrease in time during the workday to complete these demands to an expected standard impact the stress levels of staff negatively. With the increase in stress because of the increase in work demands, relationships between staff members and the rapport built with the students in a special education program that focuses on behavioral needs also experienced a negative impact. Participants shared a concern that burnout in staff members negatively impacted the students at Ohio Vale School. Participants noted that the students at Ohio Vale School were not receiving the standard of services that they felt was being promised through TU because of absences for mental health days, inconsistency of having a different teacher each class period for coverages, and staff not being completely present mentally and emotionally. While serving a population of students in special education who exhibit more aggressive behaviors, previous research has warned that the burnout of the staff working directly with these students could negatively impact the growth academically and behaviorally by transferring the feelings and unique experiences of burnout to the students (Brunsting et al., 2021).

Implications for Policy or Practice

This section of Chapter Five will address implications and suggestions for policies and practices to deal with the decreased self-efficacy and feeling of burnout among special education

staff in behavioral placement schools. Implications for policy are suggestions for central office or upper administrations. Implications for practices are suggestions for central office or upper administrations, building-level administrations, and all staff working in the special education schools that focus on behavior.

Implications for Policy

Ukeru and CCM trainings are provided to all staff at the Ohio Vale School. These trainings focus on trauma-informed de-escalation practices and restraints for when students start escalating aggressive behaviors and become an immediate risk to themselves or others. These training policies were put in place by the central office administration to provide a foundation for safety for all students and staff within the building should students become aggressive. Throughout the data collection process, participants shared that despite having these trainings, more needed to be done to ensure a safe and positive environment for students and staff within the building. It is the central office administration's responsibility to support the well-being of their employees' work environment (Kolomitro et al., 2019). Prior research has suggested that providing training on personal mental health awareness and recognizing burnout could be a beneficial method of providing support to their special education staff while keeping in mind that these trainings should take place during contracted professional development hours rather than as an extension of the workday (Baeriswyl et al., 2021). Findings from the participants' data verified the importance of having access to burnout and mental health awareness trainings and care opportunities rather than simply receiving an email with suggestions and opportunities outside of contracted hours.

Implications for Practice

      The two themes that became apparent through the responses provided to each of the data collection methods—support structure and community effort—reflected the beliefs and feelings of the participants. These two themes and the observed passion of the participants when expressing them drive the suggestion for practice for this case study. Participants reflected upon their expectations of self-care to alleviate burnout, the support provided to them by administration and contractual compensation, and how their individual experiences with burnout impact their self-efficacy. Although participants planned to use certain forms of self-care for their mental health, a single method did not always provide the alleviation from workplace stress and burnout that they needed to feel like they were performing to the best of their ability. Because the experience of decreased self-efficacy and burnout are unique, the view of how to lessen their effects could be met with a pragmatic approach. Looking at this case study through the lens of pragmatism, it should be considered that this is not an absolute unity within the realm of this case study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Support needed by staff members vary depending on their health and feelings of burnout. It was made clear that the administration, which is in charge of policy, was not present enough for the staff at Ohio Vale School to feel as though they (the central office administration) had a real understanding of what was happening in the school building and how the environment of the staff impacts the culture of the building.

      Some suggestions for practice arose for central office administration. Although the Ukeru and CCM training are crucial to ensure the safety of both staff and students and were high priorities for participants, the participants were passionate about the presence of central office administration in their building. Therefore, to better understand the decreased self-efficacy and feelings of burnout among the staff, it is suggested that central office administration make it a

point to consistently increase their presence within the building. Increased presence from central office administration could lead to more pragmatic approaches for professional development that pertain to safety, as well as the work environment that their policies and currently implemented supports offer.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

