

Walden University

College of Education

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Norrisa G. L. Newton

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Review Committee

Dr. Barry Birnbaum, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty

Dr. Narjis Hyder, Committee Member, Education Faculty

Dr. Danielle Hedegard, University Reviewer, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer
Eric Riedel, Ph.D.

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2018

Abstract

Examining Attrition Among Bahamian Special Education Teachers and

Implications for Special Education Reform

by

Norrisa G. L. Newton

MSc, The College of The Bahamas, 2013

BA, The College of The Bahamas, 2001

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Increasing levels of teacher attrition in special education within Bahamian public schools are preventing students with learning disabilities from achieving their learning goals within inclusive classroom settings. Addressing factors that influence attrition is vital to enhance the quality of education and the efficacy of educators while supporting positive social change. The purpose of this general qualitative study was to ascertain why Bahamian educators leave special education. This was achieved by exploring the influencing factors that have incited the decisions of public special education teachers within The Bahamas to resign or request premature retirement from the teaching profession, as well as how job satisfaction influences teacher retention within The Bahamas' public education system. Twelve Bahamian public educators (8 former special educators, 3 current reading specialists, and 1 current resource teacher) from a major city were randomly selected to participate in semistructured interviews. Data were analyzed via open coding. Job satisfaction, social cognitive, and social cognitive career theories were used as a lens through which to understand educators' career decisions. Findings revealed that Bahamian educators leave special education due to (a) lack of specialized training, (b) lack of administrative support, and (c) burnout. Contrary to existing literature, findings revealed that poor student behavior does not significantly influence attrition among educators, and a love for children does not significantly motivate teachers to remain. Mentoring and induction programs were cited as ineffective means of teacher retention. Educators are more likely to stay when they feel valued, appreciated, supported, and respected by administrators, colleagues, and parents.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family: To my wonderful, patient, and extremely supportive mother, Mrs. Hyacinth Spence-Ramsey, and to the best husband a wife could ever ask for—my soulmate, Shawn Christian Newton: I could not have come this far in my doctoral studies without the consistent support and encouragement given to me by my greatest fans. Thank you for never allowing me to give up during this long journey (even though the thought crossed my mind a few times). Your understanding during my long nights and early mornings meant the world to me. Giving me the space I needed along the way will always be appreciated. I will never forget the tears, the hugs, the laughs, and even the fears that we all shared together on this journey. I dedicate four years of sacrifice to you both. I made it because of you. Thank you for everything you've done to help me succeed. Your love will never be forgotten.

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Finally, I dedicate this dissertation in memory of the person who always wanted me to become a doctor (i.e., medical doctor, LOL). To my daddy, whom I affectionately called “The Foodsters:” Thank you for instilling this dream in me. I have finally become your “Dr. Riskey.”

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Prior to enrolling in Walden University in September of 2014, I was privileged to publish several research articles in various scholarly journals. I would not have evolved into a qualitative researcher had it not been for Dr. Yvonne Hunter-Johnson. Dr. Johnson, you started off as simply my research advisor but ended up becoming a very supportive mentor, and then a very good friend. I acknowledge the impact you have had on my life academically, professionally, and socially. Thank you for always pushing me beyond the limits and placing faith in me, showing me that I could accomplish anything. You brought out skills in me that I never knew I had. Thank you for being a second mom to me.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Overview of Teacher Attrition and Its Bahamian Context

Teacher attrition is a problem that has been the focus of educational researchers for many years (Joseph & Jackman, 2014); it has attracted the attention of education reformists in recent decades. Teacher attrition significantly affects school systems and, by extension, student achievement (Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013) as more teachers are needed to fill special education teacher positions. Researchers have proposed that the field of special education is one that is prone to teacher attrition (Mason & Matas, 2015; Zhang, Wang, Losinski, & Katsiyannis, 2014). Consequently, students with special education needs are at a disadvantage as educators (often general educators) who lack adequate training and skills to meet the demands of a special education program teach them. Due to the complexities and extensive demands of special education, this field is prone to higher levels of attrition than general education (Johnson & Semmelroth, 2014). This undoubtedly places special needs students at a disadvantage in that their individual needs are not adequately or effectively met, which may lead to a dysfunctional society in the future.

