

PROMOTING SELF-ADVOCACY SKILLS DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS WITH
DISABILITIES TRANSITIONING FROM MIDDLE TO HIGH SCHOOL

by

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy

Liberty University

2024

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Abstract

The purpose of this single case study was to understand the importance of self-determination skills and how these developmental skills can help students with disabilities make choices, set goals, and take responsibility for their actions, so the students can have a successful transition to high school. The skills can help motivate students in developing a student-centered transition plan. The theory guiding this study is the self-determination theory, placing emphasis on how educators can address students' basic psychological needs which are autonomy, competence, and relatedness. These needs can increase a student's intrinsic motivation to achieve. Special education teachers at one high school in Georgia were interviewed. They joined a focus group and answered questions from a questionnaire to gain an understanding of how transition planning can manage changes in various aspects of life for special education students as they move from middle to high school. Qualitative data analysis procedures were used to understand, theorize, contextualize, and synthesize how a students' transition plan can help create a positive transition experience to high school. Four themes emerged from the data that included support mechanisms, active involvement, transition processes to high school, and resources and opportunities, which the special education teachers agreed will provide an effective transition to high school. Recommendations from the study include using a longitudinal design to monitor students' advancement on time, using a mixed method strategy, and a broader and more varied sample size to improve the applicability of the overall process.

Keywords: Transition Planning, Coordination, Parental Involvement, Self-Determination

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Dedication

Frist, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to God, my creator, Who allowed for me to be capable of successfully accomplishing this feat. Second, I would like to dedicate my dissertation to my husband, Barry Norris, who started this journey with me. He was my biggest supporter, as well as greatest motivator when times were low. I thank God for him.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	3
Copyright Page	4
Dedication	5
Table of Contents	6
List of Tables	10
List of Abbreviations	11
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	12
Overview.....	12
Background.....	12
Historical Context.....	13
Social Context.....	14
Theoretical Context.....	15
Problem Statement.....	17
Purpose Statement.....	19
Significance of the Study	20
Research Questions.....	22
Central Research Question.....	22
Sub-Question One.....	23
Sub-Question Two	23
Sub-Question Three	23
Definitions.....	23
Summary.....	24

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	26
Overview	26
Theoretical Framework	26
Related Literature	30
Summary	57
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS	58
Overview	58
Research Design	60
Research Questions	60
Central Research Question	61
Sub-Question One	61
Sub-Question Two	61
Sub-Question Three	61
Setting and Participants	61
Site (or Setting)	61
Participants	62
Researcher Positionality	64
Interpretive Framework	64
Philosophical Assumptions	65
Researcher's Role	66
Procedures	67
Recruitment Plan	68
Data Collection Plan	69

Individual Interviews Data Collection Approach	69
Focus Groups Data Collection Approach	71
Surveys/Questionnaires Data Collection Approach.....	73
Data Synthesis.....	74
Trustworthiness.....	75
Credibility	75
Transferability.....	76
Dependability	76
Confirmability.....	77
Ethical Considerations	77
Summary	78
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS	79
Overview.....	79
Participants.....	79
Results.....	89
Theme 1.....	90
Theme 2.....	92
Sub-Theme 1.....	95
Theme 3.....	95
Theme 4.....	98
Research Question Responses.....	101
Central Research Question.....	101
Sub-Question One.....	104

Sub-Question Two.....	106
Sub-Question Three.....	108
Summary.....	109
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION.....	111
Overview.....	111
Discussion.....	111
Interpretation of Findings	111
Implications for Policy or Practice	120
Theoretical and Empirical Implications.....	122
Limitations and Delimitations.....	125
Recommendations for Future Research	127
Conclusion	128
References.....	129
Appendix A.....	144
Appendix B.....	145
Appendix C.....	146
Appendix D.....	148
Appendix E.....	149

List of Tables

Table 1. Teacher Participants.....	80
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List of Abbreviations

Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)

Armed Services Vocational Battery (ASVAB)

Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)

Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

Individual Educational Program (IEP)

Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA)

Mild Intellectual Disability (MID)

Moderate Intellectual Disability (MOID)

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)

Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)

Profound Intellectual Disability (PID)

Severe Intellectual Disability (SID)

Students with Disabilities (SWDs)

Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The National Center for Education Statistics (2015) stated only 65% of students with disabilities graduate on time, well below the 84% 4-year rate for students without disabilities (Kloos et al., 2022). The percentage of students with disabilities who graduated with a regular high school diploma received an alternative certificate, or they dropped out (Kloos et al., 2022). The main goal of the transition plan is to ensure that students with disabilities have equal opportunities to access educational, vocational, and community resources, which can help students be successful in high school and meet graduation requirements.

Included in Chapter One is the need for self-determination skills to motivate students with disabilities to successfully transition from middle school to high school. The significance of the study, which includes the historical, social, and theoretical significance, is also discussed. The problem and purpose of the study are addressed in detail to place emphasis on the need to conduct the research. Research questions are presented to provide an overall guide for the study.

Background

Self-determination refers broadly to having the ability to motivate and support the need to direct one's own life in ways and directions meaningful to the person (Carter et al., 2010). In the late 1930s, self-determination was referred to the personality psychology field when researchers and theorists sought to explain the internal and external factors influencing the causation of human behavior (Cmar & Markoski, 2019). The 1980s' self-determination research focused on determining why people behaved a certain way and on understanding the motivational aspects underlying behaviors that are performed freely versus behaviors that are performed under coercion or pressure. The theoretical nature of self-determination skills revolves around

autonomy, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, personal agency, competence, psychological needs, and social content. These cross-disciplinary theories have constructed a shared understanding among researchers and practitioners.

Historical Context

After having an etiology in the normalization and self-advocacy movement of the 1970s and early 1980s, the first mention of self-determination in legislation was in the Public Housing Act of 1992 and 1998. The Individual with Disabilities Educational Acts (IDEA) of 1990 and 1997 purported that self-determination had become a major component of legislated transition services (Cobb et al., 2009). Self-determination is multifaceted and reflective of both a psychological trait and a behavior skill set. From a student with disability standpoint, the experimental evidence shows an increase in the students' self-determination status and the increased quality of life. After a decade of developmental and empirical research on self-determination—what its components are and how it can be taught to students with disabilities—self-determination is now considered a key component of high-quality transition services.

The concept of self-determination begins during the early 1990s as part of a federal initiative from the U.S. Department of Education (Field & Hoffman, 2007). The funded program was given to researchers and practitioners to examine how self-determination could be applied to transition programs for students with disabilities. The programs were developed to help create more successful outcomes for this group of students.

The initiative of self-determination came about partially in response to the review following the data on graduates of special education programs, which revealed that these graduates were experiencing high rates of unemployment, low incomes, and little access to postsecondary education after the students left the Preschool through 12th grade setting (Field &

Hoffman, 2007). In alignment with self-determination movement for all individuals with disabilities, a concerted effort was made to focus on self-determination for children and youths with disabilities in United States schools (Cmar & Markoski, 2019). “Harvath, Kampfer-Bohach and Kerns (2005), conducted a study with nine participants aged through 21 years who were deaf and blind. The researchers examined how accommodations documented in the student’s IEP were being used during instruction and assessment. The results indicated that students actively refused accommodations rather than making a choice to use them, as well as the students’ number of self-determination skills in both classroom and assessment settings. None of the students had self-determination IEP goals, and most of the students did not attend their IEP meetings” (Cmar & Markoski, 2019 p.7). A group of researchers conducted participation action research through a collective study. Data was collected from six participants who were deaf-blind aged eighteen to twenty-four years old and who participated in a one-week advocacy and civic engagement course. The researchers found that participants developed self-determination and self-advocacy skills and assumed greater control over issues and policies that impacted their lives. The historical perspective on self-determination skills for students with disabilities reflects a shift from exclusion and dependency towards inclusion, empowerment, and recognition of rights.

Social Context

Once self-determination became associated with self-advocacy and self-governance, societal attitudes toward individuals with disabilities shifted from a model of institutional care to a model of full citizenship and community participation. (Cmar & Hoffman, 2019). Inclusive classrooms provide opportunities for students with disabilities to interact and collaborate with their peers, fostering social relationships. The National Center in Educational Restructuring and

Inclusion (NCERI) defines *inclusion* as providing all students the same educational opportunities in the general education classes in their neighborhood schools with support when needed.

Engaging students, their families, and relevant stakeholders is important to develop individualized plans that support the students and empower them to make choices and decisions about their education and future. For adolescents with disabilities, parent involvement can promote active student involvement during transition planning, as well as improved self-determination (Wilt & Morningstar, 2018).

Community integration provides opportunities for students with disabilities to participate in meaningful activities and develop life skills outside of the classroom. The community activities included extracurricular activities, volunteer work, and other community-based experiences. In a study conducted by (Letrello & Miles, 2003), students stated that the easiest aspect of moving to high school included making friends and getting involved in extracurricular activities, such as band, sports, drama productions, and student council. Students have access to technology, and they can access information, communicate effectively, and engage in learning activities independently. The Self-Advocacy Strategy is a computer-based strategy that was developed to prove a viable and motivating means to teach self-determination skills, reducing teachers' instructional time, as students work independently (Balint-Langel et al., 2020).

Theoretical Context

In 2015, Shogren et al. introduced the Causal Agency Theory. The theory defines self-determination as a general psychological construct within the organization structure of theories of human agentic behavior. Dweck's Motivational Model of Achievement states self-efficacy perceptions are viewed as operating within a larger self-system in which interacting with other beliefs and knowledge representations to influence motivation and performance (Liu, 2021).

Zimmerman's Self-Regulation Theory defines self-regulated learning as a process in which students are behaviorally and motivationally active participants in their learning process (Karaca et al., 2020). The theory incorporates elements of self-determination by emphasizing the importance of self-motivation and self-regulating skills. Self-regulated learning refers to the learner's ability to understand and control the learning environments (Karaca et al., 2022).

Interest in goal setting has been around since the 1930s when the notion of measuring motivation and conscious goals arose (William-Diehm et al., 2010). Goal Setting Theory by Locke and Latham (1990) emphasized the role of goal setting in motivation and performance. Goal Setting Theory highlights the importance of setting specific challenges, which influence individual self-determination, efforts, and achievement. Goal setting is an effective motivator for students with disabilities (William-Diehm et al., 2010). Dweck's and Elliot's (1986) Achievement Goal Theory focused on individuals' goal orientations and how the goal impacts motivation and achievement. The theory distinguishes between mastery goals (striving of competence and forwarding) and performance goals (striving for favorable judgment and outcomes). The theory explored the effects on self-determination, persistence, and performance. The initial dichotomous model of achievement goals proposed in the 1980s among many others, conceptualized achievement goals according to the focus of competence, and two ways of defining success—attainment of mastery (self-referenced success) and outperforming others (other-referenced success). Individuals who pursue mastery goals are concerned with the development of ability. The students are likely to seek achievement by developing competence and acquiring knowledge through effortful learning (Liu, 2021). Self-Determination Theory stated that students are characterized by three basic psychological needs, autonomy, competence, and relatedness. When the needs are answered, students are likely to be engaged in the learning

process, curious, active, and high achieving. However, it should be noted that this process is not automatic and requires support, so the teacher's professionalism and understanding of the student's needs are very important in this case (Brandisauskience et al., 2023).

Problem Statement

The problem is that middle school students with disabilities lack self-determination and self-advocacy skills. The transition planning process should emphasize empowering students with disabilities to become self-determined and capable of advocating for themselves. A study conducted by Pounds and Cuevas (2019) stated students' involvement in IEPs has been effective for special education students in learning and skills attainment. Students were not only able to voice opinions, but the students were given different options for how to learn, developed self-advocacy and self-determination skills, and learned how to set goals and objectives. However, early planning stages often do not prioritize developing essential skills, which are crucial for success beyond middle school. As mentioned by Rubio-Jimenez & Kershner (2021), barriers include limited postschool options, insufficient support and guidance, scant interagency collaboration, and little student involvement even if present at their transition-planning meeting. This problem required a collaborative approach involving educators, parents, students, and other relevant professionals.

Self-determination skills and self-advocacy skills are crucial for middle school students with disabilities to become independent and successful in their transition to view themselves as efficacious learners. African American students have shown a link between students' use of these skills and their academic achievement (e.g., higher grade point averages [GPAs]) and engagement in school (e.g., participating in class, staying on task, completing schoolwork, and graduating from high school) (Parker et al., 2020). Students with disabilities need to be taught

strategies to promote these skills. Organizing instruction in the specific skills associated with self-determination into a standalone curriculum provided a means to ensure students learned and developed these skills (Raley et al., 2018). Promoting the self-determination of people with disabilities has become a focal point in the fields of special education and rehabilitation (Chao, 2020). Students need to be taught self-awareness because the skill can help students to identify values and preferences, which guide the decision-making process. To teach decision-making skills, students need opportunities to make choices and decisions both in small and significant ways. Listing pros and cons is a positive way to teach students to make decisions. Students need to be taught how to effectively communicate their accommodations, rights, preferences to teachers, administrators, and peers. Teachers can teach and help students break down problems into manageable parts. Students need guidance in setting realistic short-term and long-term goals. Teaching them to make action plans is a supportive way to help students set goals.

A curriculum that can incorporate activities that promote self-determination skills would be a positive tool for these students. Research has demonstrated that skills associated with self-determination (e.g., goal-setting, problem-solving, decision-making) are embedded in general education curriculum standards for all students (Raley et al., 2018). Researchers have shown that instruction in self-determination designed for students with intellectual disabilities has provided a structure that supported young people in cognitive, psychological, behavioral, and environmental aspects, so they can become self-determined individuals (Chao, 2020; Shogren et al., 2019). The curriculum should include career exploration, job shadowing, and mock interviews. Self-determination and self-advocacy skills are an ongoing process, requiring consistent support, reinforcement, and opportunities for students to practice and apply the skills

in various contexts.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this case study was to explore and understand the experiences of students with disabilities in transition planning when self-determination theory is incorporated. At this stage of the research, transition planning was defined as a plan used to help students to successfully transition to high school, to post-secondary school, and adulthood. The study was focused on examining the perspectives and voices of teachers to help the transition team create the best transition plan. The researcher seeks to gain insights into which self-determination skills and principles impacted the transition process. According to the self-determination theory, a student with a learning disability engages in a style of coping defined by a multitude of self-empowering acts (Mazher, 2018). Students with disabilities have challenges when it comes to having skills that can be useful when expressing strengths, needs, and interests. One possible cause of the discrepant outcomes is lower ratings of self-determination displayed within this population of students (Zirkus et al., 2020)

Through semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires, along with the analysis of the qualitative data, I will get a full understanding of what my colleagues and I need to teach our students the skills they will need to transition to high school. The researcher seeks to uncover the challenges and success of students with disabilities as they navigate various domains of the transition process, such as educational success and social relationships. The research aimed to contribute to the development of transition planning practices that promote autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Research over the past 20 years has shown that self-determination is linked to positive outcomes for people with and without disabilities (Raley et al., 2018).

Significance of the Study

Middle school is a critical period for students, especially for students with disabilities who prepare to transition to high school. An effective transition plan can ensure a smooth transition. A transition plan can appropriately address unique needs, set appropriate goals, and provide the necessary support. Transition planning focuses on aligning academic goals, accommodations, and the services needed to promote academic success for this group of students. A study on transition planning can explore interventions and strategies that can foster positive social interactions, develop self-determination and self-advocacy skills, and support students with disabilities emotional well-being. All of these areas can contribute to a successful adjustment to high school.

The study can help all stakeholders garner a better understanding of the skills students need, such as decision-making, problem-solving, and self-determination skills. The research can also help teachers gain more knowledge to help formulate a transition plan which can help make the students successful academically and build equity social skills. The results from the study can help special education directors determine which professional development topics for training for teachers as it relates to transition planning. College professors can use the information from the study to build curriculum lessons which would better prepare pre-service teachers when it comes to writing transition plans. Administrators can use the information to help support teachers by giving more planning time and trips for students to high school for early exposure. The information can help parents understand how to assist teachers who are working with the students' transition to high school, as well as moving into adulthood.

Theoretical Significance

The theoretical significance of the case study can expand on Deci and Ryan's (1985) theory of self-determination, as it pertains to transition planning for middle school students with disabilities. The study aids in helping educators improve transition outcomes for middle school students with disabilities transition to high school. The study can place emphasis on the impact of transition planning, as it relates to autonomy, relatedness, and competence, and how educators and parents can help increase students' motivation through the facilitation of self-determination to develop an appropriate transition plan. Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model (1977) is a framework for understanding human development. The model is in relation to the agents and mutual paths of influence in human development via spheres of life emanating from the central figure, which, in this case, is the child or young person with a disability awaiting or experiencing the transition to high school (Strnadova et al., 2023).

Empirical Significance

Researchers have shown that self-determination is linked to positive outcomes for students with disabilities (Raley et al., 2018). Researchers have proven that self-determined individuals have the skills to help themselves set goals, make decisions, and make choices. Students' involvement in the Individualized Education Program (IEP) transition process can provide educators with a supportive way to implement means to improve their students' self-determination skills (Ling et al., 2018). It has been noted that teachers have limited time to teach self-determination skills along with transition skills. Several evidence-based practices can help teachers teach students with disabilities skills needed to help develop the best transition plan. Test et al. identified 32 Evidence-Based Practices (EBP) to teach transition-related skills to youth with disabilities (Rowe et al., 2021). The evidence-based practice adds to the existing literature

by providing a better understanding of how the strategies and interventions can help special education teachers teach and improve the student's skills for a successful transition.

Practical Significance

Self-determination skills have been known to improve the lives of students with disabilities. Researchers have found that higher self-determination status predicts valued adult outcomes, including positive employment and community access outcomes for students with disabilities up to two years post-school (Hagiwara et al., 2022). This study can provide evidence-based recommendations to facilitate a smoother and more successful transition to high school. This can ensure that students receive the necessary support to excel academically and emotionally. A new school environment can be stressful for any student, but it can be particularly overwhelming for students with disabilities (Letrello & Miles, 2003). The new environment can cause anxiety for students with disabilities which can affect students learning. This study can show educators a way to foster a positive and inclusive school climate with the appropriate interventions and supports which can promote the students' well-being academically and socially.

Research Questions

The research questions are aligned with the problem and purpose of this study. The questions aim to explore and examine the underlying skills students need to participate in transition planning.

Central Research Question

How can the development and enhancement of self-determination skills be tailored to meet the unique needs and strengths of individuals with disabilities during the transition process?

Sub-Question One

What are the best practices and strategies for integrating self-determination skills in developing a transition plan?

Sub-Question Two

What are the specific self-determination skills that students need to successfully navigate during the transition process?

Sub-Question Three

Does the application of self-determination theory principles in transition planning promote motivation and engagement?

Definitions

1. *Autonomy*-The sense of choice and psychological freedom and continued engagement in one's action (Lee & Kim, 2022).
2. *Competence*- A person's perception of being effective in dealing with the environment (Lee & Kim, 2022).
3. *Inclusion*- Special education philosophy that values social integration and access to general curriculum standards for children with disabilities by providing specialized services in regular classes (O'Brien et al., 2019).
4. *Individualized Education Program (IEP)*- A school district-developed document that outlines school-based needs, individualized goals, and an array of classroom accommodations and support services for a student in special education. (Yeager et al., 2022).