Theoretical Implications

The driving theory behind this case study was Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy. Within Bandura's self-efficacy theory, the further elaboration of self-efficacy's four components related to the experiences of burnout experienced by the participants in this case study (Rudenko et al., 2021) were each represented in this study. The four components of performance outcomes, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and psychological feedback were all supported by the responses provided by all the participants in each method of data collection for this study. Self-efficacy theory was Bandura's theory that judgments are created by people on what they believe to be their true abilities to implement effective actions that align with their perceived expected performance levels (Bhati & Sethy, 2022). The significant findings of this study fell into the two themes of support structure and community effort. Through decreased self-efficacy due to burnout among staff in behavioral placement schools, levels of exhaustion, lack of safety, and lack of acknowledgment except for when the state became involved, self-efficacy among the participants decreased, which, in turn, increased their stress and burnout.

Prior research also shared that a single person's self-efficacy can have an impact on the community's collective self-efficacy (Bandura, 2000). This theoretical implication was exemplified through the participants' acknowledgments that their presence, actions, and words had an impact on their colleagues, and similarly, their colleague's presence, actions, and words

had an impact on them. In the case of the participants, their decreased sense of self-efficacy and increased sense of burnout created a toxic environment that spread negativity. The special education students whom the participants served were noted as no exception to Bandura's community and collective self-efficacy. Examples of students suffering academically, socially, and emotionally were shared by the participants. Decreased self-efficacy and increased feelings of burnout created a need for staff to take mental health days. Because of these mental health days, students were left with rotating special education teachers each period, and sometimes not receiving the services listed in their IEPs. As part of the collective self-efficacy, some students were noted to have either taken advantage of the absence of staff members or reflected and mimicked the attitude and energy of the staff.

Empirical Implications

Empirical implications from this study were derived from the knowledge gathered through the examination of burnout experienced by special education staff members in behavioral placement schools, particularly Ohio Vale School. Empirical implications that have been drawn from the data collection process do jointly adhere to the literature presented in Chapter Two of this study. Observation-based patterns that were found in the data that helped to form the empirical implications (Yin, 2018) were apparent under both themes throughout this study. Observations from the data collection process through time-series analysis shared the expression of burnout from participants as well as the participants' observations of their colleagues based on each unique perspective of administrative presence, staffing and compensation, influences within the staff, and influences on students.

Predictors and definitions of burnout, although not quite given the same terms, remained consistent from participant to participant. However, the prevalence of extended periods of

emotional distress such as anxiety exposed how crucial emotional conditions and stability can be for special education staff (A & Magdalin, 2019). The testimony of one staff member shared that the instability and toxic work environment led to an increase in alcohol consumption throughout the staff. As the instability and toxicity of the environment became more consistent, so did alcohol consumption. Mental and physical health were threatened by burnout through means of emotional exhaustion leading to various levels of depression and its associated symptoms, thus the self-treatment or less healthy coping practices exhibited by staff experiencing burnout (Méndez et al., 2020).

Through the results presented from the data collected, logic dictated that staff members who experienced multiple coverages each day throughout the week participated in multiple assistance calls throughout each day, or missed their lunch and preparation periods regularly throughout the week and had to convince themselves to take days off of work for mental health days so that they would be of better service to their students. Interactions with students with whom relationships and rapport have not been established to the extent of their classroom teacher, though on behalf of colleagues, exacerbates the emotional requirements necessary to effectively provide students with their daily services (Capone et al., 2019). For special education staff who choose to remain in the field, increasing absences have the potential to become chronic (Nadon et al., 2022). The hesitation to take care of their own mental and physical wellbeing has led to a widespread feeling of exhaustion, which in turn has created a sense of cynicism in participants on an individual basis. In turn, the sense of cynicism has led to the cynicism and toxicity the participants observed in their colleagues. These environmental influences created through negative interactions with colleagues form the foundation of burnout (Atmaca et al., 2020) and ultimately decreased self-efficacy that is felt by the staff. The levels of self-esteem,

professional achievement, and self-efficacy decrease due to the negative relationship between burnout and overall health (Méndez et al., 2020). The experience of such negative and toxic emotions and feelings, though valid, fathomable, and typical, habitually undermine and compromise the social-emotional wellbeing and effectiveness of professionals.