In 2011, The Bahamas' Department of Education offered grants to public educators to pursue Master of Science degrees in reading, with a concentration in inclusive education. This initiative came on the heels of the Department's decision to officially implement inclusive education throughout its primary and secondary schools (Hunter-Johnson, Newton, & Cambridge-Johnson, 2014). This initiative came approximately 17 years following an agreement that The Bahamas signed in 1994, known

as the Salamanca Statement (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 1994). In June 1994 in Salamanca, Spain, representatives of 92 governments and 25 international organizations met and devised an agreement known as the Salamanca Statement. One of the guiding principles of this agreement was that education services should consider the diverse needs of all children, and special needs students should be allowed access to education within the regular school setting. With this agreement came The Bahamas' decision to make strides toward inclusion within its public schools.

Bahamian public schools are innately inclusive because of the diversity of cultures, ethnicities, and learning disabilities that exist within classrooms. However, the actual execution of an inclusive education curriculum has yet to be pursued. This is primarily due to the absence of paraprofessionals, Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), modified curricula, and assistive technology, which are vital components of an inclusive education program (UNESCO, 1994). The absence of these elements limits teacher efficacy in accommodating the special education needs of students with learning disabilities (Cushner, McClelland, & Safford, 2012). Unfortunately, Bahamian public schools contain socially and academically inclusive classrooms in which students receive general education instruction (Hunter-Johnson et al., 2014). This does not reflect the fundamental principle of inclusion. Being a relatively new concept for many Bahamian educators; inclusive education has received primarily negative responses from both special and general educators due to lack of training in the practice of inclusion, limited understanding of what the practice entails, and lack of special education resources,

personnel, infrastructure, and support (Hunter-Johnson et al., 2014, p. 149). To clarify the practice of inclusive education, the Special Education Unit of the Department of Education drafted a document that outlined national standards for inclusive education (Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, 2014); however, teachers' willingness to participate in this practice and possible teacher retention initiatives were not taken into consideration. Research in organizational development implies that the success of any educational plan is determined by the attitudes of those involved in implementing and executing it (Baglibel, Samancioglu, Ozmantar, & Hall, 2014).

Special education within The Bahamas, as within the United States and the Caribbean, has for many years faced the challenge of providing quality education for students with disabilities through highly trained special educators (Boe, 2014; National Development Plan Secretariat, 2016; Seymour, Munnings, & Farquharson, 2015). The United States has been a front-runner in studies that have investigated factors influencing attrition and retention among educators; however, there exists very limited research (Farquharson, Bain, & Cooper, 2005; Stubbs & Young, 2013) on this issue in The Bahamas. This limited research base is not conducive to the development of a universal understanding of the current state of teacher attrition within The Bahamas' public education system. Attrition among public educators in The Bahamas is a trend that should be examined thoroughly to identify possible solutions.

The teaching profession of the 21st century seems to be more demanding for educators compared to the profession of more primitive eras (Leroux & Theoret, 2014). The existence of cultural and intellectual diversities within classrooms defend the

significance of differentiated instruction, effective leadership skills, the implementation and application of science- and research-based pedagogies, consistent professional development, and adequate, effective teacher training. The field of special education has seemed to evolve significantly from a global perspective, as laws and legislation have proliferated due to accountability requirements for achievement, particularly regarding students with special education needs (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016; UNESCO, 1994; Wright & Wright, 2015). These demands, which have been perceived by both general and special educators, have presented a struggle that some educators are not prepared to face. Unfortunately, due to such struggles, in addition to teacher burnout, inadequate material and human resources, insufficient training, student performance and behavior, and lack of parental support, educators are leaving the education profession (Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2012; Joseph & Jackman, 2014; Leroux & Theoret, 2014).

Frustration with the public education system in The Bahamas, particularly in the area of special education, appears to have outweighed educators' passion for teaching and learning. Unless the issue of teacher attrition in education is effectively addressed, managed, and circumvented, special education will be on a trajectory toward failure. Consequently, the productivity of Bahamian communities is at stake, and the overall development of The Bahamas is at risk, if institutions of learning are not producing contributing citizens capable of impacting positive social change. To this end, it is imperative that policy makers and education officials endeavor to first determine why educators are leaving the public education system, and then devise strategies for increasing and improving teacher retention within the public schools.