5. *Intrinsic motivation*-an innate desire to achieve or behave in a specific manner because those actions are fulfilling to the student (Shin & Johnson, 2021).
6. *Relatedness*-A person's sense of belonging and being connected to others (Lee & Kim, 2022).
7. *Students with Disabilities*- A student with functional limitations caused by an impairment (O'Brien et al., 2019).
8. *Transition Plan*- A plan that focuses on a SWDs strengths, needs, and supports (Yeager et al., 2022).

Summary

Self-determination skills play a crucial role in the overall development of students. Self-determination skills are used to intervene, promoting and enhancing the self-determination of students with disabilities and are recognized as the practice given linkage to enhanced school and post-school outcomes (Shogren et al, 2019). Many students, particularly those with disabilities, often lack the essential skills for independence. For adolescents with disabilities, developmental skills are often limited by impaired cognitive ability (Chao, 2020). Self-determination refers to an individual's ability to make choices, set goals, and take responsibility for their actions. Self-determination encompasses various skills, such as decision-making, problem-solving, self-advocacy, and goal setting. Students with disabilities face unique challenges when it comes to the development of self-determination skills. Self-determination theory in transition planning for students with disabilities provides the potential to address the challenges. Self-determination theory emphasizes the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in motivating individuals to take charge and make meaningful goals. Research from the fields of education and psychology incorporate all students, including those with disabilities,

particularly research in positive psychology related to strengths-based assessment and intervention, including motivational psychology. The emphasis is on creating an environment to facilitate relatedness, autonomy, competence, and in the learning process of the participant (Shogren et al., 2019). The self-determination theory is used to make the transition planning process more student-centered and collaborative. Students are encouraged to actively participate in identifying their strengths, interests, and areas of need to facilitate more personalized goals and strategies to be developed.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Researchers consistently highlight the importance of early and proactive transition planning for students with disabilities during the middle school years (Marshall et al., 2019). Early planning allows for a comprehensive assessment of students' strengths, needs and goals, as well as the development of appropriate support and interventions. Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) or person-centered transition plans play a crucial role in supporting students' successful transition from middle school to high school. Effective plans incorporate students' input, interests, preferences, goals, and outline specific transition goals and objectives. Studies emphasize the importance of involving stakeholders in decision-making, ensuring effective communication, and fostering collaborative relationships to address students' unique needs and facilitate a smooth transition. Research highlights the need for targeted interventions and support to enhance students' self-determination, self-advocacy, problem-solving, and decision-making abilities. The research suggests the need for consistent communication, sharing of student information, alignment of curriculum and support, and the involvement of key personnel in both educational settings.

Theoretical Framework

This case study utilizes the theoretical framework of social constructivism to guide the research process. The theoretical framework is used to offer support for the research study and how the research will guide the study. The literature review will explore Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory. The theory emphasizes the importance of intrinsic motivation, autonomy, and self-regulation in successful transition. Applying the theory to transition planning involves fostering individuals' sense of competence, relatedness, and autonomy to promote the

students' active involvement in decision-making and goal setting. Specific strategies can be used to assist middle school students when developing an appropriate transition plan. The researcher can get a clear view on how teachers, parents, and other educational staff members' roles in creating the best transition plan for students with disabilities. A single case study can provide educators with information on how teachers can improve upon the strategies when working with students with disabilities, and the development of transition plans, which can lead to a better high school experience on the students' academic and social-emotional development.

Self-Determination Theory in Prior Research

Researchers have used Deci and Ryan's (1985) theory as a research framework. Jungert et al. (2016) attempted to investigate whether various dimensions of student-teacher relationships were associated with different types of motivation to defend victims in bullying and to determine the association between the types of motivations and various bystander behaviors in bullying situations among adolescents. The hypothesis was not confirmed because defending victims was not directly associated with autonomy-supportive student-teacher relationships through autonomous motivation. The researchers found that teachers who seem to inhibit rather than promote helping and defending behaviors by communicating with students should not intervene because interventions are the responsibility and domain of the teachers and other school staff (Jungert et al., 2016). In accordance with Self-Determination Theory (SDT), they found that autonomous motivation was positively and significantly associated with defending.

Sun et al. (2019) used self-determination theory to study the intrinsic motivation utilized to enhance motivation to participate in online discussions and other course activities. Through the study, the researchers found the fulfillment of needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are important facilitators of students' intrinsic motivation and engagement in

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC). When students can arrange MOOC learning in a way to feel more competent in this style of learning, and have the sense of being connected to others, their basic psychological needs are satisfied, thus increasing motivation, and contributing to engagement in MOOC learning. The results of the findings verify the applicability of SDT in MOOC's environment and echo previous studies, which show the three basic needs are associated with intrinsic motivation and lead to positive learning outcomes (Sun et al., 2018).

Self-Determination Theory in This Research Study

Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory is appropriate for the social constructivism theoretical framework for this research study, as it involves fostering the student's sense of competence, relatedness, and autonomy. A student's competence relates to the effectiveness in dealing with their environment. Competence can be seen in the classroom where students must understand the schoolwork needs to be completed successfully. The student's relatedness is seen as the willingness to interact with and connect with other people in the educational environment. Students' autonomy can be seen through the need to control decisions and a sense of choice.

The transition team members must include, at a minimum, the student, parents, special education staff, and related services personnel, and this team must work together to achieve a common goal with the intent of developing a transition plan for students moving from middle school to high school. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 requires transition planning within the Individual Education Plan (IEP) meeting. The transition meetings begin no later than when the students are 16 years of age. Some research suggests beginning transition planning in the IEP earlier than what is the federally required age, which may be beneficial to the student. State policymakers agree with beginning earlier than the federal mandated age,

emphasizing student involvement. In the IEP meetings, the student's role is to share their preferences, interests, and needs. They should actively engage in conversations, choices, and decision-making (van Rens, 2022).

Transitioning from school to school presents numerous challenges, for many students. However, research has consistently shown that children with disabilities face difficulties during this transitional period (Pitt et al., 2021). These challenges include adjusting to surroundings, coping with higher academic expectations, adapting to longer school hours, navigating changes in their routines, establishing new social networks and support systems, and interacting with a larger group of teachers and staff members. It is crucial that students with impairments receive support during this transition to avoid negative experiences. To effectively address the challenges faced by students with disabilities when transitioning from school to school, the implementation of IEPs has proven successful. The implementation of the IEP involves an approach that includes setting goals, allocating resources, and conducting evaluations.

The purpose of this single case study is to investigate high school special education teachers' perceptions of the essential supports required to promote self-advocacy skills in middle students with disabilities. The problem this single case study will address is the lack of self-advocacy skills among some students with disabilities transitioning from middle to high school.

Research questions that guide this study are derived from the foundation of the self-determination theory. The interview questions were created using the central and sub-research questions, and the self-determination theory. The study will add self-determination theory exploring the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of the students, teachers, and other educational professionals.

Related Literature

This section reviews the existing literature related to self-determination motivation, the procedures and accommodations that can work with students with disabilities, and the transition process. This review includes the components of self-determination theory, academic success in transition planning, social-emotional well-being in transition planning, teacher roles in transition planning, parent roles in transition planning, and student roles in transition planning. The strategies that can be used to assist teachers, students, and parents to develop an appropriate transition plan for students will be discussed. Each section will include research studies that have been conducted to review the challenges students with disabilities face when moving on to high school.

Historical Context of Special Education

The development of special education in the United States throughout the early 1800s was heavily influenced by the dominant attitudes and beliefs that were present in Europe (Farrell, 2009; Reddy, 2014; Yell et al., 1998). During this era, there was a dominant inclination towards the development of specialized institutions with the primary objective of aiding those with disabilities. In the past, a disability was often linked to heredity, which prompted the creation of educational establishments with the objective of cultivating self-sufficiency among individuals with disabilities (Gargiulo & Bouck, 2019; Wehmeyer et al., 2018). Moreover, special education was seen as an expression of philanthropic and benevolent intentions, with religious institutions taking on the responsibility of providing education for those with disabilities (Krischler et al., 2019).

In 1837, public education was led by Henry Barnard and Horace Mann with the objective of integrating students into American society (Farrell, 2009; Reddy, 2014; Yell et al.,

1998). However, a clear divergence existed between the curriculum used in educational institutions specifically designed for those with disabilities and that of conventional public schools. Education was a responsibility of the government, and legislative actions were undertaken at the state level to establish compulsory schooling requirements. However, despite the presence of these restrictions, individuals with disabilities were consistently marginalized from the educational environment of public schools (Huefner, 2000; Osborne Jr., & Russo, 2020).

In 1852, Massachusetts demonstrated leadership by being the first state to enact laws mandating compulsory attendance in the realm of education. In a subsequent development, the state of Vermont also adopted a similar course of action in the year 1867. In the 1890s, a sequence of judicial actions culminated in the attribution of schools with the choice to selectively reject those deemed divergent or disadvantaged, particularly those with disabilities, from accessing public educational institutions. The court instances provided justifications for these exclusions by asserting that the presence of these persons caused disruptions among the majority or failed to provide any advantages to the broader public, despite the existence of compulsory schooling regulations (Dyson, 2001; Yell et al., 1998).

In the early 1900s, a significant shift occurred in social perspectives on disabilities, leading to a change from a policy of segregation to one of integration (Connor & Ferri, 2005; Cushing et al., 2005; Turnbull & Turnbull, 2015). The first White House Conference on Children occurred in 1910, signifying a significant shift in cultural perspectives about students who had disabilities. According to Gargiulo and Bouck (2019), individuals with disabilities were transferred to specialized courses characterized by a lower teacher-to-student ratio. This organizational structure enabled individualized instruction and was seen as beneficial.

In the 1920s, educational institutions adopted the policy of separating students with disabilities by establishing separate schools and classes for them. The objective of this method was to provide individualized instruction by decreasing the number of students to teachers. The 1930s saw the confluence of the Great Depression and a decline in financial support for the education of those with disabilities. In this era, disabilities were often linked to genetic reasons, hence fostering the dominant notion that individuals with disabilities had an intrinsic inability to advance, despite the introduction of targeted educational solutions. The Great Depression coincided with an increase in the number of medical impairments which assumed that a disability required an intervention or treatment (Ainscow, 2020; Florian, 2021; Wehmeyer et al., 2022).

The use of assessment tools and diagnostic methods also contributed to the facilitation of identifying students who exhibited unique traits (Fowler et al., 2021; Grigorenko et al., 2020; Vaughan et al., 2011). During the period spanning from the 1930s to the 1940s, there was a discernible decline in the support allocated to special education, leading to the marginalization and social exclusion of persons. The exclusion resulted in a curriculum that underwent modifications and inadequate allocation of resources for educational institutions that serve students with special needs. Subsequently, parents and educators initiated the formation of groups aimed at campaigning for the educational rights and privileges of their students who had disabilities. The first establishment was the Cuyahoga County Ohio Council for the Retarded Child, which was founded in 1933 (Reddy, 2014). This time saw the first stages of a grassroots movement mostly led by parents of students with disabilities who were put in institutionalized settings. According to Wehmeyer et al. (2022), throughout the next decade, more than 10 such organizations were established around the country.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was approved by the United Nations in

1948, a significant time characterized by the conclusion of World War II and the commencement of the Cold War. The statement placed significant emphasis on the protection of basic human rights for persons worldwide (National Down Syndrome Congress, n.d.). Article 26 of the Convention has a clause that expressly acknowledged the right to access education without incurring any expenses throughout the formative years, also known as basic education. Furthermore, the Convention recognized the parental right to choose the educational method they thought appropriate for their students. The efforts laid the foundation for the adoption of tuition-free public education and emphasized the crucial role of family involvement in shaping their students' educational trajectory (Osborne Jr. & Russo, 2020).

During the period spanning the 1950s and 1960s, there was a discernible increase in the provision of governmental and federal assistance towards special education, mostly ascribed to the lobbying endeavors undertaken by parents and special interest organizations (Gargiulo & Bouck, 2019). The landmark court decision of *Brown v. The Board of Education* in 1954 acted as a catalyst for several states, prompting the enactment of laws that facilitated the integration of individuals with disabilities into regular educational environments (Grigorenko et al., 2020; Osborne Jr. & Russo, 2020). There was a growing perception among individuals that the implementation of segregation led to an inequitable distribution of opportunities for individuals with disabilities. It was believed that these individuals should have the same rights and privileges as their peers without disabilities within the realm of public educational institutions (Grigorenko et al., 2020).

In 1958, the Expansion of Teaching in the Education of Mentally Retarded Children Act was enacted, marking the first involvement of the government in the field of special education (Gargiulo & Bouck, 2019; Fowler et al., 2021; National Down Syndrome Congress, n.d.). In the

years that followed, several legislative actions were taken to provide more financial resources towards the education of individuals with disabilities (Wehmeyer et al., 2022). Later, more legislative measures were enacted to provide more resources for the education of those with disabilities. The legislative measures discussed include the Civil Rights Act of 1964, with specific emphasis on Title VI, which was later replaced by the Education for the Handicapped Act (EHA) in 1970 (Dyson, 2001; Farrell, 2009; National Down Syndrome Congress, n.d.).

The beginning of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s led to a shift in the dominant strategy from integration to mainstreaming (Schifter, 2015). In the year 1968, there was a notable development in the field of behavioral science known as Applied Behavior Analysis. This scientific approach was designed with the purpose of gaining a deeper understanding of human behavior (Gargiulo & Bouck, 2019; Schmidt & Vrhovnik, 2019). The concept of normalization was first presented by Bengt Nirje in the year 1969. The idea later had a substantial influence on social perspectives and the development of initiatives targeting individuals with disabilities (Rieser, 2013). In the 1970s, educational institutions began adopting a humanistic approach, resulting in the widespread acceptance of normalization ideologies (Florian, 2019; Schmidt & Vrhovnik, 2019). In 1972, two notable judicial decisions emerged, addressing the matter of educational institutions' exclusion of individuals with disabilities (Osborne, Jr & Russo, 2020). In 1973, the Rehabilitation Act was passed, including Section 504, a provision that especially focused on safeguarding the civil rights of those with disabilities and implementing steps to counteract discriminatory practices (Osborne Jr & Russo, 2020). IDEA (2004) was implemented in 1990 as a modification to the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA). The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was also adopted, promoting the social model of disability, which asserts that impairment arises from environmental barriers that impede persons

with disabilities (Zeitlin & Curcic, 2014).

During the early 1900s, there were legislative changes made to the existing public policies concerning special education (Bemiller, 2019). These changes led to the renaming of the legislation as IDEA (2004). The legislation received further modifications in the years 1997 and 2004 (Ainscow et al., 2019). The United Nations passed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2006, which marked a significant shift in the international perspective on persons with disabilities, recognizing them as individuals with inherent rights and fundamental freedoms (Smith, 2006).

The introduction of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation resulted in a transformation in social perspectives about individuals with disabilities (Francisco, et al., 2020). This objective was accomplished by ensuring their entitlement to undergo appropriate assessment and examination in accordance with grade-level criteria. Moreover, the schools were assigned the task for ensuring students' academic achievement, establishing their accountability (Brady et al., 2019; Kleinhammer-Tramill et al., 2021). However, despite the intentions behind its creation, this law was brought under scrutiny for widening the gap between students in the mainstream and those who are disadvantaged, notably persons with disabilities (Kleinhammer-Tramill et al., 2021).

Kleinhammer-Tramill et al. (2021) wrote that instead of promoting the reduction of disparities, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) worsened the education process by imposing unrealistic standards on students from disadvantaged families and those with disabilities. The implementation of the NCLB legislation marked a shift towards neoliberal educational paradigms, which suggests that an individual's accomplishments are mostly influenced by their own decisions and behaviors (Bondar, 2021). This strategy asserts the

premise of an egalitarian initial condition for all students, which fails to correspond with the reality of diverse levels of advantage that students inherit, shaped by characteristics such as race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status. The law had a notable impact on the domain of special education, as it resulted in the adoption of standardized testing as the predominant gauge of academic accomplishment and drove educational institutions to place a higher emphasis on intellectual endeavors. The enactment of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015 was a direct reaction to the concerns expressed by educators and families over the impracticality of the rigid requirements set by the NCLB Act (Bondar, 2021; Hill & Taylor, 2020). This amendment addressed the concerns and superseded the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) had more flexibility as compared to the NCLB law, since it did not only rely on standardized test outcomes as the primary indicator of educational success.

An examination of the existing body of literature pertaining to the historical context of special education in the United States reveals a discernible evolution in the legislative framework governing this field. This progression is characterized by a shift from a basic recognition of the equitable rights of individuals with disabilities to a more comprehensive emphasis on meeting the specific educational needs of students with disabilities. Over time, the laws have been subject to revisions and renewals, as Congress considers ideas and findings from stakeholders, with the aim of improving and maintaining the laws' ongoing relevance. An enduring issue in the realm of special education has revolved on the potential weakening of the regular curriculum and teaching methods, which have placed a disproportionate emphasis on noncognitive aspects that differ greatly from those in general education. Furthermore, stakeholders have expressed concern about the patterns of disciplinary actions seen among students with disabilities.

Historical Context of the Self-Advocacy Movement

The origins of advocacy for individuals with disabilities in the United States may be traced back to the People's First Movement (Balint-Langel & Riden, 2022; Foley-Nicpon & Cederberg, 2021). The self-advocacy movement draws inspiration from civil rights organizations that emerged throughout the 1950s and 1960s, such as those advocating for the rights of African Americans and women, as well as advocacy groups dedicated to supporting parents of persons with disabilities (Murawski & Hughes, 2021; Roper, 2023). Moreover, the prioritization of deinstitutionalization throughout the 1970s, together with the rise of self-help movements in the 1980s, had a significant role in catalyzing the development of the self-advocacy movement for individuals with disabilities (Holzberg & Ferraro, 2021; Kamperman, 2020).

The inception of the first chapter of People First in the United States was predicated upon the notion that individuals with disabilities had the capacity to assume responsibility for their own social organizations (Koca et al., 2023; Walker et al., 2021). After the first conference held in Salem, Oregon, in 1974, several chapters emerged around the nation under different titles. These chapters served as platforms for persons with disabilities, offering them an opportunity to engage in discourse and pursue the advancement of both individual and collective rights (Cantley & Martin, 2020; Woolf & de Bie, 2022). The independent living movement has also facilitated the development of self-advocacy skills and served as a catalyst for adult self-advocacy activity (Burke & Goldman, 2018; Krishnan, 2021).

Individuals who have been diagnosed with disabilities and exhibit great self-advocacy skills often confront the prevailing attitudes held by others, which tend to see them as lacking the ability to independently make choices about their own life, therefore necessitating the supervision and protection of specialists (Koca et al., 2023; Robert & Parker, 2020). The

excessive shielding provided by those in positions of power and the resulting reliance on others to express one's demands have had an adverse impact on the self-governance of individuals with disabilities (Foley-Nicpon & Cederberg, 2021; Roper, 2023). Scholarly literature in the fields of disability studies and educational research has recognized the significance of cultivating self-advocacy skills in facilitating the smooth transition of students with disabilities into adulthood (Holzberg & Ferraro, 2021; Woolf & de Bie, 2022). Nevertheless, scholarly investigations have also shown that the training of self-advocacy skills and the provision of chances for self-advocacy are often lacking in the education of students with disabilities (Kamperman, 2020; Walker et al., 2021).