Prior research demonstrated that the building blocks of burnout are observations of insensitivity towards colleagues or within personal relationships, an escalated sense of emotional exhaustion, and the decreased sense of professional achievement and personal competence for prolonged periods (Güler et al., 2019). The level of professional self-efficacy as well as the overall group's level of efficacy had an impact on both individual performances of daily job requirements as well as the function of the school as a whole Burnout's impact on the special education staff in behavioral placement schools was not an instantaneous experience but rather one that took a toll on the mental health of the staff in part due to their positions requiring them to work closely with people, particularly school-age students with behavioral issues and colleagues experiencing similar situations.

Limitations and Delimitations

A limitation of imposed restrictions (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018) was present during this study. The limitation included in this study is my connection with the TU and the Ohio Vale School. I have been employed at Ohio Vale School through the TU for 2 years. Through previous employment, I knew about Ohio Vale School being a popularly utilized TU. Because I was collected data for this case study with colleagues, I had to ensure that any personal biases that I might have had were not present in the process. Accuracy with responses and confidentiality were handled with the utmost respect and care.

Additionally, two delimitations, restrictions that were consciously set by the researcher (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018) became apparent during this case study. The first of these delimitations was that the time of this case study was limited to 9 weeks; in other words, one-quarter of the school year at Ohio Vale School. This restriction was due to time constraints of the program in which the researcher was participating, as well as to not impose so much extra work that any potential burnout by the staff would be exacerbated. The second delimitation was that the participation was limited to staff within the Ohio Vale School who worked regularly and directly with the student population day-to-day. The progression of self-efficacy outlined by Bandura (2000), the creation of expectations, behaviors, and outcome expectations, and the outcome of the behaviors, although not in a positive manner, aligned with this case study and the participants' authentic and unique experiences and responses.

Recommendations for Future Research

This case study spanned 9 weeks and involved 12 special education staff members who volunteered their time as participants. I have two recommendations for future research. The first recommendation is that the study be expanded in duration to that of a full school year. This extension of duration will allow the researcher to track participants and their feelings of self-efficacy and burnout from the initial days of professional development before the students start at the beginning of the school year until the final day of professional development at the end of the school year after the students have started their summer break. A full school year's worth of data collection will allow for a greater understanding of the struggles with burnout and decreased self-efficacy that special education staff members experience.

The second recommendation for future research is to expand the participant population. This case study focused on special education staff in behavioral placement schools who worked

with students regularly. For future research, I recommend that the term staff be broadened to people who work within the school building. This increase would include secretaries, nurses, and building-level administration. To better understand the culture of the building, all parties working within the building should be represented. The broadening of the term staff would increase the number of participants as well as the perspectives and experiences within the study.

Conclusion

The purpose of this case study was to understand the decreased self-efficacy that leads to burnout for special education staff in the Ohio Vale School in the Rust Belt. This qualitative case study was completed between November 2023 and January 2024 in the Rust Belt. The data that were collected throughout this case study came in the forms of two letter-writing activities bookending the data collection process, two semi-structured individual interviews that also bookended the data collection process, and weekly check-ins in the form of structured responses. The 12 participants from this study were men and women holding various positions at the Ohio Vale School through TU. After the data were analyzed, two themes emerged: support structure and community effort. Within each theme, two sub-themes presented themselves. For the support structure theme, the subthemes that were presented were administrative presence and staffing and compensation. For the theme of community effort, the two sub-themes that became apparent were influences within staff and influences on students. A summary of these findings suggested that the participants' two major concerns were that being present mattered to the participants and that one person's experience with decreased self-efficacy and burnout could infect and influence the building staff as a whole.