Although special education within The Commonwealth of The Bahamas has evolved gradually over the past two decades, this sector of the Bahamian education system is still in dire need of more consistent, effective, and robust initiatives that will assist in promoting the retention of highly qualified special educators (Bahamas Government, 2016; National Development Plan Secretariat, 2016). The successful implementation and operation of special education programs, or any educational program for that matter, hinge upon a myriad of social and emotional factors that must be addressed if student achievement and teacher efficacy are to be attained and maintained (Campbell-Whatley & Lyons, 2013). If left unaddressed, factors such as teacher support and training, leadership, teacher emotions, and lack of special education resources and infrastructure will instigate the demise of special education in The Bahamas.

Given the cultural and ethnic diversity of classrooms in public schools across the archipelago of The Bahamas and rising populations of students with disabilities who have special education needs, it is imperative that highly trained special educators are not only attracted to, but also retained within the field (Newton, Hunter-Johnson, Gardiner-Farquharson, & Cambridge, 2014). This is undoubtedly the foundation of special education reform: providing appropriate, quality education for all students, regardless of their learning needs (Cushner et al., 2012). Attracting, developing, and retaining qualified special educators is undeniably a challenge. Despite this challenge, teacher retention initiatives are vital to the academic, professional, and social development of a country's citizenry (Adnot, Dee, Katz, & Wyckoff, 2016).

In keeping with the mandate of The Bahamas Disability Act, public schools throughout The Bahamas must have appropriately trained professionals teaching students with special education needs. This is currently a mammoth task, as there exists an overall shortage of teachers, especially those who are trained in special education. To this end, general education teachers are placed in classrooms where inclusive education practices should be carried out but are implemented ineffectively (or not at all), due to lack of adequate training in special education practices such as inclusion. This negatively impacts not only students' achievement, but also the prospects for the overall survival of the Bahamian society. This problem speaks to the importance of education reform, specifically in special education, where there is a greater need for special educators as well as other paraprofessionals (Ministry of Education, Science, & Technology, 2014). The effectiveness of special education practices in The Bahamas will determine the level at which students are capable of transitioning into adulthood following their primary and secondary education. Special education reform will undoubtedly have rippling effects on the productivity and sustainability of the Bahamian society.

This research focused on the examination of attrition among special educators within the public education system of The Bahamas and the implications of the attrition trend for social change within the country. This chapter includes sections covering the background of the study, current research literature pertaining to the study's topic, the problem statement, the purpose of the study, the research questions, and the study's conceptual framework. Additionally, I address the nature and methodology of the study,

present definitions of key terms, and describe the study's assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Background

Teacher attrition is a dilemma that negatively impacts not only a country's finances, but its citizens' social and academic outcomes as well (Mason & Matas, 2015, p. 45). This speaks volumes to the importance of this study, given the social impact that a poorly educated society may have upon a country. Teacher attrition is a complex issue that is impacted by a myriad of variables (Berry, 2012; Dukes, Darling, & Doan, 2013; Lim, Lent, & Penn, 2016). It is a global problem that has demanded intensive investigation in recent decades, with increasing levels of teacher shortages within education systems around the world (Brown, 2014; Hiatt, 2012; Jacks, 2014).

Exploring the experiences of special education teachers within their daily working environments is key to understanding the factors that influence their decisions to either remain in the teaching profession or leave (Dukes et al., 2013). The importance of studies such as this should therefore not be underestimated. Due to the limited research base on special educators' attrition rates in The Bahamas' public education system and best practices for teacher retention, this study addressed the gap in knowledge pertaining to these issues relative to the Bahamian teacher population. An investigation into this trend is particularly critical now, in consideration of recent concerns about teacher shortages across Bahamian public schools.

This study may be beneficial in informing the formulation of education policies regarding the attraction, recruitment, and retention of special educators within The

Bahamas' public education system. This study is all the more significant because it can be used to provide insight in the development of teacher education programs that would better equip preservice teachers for teaching in inclusive education classroom settings (Goldhaber & Cowan, 2014). It is only through understanding the underlying causes of attrition among special educators that a plan toward attrition reduction may be established.