The idea and ability of self-advocacy are closely linked to the notion of self-determination (Krishnan, 2021; Woolf & de Bie, 2022). Existing research has shown that individuals who possess self-determination tend to have more favorable results in the period after their formal education (Roper, 2023; Kamperman, 2020). The study conducted by Wehmeyer and Schwartz (1998) revealed a significant correlation between post-school career performance and the development of self-determination skills. Additionally, Wehmeyer and Schwartz emphasized the significance of an individual's capacity to self-advocate as a crucial component in the process of achieving self-determination (Murawski & Hughes, 2021; Balint-Langel & Riden, 2022). The study conducted by Wehmeyer and Palmer (2003) was further expanded upon via a comprehensive survey that examined the results of students after their completion of formal education (Cantley & Martin, 2020; Krishnan, 2021).

The research conducted by Holzberg and Ferraro (2021) and Robert and Parker (2020) examined the post-school outcomes of students in their last year of high school, specifically comparing those with high and low self-determination scores. Research has shown that

individuals who possess elevated levels of self-determination, including the sub-skill of self-advocacy, exhibit greater financial independence across several variables (Balint-Langel & Riden, 2022; Koca et al., 2023). Nevertheless, existing data suggests that 39 students need intentional guidance in developing self-advocacy and self-determination skills (Krishnan, 2021; Roper, 2023). Izzo and Lamb (2002) observed that a considerable number of students with disabilities lack sufficient self-awareness of their strengths and requirements when transitioning from the supportive school environment. Consequently, they have difficulties in effectively articulating the adjustments they need in contexts outside the educational setting (Cantley & Martin, 2020; Robert & Parker, 2020).

According to the findings of Pocock et al. (2002), the establishment of a school culture that fosters the growth of students' self-advocacy skills and offers ample opportunities for skill application in alignment with classroom instruction and modeling was identified as the pivotal factor contributing to the program's effectiveness (Kamperman, 2020; Woolf & de Bie, 2022). In a similar vein, Zickel and Arnold (2001) expounded upon the extent to which students exhibited ownership over their educational planning process after their engagement in a curriculum focused on self-advocacy skills, specifically pertaining to the formulation of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) (Krishnan, 2021; Murawski & Hughes, 2021).

The significance of self-advocacy skills is evident across several grade levels, as shown by research (Cantley & Martin, 2020; Kamperman, 2020). While Lock and Layton (2001) highlighted the necessity of self-advocacy skills in post-secondary education, other scholars in the field of education have underscored the significance of cultivating these skills at earlier stages to promote smoother and more meaningful transitions (Foley-Nicpon & Cederberg, 2021; Roper, 2023). The importance of self-awareness in students' ability to effectively express their

needs at a younger age has been underscored (Arnold & Czamanske, 1991; Barrie & McDonald, 2002; Zickel & Arnold, 2001). This notion is further supported by Krishnan (2021) and Walker et al. (2021)

While there is some literature support for the potential benefits of instructing self-advocacy skills, Algozzine et al. (2001) conducted a review of intervention studies in the field of self-determination and discovered that interventions primarily targeted students within high school or post-secondary environments. Moreover, the teaching of self-advocacy skills to students with other disabilities has not been consistently addressed (Roper, 2023; Woolf & de Bie, 2022). Merchant and Gajar (1997) conducted a review of the literature on self-advocacy and identified two key findings. Firstly, they observed a deficiency in self-advocacy among persons with disabilities. Secondly, they found a scarcity of data regarding the education of self-advocacy skills. These findings have been corroborated by other studies (Balint-Langel & Riden, 2022; Kamperman, 2020).

Since the publication of Algozzine et al. (2001), there has been a sustained presence of research on treatments aimed at promoting self-advocacy in the professional literature (Holzberg & Ferraro, 2021; Krishnan, 2021). Additional investigation into tactics aimed at fostering self-advocacy is necessary. However, prior to doing such research, it would be beneficial for educators and other professionals to establish a conceptual framework of self-advocacy. This framework would aid in the development of future interventions (Koca et al., 2023; Woolf & de Bie, 2022).

Researchers have shown the significance of self-advocacy in the lives of persons with disabilities. However, it is necessary to implement systematic education and intervention to effectively equip students with these essential skills (Murawski & Hughes, 2021; Walker et al.,

2021). The importance of educators prioritizing self-advocacy as a fundamental skill in the ever-changing environment of inclusive education cannot be emphasized enough (Cantley & Martin, 2020; Robert & Parker, 2020).

Self-Advocacy Among Students with Disabilities

The idea of self-advocacy can be understood from perspectives and interpretations. When it comes to communication, it is about being able to express one's needs, seek help and support, stand up for oneself, and find a suitable support network. Developing self-advocacy skills is crucial for children, as it helps them navigate transitions between levels (such as middle school to high school or high school to post-secondary education) and prepares them for work and independent life. For students with disabilities, self-advocacy is especially important, as it allows them to understand their talents, recognize their strengths and limitations, express their preferences, and communicate their requirements (Cantley & Martin 2020). By acquiring these skills, students gain a sense of confidence in their ability to communicate effectively, make decisions, and become more independent as they enter adulthood. According to research by McConnell et al. (2013) cited in Cantley and Martins (2020) study, self-advocacy is considered one of the ten academic skills that can predict successful transitions for students with disabilities. Many students may feel afraid or hesitant to express their thoughts and ask questions. In her book "Rising Strong, " Brown (2017) explained that our instinct when faced with emotions is often to withdraw or detach from them (p. 49). This fear of self-advocacy can make it difficult for students to effectively address and meet their needs.

The acquisition of self-advocacy skills is of paramount importance for students across all academic levels. It assumes a crucial function in several domains of life including the household, educational institutions, the community, and professional settings. Self-advocacy skills have a

particular significance for students in special education who face more obstacles compared to their non-disabled counterparts. The process begins with enhancing the channels of communication between students and instructors, so empowering students to express their requirements. This facilitates the acquisition of suitable adjustments and accommodations, enabling students to demonstrate their genuine capabilities and maximize their academic potential. The ability of students to engage in self-advocacy has been shown to positively correlate with their academic performance in school and their subsequent achievements in adulthood.

The significance of instructing the self-determination ability of self-advocacy is seen in several scholarly works. Pocock et al. (2002) provided effective strategies for promoting self-advocacy among students with disabilities. According to Pocock et al. (2002), before being able to express their strengths, problems, learning styles, and interests to others, students need to first comprehend these aspects of themselves. Students are taught self-advocacy skills, such as communication and bargaining as they develop a greater awareness of themselves as individuals. The prior abilities that students have acquired, such as self-awareness and self-advocacy, are built upon and expanded upon by the added skills of talking to large audiences and mentoring younger students. Other students with disabilities should serve as mentors for their peers. By doing so, upperclassmen with more developed self-advocacy skills can help the younger students develop their self-advocacy skills. Participants in Linking Employment, Academics and Disability Services (LEAD) had already visited college campuses and presented their proposals to representatives there. They also gave presentations to municipal boards. The coleaders of the group are responsible for monitoring these exchanges and providing comments on them. Additionally, the coleaders looked for one-of-a-kind teaching opportunities for the group.

Students with disabilities should also be provided with opportunities to improve their self-advocacy skills in activities outside of the classroom. For example, high school students with disabilities can be provided with opportunities to visit college campuses and present proposals to disability advocates. Additionally, school administrators and those within the district should support students' self-advocacy. The principal may provide the students with chances to share with the teaching staff projects that demonstrate their ability to advocate for themselves. Administrators from schools and districts can provide additional support by attending the presentations.

There is an emphasis, not only on assisting students in attaining their academic objectives, but also on supporting them in areas outside the educational realm, such as employment, community integration, and overall well-being. The high school graduation rate is seeing an upward trend; yet individuals with disabilities continue to exhibit an approximately threefold higher likelihood of discontinuing their education compared to their non-disabled counterparts (Snyder et al., 2019), as referenced in Robert and Parker (2020). The available research indicates that students who possess self-advocacy abilities are more likely to have greater success after completing their formal education. According to Balint-Langel et al. (2020), individuals with disabilities who lack self-determination skills may depend on adults to make significant choices pertaining to their education and future objectives. By cultivating self-advocacy skills, educators, who provide this kind of teaching, will empower students with the capacity to actively engage in their educational pursuits and develop enduring objectives for post-school endeavors.

In a study conducted by Balint-Langel et al. (2020), the researchers implemented the Self-Advocacy Strategy (SAS) to middle school students using self-paced computer-assisted

education provided via compact disk, as opposed to traditional live instructor instruction. The findings indicated a notable disparity in student engagement, although no substantial impact was seen on their degrees of self-determination. Previous research conducted in both special education classrooms and general education classes has examined the impact of interventions on self-determination and self-advocacy skills. These studies used a validated measure to assess the positive improvements in these areas (Burke & Goldman 2018). This underscores the need to impart self-advocacy skills via explicit instructional methods.

There exists a diverse array of programs and curricula presently accessible and emerging to facilitate students in acquiring the skill of self-advocacy. The active involvement of students in the planning of their transition from high school to post-secondary education and subsequent career and independent life is of utmost significance. While IDEA requires the participation of students in the development of their Individualized Education Program (IEP) and transition planning, a significant number of students lack the necessary knowledge, skills, and self-assurance to effectively engage in these processes. Through the enhancement of their self-advocacy abilities, students may actively engage in the planning process by acquiring the necessary information to articulate their individual needs and preferences.

According to Lingo et al. (2018), federal legislation and regulations pertaining to special education mandate that students in the transition-age group must participate in transition education programs to adequately equip themselves for the post-secondary phase of their lives. The acquisition of self-advocacy skills, as well as other abilities related to self-determination, is deemed essential for all students. However, the responsibility for providing instruction in this area has typically been assigned to special education instructors, school counselors, or health teachers. Due to the rising prevalence of mental health issues, counselors and health educators

are faced with the challenge of incorporating new treatments and curricula into their existing responsibilities, making it more challenging to provide dedicated time for the explicit instruction of self-advocacy skills. According to Lingo et al. (2018), there has been a rise in the need for special educators who can teach academic skills. The obligations associated with the role of special educators are inherently challenging. Given the responsibilities encompassing tasks, such as administering diverse assessments, composing IEP and evaluations, supervising and advocating for students during meetings, offering suitable accommodations and modifications, and maintaining communication and collaboration with both general education teachers and parents, the allocation of time for academic instruction becomes challenging, let alone the teaching of transition skills to students.

Self-Determination in Transition Planning

When reviewing the existing literature, several themes emerged regarding the transition of students with disabilities from middle school to high school. Students' academic performance, as well as their sense of well-being and mental health (van Rens et al., 2019), during the transition to high school, motivation, and academic performance begins to decline. To stop any negative consequences caused by the transition, it is very important to boost students' intrinsic motivation, self-regulation, and well-being. The self-determination theory developed by Ryan and Deci (1985) focused on two types of motivation, extrinsic and intrinsic. Intrinsic motivation is used to improve students' academic and social well-being. The three main psychological needs that are warranted for increasing motivation are competence in the students dealing with a new environment, relatedness in the students' sense of belonging, and autonomy in the students' sense of choice in continuing in their choice of actions (Lee & Kim, 2022).

Competence in Transition Development

Competence relates to the student's desire to feel effective and capable in their endeavors, to learn and improve, and to experience a sense of accomplishment. The first year of high school is a critical period for students moving up from middle school to high school. Students tend to experience significant changes in the educational system and classroom climate. The transition can have an impact on a student's success in high school (Letrello & Miles, 2003).

High school environments are more competitive than middle school, characterized by less individualized instruction, fewer opportunities for student choice and enhanced decision-making, and more focus on comparative evaluation. During this transitional period, most students entering high school tend to make goal-directed self-regulatory efforts to handle transitional challenges and adjust to the significant changes wrought by the school and classroom environments (Lee & Kim 2022). The transition team collaborates with the student to set specific, achievable goals for the transition to high school. A teacher's job is to break down the goals into smaller steps to make the goals more manageable. The Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction is an instructional framework that teaches students to set goals and decide to achieve those goals and monitor their progress toward goals (Rowe et al., 2021). Celebrating the students' accomplishments helps them to feel successful along the way and reinforces their sense of competence.

For students with disabilities, this new change in environment can cause extreme anxiety. The results from a study conducted by (Letrello & Miles, 2003) showed that eighth graders were fearful of high school, especially of the size of the school, and of not being able to find their class. Creating an inclusive learning environment where students with disabilities can actively participate and engage in their education can help ease these fears. Teachers creating

differentiated instruction and accommodation based on the student's individual needs allow the student to succeed alongside their peers. The block schedule was one of the most difficult adjustments. One way to increase students' competence is to set up high school visits, pair students with upperclassmen, help with registration, and peer panels. Students with disabilities indicated that they relied more heavily on help from peers and teachers to be successful in the ninth-grade year.

Relatedness in Transition Development

Students stated that one fear that they had is not having enough time for friends and social interactions because of the demands of homework (Letrello & Miles, 2003). Social interactions prove to be an important factor when students transition to high school. Facilitating opportunities for students to connect with their peers, both with and without disabilities, can enhance their sense of relatedness and belonging. Peer-mediated approaches have the potential to benefit both students with disabilities and peers without disabilities who provide support (Schaefer et al., 2018). Schools should consider mentorship programs, peer support groups, or inclusive extracurricular activities to foster positive social interactions. The Take Charge curriculum is a published curriculum that includes student coaching, mentorship, peer support, and parent support (Rowe et al., 2021). The goal is to encourage students to develop self-advocacy skills, such as articulating their needs, requesting accommodations, and seeking support when necessary. It is essential to ensure a seamless transition regarding the support services and accommodation the student receives. Individualized Education Program (IEP) should be reviewed and updated to address the student's evolving needs in the high school setting. Middle schools and high schools should collaborate closely to share information about the student's strengths, challenges, and support strategies. This collaboration helps ensure a

smooth transition and allows high school staff to be prepared to meet the students' needs from the start. These skills empower students with disabilities to take an active role in their education and build a sense of relatedness with their teachers and peers.

Autonomy in Transition Development

Promoting autonomy for middle school students with disabilities during the transition planning process is crucial for fostering student's self-confidence, independence, and active participation in one's educational journey. The transition team should encourage students to reflect on strengths, interests, and areas where support is needed. Van Rens et al., (2019) contends that the students' input can make a valuable contribution to understand, from their perspective, how they experience their daily lives, including their school lives and what is important for them.

The transition team can help students identify short-term and long-term goals for their high school experience. This process allows students to take ownership of the transition plan and set objectives. Van Rens et al. (2019) educator can contribute to a successful transition especially if they know what students find important, and the students' needs can be achieved by teaching students how to advocate by expressing needs, requesting accommodations, and seeking support, give ownership of the transition plans. Providing students opportunities to practice self-advocacy in simulated or real-life situations, prepares them for leaving high school and entering the workforce.

Empowering students to play an active role in shaping one's educational experience and, according to van Rens et al., (2019), teachers can play an important role in guiding and supporting students through the transition. Involving students in the development of their transition plan means including them in meetings, discussions, and decision-making processes

related to their educational goals, services, and accommodations. The parents and students are required to be team members in IEP meetings where transition services and postsecondary goals are discussed (Luft & Reynolds, 2023). The information provided is valued and considered when creating the plan.

Every child has the right to be heard in matters affecting his or her life, including well-being and experience in the educational setting (van Ren et al., 2019). The transition team supports students in developing skills that promote independence, such as time management, organization, and self-regulation. Students who can successfully move to secondary school has a more independent person because of the knowledge on developing organizational skills and self-regulate learning and being motivated to learn by being supported by teachers and parents (Uka & Uka, 2020). Teaching students strategies, such as problem-solving and decision-making, will serve students well during the transition and beyond. Through the promotion of autonomy, middle school students with disabilities can become active participants in transition planning, which can lead to a smoother and more successful transition to high school.

Academic Success in Transition Development

Ensuring academic success for students with disabilities during the transition planning process requires careful consideration of the individual needs and the provision of appropriate support. Affective teacher-student relationship seems to be especially relevant to achieving a successful transition for students (van Rens et al., 2019). The student's transition plans should include specific academic goals and strategies to address unique learning needs in the high school setting. Teachers can teach students with learning disabilities (LD) to use self-talk statements to help them cope directly with academic obstacles (Mazher, 2018). Facilitating collaboration between middle school and high school educators to share information about the

student's academic progress, instructional strategies, and effective accommodations that can make for a successful transition.

Transition teams should be formed at the middle school and the high school to plan activities for the transition to ninth grade (Letrello & Miles, 2003). This collaboration ensures a smooth academic transition and allows high school teachers to be prepared to meet the student's needs from the start. Assess the student's academic abilities and modify the curriculum as needed to make it accessible and inclusive. The use of differentiated instruction techniques, such as providing alternative formats, breaking down complex tasks, or offering additional support materials. Mastery-oriented teachers offer a multitude of choices in their daily classroom life. These teachers create flexible groupings to help students interact with each other in different ways: e.g., in a science lesson, students can work alone, in pairs, in groups of three, or with those they would like to work (Mazher, 2018).

Developing personalized learning plans that consider the student's learning style, preferences, and strengths, is the first step in setting up students for success. Individualized instruction provides opportunities for independent learning, hands-on activities, or collaborative projects that cater to specific needs. Schools should offer transition support classes or programs specifically designed to help students with disabilities acclimatize to the demands of the high school academic world. Transition support practices are related to improved academic and socio-emotional outcomes (Fontil et al., 2019). The classes can provide targeted instruction, study skills training, and organizational support to enhance academic success.

Social-Emotional Well-Being in Transition Development

The promotion of social and emotional well-being is crucial for middle school students with disabilities during the transition planning process to ensure a positive and successful move

to high school. To make sure students have a smooth adjustment to high school, inclusive classrooms are a great help. With access to an inclusive environment, teachers can create more opportunities for peer interaction and practice of important social and communication skills by prioritizing heterogeneous instructional groupings and planning more interactive activities (Schaefer et al., 2018). Inclusion will provide opportunities for students to develop and enhance their social skills, offer social skills training, peer mentoring, or social-emotional learning programs to help them navigate social interactions, build friendships, and develop self-awareness and self-regulation skills.

Open lines of communication between students, parents/guardians, and school staff, can have a positive impact on successful transition plans when they work with the organization of the mentorship assisting the child in developing transition programs (Pitt et al., 2021). The transition team should encourage students to express their feelings, concerns, and needs regarding the transition. The transition teams need to listen to students' perspectives about support and guide them accordingly. "Since The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which gives young people the right to express their views and to be taken seriously, the involvement of students in decision making has become an area of growing interest" (van Rens et al., 2018 p. 1483). The school should have access to school counselors, psychologists, or social workers who can provide individual or group counseling sessions. As professionals trained in both mental health and educational systems, school counselors are uniquely situated to meet the growing mental health concerns of school-aged youth (Lambie et al., 2019). These professionals can help students manage stress, cope with anxiety, build resilience, and develop strategies to navigate social and emotional challenges during the transition. Students need ongoing support, interventions, and the educational staff should adjust as needed based on the student's individual

needs and progress.