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Appendix A

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

November 16, 2023

Katherine Taylor
Susan Stanley

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY23-24-539 Addressing the Effects of Special Education Staff Burnout in Behavioral Placement Schools: A Case Study

Dear Katherine Taylor, Susan Stanley,

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).

For a PDF of your exemption letter, click on your study number in the My Studies card on your Cayuse dashboard. Next, click the Submissions bar beside the Study Details bar on the Study details page. Finally, click Initial under Submission Type and choose the Letters tab toward the bottom of the Submission Details page. Your information sheet and final versions of your study documents can also be found on the same page under the Attachments tab.

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 email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office

Appendix B

Research Question

Case Study Research Questions:

Central Research Question
Why do special education staff experience decreased self-efficacy that leads to burnout?

Sub-Question One
What effects does burnout syndrome have on special education staff in behavioral

placement schools?

Sub-Question Two
How does verbal persuasion from building-level and central office administrations affect

the burnout of special education staff?

Sub-Question Three
How does burnout syndrome in one special education staff member affect their

colleagues' performances?

Sub-Question Four
How does burnout syndrome in special education staff affect the performance outcomes

of special education students?

Appendix C

Interview Questions

Initial Interview Questions:

1. Introduction: What is your educational background?

2. Describe your history with the Transitional Unit (TU).

3. How would you say your job description aligns with the job that you interviewed for? With the job, you have performed for the TU on a day-to-day basis?

4. How would you define burnout?

5. Do you feel as if you have or are experiencing burnout with your career at TU? (SQ-1)

6. If yes, please elaborate on these experiences. (SQ-1)

7. If no, how do you manage to keep yourself in a position for handling the demands presented to you? (SQ-1)

8. What comments, if any, have you heard from building or central administration that have influenced or affected your job performance or the way that you feel about and view your position here? (SQ-2)

9. When thinking about burnout, we typically think of it as a unique experience on an individual basis. Do you feel as though it is possible for a colleague's burnout to affect other staff members in the building? Have you seen this? If so, could you elaborate on the experience? (SQ-3)

10. Do you feel as though it is possible for the staff's burnout to affect their students and their growth? Have you witnessed this? If yes, could you elaborate on the experience?

11. How did you prepare for this school year? Did you have any expectations going into this school year?

Final Interview Questions

1. How is your year going so far?

2. How have your preparations and expectations at the beginning of the year measured up to your experiences so far this year?

3. In what ways, if any, have you witnessed burnout throughout the building so far this year? (SQ-1)

4. In what ways, if any, has the building level and central office administrations involved themselves in your experiences thus far this school year? (SQ-2)

5. How have their interactions affected your experiences thus far this year? (SQ-2)

6. At the beginning of the year, we spoke about how burnout in one staff member affects their colleagues. How, if at all, has this been prevalent this year? (SQ-3)

7. We also spoke about staff burnout affecting the students whom we serve. In what ways, if any, has this been prevalent so far this year? (SQ-4)

8. Looking back at the first half of the school year, how are you planning, preparing, and managing expectations for the remainder of the school year?

Appendix D

Structured Response Questions

Weekly Structured Response Questions:

1. Were you able to follow your lesson plans with your students as submitted for the start of the week? Why or why not?

2. What would you describe as your greatest source of stress this week?

3. Were you provided with all of your prep periods throughout the week?

4. If yes, were you able to use your prep period efficiently?

5. If no, what took the place of your prep period?

6. How were you compensated for your missed prep period?

7. Were you provided with all of your lunch periods throughout the week?

8. If yes, how did you choose to spend your lunch period?

9. If no, what took the place of your lunch period?

10. How were you compensated for your missed lunch period?

11. Did you take work home with you?

12. If yes, what made you take work home with you?

13. If no, what was the defining factor in not taking work home?

14. What methods to minimize stress and burnout have you taken this week?

15. Were these methods effective in maintaining healthy levels of work-related stress?

16. How have the events of this week impacted your preparations professionally and personally for next week?