Problem Statement

Attrition among special educators poses a threat to achievement for special needs students globally. This conclusion has been supported by Grant (2017), Tyler and Brunner (2014), and Dukes et al. (2013), whose studies revealed that teacher absence negatively influences student learning. These studies reflect the work of Cook et al. (2015), who argued that without highly trained special educators, students' needs are not adequately addressed. Effective pedagogical practices in special education, executed by trained special educators, are critical in addressing the special education needs of all learners. Research findings support a correlation between high teacher turnover and poor student achievement (Boe, deBettencourt, Dewey, Leko, Rosenberg, & Sindelar, 2013). Current research published in *Teacher Education and Special Education* (Tyler & Brunner, 2014) defended the significance of pursuing solutions to special educator attrition. The Bahamas is not exempt from the global epidemic of attrition.

According to The Commonwealth of The Bahamas' National Census of Special Education (National Development Plan Secretariat, 2016), an increasingly significant number of special educators have been prematurely resigning from The Bahamas' public

education system. This is resulting in massive teacher shortages in both primary and secondary public schools across The Bahamas. With this large shortage of teachers, as supported by research conducted by Stubbs and Young (2013), special education in The Bahamas is at severe risk. There are now more general education teachers (without backgrounds in special education) in classrooms where the special education needs of diverse learners are not being met adequately (Bahamas Government, 2016). The unfortunate pattern of placing generalists in special education environments negatively affects the education of students with special education needs. Kurth and Keegan's (2014) examination of this practice revealed that some generalists are unable to effectively address the varied needs of students with learning and behavioral challenges due to poor background in special education. Such findings were echoed by Cancio, Albrecht, and Johns's (2013) examination of the importance of support for teachers who work with challenged students.

The reasons for high levels of attrition among Bahamian special education teachers should be investigated to assist Bahamian education officials in determining what initiatives are required to successfully retain teachers in the public education system. This investigation was also of equal importance in determining ways in which Bahamian general educators may be motivated to seek training in the area of special education (Hunter-Johnson et al., 2014). By attracting generalists' interest toward the field of special education, opportunity for their efficacy and competence in special education practices would ultimately be facilitated. Consequently, they would be better

equipped to enable special needs students to achieve more positive learning outcomes (Seymour et al., 2015).

What is even more damaging to the field of special education is the premature departure of early-career teachers (i.e., beginning teachers). This group of educators has been found to be leaving the profession at more alarming rates than veteran or general educators (Pepe & Addimando, 2013). Attrition among beginning teachers was studied by Shepherd, Fowler, McCormick, Wilson, and Morgan (2016), and Jones, Youngs, and Frank (2013), who found that poor self-efficacy (due to inadequate preservice preparation) contributes significantly to high attrition rates among this particular group. Current, evidence-based teaching strategies implemented for special education instruction are missing from the existing research. Using similar samples, Dixon, Yssel, McConnell, and Hardin (2014) and Wong, Ruble, and McGrew (2017) examined the relationship of teacher qualifications and preparation levels with attrition rates. The current literature does not speak to *what* special educators are doing differently to improve student success, thereby increasing both student and teacher motivation and resilience (Baldwin, Omdal, & Pereles, 2015). According to the standards of the Council for Exceptional Children, evidence-based practices in special education are heralded by educational researchers as effective in addressing the special learning needs of students with learning disabilities (Cook & Cook, 2013). Within the existing research on teacher attrition among special educators, it is evident that the underlying reasons behind this issue have been exhaustively reviewed.

One gap in the research is a comparison of special educators' ideal perceptions of teaching and their current teaching experiences. Such an exploration is useful in emotionally and mentally preparing preservice special educators for the field (McGrew, Ruble, Wong, & Yu, 2017). Enhancing the experiential background of preservice special educators would result in them entering the field with a clearer understanding of what to expect, thereby reducing the possibility of disillusionment or possibly regret. This supposition was defended by Werts, Carpenter, and Fewell (2014), who found that preservice teachers who were more exposed to real-life classroom experiences do not become as disillusioned upon entering the field. To this end, mentoring and induction programs are often highlighted in special education literature (*Exceptional Children, The Journal of Special Education, and Teacher Education and Special Education*) as a vital part of retaining high-quality special educators (Dunn, Jones, Leko, Nagro, Rock, Spooner, & Vasquez, 2016; Fowler et al., 2016)

Data obtained from the *Official Gazette of The Bahamas* (Bahamas Government, 2016) indicated a rapid increase in the number of teacher resignations from the public system over the past 10 years. Between the period of 2006 through 2012, the number of teacher resignations from the Bahamian public education system ranged from 45 to 52 teachers per year. During the period of 2013 through 2016, the total number of teacher resignations from the public education system doubled. According to *Gazette* records, 180 public school teachers resigned during the 2016 -2017 academic school year. Twenty-five percent of these teachers were either special educators, resource teachers, or reading specialists.