Parental Involvement in Transition Planning

Parental involvement plays a role in the process of planning transitions for students with disabilities. Various legislation, such as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004), mandates parent's participation to ensure outcomes after leaving school (Landmark et al., 2013). Collaborating with parents is essential to consider the needs, strengths, and preferences of each student, creating a transition plan that leads to success. Parents possess information about their child, and their influence on career choices is significant. Their insight into their child's abilities, challenges, and goals is invaluable in developing a transition plan. Parents can share relevant information about their child's strengths, interests, and areas where they may need additional support. This information helps the transition team develop appropriate strategies and accommodations to support the student's success in the new high school environment. Effective communication and collaboration between parents and school staff are vital in crafting a tailored transition plan that best serves the student's needs. Research shows that when families and young individuals actively participate in the transition planning process, the students with disabilities are more likely to lead a constructive adult life (Lo & Bui, 2020).

Teachers and parents can work together to help students develop self-advocacy skills. Parents and special education teachers are two significant actors highly associated with success in the IEP transition planning for students with intellectual disability, and both parties play significant and complementary roles that cannot be ignored (Almalki et al., 2021). The skills can help students play an active role in their education and transition planning. By working together, parents and educators can support the successful transition of students with disabilities into high

school, promoting their social and emotional growth. Parents engaged in IEP transition planning exhibit high rates of school attendance and graduation, including other advantages of parental involvement, such as effectively helping students achieve successful postsecondary education outcomes, thus leading to active student involvement during transition planning and improvement in self-determination. Parental involvement contributes to a positive relationship between parental engagement and the academic achievement of students (Almalki et al., 2021).

Teacher Roles in Transition Development

Teachers play a critical role in the transition planning process for middle school students with disabilities. The teacher's job is to advocate for students with disabilities in Individual Education Plans (IEP) meetings and conduct an instructional assessment to determine accommodations and modifications necessary to facilitate students in achieving their IEP objectives and goals (Li et al., 2009). The teachers have firsthand knowledge of the student's academic abilities, learning styles, and support needs. Teachers can incorporate transition-related instruction into their curriculum to help students develop essential skills for success in high school. The Self-Determined Learning Model (SDLMI) is an instructional model that enables teachers to provide opportunities for students to direct their learning by setting goals, creating action plans, and revising their goals or action plans (Matusevich et al., 2023). The curriculum includes teaching self-advocacy skills, organization and study strategies, and time management techniques. By explicitly addressing these skills, teachers help to empower students to navigate high school more effectively. Teachers can provide valuable input through ongoing assessment and evaluation of the student's academic performance, strengths, challenges, and progress.

Yeager and Deardorff (2022) indicated that students and IEP team members can complete various assessments to further explore and substantiate strengths. This information

helps inform the transition team and ensures appropriate support and accommodation are in place. Teachers are key contributors to developing and reviewing the student's IEP. Special education teachers are mainly responsible for IEP meetings and direct service delivery. Special education teachers can integrate responsibilities for planning and delivering transition services and activities (Li et al., 2009).

Teachers can provide input on academic goals, accommodations, and necessary support. The teachers' expertise in instructional strategies and curriculum adaptation ensures that the IEP addresses the student's academic needs during the transition. Teachers should collaborate with high school educators to share information about student's academic abilities, learning styles, and support strategies. Francis et al. (2018) wrote that collaboration between all relevant stakeholders, including parents, students, educators, and community-based service providers (e.g., vocational rehabilitation, centers for independent living), is a key component of successful transition planning and implementation of services. This collaboration ensures a smooth transition by providing insights into student's needs and enabling high school teachers to plan and prepare accordingly. Teachers contribute significantly to the successful transition of middle school students with disabilities to high school. Their expertise, support, and collaboration with the transition team and families help create a seamless and supportive educational experience for these students.

Student Roles in Transition Development

Student involvement and empowerment in the development of transition planning are essential for fostering a sense of ownership, self-advocacy, and successful outcomes. Student-led IEPs are student-centered and student-directed, empowering youth to actively contribute to the planning and implementation of their IEPs (Biegun et al., 2020). Students can engage in self-

reflection to identify strengths, interests, and areas where support is needed the most. Yeager and Deardorff (2022) posited that depending on preferences, students can reflect by writing in a transition notebook or dictating responses with an audio recording device, saving files in a transition folder online. Students need to be encouraged to set academic and personal goals for the transition to high school.

The goals and action plans can help students take ownership of one's educational journey and have a clear vision for the future. Students could be encouraged to communicate with teachers, support staff, and the transition team to ensure the needs of the students are addressed and individual needs are met. Many students have problems with communicating and might need other means of communication. Biegun et al. (2020) stated the use of assistive technology (AT) can be beneficial in helping students address these barriers. Assistive technology allows students to actively participate by expressing their strengths, interests, preferences, and needs. Self-advocacy empowers students to actively participate in the decision-making processes.

The student's input is invaluable in developing a plan that aligns with aspirations and needs. The benefits of having the student involved in IEP planning and development extend well beyond compliance, as it has been linked to higher levels of goal attainment and higher graduation rates (Cavendish et al., 2020). Students can identify areas where goals may require additional support during the transition. The conversation can involve discussing academic challenges, social concerns, or specific accommodations. In the transition process, students can collaborate with teachers and support staff. The student can share aspirations, concerns, and ideas for support. Collaboration can ensure educators have a better understanding of the student's needs and preferences, enabling educators to provide appropriate guidance and assistance. Involving students in the development of the transition plan empowers ownership in education

and promotes overall success. Students who are involved with planning their IEP have a better understanding of their disability and increased self-determination skills (Biegun et al., 2020).

Adolescents in middle school and high school undergo a critical developmental phase. If individuals are educated about the advantages of embracing vulnerability throughout their formative years, they may internalize this mindset and use it consistently throughout their lifespan. This positive outlook fosters trust and support from others. Given the considerable demands placed on several domains, allocating time for the explicit education of self-advocacy skills is a challenge. Nevertheless, even a small amount of direction may have a significant impact. By doing a comprehensive analysis of existing research, literature, and curriculum, it becomes feasible to include fundamental but crucial instructional components.

The existing body of literature indicates a growing need for special educators to prioritize the instruction of academic skills. In addition to the responsibilities of supervising Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), facilitating transition planning, evaluating progress, holding meetings, and implementing accommodations and adjustments, there is little opportunity to dedicate time toward instructing self-advocacy skills. As a result, a considerable number of students are encountering difficulties in exercising autonomy in decision-making, problem-solving, goal setting, and acknowledging the repercussions of their choices. IDEA (2004) places a significant focus on the acquisition of transition services aimed at facilitating the successful transition into adulthood. Individuals with impairments in their youth have a comparatively reduced propensity to pursue post-secondary education in comparison to their non-disabled counterparts. Furthermore, they are less inclined to successfully get a bachelor's degree and experience a significantly lower rate of employment within the age range of 16 to 64.

Summary

The transition from middle school to high school has always been a major challenge for students with disabilities. Transitions are known to affect students' academic performance and general sense of well-being as the student leaves one educational environment to move to another educational environment. Research has emphasized the importance of self-determination theory and the significance of meeting students' psychological needs when it comes to autonomy, relatedness, and competence during the transition from middle school to high school. Self-determination theory recognizes the significance of autonomy in motivating individuals to take ownership of their actions and decisions. In transition planning, it is important to involve the student in the process. The students can express preferences, goals, and concerns during the meeting. The theory emphasizes the development of competence and mastery in individuals. For students transitioning to high school, it is essential to identify and build upon the strengths and skills needed for success. Relatedness refers to the need for social connection and positive relationships. During the transition to high school, students may experience anxiety or concerns about fitting in or forming new relationships. Supporting the social-emotional well-being of the student and facilitating opportunities for peer interaction and support is crucial. The main focus of the transition plan is to make sure the students have a smooth transition from one school building to the next without any main problems, such as getting lost in a new environment, being in classes where the students have to interact with other students of varying ages, and being surrounded by people they have never met.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The transition from middle school to high school poses several problems for many students. However, existing research has shown that students with disabilities have more difficulties during this period of transition compared to their peers without disabilities (Pitt et al., 2021). The challenges encompassed in this context involve the process of adjusting to unfamiliar physical environments, facing increased academic expectations, dealing with longer school hours, undergoing modifications to established routines, navigating social networks and support systems, and interacting with a larger group of school staff, including multiple teachers' sufficient assistance provided during the period of transition has the potential to result in adverse encounters for students who have disabilities.

The implementation of individual education plans (IEPs) provides a mechanism to successfully handle challenges that emerge as students with disabilities make the transition from middle school to high school. The accomplishment of this objective is realized by the execution of a synchronized and cooperative approach, including the setting of objectives, allocation of resources, and evaluation. Considerable study research has been undertaken pertaining to the transition process experienced by students with disabilities when they go from high school to post-high school education. Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that the shift from middle school to high school entails specific challenges, including those influenced by the intricacies of puberty and the transition to adolescence (Chun et al., 2023; Cumming et al., 2022; Jindal-Snape et al., 2020). Furthermore, the transition process involves the participation of several stakeholders who possess specific roles and duties. This is in contrast to the transition into post-academic life, as highlighted by Marshall et al. (2019) and Bruck et al. (2022), where the

involvement of parents is absent. Moreover, this transitional phase offers prospects for the sustained provision of assistance, the adoption of methods at the systemic level, and the continuous monitoring and evaluation that are linked to the transfer from middle school to high school (Bruck et al., 2022; Chun et al., 2023; Cumming et al., 2022; Jindal-Snape et al., 2020).

Strnadová et al. (2023) suggested that the implementation of a well-managed transition from middle school to high school may provide favorable outcomes for students, such as the provision of continuous and comprehensive assistance, which in turn facilitates their sustained enrollment and active engagement in the developmental processes of high school. Therefore, it is crucial to prioritize research endeavors that are focused on addressing the distinct needs of students with disabilities throughout their transition from middle school to high school. The implementation of a complete transition plan for middle school students with disabilities may effectively facilitate the creation of a supportive educational setting by high school teachers. This environment would allow this specific group of students to surmount obstacles, attain their objectives, and adeptly traverse the many difficulties encountered throughout their high school years.

The purpose of this single case study was to investigate high school special education teachers' perceptions of the essential supports required to promote self-advocacy skills in students with disabilities. Chapter Three included the research questions, setting, and participants as well as the procedures used in the study. Data collection, analysis, and synthesis are described in the chapter along with trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

Research Design

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore and understand the experiences of students with disabilities in transition planning when self-determination is incorporated. The

study defined the importance of early transition planning in middle school on the student's academic performance and their social and emotional adjustment. The focus discussed the unique challenges and needs of the students during the transition process, and it helped to identify effective strategies and supports in creating a success plan. One strategy was to check and connect to increase student engagement and IEP participants. Check and Connect is an intervention that uses data to track students at risk of dropping out of school and pairing them with a mentor who can help the at-risk student progress toward graduation (Rowe et al., 2021). The chapter included the qualitative case study's research design to better understand the influence of early transition planning on high school success. I explored whether early transition planning in middle school could enhance students' long-term academic and social success in high school. The chapter includes the research questions, setting, and participants, as well as the procedures used in the study. Data collection, analysis, and synthesis are described in the chapter, along with trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

Research Questions

The primary study inquiry is in accordance with the objective statement, focusing on the perspectives of secondary school educators about the fundamental resources necessary for cultivating self-advocacy abilities in students with disabilities. Based on the self-determination theory proposed by Deci and Ryan (1985), the sub-questions were provided to examine the components of competence, relatedness, and autonomy. The objective was to gain insight into how these aspects are included in transition planning and how they impact the involvement of students in the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process. The third sub-inquiry explored the motivational elements of the self-determination theory, differentiating between intrinsic and

extrinsic motives and their significance in the context of enhancing self-advocacy abilities throughout the transitional period.

Central Research Questions

How can the development and enhancement of self-determination skills be tailored to meet the unique needs and strengths of individuals with disabilities during the transition process?

Sub-Question One

What are the best practices and strategies for integrating self-determination skills in developing a transition plan?

Sub-Questions Two

What are the specific self-determination skills students need to successfully navigate during the transition process?

Sub-Questions Three

Does the application of self-determination theory principles in transition planning promote motivation and engagement?

Setting and Participants

Site

Blue Creek High School is a pseudonym and BCHS is the acronym that will be used throughout this study to reference the school in which the research will be conducted. BCHS is one of the two high schools within Lumbar, GA. The city falls within Laney County, Georgia. The site was selected because of the diverse population of the county, as well as the school. BCHS has a student population of 1,081, with 275 who have IEPs. Of the students, 517 are male and 564 are female. There are 309 ninth graders, 260 10th graders, 258 11th graders, and 254 12th graders who attend the school. When reporting racial demographics of the student body by

race, the highest number of students who attend BCHS, 541 are Black, 302 are White, 137 are Hispanic, 88 of the students are two or more races, 8 Asian, 4 native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders, and one American Indian/Alaska native students. Also, 268 qualify for free or reduced-price meals. BCHS is considered a Title 1 school and receives federal funding to improve its students' performance in language arts and math. For this research, the teachers of the students will be part of the study. The community in which the county's numerous schools are located consists of a large military base, which provides a tax base for the overall schools in the county. Based on the number of students who have parents in the military, the county Board of Education receives compensation from the federal government due to the loss of tax base as it relates to the military not being taxable. The soldiers also spend money in the city and pay taxes for new houses being built. With this military installation being one of the largest on the East Coast, the amount of hardship land use money and the taxes are both vital and extremely beneficial to the community.

As part of the administrative structure at BCHS, there is one principal in the school and four assistant principals, each of whom has a different leadership function within the school. A curriculum coordinator position also serves as an important aspect of the leadership team. The special education staff rotates from classroom to classroom to meet the needs of the special education students as a part of the educational process for students with a transition plan. The population of the educational staff, the administrative staff, other disability specialists, and the special education staff work together to provide the best services for the students.

Participants

For this research study, I used convenience sampling to recruit participants. Convenience sampling is a type of probability sampling where units are selected based on how easily accessible they are to the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Before reaching out to

participants, I will follow guidelines by obtaining clearance from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Liberty University. Once I have obtained approval from the IRB, my next step was to seek permission from the principal at BCHS where the study will be conducted. Upon receiving authorization from Liberty University to conduct the study, I provided a copy of the approved proposal to the principal of BCHS and request permission to conduct the study on the BCHS premises. After gaining approval from the principal, my next step was to schedule a meeting with him to thoroughly explain the complexities of my study and address any questions. Following this meeting, I requested identification details, email addresses, and phone numbers of special education teachers at BCHS. Afterward, an invitation letter was sent to every education teacher at BCHS asking for their involvement in the study.

Once the participants gave their consent, the researcher reached out to each of them through email. I sent a permission form electronically to all participants to arrange interviews. I communicated with all of the eligible teachers. The interviews were conducted via Google Meet video conferencing. Before starting the interviews, it was essential for every participant to provide their signature and deliver a written consent form to the researcher either by email or in person. Each interview was expected to last between 45 minutes and one hour. After each interview, I invited the participants to take part in a focus group session by sending an email invitation for convenience. Once all individual semi-structured interviews were completed, each participant received another email inviting them to participate in the focus group session. Those who expressed interest in volunteering for the study could reach out to the researcher by phone or email. The focus group meeting was scheduled for a day and time that was convenient for everyone within the school library premises. Transcripts generated from the recordings of the

interviews and the focus group were used to gather data. To ensure the confidentiality of participants, numerical identities were added to their names.

Researcher Positionality

The intent behind the study of transition planning is to provide data on the growth and development of students in the 8th grade to high school. The information provided a basis to enhance the development of the child and to make for a successful learning experience for students. The focus was on what strategies to use in helping students develop self-determination skills, as well as self-advocacy skills. The information gathered in the study showed middle school teachers the interventions and skills needed to be taught in the classroom to help students develop the motivation to achieve goals for success.

Interpretive Framework

The social constructive framework was used in the study. In social constructivism, individuals seek an understanding of the world in which they live and work (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Social constructivism helped middle school special education teachers foster self-advocacy skills in students with disabilities who are making the transition from middle to high school. The focus was on how parents, teachers, and other staff members work together to create a well-developed transition plan in a student's IEP. Social constructivism allowed me to study strategies and interventions teachers can use to help students develop the skills and knowledge necessary to successfully transition to high school and beyond. A case study approach helped me build a better understanding of *what* to focus on when creating a transition plan including the student's strengths, interests, and needs. The case study is aimed at helping the students and the team develop the skills and knowledge necessary for success. Through multiple methods of data collection, I saw the impact the strategies that were used can have on a student's high school

success. I have created transition plans, and I am hoping the study will help me, as well as my colleagues, become better at creating plans to better prepare our students for high school.

Philosophical Assumptions

Self-determination theory postulated that there are basic psychological needs that universally must be satisfied for people to experience ongoing growth, integrity, and wellness, namely needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2022). Transition planning is an essential part of special education programs for students with disabilities. The process enables students to prepare for life post-high school, covering aspects such as postsecondary education, vocational training, integrated employment, continuing and adult education, and independent living. To deliver the most effective transition planning, it is necessary to consider the philosophical assumptions of ontology, epistemology, and axiology (Mazzotti et al., 2021).

Ontological Assumptions

Ontological assumptions in the context of transition planning are concerned with understanding the reality of a student's experiences and capabilities. These experiences and capabilities involve recognizing that each student's experience with a disability is unique and impacts their learning and post-school opportunities in different ways. An effective transition planning process must respect these diverse realities and shape its approach accordingly (Kohler & Field, 2003).

Epistemological Assumptions

Epistemological assumptions determine how knowledge about the student's abilities, needs, and goals are acquired and interpreted. Epistemological assumptions emphasize a collaborative approach between the students, families, educators, and other stakeholders. The

collaborative approach, referred to as *Person-Centered Planning* is built on the assumption that the best way to understand a student's needs is through them and their significant others' perspectives, acknowledging that they are the experts of their own experiences (Clark & Unruh, 2020).

Axiological Assumptions

Axiological assumptions refer to the values and ethics that underpin the transition planning process. Respect for the autonomy, aspirations, and rights of students with disabilities forms the basis of this process. It is also essential to consider inclusivity and social justice, ensuring that students have equitable access to opportunities post-high school. In the transition planning process, the axiological assumption emphasizes the importance of self-determination, promoting the student's ability to make informed decisions about their future (Test et al., 2019).

Researcher's Role

As a special education teacher, helping my students is important to me because I want my students to be successful in the educational setting. By the time students reach eighth grade, it is my responsibility, along with parents, to start forming a plan to help prepare the students for high school. Transition plans are developed to help with getting the student ready for high school. A plan is developed based on the student's strengths, needs, and interests, which can help create a successful plan. The study can help other teachers and myself, who work with students with disabilities, to create a plan for students to succeed academically and socially in high school.

In qualitative research, the researcher serves as a human instrument. It was my job to collect and analyze the data. The data came from interviews with teachers, focus groups and questionnaires. The participants in my study consisted of teachers who work with the students

and parents. To prevent bias and assumptions, I used several data collection methods that included individual interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires (Creswell & Poth, 2018). New forms of qualitative data continually emerge in the literature, but all forms might be grouped into four basic types of information: interviews (ranging from one-on-one, in-person interactions to group, web-based interaction), and observation (ranging from nonparticipant to participant).

Procedures

Before conducting the study, I received permission from Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Once the IRB approval was obtained, I then approached the principal at BCHS to request permission to conduct the study. Upon receiving permission from the principal, a copy of the approved proposal was provided along with a request to conduct the study on-site. I met with the principal to discuss and clarify all aspects of the study and addressed any queries or concerns. Following this, I asked for the contact information (names, emails, and phone numbers) of all education teachers at BCHS school. Each teacher received an invitation letter soliciting their participation in this study.

Once participants volunteered for this study, I reached out to everyone via email. Permission forms were sent to them electronically. I scheduled interviews with each participant, which was conducted and recorded using Google Meet video conferencing. Before the interviews began, participants had to sign a consent form and submit it either by email or in person. Each interview was expected to last 45 minutes to an hour. Following each interview, participants were invited to join a focus group through an invitation letter. After completing all one-on-one structured interviews, I sent an invitation letter for the focus group session to each participant via email. Volunteers interested in participating in the study could contact me by phone or email. The focus group meeting itself took place on a date and time at the school

library. Audio recordings were used during both focus groups and interviews. For data collection purposes I ensured anonymity by assigning numbers for the teachers' names.

Permissions

Before the beginning of any research, it is imperative to obtain approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Liberty University. The approval granted the permission necessary to conduct my research. I sought site approval after I had been granted approval from the IRB. I needed to have my submission letter along with other required documentation. Once I received site approval, I reached out to the school principal to set up a meeting to discuss my research study plan for collecting data.

Recruitment Plan

After obtaining approval, I began the recruiting process. Special education teachers are the ones who engage with students in designing the transition plan. The teachers were able to give me in-depth insight into the stages involved in the development of transition plans. I used convenience sampling to find and select suitable participants who had expertise in drafting IEPs and transition plans. "It is essential to remember that "convenient sampling saves time, money, and effort, but at the sacrifice of data and credibility" (Creswell & Poth, 2018 p. 159). As part of the informed consent procedure, participants were provided with comprehensive study information. Once all completed papers had been gathered, I prepared a list of participants and an online Google form survey and distributed it to all participants, collecting information about the best days and times for scheduling interviews. The participants got an invitation for the preferred date and time.

Data Collection Plan

Obtaining informed consent is an essential component and primary stage in the process of data collecting. Before conducting interviews with participants for the purpose of data collection, I obtained a signed and dated informed consent form from each participant. An informed consent form encompasses a concise overview of the study, its methods, potential advantages, privacy measures, associated risks, and the participants' prerogative to withdraw from the study at any stage. The process of data gathering encompasses a series of processes that began after the acceptance of the equipment, data collection methods, and analytic procedures by Liberty University's IRB.

The use of a case study database was vital for conducting comprehensive research. A centralized database will be used to store case study data and analytical information (Yin, 2014). The central repository integrates several components, such as raw data from data sources, notes, narratives, tabular information, documents, and outcomes. This site encompasses all facets of data collection and information processing. I used manual coding qualitative data analysis to fulfill this objective.

After the database for the case study became available, I conducted field tests to enhance the efficacy of data collection methodologies. Field testing was undertaken on the questionnaire, interview guide, and focus group guide to ensure that the questions were clear and acceptable for getting thorough and meaningful data to answer the research objectives. I monitored and offered directions for the expert panel's review of the questionnaire.

Individual Interviews Data Collection Approach

Participants were interviewed to provide input about their roles when it comes to working with students and how teachers used their knowledge of the students to develop a

transition plan. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim and stored in an electronic form. Through the coding process, words and phrases were highlighted or grouped together based on themes emerging from coding. The themes were color-coded to separate and organized into primary and secondary themes. This process helped me gain insight into the information I would receive from the participants in the individual interviews.

Individual Interview Questions

1. Please introduce yourself and describe your educational background and career goals taking you through your current position including how long you have been working at BCHS?
2. Describe the overall academic strengths and needs of the students within the school in which you teach. **SQ2**
3. How are these skills or lack of skills relevant to their transition plan? **SQ2**
4. Describe any challenges or barriers the students may face when transitioning to high school. **SQ1**
5. How can this challenge be addressed? **SQ1**
6. How are the students' families involved in the transition planning process? **SQ3**
7. What strategies are being used to promote family engagement and collaboration? **SQ1**
8. Describe any successful practices you use when working with students of Disabilities. **SQ1**
9. How are these barriers addressed? **SQ1**
10. What professional development experiences have you had to help prepare you to write transition plans? **SQ1**

11. What academic standards are already in place to help build students self-determination skill? **SQ2**
12. What opportunities are being provided for students to develop independent living skills, such as managing finances, transportation, and daily living tasks?
SQ2
13. How are the students' progress towards their transition goals being monitored and evaluated? **SQ1**
14. What else would you like to add to our discussion of your experiences developing transition plans? **SQ1**
15. What else would you like to share about working with students?

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

Participants were comprised of high school special education teachers who provide instruction to students with disabilities who attend BCHS. Participants were interviewed to provide input about roles when it comes to working with students with disabilities and how they used the knowledge of the students to develop a transition plan. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim and stored in an electronic form. Through the coding process, words and phrases were highlighted or grouped together based on themes emerging from coding. The themes were color-coded to separate and organize them into primary and secondary themes. This process allowed me to gain insight into the information I received from the participants in the individual interviews.

Focus Groups Data Collection Approach

The key aspect of focus groups is the interactions between participants as a way of collecting qualitative data that would not emerge using other methods (Flynn et al., 2018). The

participants in my study consisted of 13 high school special education teachers who provide instruction to students with disabilities who attend BCHS. I conducted in-person groups, as well as video conferences for those who were more comfortable participating at home. I created a list of open-ended questions which guided the conversations between the participants. The questions allowed the participants to share opinions and experiences, as well as fears and concerns, and I encouraged participation from everyone involved in the groups. The data collection approaches are valuable methods that can provide rich and detailed data that can be used to gain insights into my study.

Focus Group Questions

1. How can teachers and other staff members support students during the transition to high school?
2. What roles do you think parents and families should play when creating a transition plan?
3. What types of resources or programs would be most beneficial for students that can be added to the transition plan?
4. What are the most important skills that should be added to a middle school transition plan?
5. How are the transition plans that are created at the middle school level helpful to students when they move to high school?

The focus groups were created to encourage dialogue amongst participants about creating transition plans at the middle school level. The participants were special education teachers. Questions one and two are open-ended questions to encourage teachers to communicate with each other about the best way to develop a transition plan that will make students successful while in high school, as well as post-secondary. Question four allowed the group to discuss all

programs that will help students be successful in high school and in the future. Question five allowed special education teachers to talk about the skills that students have which can lead to jobs after graduation. Question six opened dialogue between the groups about how to develop the best transition plan at the middle school level to help make the student's high school years a success. The information gathered in the group gave me a different point of view on developing transition plans at the middle school level.

Questionnaires Data Collection Approach

Questions asked during the interview and focus group meeting were used to gather detailed insights from special education teachers, shedding light on the perspectives and challenges related to promoting self-advocacy among middle school students with disabilities during the transition planning process.

Questions for teachers:

1. How do you perceive your role in supporting students' self-determination during the transition planning process?
2. What strategies do you employ to foster student autonomy in decision-making?
3. What challenges do you encounter in promoting self-determination among students with disabilities?
4. How many years of experience do you have working with students with disabilities?
5. Have you received any training or professional development related to fostering self-determination in students with disabilities during the transition planning process? If yes, please provide details.

6. How do you collaborate with parents/guardians and other professionals to support the self-determination among students with disabilities during the transition planning process? Please explain.

Questionnaire Data Analysis Plan

The results from the questionnaire were transcribed and organized using thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes. The themes were color-coded into primary and secondary themes. Questionnaires that were printed will be stored in a locked file cabinet to always ensure security. The online questionnaires was downloaded and saved in a folder on my computer with password protection. The information gathered from the questionnaire was coded by responses from teachers. Then, the information was coded by responses that were the same from both sets of participants.

Data Synthesis

The data for the case study were coded to find themes to gain a better understanding of how the students' teachers collaborate to develop a transition plan grounded in the student's academic strengths and needs, as well as their social-emotional strengths and functional needs. Data was analyzed and synthesized to identify patterns and trends that help to develop the best transition plan for the students. Yin (2018) suggested that the pattern-matching process explains the *hows* and *whys* of a case study. The thematic analysis technique helps to identify and organize the themes that emerged in my case study. I uploaded all my data into the NVivo computer software program. This software helps to organize themes and how they relate to each other. NVivo helps analyze, manage, shape, and analyze qualitative data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The data synthesis process gave insightful information that can be used in developing a transition plan that would prepare students for success in high school and in the future.

Trustworthiness

The concept of trustworthiness in qualitative research pertains to the methods used to establish the value of a study and assesses how credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were addressed within the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure the credibility of their study, qualitative researchers should use a set of techniques as outlined by Lincoln and Guba. In addition, it is crucial to develop a comprehensive strategy for the use of these tactics to establish trustworthiness before their execution and to diligently record their application whenever relevant over the course of the research (Creswell, 2021; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the inclusion and systematic documentation of these tactics contribute to the establishment of credibility, rigor, and value in the research. The present research used the recommended methodologies proposed by Lincoln and Guba as a theoretical framework and reference point for addressing the concepts of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to achieve trustworthiness.

Credibility

Credibility is characterized by believability, as well as trust in the veracity and exactness of the results that are being presented (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Moser & Korstjens, 2021). The triangulation of data from many diverse sources was gathered and validated in this research so that the findings could be taken seriously (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell, 2021). To achieve rigor and triangulation in this research, the methods of data collecting that were used were individual interviews, focus group discussions, and questionnaires from participants. The exploration of the experiences of the participants through these various ways of data collecting helped me to improve the validity of the research by finding and developing themes (Creswell, 2021). In addition, credibility was established by member-checking, which gave participants the

chance to reread their interview and focus group transcripts to ensure that they were accurate (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

Transferability

The capacity to transfer results from one research to another indicates the likelihood that those findings may be used in other settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to Lincoln and Guba's research, the use of thick description is one of the methods that may be utilized to show transferability. Some examples of thick descriptions included providing extensive information on the characters, locations, events, and circumstances of the story. In addition, the richness of the many forms of coding that were used to produce themes across all three modalities of data collecting helped in transferability via dense description. I made every attempt to give detailed descriptions throughout the results and set circumstances that are favorable to transferability; nonetheless, it was up to the reader to determine if transferability has been successfully achieved or established.

Dependability

Dependability relates to both the replicability of the research and the consistency of its results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I showed that I can be relied on by providing an effective and complete overview of the processes for the research. In addition, the methods that were used in this research have been detailed, step-by-step, to allow other researchers to conduct their own versions of the study. In addition to this, an inquiry audit was conducted by having the Qualitative Research Director and the dissertation committee at Liberty University conduct a thorough examination of the goods and procedures that were involved in the research.

Confirmability

The concept of confirmability investigates the degree to which the study results were formed and reflected by the participants, as opposed to research bias or the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). During this research, one method that was implemented was an attempt to be more reflexive. The pursuit of confirmability via reflexivity is made apparent by the openness and disclosure of my own work experience with the issue, as well as the way those earlier experiences have informed my current thoughts and perspectives on the matter (Creswell, 2021; van Manen, 2020). All my experiences, values, and prejudices that I bring to the research have been revealed in the interest of preserving reflexivity and adhering to the guidelines made by (Creswell & Poth, 2021).

Ethical Considerations

During the process of planning and designing a qualitative study, researchers need to consider what ethical issues might surface during the study and plan how these issues need to be addressed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Once I received approval from my college to conduct my case study, I set up a meeting with the principal to discuss conducting my case study in the building and be given consent to do my research. I asked several of my colleagues to help me with my research. Informed consent was given to teachers who agreed to be participants in the study. The consent informed the participants that the study was voluntary, and they could leave the study at any time. The safety of the participants were ensured throughout the study. All electronic data will be password protected. Data will be destroyed after three years. All data on paper was shredded and electronic data was deleted.

Summary

Chapter three presented a detailed description of the specific tools, procedures, and designs used in the qualitative case study. Data collection consisted of individual interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires. I served as a human instrument to collect, analyze, and synthesize the data to develop a detailed account of the participant's role and the overall outcome of students' development of self-determination skills. Confidentiality was maintained through the interviews and focus group process and in the data analysis stage. The trustworthiness of the study was upheld through credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. All ethical considerations were considered and risks to participants were minimized.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore and understand the experiences of students with disabilities in transition planning when self-determination is incorporated. This case study utilizes the theoretical framework of social constructivism and Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory to guide the research process. In this chapter, the participants' lived experiences of the components of competence, relatedness, and autonomy are included in transition planning, and how they influence the involvement of students in the IEP process is presented. This chapter includes descriptions of the participants' accounts of developing and enhancing strategies to help high school students with disabilities develop and improve their self-determination and self-advocacy skills during the transition process. Also presented in this chapter are the themes that emerged from the data and the answers to the research question and sub-questions that guided this study.

Participants

The participants in this study consisted of teachers who worked with students who received IEPs and their teachers. After receiving permission from Liberty University's IRB and the principal at BCHS to conduct this study, I asked for the contact information (names, emails, and phone numbers) of all special education teachers at BCHS school. After receiving the potential participants' contact information, I emailed each of the teachers an invitation letter requesting their participation in this study.

Convenience sampling was used to choose the teachers who participated in this study. Fifteen teachers replied to the invitation. Of those 15 participants, 11 were selected using convenience sampling. Specifically, 11 were chosen for the one-on-one semi-structured

interviews, and each completed the questionnaire. There were four who volunteered to participate in the focus group meeting. Table 1 provides a demographic description of the selected participants, giving the educational background of each teacher, the number of years each has worked at BCHS, followed by a description of each period. Pseudonyms were used to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

Table 1

Teacher Participants' Demographics

Participant	Highest Level of Degree Completion	Race	Years Teaching	Grade Level
Marissa	Doctorate	Black	35	9-12
Vivian	Bachelor	Caucasian	20+	9-12
Vera	Masters	Caucasian	08	9-12
Callie	Ed. Specialist	Caucasian	34	K-12
Sabrina	Masters	Black	20+	9-12
Sophia	Ed. Specialist	Caucasian	15	9-12
Brooke	Masters	Caucasian	20	9-12
Jay	Doctorate	Black	05	9-12
Maya	Doctorate	Black	20+	9-12
Ava	Masters	Black	15	9-12
Emily	Masters	Caucasian	31	9-12

Marissa

Marissa has a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology, a master's degree in integrated education, a specialist degree in science, and a Ph. D in Science Education. She has accumulated over 35 years of expertise in the field of teaching students with disabilities. She has also undergone training in transition planning to assist students in achieving self-sufficiency. This training was designed to promote self-determination in students with disabilities throughout the transition planning process. She understands the significance of self-advocacy for students with disabilities and the importance of students knowing how to advocate by expressing their wants and needs in the educational setting. Marissa believes that building strong, trusting relationships with students and families is crucial for successful teaching and transition planning.

Vera

Vera has a bachelor's degree in mass communications with a broadcasting emphasis and marketing minor in Missouri at Evangeline University. Her professional journey started in the field of radio, where she developed and refined her abilities in communication, writing, and critical thinking. She began her career in the business sector, holding positions as the executive director for a Chamber of Commerce and working in advertising and promotions for tourism. She later made a career change and entered the field of education, initially working as a substitute teacher. Vera has since progressed to become a special education teacher teaching language arts and is currently in her eighth year at BCHS. She has used her expertise in mass media and marketing to effectively communicate and connect with the community, resulting in the establishment of a nurturing learning environment. Her position entails collaborating in teaching and offering personalized assistance to students with a wide range of learning requirements. She collaborates closely with other educators, parents, and administrators to

develop personalized education plans (IEPs) that provide students with the necessary tools and assistance to achieve success. Vera recognizes the significance of connecting learning to students' interests, especially for those who have deficiencies in basic skills, such as reading comprehension. To address this, Vera varies educational material to match students' passions, such as crime series, drama, and drawing, to increase their involvement and motivation.

Sophia

Sophia has a bachelor's and master's degree in special education and an Ed.S. in Teaching and Learning. She teaches math in the resource classroom. She has fifteen years of expertise in catering to the needs of children with disabilities. She utilizes a range of teaching methods to cater to many learning styles and abilities, and she has a wealth of expertise in creating and executing personalized plans (IEPs) for students with varying requirements. She just collaborated with Mary Smith, an employee of the Lumbar County School Systems, Department of Exceptional Learning Program. Mrs. Smith assisted Sophia in developing precise objectives for job applications and independent living that promote self-determination in students with disabilities as part of the transition planning process. She believes that continued professional development guarantees that she and her fellow teachers remain updated with the most effective methods in special education.

Sabrina

Sabrina, who has been teaching for 21 years, has a solid educational background with a bachelor's degree in psychology with an emphasis in counseling, a master's in special education behavior disorder, and an educational specialist degree in educational technology. She has extensive experience dealing with students who have Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD). Her

objective is to shift into the technology or Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education (CTAE) department, with a specific emphasis on coding. Sabrina's expertise in psychology and counseling provides her with a solid basis for comprehending and attending to students' behavioral and emotional requirements. Her background in special education has provided her with effective solutions to assist students with behavioral difficulties. Her knowledge of educational technology enables her to seamlessly incorporate technological resources into her teaching methods. Students have scholastic difficulties, such as being significantly behind in reading comprehension, spelling, and fundamental mathematics by three or more years. Addressing these gaps in students' transition plans is key since these abilities are vital for both academic performance and employment. Students going to high school can face considerable obstacles in adapting to block scheduling and higher academic expectations. She did admit to having a hard time teaching her students those important self-determination skills. Sabrina remains committed to assisting students and equipping them for future accomplishments, even in the face of difficulties.

Vivan

Vivan has a bachelor's degree in special education and possesses extensive knowledge in the field of education. Additionally, she has a specialist degree in special education, specializing in math, as well as a leadership degree. Her future goal is to become an administrator one day. This instructor has accumulated 20 years of expertise in dealing with impaired students, she is committed to establishing an inclusive and nurturing educational setting for students with varying needs. She likes to incorporate a robust connection with students and their families to comprehend their distinct requirements and ambitions. This adoption of this relational approach cultivates trust and facilitates open communication, both of which are essential for the

development of successful IEPs, and she has very strong feelings about setting students up for success. Vivian did not document any instances of receiving training or engaging in professional development activities that focused on promoting self-determination among children with disabilities in the context of transition planning. She has been to several training courses on how to write an IEP, and the transition plan is part of an IEP. Vivian stated that she works with teachers who have had some training, and she plans to advocate for those teachers who have not had any professional development on self-determination skills. She knows that with this training, she and other teachers will stay updated with the latest and most effective techniques in special education.

Brooke

Brooke has a strong foundation in special education, and she has a bachelor's degree in physical education and health, a master's degree in special education, as well as a master's degree in visual disability. With a remarkable 20-year tenure, Brooke specializes in Visual Therapy. She also specializes in Braille education, assistive technology use, and orientation and mobility proficiency. She acknowledges the significance of resilience and adaptation in students, particularly those who succeed in using aids, such as magnifiers and Closed-Circuit Televisions (CCTVs). Students with visual impairments may face significant challenges while transitioning to high school, mostly owing to the need for orientation and mobility instruction. She did not disclose any instances of training or professional development specifically focused on promoting self-determination in students with disabilities throughout the transition planning process. She mentioned going to the high school on the first day to teach her students how to orient themselves throughout the school, and she does frequent check-ins. Also, she mentioned engaging in collaborative efforts with other instructors. She collaborates with them by offering

practical assistance through transition plans that have academic, social, and independent living objectives.