At present, research on the trend of attrition among special educators within the Caribbean is scarce. This scarcity in data applies to The Bahamas as well. To this end, it was intended that through this current study, the existing gap in literature from a Bahamian perspective would be deeply explored to illuminate the issues that special educators experience daily, thereby informing solutions to these issues (Hunter-Johnson et al., 2014; Pepe & Addimando, 2013). Determining the root cause of special educators leaving the teaching profession is critical and warrants in-depth exploration (Grant, 2017). Teacher attrition in special education should be explored, if achievement among all learners is to be pursued and maintained within the area of special education (Bettini, Park, Benedict, Kimerling, & Leite, 2016; Hunter-Johnson, 2015; Vernon-Dotson, Floyd, Dukes, & Darling, 2014).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this general qualitative study was to explore the influencing factors that have incited the decisions of public special education teachers within The Bahamas to resign or request premature retirement from the teaching profession. Through this study, it was anticipated that education policy makers within The Bahamas' Department of Education would develop a deeper understanding as to what is required to effectively satisfy the concerns of public educators to improve teacher retention rates in the area of special education. Additionally, it was anticipated that data obtained through this study would direct the development of teacher education programs at the tertiary level of education within The Bahamas, to better equip preservice teachers with the skills and training required to enhance the academic achievement of special needs students.

Through this study, stakeholders involved in the process of education reform within The Bahamas may be able to make more informed decisions regarding teacher issues, thereby ensuring that more special educators remain in the public system to more effectively address the special education needs of all learners. This study served as a research platform within the area of teacher attrition and retention in The Bahamas. Such data are significantly limited and have not been previously addressed at an extensive level within The Bahamas.

Research Questions

- What are the influencing factors that have incited the decision of public special education teachers within The Bahamas to resign or request premature retirement from the teaching profession?
- How does job satisfaction influence teacher retention within The Bahamas' public education system?

Conceptual Framework

Research literature has identified job satisfaction as a compelling indicator of teachers' levels of commitment to their jobs (Cancio et al., 2013). Job satisfaction is the conceptual framework that acts as a lens to illuminate this study. This concept was originally introduced by Locke (1969), and it has been posited that an individual's perceptions motivate a particular behavior, or response (Collie et al., 2012; Erdem, Illgan, & Ucar, 2014). Lofgren and Karlsson (2016) found job satisfaction to be a strong mediator in workplace factors, thereby impacting teachers' decision to either leave the profession or remain. This supports Conley and You's (2016) findings, which indicated

that highly satisfied educators are more likely to remain in their teaching positions. This indicates the need for education policy makers to examine special educators' working environments, to have a basis for workplace restructuring in hopes of reducing teachers' intentions to leave. The job satisfaction concept is applicable to teacher retention and attrition, as an understanding of this concept is useful in determining how teachers' work performance, commitment, and motivation collectively affect their disposition toward their jobs, as well as their concern for facilitating positive student outcomes. Collie et al. (2012) concluded that teachers who experienced greater levels of perceived efficacy and job satisfaction were likely to encourage greater achievement among their students. This affirms researchers' assumption that teacher attrition and turnover negatively affect student achievement (Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013).

Theoretical Framework

Job satisfaction, due to its affective, cognitive, and behavioral domains, is grounded in Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, and, by extension, Lent et al.'s (1994) social cognitive career theory (see Figure 1). Bandura, through his social cognitive theory, posited that behavior results from the interaction of individuals with their environment. This therefore justifies the assumption that extensive workloads and stresses from accommodating a myriad of disabilities in one classroom are influential in discouraging educators from remaining within the field of special education (Dukes et al., 2013).

Social cognitive career theory was designed to explain and predict a person's development of academic interests and intentions (Zhang et al., 2014). It was proposed

that individuals' occupational interests reflect their self-efficacy beliefs and are influenced by their abilities. Researchers have posited that special educators who are dissatisfied often feel this way due to their inability to achieve a desired outcome, or they may express low levels of self-efficacy (Aloe, Shisler, Norris, Nickerson, & Rinker, 2014; Andrews & Brown, 2015; Collie et al., 2012; Dicke et al., 2014). This justifies researchers' proposition that self-efficacy protects against teacher burnout, thereby fostering teachers' commitment to the teaching profession (Aloe, Amo, & Shanahan, 2014; Chestnut & Burley, 2015).