Callie

Callie has a considerable amount of expertise in the field, now fulfilling her 34th year as an educator. She has worked in different capacities within special education, including teaching in self-contained classrooms and settings for Mild Intellectual Disability (MID), Moderate Intellectual Disability (MOID), Severe Intellectual Disability (SID), and Profound Intellectual Disability (PID). Callie has a specific qualification in the field of educating students who have hearing impairments or are partially deaf. She has mostly taught at the high school level for much of her career, spending 18 years in this capacity before switching to her present position as the district's teacher for students who are deaf or hard of hearing. Callie has a bachelor's degree in speech pathology and audiology, which has played a crucial role in assisting students with communication impairments. Her qualifications in leadership and her educational specialist degree have helped her focus on integrating teaching with the arts. Callie's credentials have facilitated the incorporation of innovative techniques into her teaching approach, hence enhancing the accessibility and enjoyment of learning for students with diverse requirements. Callie's approach in prioritizing self-advocacy for children with disabilities emphasizes the significance of their comprehending their needs and being able to convey them proficiently. It is especially important for students with hearing problems since they may have to clearly express their need for adjustments in educational environments. She emphasizes the need to work together with families and other educators to provide a complete support system for students.

Emily

Emily, a self-contained special education teacher, has accumulated 31 years of expertise in dealing with impaired students. Emily got her graduate degree in Learning Disabilities and a master's degree from the University of Georgia. She has spent a total of 20 years teaching in elementary school and middle school before transitioning to high school, where she has been teaching for the last 11 years. Her teaching methodology entails identifying students' preferences since their level of involvement is enhanced when they are interested. An example of this is incorporating animal-themed material into classes for a student who has a strong affinity for animals, which has resulted in notable enhancements in their level of interest and academic achievements. Implementing personalized reward systems, dividing activities into achievable increments, and utilizing visual aids and calendars are effective strategies in her classroom. Emily stated that engaging in collaboration with other experts, such as speech therapists and occupational therapists, and actively incorporating parents via consistent communication is essential in delivering complete assistance. Emily was on a transition planning committee about eight years ago. The county brought in a specialist, and she and several other teachers took classes during the day to learn how to effectively write transition plans. While on this committee, she received valuable resources to use when creating transition plans. She went on to emphasize that this training has helped her when it comes to helping students develop self-determination skills which she said helped her students advocate for themselves and get a better understanding of their limitations.

Maya

Maya has extensive expertise in educational programs at both middle school and high school, with certifications in Kindergarten through 12th grade special education and educational

leadership. Her professional trajectory has primarily centered on the field of special education, with a particular emphasis on at-risk students. The certification in K-12 special education offered a strong basis, enabling comprehension of the varied requirements of children with disabilities. In addition, the educational leadership credential has provided her with the essential abilities to assume administrative positions, when necessary, in her current position as an inclusion teacher. She has been the director of an alternative school. In the 20-plus years that she has been teaching, she did not disclose any training specifically focused on promoting self-determination in students with disabilities throughout the transition planning process. Not even when she was the director of the alternative school. When she worked there, she helped create educational programs designed for adolescents who were at risk. The program was to help those students who had previously shown disinterest in the conventional educational environment. The opportunity to collaborate with a committed group of educators and support personnel at BCHS has been very valuable in her transition to her current position. She plans to become an administrator where she will advocate for equitable and inclusive policies and practices, as well as mentor new educators by imparting the knowledge and experiences she has acquired.

Ava

Ava earned a bachelor's degree in general studies. She earned her teaching certificate through the Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (TAPP) program. She also has a master's degree in early childhood education. Ava also has 15 years of experience working with students with special needs. Her primary professional objective has always revolved around having a significant and purposeful influence on the lives of her students. Ava believes that building relationships with students helps her get a strong indication of the students' strengths, weaknesses, and interests. She knows that parents are key team members when it comes to

creating a transition plan for their child(ren). Ava does her best to keep them informed. She is currently reading a book on teacher efficacy. The book explores strategies for promoting student autonomy in the classroom, which may be relevant to fostering self-determination in students with disabilities during the transition planning process. Before reading the book, Ava fostered student autonomy by practicing academic choice in the classroom, having students research topics that they would like to explore during the lesson, and having them reflect and ask questions about their learning. Now that she has read the book, she realizes that it is more than giving students choices in class. She plans to use what she has learned from the reading to help her students become advocates for themselves in their education and their everyday lives. She wants them to be aware of their disabilities and how to ask for help when needed to be successful while in school and in their adult lives.

Jay

Jay is a retired military veteran who earned his bachelor's degree in special education while in the army. He has been teaching for the past five years and is currently working on his master's degree in special education. He believes in providing examples for students, and he believes that demonstrating decision-making is most beneficial for students preparing for the transition process can help students' autonomy. Jay would like to have an after-school program to work with students with disabilities to help them become successful adults. Even though he does not have formal training in self-determination, he believes that he can use his military background to help students develop their self-determination skills by giving them the skills and resources that will guide students throughout the transition process.

Results

This section includes the results of the data analysis. The results are categorized into four themes. The data was triangulated through three data collection methods that included interviews, questionnaires, and focus group meetings. The data collected from interviews, questionnaires, and focus groups allowed participants to share their viewpoints on the roles they play when it comes to incorporating self-determination skills into the development of transition planning.

Permission forms were sent to each participant electronically. I scheduled interviews with each of them, which were conducted and recorded using Google Meets video conferencing. Before the interviews began, each participant signed a consent form and submitted it by email. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes to an hour. Following each interview, participants were invited to join a focus group. After completing all one-on-one semi-structured interviews, volunteers interested in participating in the focus group contacted me by phone or email. The focus group meeting took place in the school library. The focus group meeting was recorded on my cell phone. Transcripts from the interviews and focus groups were transcribed using manual coding. Member checking was used so that the participants could view their responses and make any changes for correctness. To guarantee the security of the data, I removed all identifiable information and saved all recordings, questionnaires, and transcriptions on a flash drive that required a password for access. An analysis of the data revealed four themes and one sub-theme that answered the research questions. Each theme plays a crucial role in supporting and enriching students' educational journey preparing them for high school and beyond.

Theme 1: Support Mechanisms

The participants' responses indicated that support mechanisms that were essential for student success during transitions were underpinned by effective collaboration between schools, instructors, and parents. These endeavors also guaranteed that students adapted to the new academic requirements and acquired the requisite confidence and abilities to succeed in high school and life beyond. The theme of Support Mechanisms is crucial for enhancing the student experience during critical transitions, such as moving from middle to high school. Support Mechanisms encompasses the roles that schools, teachers, and parents play in fostering an environment where students feel supported and empowered. The terms "help," "support," "provide," "schools," "students," and "parents" were frequently used, indicating a collective effort to create comprehensive support networks.

Schools serve as the central hub for these mechanisms, orchestrating resources and programs tailored to student needs, including the implementation of mentoring systems, where older students help younger ones acclimate to the new environment, or specialized counseling services that address academic and emotional challenges. By creating a structured support system, schools can mitigate the stress associated with academic transitions and enhance student preparedness.

Teachers play a vital role by recognizing individual student needs and providing the necessary academic and emotional support. This personalized attention ensures that each student can navigate the complexities of high school life with confidence. Teachers also act as liaisons between the school and parents, facilitating a seamless flow of communication.

Parents' involvement is essential, as they provide foundational emotional and motivational support. Engaged parents can help reinforce the importance of education, assist

with setting academic goals, and participate in school activities. This involvement helps to create a nurturing environment that extends beyond the school boundaries, offering students a stable support system at home. The effective collaboration between schools, teachers, and parents underpins the support mechanisms that are critical for student success during transitions. These efforts ensure that students not only adjust to new academic demands but also develop the confidence and skills necessary to thrive in high school and beyond.

Regarding the significance of conducting information sessions for families on transition planning topics, Vivian underscored, "This approach guaranteed that parents were adequately informed and could actively engage in their children's education." Vera pointed out, "Regular communication with families ensured that they were informed about their child's progress and could collaborate effectively with educators." Parents were actively engaged in the planning process through this consistent communication, which guaranteed that transition plans were customized to accommodate the student's requirements and were consistent with the family's objectives and expectations. The students' support network was established through this collaborative approach, which was advantageous to them in both their academic and domestic environments.

Brooke pointed out, "Collaboration with teachers is crucial to ensure that they are aware of the specific needs and accommodations of students with visual impairments." Through this collaboration, a supportive educational environment was established, enabling students to flourish.

Jay noted, "By providing additional tutoring and study skills workshops, we help students manage their time, organize assignments, and study for exams." Students were guaranteed the support they required to achieve academic and personal success by providing

them with the requisite tools and resources, such as customized learning materials or technology aids.

The participation of students' families in the transition planning process is a critical element in achieving successful results, as noted by Ava. The input of families is essential in the development of a more personalized and comprehensive transition plan, as it contributes to an understanding of the unique requirements and aspirations of each student.

Emily stated, "The foundation of my methodology is identifying students' interests and engagement, as this increases their likelihood of learning and participation." I had a pupil who was particularly enamored of animals, for instance. Through the incorporation of animal-related content into his lessons, I observed a substantial enhancement in his learning outcomes and engagement.

The critical function of support mechanisms was evidenced by these insights from a variety of educators. To assist students in navigating their transitions, effective support necessitated the provision of essential resources and collaboration between educators and families. Support Mechanisms was a critical theme for improving student experiences during significant transitions, such as the transition from middle to high school. Support Mechanisms revolved around the duties of schools, instructors, and parents in the establishment of a supportive environment.

Theme 2: Active Participation

Active Participation emphasized the proactive involvement of schools, instructors, and parents in the educational voyage of students, particularly during transition phases. The phrases "can help," "schools can," and "parents can" emphasized the prospective actions that these stakeholders can take to ensure a seamless transition to high school.

Schools were actively engaged in the development of programs that were specifically designed to meet the requirements of transitioning students. This encompassed orientation sessions that acquainted students with the high school environment and helped them cultivate the academic and social skills required for success in a more rigorous educational environment. Vera, emphasized, "We conduct standard meetings with parents to address their child's transition plan and progress." "These meetings offer parents the chance to share their perspectives, ask questions, and work in conjunction with teachers and other members of the IEP team" (Callie).

Teachers' participation was indispensable in the establishment of an engaging and responsive learning environment. Teachers can identify and address potential learning deficits early, provide additional resources, and customize instruction to meet the diverse requirements of their students. A trusting relationship between students and educators, which is essential for academic success, was fostered by this active engagement. According to Emily, "By keeping families informed through regular newsletters, emails, and updates, we can foster a sense of connection and encourage active participation."

Active participation by parents was equally critical. By participating in school events, fostering open communication with teachers, and remaining informed about educational policies and practices, parents effectively supported their children. Parents were proactive in ensuring that they were involved in their children's educational development, providing encouragement and support that was consistent with the school's efforts.

Students were provided with comprehensive support because of the active involvement of all stakeholders in the dynamic educational ecosystem. The collaborative approach not only facilitated the navigation of the current educational phase for students but also established a solid foundation for their future academic and personal accomplishments. The following statement

was made, "Hosting events such as parent nights, open houses, and orientation sessions specifically for families of incoming high school students helps ease the transition process and provides ongoing support." These stakeholders can establish a supportive and nurturing environment that promotes the well-being and success of students through cooperation.

Additionally, Marissa stated, "It is imperative to establish strong, trusting relationships with students and their families to facilitate successful transition planning." The transition process necessitates consistent communication, personalized assistance, and the establishment of a welcoming environment that caters to both academic and social-emotional requirements.

In addition, Sophia underscored the significance of collaborative planning, asserting, "By incorporating students into the transition planning process and customizing plans to their unique strengths and aspirations, we can cultivate self-determination and equip them for future success."

According to Marissa, "Engaging students in hands-on projects and real-world applications of their studies helps them see the relevance of their education and stay motivated during the transition." In addition to fostering academic learning, this practical approach also assists students in the acquisition of essential life skills.

Sabrina underscored the significance of extracurricular activities, asserting that "students are allowed to establish social connections and cultivate a sense of belonging in their new environment through their involvement in clubs, sports, and other school activities." She also stated that the student's overall school experience is improved by this comprehensive engagement, which fosters a sense of integration and support.

Sub-Theme 1: Autonomy and Self-Advocacy in Transition Plans

This sub-theme emphasizes students taking an active role in their Individualized Education Programs (IEP). This participation not only enhances their self-esteem but also provides them with the essential abilities to advocate for themselves in other aspects of life, including personal and professional settings outside the school environment. Through active engagement of the students in the planning and decision-making aspects of their educational journey, they acquire crucial life skills, such as negotiating, decision-making, and proactive thinking, which are vital for their future achievements. Sophia, "By incorporating students into the transition planning process and customizing plans to their unique strengths and aspirations, we can cultivate self-determination and equip them for future success."

Theme 3: Transition to High School

The Transition to High School program was designed to equip students with the necessary skills and resources to navigate the substantial change and obstacles that come with the transition to high school. "High school" and "transition" were terms that underscored the significance of this critical period in a student's academic career. This subject dealt with the practical and psychological preparations that students must make to succeed in a new, frequently more difficult educational environment.

This transition was significantly facilitated by schools, which offered customized orientation programs that acquainted students with the academic standards and social dynamics of high school. In addition to peer-led activities that fostered community building and camaraderie, these programs included campus tours and introductory sessions with prospective educators. According to Vera, "Organizing visits during the summer where students can walk

through their schedules and familiarize themselves with the layout of the school can help ease their anxiety and build their confidence.”

The transition also encompassed the academic preparation of students. To guarantee that students were not only prepared for the curriculum but also possessed effective study and time management strategies. According to Jay, "Offering students planners or digital tools to assist them in managing assignments, tests, and deadlines can also be advantageous.”

Another critical component of this motif was social-emotional preparation. Schools must provide students with the necessary support to cultivate the social skills and resilience necessary to navigate the intricacies of high school life. This comprised counseling sessions, classes on social skills, and activities that emphasized emotional intelligence and self-awareness. According to Maya, "Creating a positive school culture that emphasizes inclusivity, respect, and support can also help students feel more comfortable and accepted.”

In her discussion of the significance of parental involvement, Vivian stated, "Workshops and informational sessions for parents can cover topics such as helping their child with homework, understanding high school graduation requirements, and preparing for college and career planning.” We ensured that families were adequately informed and prepared to provide their children with the necessary support during this critical transition period by engaging them. Keeping parents informed gives them the tools they need to help their child be successful.

A key component of the transition planning process is the inclusion of personalized support provided to the child with a learning disability to provide additional support as they continue to proceed through their academic career. The aforementioned concept was emphasized by Callie, who stated, "We conduct regular meetings with parents to discuss their child's transition plan and progress.” Parents and teachers can schedule an amendment meeting. These

meetings are used to discuss a student's transition plan and, if changes are necessary, to provide a more adequate transition plan. "These meetings offer parents the chance to share their perspectives, ask questions, and work in conjunction with teachers and other members of the IEP team."

A comprehensive strategy that addressed the academic, emotional, and social requirements of students was necessary for effective transition planning. The likelihood of pupil success in high school was considerably increased by schools through the meticulous planning and implementation of transition strategies. According to Brooke, "Engaging students in hands-on projects and real-world applications of their studies helps them see the relevance of their education and stay motivated during the transition." Maya further stated, "By keeping families informed through regular newsletters, emails, and updates, we can foster a sense of connection and encourage active participation."

According to Emily, the role of personalized learning plans in facilitating the transition is as follows: "Tailoring instruction to meet the individual needs of each student helps them build confidence and achieve academic success." Assuring that students were engaged and motivated, these personalized plans frequently included specific objectives and milestones that they could work toward.

In addition, Ava underscored the significance of peer support systems, stating, "Pairing incoming students with peer mentors who can offer guidance and support helps new students feel more connected and less isolated." The social and academic challenges of high school were more effectively navigated by students who were provided with a dependable support network through this peer mentoring system.

Schools also endeavored to establish an inclusive and nurturing atmosphere that promoted a sense of community and belonging. Callie emphasized that "the implementation of programs that foster diversity and inclusion contributes to the development of a school culture in which all students feel respected and valued." Many of these initiatives were instrumental in assisting students in adjusting to their new environment and establishing positive relationships with their peers.

To establish a solid foundation for the future success of students, schools addressed both the academic and social-emotional aspects of the transition. Students were adequately equipped to confront the challenges of high school and beyond through comprehensive transition planning, which ultimately enhanced their overall development and well-being. Collectively, these perspectives from a variety of educators underscored the critical significance of comprehensive and deliberate transition planning for the success of students.

Theme 4: Resources and Opportunities

Resources and Opportunities indicated the availability and provision of educational materials and activities that facilitate academic and personal development, improving the learning experience. The theme's frequent references to "resources" and "programs" underscored the critical role that access to a variety of educational instruments played in the success of students.

Schools recognized the significance of offering students a variety of resources and opportunities to facilitate a successful transition to high school. One of these endeavors was to provide orientation programs that assisted students in acclimating to the new environment.

Vivian explained, "We provide transitional support services that gradually increase students'

independence while still offering the necessary assistance.” These meetings encompassed continuous check-ins with case managers and transitional IEP meetings.

Moreover, Brooke underscored the importance of customized strategies for traversing the new environment and managing anxiety, stating, “These programs encompass map-reading activities, tours, and practice navigating from class to class.” This type of initiative was designed to alleviate students' apprehension and enhance their self-assurance before the commencement of the academic year.

The academic transition was also addressed through the provision of targeted support programs. Vera underscored the significance of teaching study skills, time management, and organizational strategies, asserting that, “To confront academic obstacles, high schools must offer supplementary resources and support, including tutoring programs, study groups, and academic counselors.” These resources were indispensable in assisting students in acquiring the skills required to achieve academic success.

Personal development opportunities were significantly enhanced through participation in extracurricular activities. “High school provides a diverse array of extracurricular opportunities, such as sports, clubs, and volunteer work,” stated Sabrina. These activities are beneficial for personal growth and development; however, they can also increase the burden and time management requirements of students. The ability to balance academic responsibilities with extracurricular activities was an essential skill that students needed to gain.

Emphasis was also placed on parental involvement as a critical element of student support. According to Emily, “Hosting events such as parent nights, open houses, and orientation sessions specifically for families of incoming high school students helps ease the transition process and provides ongoing support.” We ensured that parents were adequately informed and

prepared to provide their children with the necessary support during this critical transition period by engaging them.

In addition to academic and extracurricular support, social-emotional resources were essential. Jay emphasized the necessity of mental health resources and counseling services, stating, "We provide peer support groups, stress management workshops, and counseling services to help students maintain their emotional well-being." These materials offered students a secure environment in which to articulate their apprehensions, cultivate resilience, and devise coping strategies.

In addition, the significance of programs that are customized to accommodate a wide range of requirements was underscored. The fourth teacher said, For instance, an online course on career exploration, such as O*NET Career Exploration, introduced me to various assessment tools that help students identify their interests and strengths, which we then use to guide their career planning.

These programs were customized to ensure that students received personalized guidance that was consistent with their unique capabilities and aspirations. The importance of ongoing communication with families to ensure that they are informed and engaged in their children's education was also acknowledged by Emily. According to Maya, "By keeping families informed through weekly newsletters, emails, and updates, we can foster a sense of connection and encourage active participation."

The critical role of technology in the provision of resources was highlighted by Ava. According to her, "The use of educational technology tools, such as online learning platforms and digital resources, can improve students' learning experiences and equip them with the

relevant skills for the future.” It was essential to incorporate technology into contemporary education to guarantee that students were proficient in the use of digital instruments.

Emily underscored the significance of professional development for educators, asserting that "Ongoing professional development for teachers guarantees that they are equipped with the most recent instructional strategies and resources to facilitate student success." Better support for students was the result of this continuous learning for teachers. The provision of resources and opportunities was essential in assisting students during their transition to high school. Schools sought to cultivate an inclusive and supportive environment that promoted student success by providing a comprehensive array of academic, extracurricular, and social-emotional support. Through these endeavors, students were not only adequately prepared for the academic obstacles that lay ahead, but also provided with the necessary skills and self-assurance to excel in high school and beyond.

Research Question Responses

Central Research Question

How can the development and enhancement of self-determination skills be tailored to meet the unique needs and strengths of individuals with disabilities during the transition process?

The transition process necessitated a multifaceted and personalized approach to the development and improvement of self-determination skills for individuals with disabilities. By establishing robust support mechanisms, providing career exploration opportunities, utilizing innovative teaching methods, and involving students and their families, educators customized transition plans to meet the individual needs and strengths of each student. Sabina emphasized the practical elements of directing pupils towards attainable objectives by trying to “respectfully steer them towards feasible career aspirations.” In addition to enabling students with disabilities

to realize their maximum potential, this comprehensive strategy also facilitated a more seamless transition.

A comprehensive, individualized approach was employed to customize the development and improvement of self-determination skills for individuals with disabilities during the transition process to match their unique strengths and requirements. A combination of strategies that prioritized personalized education plans, the active participation of key stakeholders, and targeted support mechanisms were employed. A more effective transition from middle school to high school and beyond was facilitated by educators who comprehended and addressed the unique strengths and requirements of each student.

Central to this process was the development of comprehensive transition plans that were customized to the unique requirements of students with disabilities. Teachers, parents, students, and other pertinent professionals were all involved in the collaborative development of these plans, as indicated by IDEA. The transition plans were holistically addressed by this collaborative approach, which encompassed the development of social, emotional, and life skills, in addition to academic objectives. Continual support and insight into the student's assets and areas that required development were essential, and the involvement of families was crucial.

The significance of self-advocacy was underscored by a participant who had a significant background in special education. Teaching students to comprehend their requirements and to effectively communicate with them served as a component of this. Vivian stated that teachers' participation in the process by assisting students in "working towards their objectives," underscoring the educators' responsibility to provide essential assistance and direction so that students are more capable of attaining self-directed goals. For students with disabilities, self-advocacy was especially crucial, as they frequently necessitated accommodation and

modifications to their educational environment. These abilities were developed to enhance students' independence and self-assurance in the management of their educational journeys.

Another participant emphasized the importance of creating a learning environment that is both inclusive and supportive. Building strong relationships with students and their families was crucial for comprehending their distinctive needs and aspirations. Vera said that the teachers' primary responsibility is to serve as mentors for their students. Educators were able to construct more effective IEPs that were in alignment with the personal objectives of the students by establishing a trusting and open communication channel. The results of learning were also improved by the implementation of innovative teaching methods and technology, which made education more engaging and accessible for students with special needs.

However, the research also emphasized the significance of vocational training and career exploration as components of the transition process. The integration of career-oriented initiatives into the curriculum was the subject of discussion among the participants. This would enable students to investigate a variety of career paths and acquire the requisite skills for future employment. Not only did this offer students practical experience, but it also facilitated the establishment of realistic career objectives. In the preparation of students for the workforce, vocational training programs were particularly beneficial, as they fostered a sense of self-determination and competence.

Other critical components included support mechanisms. The following were offered: mentoring programs, specialized counseling services, and additional tutoring and study skills workshops. To assist students in managing the increasing academic demands and navigating the social dynamics of high school, schools have implemented structured support systems. As an illustration, one participant underscored the efficacy of school tours, which enabled students to

become acquainted with the high school environment before the commencement of the academic year. The students' apprehension was alleviated, and they felt more prepared.

Continuous assessment and personalized support were emphasized by an additional participant. Regularly evaluating and adjusting transition plans per the students' progress guaranteed that the plans remained effective and pertinent. This ongoing process facilitated the identification of any emergent requirements and the prompt resolution of them, thereby fostering the students' overall development.

Sub-Question One

What are the best practices and strategies for integrating self-determination skills in developing a transition plan?

There are numerous strategies and best practices that can be employed to ensure that students with disabilities can successfully transition from middle school to high school and beyond by incorporating self-determination skills into their transition plans. Developing comprehensive IEPs that integrate the principles of self-determination is a fundamental approach. Marissa emphasized the significance of exploring various hobbies and vocations to gauge students' interest as part of the IEP process. Callie also spoke on teachers' responsibility in assisting students in their pursuit of objectives, emphasizing the continuous assistance required to guarantee that students remain focused, and make progress. This approach encourages students to take control of their educational choices, promoting engagement. Starting with the students' active participation in their planning, this process encourages them to express their preferences, strengths, and objectives.

Key strategies involve the promotion of self-advocacy, which involves students developing the ability to comprehend and articulate their needs and desires. Teaching them to

express their learning approaches, the accommodations they need, and their long-term goals is a component of this. By including goal-setting exercises in the curriculum, students can identify objectives that are attainable and are easy to break down into manageable steps. Callie stated, "One of the most impactful practices I've implemented is involving students in their learning process. I encourage them to take an active role in setting their goals, tracking their progress, and reflecting on their achievements."

This approach not only fosters self-awareness and self-advocacy but also helps students develop a growth mindset. Students learn that effort and persistence can lead to improvement, which boosts their motivation and resilience. It is recommended that these objectives be periodically reviewed and updated to accommodate the student's changing interests and capabilities.

Offering students the opportunity to make decisions and solve problems in real-world scenarios is another critical practice. Classroom activities that replicate real-world obstacles or the integration of choices into their academic and extracurricular pursuits may be implemented. Ava spoke of the integration of project-based learning (PBL), "PBL provides students with opportunities to work on real-world projects that require critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration". These projects often involve identifying a problem or challenge, developing a plan to address it, and executing the plan. Through PBL, students learn to take initiative, make decisions, and manage their time and resources effectively. This hands-on approach not only enhances academic skills but also builds confidence and self-determination" This fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility by enabling students to make decisions about their education.

Collaboration among educators, families, and students is essential. Callie stated that she works closely with special education teachers, speech therapists, and other professionals to

develop and implement effective strategies for each student. Regular team meetings and open communication ensure that all instructors are on the same page and working toward common goals for the student. Open communication channels and consistent meetings guarantee that the transition plan is customized to the student's distinctive requirements, being endorsed by all stakeholders. Parents and educators may expand their capacity to assist students in their educational endeavors by participating in classes and training sessions that emphasize self-determination theory. Additionally, utilizing technology and assistive tools can significantly contribute to the promotion of self-determination. For example, students with hearing impairments may require assistive technology, such as hearing aids or FM systems so that they may fully participate in class. Other assistive technologies, such as digital planners and goal-tracking applications, can assist students in managing their tasks and monitoring their progress, thereby granting them a greater degree of autonomy.

Sub-Question Two

What are the specific self-determination skills students need to successfully navigate during the transition process?

For students with disabilities to successfully transition from middle to high school, they must cultivate several specific self-determination skills. Self-awareness, goal setting, self-advocacy, decision-making, problem-solving, and self-regulation are among the abilities that are included. Self-awareness entails awareness of one's strengths, limitations, interests, and values. This awareness is fundamental, as it enables students to make well-informed decisions regarding their personal and educational objectives. Mays stated, One key component is the use of student-centered instructional strategies that encourage active participation and critical thinking. By incorporating open-ended questions, project-based learning, and inquiry-based approaches,

teachers create opportunities for students to explore their interests, ask questions, and take ownership of their learning.

An additional essential skill for the student is goal setting. Setting realistic and achievable objectives is a skill that students must acquire. Short-term and long-term objectives are identified during this process, and a strategy is devised to achieve them. Setting goals motivates students to remain motivated and take proactive measures toward their future. Maya also said that teachers can provide opportunities for students to set personal and academic goals, track their progress, and reflect on their achievements. By regularly setting and reviewing goals, students learn to take responsibility for their learning and develop a sense of ownership and accountability.

For students to effectively communicate their requirements and preferences, self-advocacy is indispensable. Whether in academic or daily life activities, this skill entails instructing students on how to effectively communicate their needs for accommodations and assistance. Self-advocacy allows students to assume responsibility for their education and engage in the pursuit of the resources they require. Students are confronted with a plethora of decisions regarding their personal affairs and education. Decision-making skills are critically important. Students can effectively navigate the intricacies of secondary school by being taught how to evaluate options, consider potential outcomes, and make informed decisions. An additional essential skill is problem-solving. Students are required to acquire the ability to recognize issues, devise potential solutions, and execute the most effective approach. During their transition, this skill is especially crucial for surmounting potential challenges. Self-regulation is the process of controlling one's own emotions and behavior. Students can maintain their focus and resilience, particularly when confronted with new challenges, by employing strategies, such as emotional regulation, stress management, and time management.

Sub-Question Three

Does the application of self-determination theory principles in transition planning promote motivation and engagement?

Self Determination Theory (SDT) principles are implemented in transition planning to substantially enhance the motivation and engagement of students with disabilities. SDT emphasizes the significance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in the development of intrinsic motivation. Educators can establish an environment in which students feel engaged and empowered by integrating these principles into transition planning. Sophia stated that she likes to build students' confidence as another critical aspect of this approach. Many students with disabilities struggle with low self-esteem and self-doubt, particularly in subjects like math, where they may have experienced repeated failures. To address this, a supportive and positive classroom environment where students feel safe expressing their difficulties and asking for help is a necessity. I provide regular encouragement and positive reinforcement, celebrating small successes and progress. This helps students develop a growth mindset and believe in their ability to improve and succeed. By involving students in the decision-making process regarding their education, autonomy is fostered. The likelihood of students being invested in their outcomes is increased when they can establish their objectives and select their paths. This enhanced intrinsic motivation is a result of their sense of control over their learning journey. Competence is attained by establishing attainable objectives and offering students the requisite assistance to achieve them. The confidence of students increases as they achieve their objectives and observe their progress. They are further motivated to pursue their objectives by this sense of competence.

Collaborative planning and robust support networks that involve educators, families, and peers are instrumental in fostering relatedness. Sophia also stated that creating a supportive and

inclusive classroom environment is another important aspect of addressing barriers. This involves fostering a positive classroom culture where all students feel valued and respected. Clear expectations are established for behavior and promote a sense of belonging and community. For example, positive reinforcement is used to encourage positive behaviors and provide consistent feedback to help students understand and meet expectations. Creating an inclusive environment helps reduce anxiety and build confidence, allowing students to focus on their learning.

Students' participation in the transition process is enhanced when they perceive that their peers support and comprehend them. It is essential to maintain motivation by cultivating a sense of belonging and connection. In addition, the practical implementation of SDT principles entails the instruction of self-determination skills in real-world contexts. Participating in real-world problem-solving, career exploration activities, and hands-on initiatives enables students to comprehend the significance of their education. It is this relevance that increases their engagement and renders the learning experience more meaningful. The integration of self-determination theory into transition planning not only equips students with the necessary skills to confront future obstacles but also encourages a more engaged and motivated approach to their personal growth and education.

Summary

This chapter included a descriptive summary of each of the participants who agreed to be included as part of this study. The data provided insight into the roles that each of the teachers at BCHS perceived as their role in helping students build their self-determination skills. This research included the teachers' background information and their length of teaching in the public school system. Four themes emerged from the data collected through the interviews,

questionnaires, and focus groups. The themes included support mechanisms, active participation, transition to high school, and resources and opportunities. Also included in the data collected was a sub-theme on autonomy and self-advocacy in transition plans. Finally, the central research question and each sub-question were analyzed to better understand what the students needed to help build their self-determination skills.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore and understand the experiences of students with disabilities in transition planning when self-determination theory is incorporated. Chapter five will present an interpretation of findings, implications for policy and practice, theoretical and methodological implications, limitations and delimitations, and recommendations for future research.

Discussion

A qualitative case approach was used to carry out this study's purpose. Four themes with one sub-theme emerged from three data sources. A comprehensive analysis of various interpretations, implications, limits, and delimitations is provided, along with suggestions for further study. The findings offer valuable insights into the experiences of the participants. The data analysis emphasized the need for understanding the viewpoints of the participants when it comes to incorporating self-determination skills in transition planning through the lens of the self-determination theory.

Interpretation of Findings

This researcher found that teachers shared beliefs about factors that are essential to students with disabilities in transition planning from middle to high school. The data sources were semi-structured interviews, a focus group, and an open-ended questionnaire. The themes were support mechanisms, active participation, transition to high school, and resources and opportunities. The results are supported by both empirical and theoretical sources. Each theme plays a crucial role in supporting and enriching students' educational journeys, preparing them for high school and beyond.

Summary of Thematic Findings

Support Mechanisms. The thematic analysis demonstrated that support mechanisms are essential for ensuring student success during critical educational transitions. Participants' responses emphasized the significance of collaboration among schools, instructors, and parents to aid students in adapting to new academic tasks. Not only do these endeavors assist students in developing the requisite skills and confidence for secondary school, but they also equip them with the tools necessary to confront future obstacles. In particular, the motif of support mechanisms was identified as essential for improving the student experience, particularly during the transition from middle to high school.

The cornerstone of support mechanisms was emphasized in the analysis, being the significance of effective collaboration among schools, instructors, and parents. Resources and programs that are customized to satisfy the requirements of students are coordinated by schools, which function as central centers. A comprehensive approach to student support is guaranteed by this collaboration, which cultivates an environment that is conducive to personal and academic development. In transition planning, particularly for students with disabilities, such collaboration is essential (Aftab et al., 2022). This comprehensive support for students is guaranteed by the interconnectedness of various stakeholders, which in turn improves their chances of success.

Schools play a critical role in the coordination of support mechanisms, and implementing programs that cater to the transitional requirements of students. For instance, mentoring systems that involve an upper-class student guiding a younger student can significantly facilitate the transition process. To foster self-determination and goal attainment among students, school-based interventions are indispensable (Burke et al., 2020). Not only do these initiatives enhance academic performance, but they also facilitate the establishment of social connections, which are

essential during transitional periods. The diverse requirements of students can be effectively addressed by schools by establishing structured support systems.

Teachers are essential in enabling students to succeed during transitions. In addition to academic instruction, they are responsible for offering emotional and social support. Special educators, in particular, are instrumental in the enhancement of transition planning for students with intellectual disabilities (Ahmad & Thressiakutty, 2020). Teachers can assist students in handling the obstacles of transitioning to high school by cultivating a supportive classroom environment. Teacher training on transition-related issues can further improve their capacity to provide effective support to students.

Parental involvement is an additional critical component of effective support mechanisms. By involving parents in the transition process, students are guaranteed to consistently receive support at both home and school. Chambers (2018) has reported that students' transition experiences are positively affected by parental involvement. Personalized support plans can be developed by collaborating with instructors and providing valuable insights into the requirements of their children. A stable support network that is essential for the successful transition of students is established through this partnership between parents and educators.

Integrating theoretical perspectives into the comprehension of support mechanisms offers a more profound understanding of their efficacy. Autonomy, competence, and relatedness are prioritized by self-determination theory in the context of student motivation and success (Cho & Kim, 2019). An environment that encourages student autonomy and competence can be fostered by schools by aligning support mechanisms with these theoretical principles. Not only does this

theoretical integration improve the practical implementation of support mechanisms, but it also contributes to the development of new knowledge in the field of educational transitions.

Active Participation. Schools, instructors, and parents are proactive in their involvement in the educational voyage of students, particularly during transition phases, as evidenced by the thematic findings on active participation. "Active involvement" connotes the potential actions that these stakeholders can take to guarantee a smooth transition to high school. Schools were dedicated to the development of programs that were specifically tailored to accommodate the requirements of students who were transitioning. In addition to orientation sessions that acquainted students with the high school environment, these programs also provided seminars that assisted them in the development of the academic and social skills required for success in a more rigorous educational environment (Chambers, 2018; Ahmad & Thressiakutty, 2020; Cho & Kim, 2019).

In order to establish a learning environment that is both responsive and engaging, teachers' involvement is indispensable. To address potential learning deficits early, teachers can provide additional resources and customize instruction to meet the diverse requirements of their students, and they will then implement proactive strategies. Students and educators establish a trusting relationship through this active engagement, which is essential for academic success (Cobb et al., 2009; Marshall et al., 2019). As per Emily, the establishment of a sense of connection and the promotion of active participation was facilitated by consistent communication with families through newsletters, emails, and updates (Bruno et al., 2018).

Equally important was the active involvement of parents in fostering their children's education. Effectively supporting their children, parents participated in school events, maintained open communication with instructors, and remained informed about educational policies and

practices. Landmark et al. (2013) and Lapon (2020) have both reported that workshops and information sessions have afforded parents valuable insights into the curriculum, teaching methods, and available support services, thereby aligning their efforts with those of the school. Pitt et al. (2021) stated that this comprehensive support network facilitated a seamless transition for students and established a strong foundation for their future academic and personal accomplishments.

Students' overall education experience and sense of belonging were improved by the collaborative approach that involved schools, instructors, and parents, which provided comprehensive support. Hosting events, such as parent nights, open houses, and orientation sessions that were specifically designed for the families of incoming high school students facilitated the transition process and offered continuous support (Richter et al., 2022; Rowe et al., 2021). It was essential to establish strong, trusting relationships with students and their families to facilitate successful transition planning. This required a welcoming environment that was conducive to both academic and social-emotional requirements, personalized assistance, and consistent communication. This shared understanding underscores the necessity of participatory engagement from all stakeholders, underscoring the necessity of a collaborative and comprehensive educational strategy (Schaefer et al., 2018; Shogren, 2013).

The Transition to High School

The thematic findings on the transition to high school underscore the importance of providing students with the requisite skills and resources to successfully navigate this critical period in their academic endeavors. The significance of practical and psychological preparations that students must make to flourish in a new, frequently more difficult educational environment is underscored by this theme. By providing students with personalized orientation programs that

introduce them to the academic standards and social dynamics of high school, schools are instrumental in easing this transition. Campus tours, introductory sessions with prospective educators, and peer-led activities that promote community building and camaraderie are among the programs that are offered (Bagnall et al., 2021; Marshall et al., 2019).

Academic preparation is an additional critical component of the transition to high school. School districts implemented classes that emphasize essential academic competencies to guarantee that students are adequately equipped with effective study and time management strategies and are adequately prepared for the curriculum. It may also be advantageous to furnish students with digital tools or planners to facilitate the management of assignments, examinations, and deadlines (Landmark et al., 2013; Mazher, 2020). Students are equipped with the requisite abilities to manage the elevated academic expectations of high school through this proactive approach.