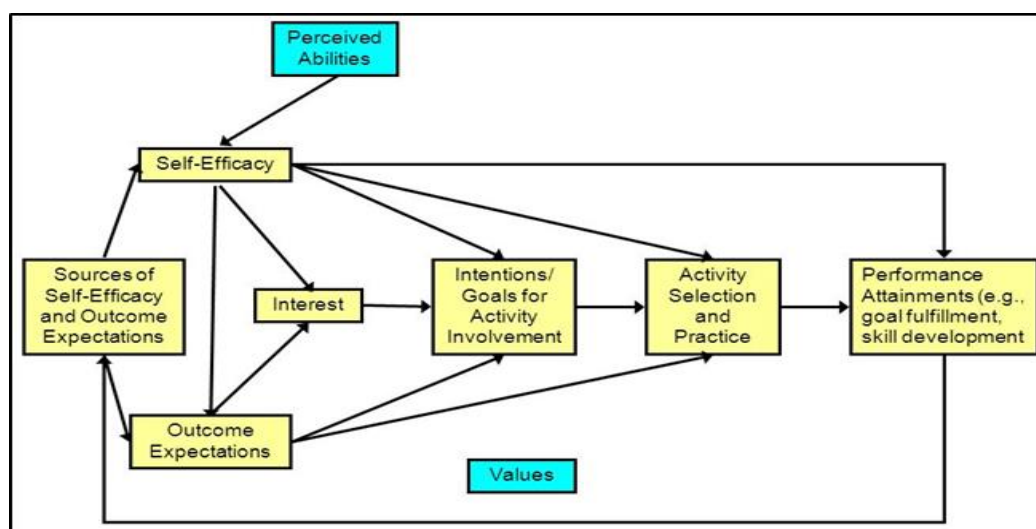


Figure 1. Social cognitive career theory flow chart. Adapted from “An Examination of Preservice Teachers’ Intentions to Pursue Careers in Special Education,” by D. Zhang, Q. Wang, M. Losinski, and A. Katsiyannis, 2014, *Journal of Teacher Education*, 65(2), p. 156 Copyright 2014 by American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education.

Job satisfaction, in combination with social cognitive theory and social cognitive career theory, was used to explain the favorable or unfavorable manner in which employees perceive their work, based upon the interactions within their social (i.e.,

working) environment. These theories were used as frameworks for understanding various aspects of career development, including performance and persistence in educational and occupational pursuits (Andrews & Brown, 2015). Researchers have found that educators perform their duties based upon their emotions or feelings (Lofgren & Karlsson, 2016). It is therefore posited that special educators who are less satisfied with the conditions of their working environment are less likely to remain in the field. The conceptual and theoretical frameworks used as the basis for this study justified the research questions posed and the study approach selected. In alignment with the characteristics of a general qualitative study, the research questions were used to develop an understanding of the experiences that contribute to special educators' career decisions and were maximized using a semistructured interview. A more detailed explanation of the theoretical propositions is provided in Chapter 2.

Developing an understanding of the effects of job satisfaction on educators also results in insight into the magnitude at which student performance and achievement are consequently affected (Tyler & Brunner, 2014). Grasping the underlying concept of job satisfaction and the impact it has on teacher career decisions is crucial to the efforts of education reformists and policy makers in their quest to devise effective teacher retention strategies and initiatives. Application of Locke's job satisfaction concept offers guidance on ways in which to facilitate teacher retention, thereby reducing attrition among educators in both general and special education classrooms.

Nature of the Study

This study adopted a general qualitative study design, which allowed for a more in-depth examination of the issues surrounding attrition and retention of special educators as various perceptions were analyzed. A general qualitative study was the most appropriate research design because it facilitated an in-depth understanding of the issue at hand through examination of the experiences of special educators within their workplace. In qualitative studies, data saturation is vital, and it is imperative that the researcher can obtain rich data from the study's sources (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Walden University's handbook on sources of data for research (Walden University, 2014) identified interviews as an appropriate data source in qualitative research. To this end, this study collected data via semistructured interviews, which were audio tape-recorded (with participants' approval). Enabling the reader to develop a clear understanding of the factors surrounding teacher attrition, this qualitative research was consistent with understanding why educators make the career decisions they do, which is the primary focus of this dissertation. The semistructured interviews included questions pertaining to (a) teacher demographics, (b) overall school and classroom data, and (c) professional and social-emotional needs of teachers that should be met to enhance retention levels.