Social and emotional preparation is also essential during this transition. Schools are obligated to offer students the necessary assistance to cultivate the social skills and resilience necessary to successfully navigate the intricacies of high school life. This support encompasses social skills classes, counseling sessions, and activities that prioritize self-awareness and emotional intelligence (Parker et al., 2020; Pitt et al., 2021). The establishment of a positive school culture that prioritizes inclusivity, respect, and support can aid students in feeling more at ease and accepted. Students develop social-emotional competencies, which are essential for success, in this supportive environment.

To guarantee a seamless transition to high school, parental involvement is equally critical. Informational sessions and workshops for parents may encompass subjects, such as assisting their child with assignments, comprehending the graduation requirements of high

school, and preparing for college and career planning (Bruno et al., 2018; Lapon, 2020). In order to ensure that families are adequately informed and prepared to provide their children with the necessary support during this critical transition period, it is essential to engage them in regular meetings to discuss their child's transition plan and progress. This allows parents to share their perspectives, ask questions, and collaborate with teachers and other members of the IEP team (Chambers, 2018; Schaefer et al., 2018).

A comprehensive strategy that addresses academic, emotional, and social requirements is essential for effective transition planning. The probability of student success in high school is substantially enhanced by institutions that meticulously plan and execute transition strategies (Richter et al., 2022; Rowe et al., 2021). Engaging students in real-world applications of their studies and hands-on initiatives aids in their comprehension of the significance of their education and their retention of motivation during the transition. A sense of connection is fostered, and active participation is encouraged by providing families with regular updates, emails, and newsletters (Chambers, 2019).

To facilitate the transition, it is essential to provide personalized support. According to Ahmad and Thressiakutty (2020) and Shogren et al. (2019), tailoring instruction to the unique requirements of each student is instrumental in fostering academic success and fostering confidence. Pairing incoming students with peer mentors who can provide guidance and support, such as peer support systems, can help new students feel more connected and less isolated (Cmar & Markoski, 2019; Uka & Uka, 2020). Students who can rely on a dependable support network through this peer mentoring system are better equipped to navigate the social and academic challenges of high school.

Schools endeavor to create a nurturing and inclusive environment that fosters a sense of community and belonging. Developing a school culture in which all students feel respected and valued is facilitated by programs that promote diversity and inclusion (Chao, 2020; Pit-ten Cate et al., 2018). It is imperative that students are adequately prepared to confront the challenges of high school and beyond by addressing both the academic and social-emotional aspects of the transition. This comprehensive transition planning ultimately emphasizes the critical significance of deliberate and inclusive transition strategies, thereby improving the overall development and well-being of students.

Resources and Opportunities

The provision of resources and opportunities was crucial in aiding students during their transition to high school. Schools endeavored to foster an inclusive and supportive environment that facilitated student success by providing a comprehensive set of academic, extracurricular, and social-emotional support. In addition to being adequately prepared for the academic challenges that lie ahead, these endeavors also equipped students with the requisite skills and self-assurance to succeed in high school and beyond (Richter et al., 2022; Rowe et al., 2021).

The critical importance of supplying educational materials and activities that facilitate personal and academic development is indicated by the thematic findings on resources and opportunities. Having access to a variety of resources and programs substantially improves the learning experience and facilitates the successful transition of students to high school. Accessibility to a variety of educational resources is emphasized in this theme, which is crucial for student success. Orientation programs were implemented as one such endeavor to assist students in adapting to their new surroundings. These programs implemented transitional IEP meetings and continuous check-ins with case managers to guarantee that students progressively

acquired independence while still receiving requisite support (Marshall et al., 2019). Map-reading activities and practice navigating from class to class were among the customized strategies that were implemented to reduce students' apprehension and boost their self-assurance before the commencement of the academic year (Bagnall et al., 2021).

The academic transition was also addressed through targeted support programs. Crucial elements of these programs were the instruction of organizational strategies, time management, and study skills. High schools offer students additional resources and assistance, such as academic counselors, study groups, and tutoring programs, to assist them in overcoming academic obstacles (Bruno et al., 2018). According to Burke et al. (2020), these resources were essential in providing students with the necessary skills for academic success, thereby guaranteeing that they were adequately prepared to meet the demands of secondary school.

Through participation in extracurricular activities, personal development opportunities were substantially improved. Personal growth and development were facilitated by the diverse array of extracurricular opportunities that high schools provided, including athletics, organizations, and volunteer work. Developing the ability to balance academic responsibilities with extracurricular activities was a critical skill for students (Gaias et al., 2020). Students were not only required to effectively manage their time, but these activities also facilitated personal development, thereby preparing them for future challenges (Parker et al., 2020).

A critical component of student support was underscored as parental involvement. It was beneficial to organize events, such as orientation sessions, parent evenings, and open houses to facilitate the transition and offer continuous assistance. Parents were informed and prepared to provide their children with the necessary support during this critical period by engaging them (Landmark et al., 2013). Additionally, schools were required to provide social-emotional

resources, including peer support groups, and counseling services, to assist students in maintaining their emotional well-being (Schaefer et al., 2018). In addition to providing students with a secure environment in which to express their concerns, these resources also facilitated the development of coping strategies and resilience. It was also significant to have programs that were tailored to meet the requirements of a diverse population. Various assessment tools were implemented by schools to assist students in identifying their interests and strengths, thereby facilitating their career planning (Chao, 2020). To ensure that families were informed and engaged in their children's education, it was imperative to maintain ongoing communication (Pitt et al., 2021). Educational technology tools, including online learning platforms and digital resources, were emphasized as a critical component of resource provision, as they enhance students' learning experiences and provide them with pertinent future skills (Cho & Kim, 2019). Educators were guaranteed the most recent instructional strategies and resources through professional development (Shogren et al., 2019). The objective was to facilitate student success.

Implications for Practice

The implications for practice based on the findings of resources and opportunities are multifaceted and deeply impactful. To effectively support the academic and personal development of students, schools must prioritize the development and maintenance of a variety of resources and programs. Marshall et al. (2019) asserted that through the provision of indoctrination programs and ongoing check-ins, students can progressively develop independence while obtaining the requisite support. Additionally, Bagnall et al. (2021) have observed that customized strategies, including map-reading activities and practice navigating the school environment, can substantially reduce student apprehension and increase confidence.

Schools can enhance overall student outcomes and facilitate simpler transitions by guaranteeing that these resources are accessible and customized to the unique requirements of each student.

The integration of scholastic support programs that prioritize organizational strategies, time management, and study skills is essential for the success of students. Tutoring programs, study groups, and academic counselors are among the supplementary resources that high schools can offer to better prepare students for academic challenges (Bruno et al., 2018). Burke et al. (2020) emphasized the necessity of interventions to develop self-determination, a critical skill for students with disabilities. The integration of these academic support mechanisms into the curriculum is necessary for schools to create a learning environment that is conducive to the development of essential life skills and that also addresses academic challenges.

Social-emotional resources and parental involvement are both equally critical in providing students with the necessary support. According to Landmark et al. (2013), the organization of events, such as orientation sessions and parent evenings guarantees that parents are fully informed and actively involved in their children's education. Peer support groups and stress management among other forms of social-emotional support, offer students a secure environment in which to articulate their anxieties and cultivate effective coping mechanisms (Schaefer et al., 2018). Additionally, students can be better equipped to confront future challenges and improve their learning experiences by incorporating technology into the provision of resources, such as online learning platforms (Cho & Kim, 2019). According to Shogren et al. (2019), professional development for educators is crucial for the cultivation of an inclusive and supportive educational environment, as it guarantees that instructors are endowed with the most recent instructional strategies. In addition to academic preparation, this comprehensive approach also provides support for students' overall well-being and future success.

Empirical Implications

Parental involvement and social-emotional support are critical areas where empirical research can inform practice. Research has shown that students' anxiety and confidence can be substantially reduced and enhanced by structured orientation programs and continuous support. Bagnall et al. (2021) discovered that students' anxieties can be mitigated through customized strategies, including map-reading exercises and practice navigating the school environment. It is recommended that schools implement and rigorously evaluate comparable programs to guarantee that they effectively accommodate students' transitional requirements. These programs can be improved and adjusted through consistent empirical evaluation, thereby increasing their effectiveness.

To guarantee that academic support programs adapt to the diverse requirements of students, they must undergo empirical validation. To assist students in surmounting academic obstacles, Bruno et al. (2018) underscored the significance of supplementary resources, such as academic counselors, study groups, and tutoring programs. These programs should be evaluated in empirical studies to determine their effects on student performance and retention rates. The importance of fostering self-determination among students with disabilities is underscored by Burke et al. (2020), who recommended that targeted interventions undergo consistent evaluations to assess their efficacy. To guarantee that academic support programs are both effective and adaptable to evolving student requirements, schools can establish them based on empirical research.

Social-emotional support and parental involvement are critical areas in which empirical research can inform practice. Parental engagement is crucial for student success, as emphasized by Landmark et al. (2013). This engagement can be improved through consistent communication

and events. Best practices for promoting parental involvement and the specific effects of various forms of engagement on student outcomes should be investigated through empirical research. Schaefer et al. (2018) emphasized the importance of social-emotional resources, such as counseling services and peer support groups. Assessing the efficacy of these programs through empirical research can offer valuable insights into their influence on student academic achievement and well-being, thereby assisting educational institutions in the implementation of the most advantageous interventions.

Finally, the empirical implications of the integration of technology and professional development for educators are substantial. Educational technology tools can improve students' learning experiences and equip them with the skills necessary to confront future challenges, as demonstrated by Cho and Kim (2019). To determine the most effective technological tools and methodologies for various pupil populations, empirical research should be conducted. Shogren et al. (2019) underscored the significance of continuous professional development for educators, which must be based on empirical evidence to ensure that it is tailored to the current educational requirements. Schools can effectively support student success by providing educators with the necessary skills and knowledge by consistently evaluating and updating professional development programs based on empirical data.

Theoretical Implications

The theoretical framework that guided this study was based on the self-determination theory developed by Ryan and Deci (1985) who emphasized the importance of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in enhancing students' academic and social well-being. This theory identified three fundamental psychological needs: competence, relatedness, and autonomy, which were crucial for fostering motivation. In the context of transition planning for students

with disabilities, addressing these needs significantly improved their academic performance, sense of well-being, and mental health during the critical transition from middle school to high school (Lee & Kim, 2021; van Rens et al., 2019). By integrating self-determination theory into transition planning, educators created environments that supported these psychological needs, thereby promoting successful transitions and long-term academic success.

Competence is related to students' desire to feel effective and capable in their endeavors, particularly when facing new and challenging environments like high school. Research indicated that high school environments were often more competitive and less individualized than middle school settings, which could be daunting for students, especially those with disabilities (Letrello & Miles, 2003). To address this, the Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction (SDLMI) can be implemented to help students set goals, make plans, and monitor their progress, thus enhancing their sense of competence (Rowe et al., 2021). Empirical evidence suggested that structured goal-setting and incremental achievement helped students build confidence and manage the transition more effectively (Burke et al., 2020). Creating supportive environments that recognized and celebrated students' accomplishments further reinforced their sense of competence and encouraged continued effort and engagement in their education.

Relatedness, or the need to feel connected and valued by others, was another critical component of self-determination theory that significantly impacted students' transition experiences. Social interactions and peer relationships were particularly important during the transition to high school, as they mitigated feelings of isolation and anxiety (Letrello & Miles, 2003). Schools fostered relatedness by implementing peer mentorship programs, inclusive extracurricular activities, and social skills training (Schaefer et al., 2018). Such initiatives not only provided social support but also promoted inclusive school cultures where all students felt a

sense of belonging and acceptance. By facilitating positive social interactions and building strong peer networks, schools enhance students' sense of relatedness, thereby supporting their overall adjustment and success during the transition period (Bagnall et al., 2021).

Autonomy, the need to feel in control of one's actions and decisions, was the third critical component of self-determination theory. Ensuring that students had a sense of choice and control over their educational paths significantly boosted their intrinsic motivation and engagement. This was particularly important for students with disabilities, who faced additional challenges in asserting their autonomy (Cho & Kim, 2019). By involving students in their transition planning, providing opportunities for self-advocacy, and offering choices in their learning activities, educators supported the development of autonomy (Chao, 2020). Researchers showed that when students were actively involved in setting their goals and making decisions about their education, they were more likely to be motivated and take ownership of their learning (Shogren et al., 2019). Therefore, fostering autonomy in transition planning led to more personalized and effective educational experiences that aligned with students' interests and strengths, ultimately enhancing their success and satisfaction in high school and beyond.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations are potential weaknesses in a research study that the researcher cannot control. One limitation of this study was the sample size of the number of participants. A restricted number of participants may limit the generalizability of the findings, as the data collected may not accurately represent the broader population. The limited sample size was partially attributable to the availability of participants within the defined study period and logistical constraints. This limitation has the potential to result in distorted results and could compromise the study's overall reliability.

Another limitation of the study was its geographic location. The geographic location for this study was restricted to teachers from a single school district in Georgia. The geographic restriction may impact the diversity of perspectives and experiences that are documented in the study, as the results may not be pertinent to other regions with distinct demographic, cultural, or socioeconomic contexts. The results' generalizability may be impacted by the restricted location scope, which could minimize their applicability to a broader range of educational environments.

In addition, the study encountered limitations associated with the self-reporting nature of data acquisition. Participants' responses may be affected by personal biases, memory recall issues, or the wish to yield socially acceptable responses. This has the potential to result in biased findings that do not accurately reflect the true experiences and perceptions of the participants, potentially affecting the accuracy and authenticity of the data.

Delimitations refer to deliberate choices made by the researcher to establish certain boundaries for the study. One such delimitation was the decision to concentrate solely on students who were transitioning from middle school to high school. To offer a comprehensive understanding of this critical transitional period, it was determined that transitions at various educational levels may involve distinctive challenges and experiences. The researcher endeavored to develop targeted strategies and insights that are pertinent to this specific phase in students' academic journeys by restricting the scope to this specific transition.

Another delimitation was the selection of a qualitative research approach. During the transition to high school, the researcher selected this approach to investigate the intimate, nuanced experiences of students. In-depth examinations of students' emotions, perceptions, and strategies for coping were feasible through qualitative methodologies, including interviews and focus groups. The complexity and profundity of the transition experience were intentionally

selected to be captured by this method, as qualitative measures alone may not provide a comprehensive understanding.

The study was also restricted to transition planning for students with disabilities. To accommodate the unique requirements and obstacles encountered by this demographic during the transition to high school, this decision was chosen. To identify effective support mechanisms and interventions that are customized to the unique circumstances of students with disabilities, the research focused on this population. This focus was designed to address a deficiency in the current literature and offer actionable insights for educators and policymakers who deal with this demographic

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the study's results, limits, and delimitations, the following suggestions for further research are offered. Future research should strive to include a broader and more varied sample size to improve the applicability of the results to other communities and educational contexts. By extending the geographical location beyond one school district in Georgia, a wider array of experiences and contextual elements that impact the transition from middle school to high school may be included. In addition, future research might use longitudinal designs to monitor students' advancement and adaptation over time, yielding a more profound understanding of the enduring impacts of transition support systems. To overcome the inherent limitations of self-reporting bias, researchers should contemplate using a mixed-methods strategy that integrates qualitative interviews with quantitative surveys and observational data. This method may provide a more holistic understanding of the student's experiences and the efficacy of different assistance techniques. It is crucial to do further research on the requirements and difficulties experienced by students with disabilities throughout transitions. This research should

prioritize the development of individualized treatments that may be customized to meet individual needs. Examining the function of technology and digital tools in assisting transitions might provide creative solutions and improve the flexibility of educational methods in various settings.

Conclusion

The need for a supportive, resource-rich environment and self-determination in transition planning were the most important findings from this study. Schools must emphasize building and sustaining a range of activities to promote the academic and personal development of middle school students with disabilities. Orientation programs, tutoring, academic counseling, peer support groups, and stress management courses were recommended. Creating an inclusive and supportive educational environment also required technology integration and professional development for teachers. To lessen student anxiety and ease transfer, planned orientation sessions, continual assistance, and personalized techniques were shown to be essential.

Additionally, integrating competence, relatedness, and autonomy into education boosted students' motivation, confidence, and academic achievement. Such methods are expected to provide a comprehensive education by preparing students with disabilities intellectually and supporting their well-being and future success.

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Appendix A

IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

February 13, 2024

Tina Norris
Janet Deck

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY23-24-1018 Promoting Self-Advocacy Skills Development of Students with Disabilities Transiting from Middle School to High School

Dear Tina Norris, Janet Deck,

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(

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 546.111 (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.

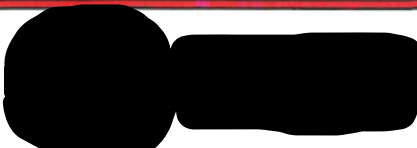


If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

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

Appendix B

Site Approval Letter

 <i>Providing students an education which promotes excellence, good citizenship, and a love of learning</i>	
SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS 	MEMBERS, BOARD OF EDUCATION 




RE: Research Request
DATE: February 14, 2024
TO: Tina Norris

The review of your research request to conduct research focusing on the proposed topic, *“Promoting Self-advocacy Skills Development of Students with Disabilities Transitioning from Middle to High School”* has been approved at the district level. You may proceed to obtain permission to complete this study from the building principal of the selected school.

As part of the study, I authorize you to disseminate any necessary staff surveys to the selected teachers with the understanding that no student information can be provided in the teacher responses. The only information available to you or that you may ask in your interviews/surveys is what is considered to be only public information. Individuals’ participation will be voluntary at their own discretion.

Sincerely,



Assistant Superintendent of Teaching & Learning



Appendix C

Interview Questions

1. Please introduce yourself and describe your educational background and career goals taking you through your current position including how long you have been working at BCHS?
2. Describe the overall academic strengths and needs of the students within the school in which you teach. SQ2
3. How are these skills or lack of skills relevant to their transition plan? SQ2
4. Describe any challenges or barriers the students may face when transitioning to high school. SQ1
5. How can this challenge be addressed? SQ1
6. How are the students' families involved in the transition planning process? SQ3
7. What strategies are being used to promote family engagement and collaboration? SQ1
8. Describe any successful practices you use when working with students with disabilities. SQ1
9. How are these barriers addressed? SQ1
10. What professional development experiences have you had to help prepare you to write transition plans? SQ1
11. What academic standards are already in place to help build students self- determination skills?
12. What opportunities are being provided for students to develop independent living such as managing finances, transportation, and daily living tasks? SQ2
13. How are the student's progress toward their transition goals being monitored

and evaluated? SQ

14. What else would you like to add to our discussion of your experiences developing transition plans? SQ1
15. What else would you like to share about working with students?

Appendix D

Focus Group Questions

1. How can teachers and other staff members support students during the transition to high school?
2. What roles do you think parents and families should play when creating a transition plan?
3. What types of resources or programs would be most beneficial for students that can be added to the transition plan?
4. What are the most important skills that should be added to a middle school transition plan?
5. How are the transition plans that are created at the middle school level helpful to students, when they move to high school?

Appendix E

Questionnaires Questions

1. How do you perceive your role in supporting students' self-determination during the transition planning process?
2. What strategies do you employ to foster student autonomy in decision-making? 3. What challenges do you encounter in promoting self-determination among students with disabilities?
4. How many years of experience do you have working with students with disabilities?
5. Have you received any training or professional development related to fostering self-determination in students with disabilities during the transition planning process? If yes, please provide details.
6. How do you collaborate with parents/guardians and other professionals to support the self-determination among students with disabilities during the transition planning process? Please explain.