Additionally, data were obtained from one focus group interview. According to Bernard (2012), focus groups are one way in which researchers can elicit multiple perspectives on a given topic. This method, according to Fusch and Ness (2015), drives research through openness.

Analysis of the data was carried out through the process of open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 2010) to establish themes and major concepts, thereby creating greater knowledge. Through the interviews, I sought insight into factors influencing special educators' decisions to prematurely leave the profession or continue in the profession. It was also anticipated that the interaction among the interviewees within the focus group would generate rich, in-depth data as a group (i.e., shared) experience was examined (Creswell, 2013).

Teacher attrition has been described by researchers as the voluntary departure of teachers from the profession (Tyler & Brunner, 2014). It is a complex and problematic issue that, if left unresolved, presents dire ramifications for teachers, students, and the education system as a whole. For this reason, it is imperative that the main causes of this problem are identified; this was the aim of this study.

Definitions

Attrition

Numerous researchers have defined *attrition* as a “loss, weakening, and wearing down of professionals through undefined roles, excessive paperwork, and the demands of service delivery” (Guerra, Hernandez, Hector, & Crosby, 2015). Tyler and Brunner (2014) defined *teacher attrition* as “early and/or voluntary teacher resignation” (p. 204). Other researchers (Conley & You, 2017) have referred to *teacher attrition* as teachers leaving the field of education. Researchers have also used the terms *attrition*, *transfer*, and *exit* interchangeably in reference to individuals leaving teaching.

Inclusive Education/Inclusion

Inclusive education, also referred to as *inclusion*, is instruction of students with diverse learning needs (social, physical, mental, sociocultural) within the regular (mainstream) classroom setting, in the least restrictive environment. This means that all special needs students have access to the general education curriculum, in the same way as their nondisabled peers (Cushner et al., 2012; Hunter-Johnson et al., 2014).

General Educator

A teacher who instructs students in the curriculum designed for preschool through high school (Berry, 2012; Conley & You, 2017; Major, 2012; You & Conley, 2015).

Special Education

Specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability (Conley & You, 2017).

Special Educator

A teacher trained in special education practices, who instruct students who have special learning needs (Andrews & Brown, 2015; Crutchfield, 1997; Tyler & Brunner, 2014).

Retention

Keeping teachers in the teaching profession, or the commitment of teachers to the teaching profession (Andrews & Brown, 2015; Campbell-Whatley & Lyons, 2013).

Job Satisfaction

Erdem, Ilgan, and Ucar (2014) and Cameron and Lovett (2015) defined *job satisfaction* as the feeling that employees hold toward their job.

Social Cognitive Theory

Originated by Bandura (1986), the underlying principle of this theory is that individuals react or behave according to their experiences and interactions within their social environments (Andrews & Brown, 2015; Conley & You, 2016; Guerra, Hernandez, Hector, & Crosby, 2015).

Social Cognitive Career Theory

A paradigm originated by Lent et al. (1994), *social cognitive career theory* is used to explain and predict an individual's academic interest and intentions (Lim et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2014)

Assumptions

It is assumed that teacher attrition harms student achievement (Roby, 2013; Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013). It is also assumed that teachers who experience greater levels of perceived job satisfaction encourage greater achievement in their students (Collie et al., 2012). These assumptions were necessary in the context of the study to influence the inferences that may be drawn from it.

Scope and Delimitations

Delimitations are the boundaries of a thesis or dissertation established by the researcher. These boundaries include research questions, the theoretical or conceptual framework of the study, and populations chosen to study (Patton, 2014). Issues and challenges within special educators' day-to-day working environment were the focus of this study, in which I sought to determine the impetuses behind educators' decisions to leave the teaching profession, as well as what must be done to enhance educators' levels

of commitment. This study was chosen as a way of improving the standards of special education within The Bahamas' public education system, through the revelation of findings specific to teacher attrition and retention within the field of special education. This is important because the learning needs of students with disabilities must be addressed to improve their academic achievement and future quality of life as productive and contributing citizens of The Bahamas.

Using convenience sampling, I recruited a group of primary special education teachers ($n = 12$) who met the following inclusion criteria: formerly taught in The Bahamas' public education system as a special education teacher, resource teacher, or reading specialist ($n = 8$); currently teaching in The Bahamas' public education system as a special education teacher, resource teacher, or reading specialist ($n = 4$); and minimum teaching experience of 3 years, with minimum qualification of a bachelor's degree in primary education, high school education, or special education from an accredited university.

Limitations

Limitations are weaknesses within a study that are primarily outside the researcher's control. Examples of limitations include research design choice, limited funding, or inadequate sample. Generalizability was a limitation of this study, given that the sample was limited to one island (out of approximately 30 populated islands) within The Bahamas. Convenience sampling was another limitation of this study; this procedure may lead to underrepresentation of groups (i.e., special educators) within a sample. A third limitation was that qualitative studies do not lend themselves well to replicability, as

data are derived from specific individuals' personal experiences. One potential bias that could have influenced this study's outcomes was researcher bias (Creswell, 2013). Due to the relationships that I had with some of the participants (i.e., we were former colleagues), I could have led or guided participants in their interview responses. To address these limitations and biases, the following measures were taken: (a) only open-ended questions were asked, (b) all data were collated and evaluated equally, (c) interviews were transcribed to ensure validity of data, and (d) the study underwent peer review to sustain objectivity.

Significance

Over the past decade, there has been a continuous increase in the number of educators resigning or prematurely retiring from The Bahamas' public education system. According to The Bahamas' State of the Nation Report (National Development Plan Secretariat, 2016), the highly qualified educators are the ones leaving the field of education. This trend is posing a significant threat to general education and is even more concerning in special education. The results of this study contribute to the limited research base of studies on public education in The Bahamas by providing insight into the Bahamian education system from the perspective of special education. Through this study, the teaching profession within The Bahamas' public education system may be greatly impacted, as education policy makers may be better able to make informed decisions regarding the implementations (i.e., policies, standards, legislature, programs, etc.) that are required to promote the retention of educators within The Bahamas' public education system. Developing a deeper and more profound understanding of why

teachers are leaving is fundamental to the process of education reform. The only way in which to determine how to attract and retain educators is to ascertain what motivates them to remain in the teaching profession.

The purpose of education is to produce well-rounded, educated citizens who are capable of instigating positive social change, thereby making positive contributions to the development of their society. To this end, a study such as this one is relevant to student success, in that it is important that policy makers endeavor to retain knowledgeable, experienced, and well-informed professionals, particularly in the area of special education (Chestnut & Burley, 2015; Dicke et al., 2014), in an effort to enhance the academic outcomes of students with special education needs and to develop the efficacy of all teachers (Hanushek, Rivkin, & Schiman, 2016; Joseph & Jackman, 2014). Educated students are more likely to become productive members of society. To ensure that students receive the best education possible, it is imperative that they are guided and instructed by educators who are comfortable in and committed to their roles.

Furthermore, this study is significant because it provides a platform for generating additional knowledge beneficial to the recruitment and retention initiatives of Bahamian teachers. This, in turn, could reduce attrition rates among special educators within the public education system, thereby providing special-needs students with the qualified teachers they require to maximize their academic outcomes. If this occurs, the overall teacher shortage within The Bahamas public education system could be ameliorated.

This study provides insight into the special education reform strategies required for adequately training preservice teachers in special education at the tertiary level of

instruction and facilitating the retention of highly qualified special educators. Taking the time to understand the underpinnings of teacher retention is worth the effort when positive social change is at stake.

Summary

Attrition among Bahamian special educators is a complex issue that demands the attention of all Bahamian education stakeholders and policy makers. Not only common in this archipelago of nations, teacher attrition is a global challenge that has impacted numerous countries for decades (Boe, 2014; Dupriez, Devvaux, & Lothaire, 2015; Mason & Matas, 2015; Wang, Hall, & Rahimi, 2015). Researchers have supported the importance of examining the causes of attrition among special educators to develop strategies for more effective teacher retention (Avalos & Valenzuela, 2016; Cameron & Lovett, 2015; Clandinin et al., 2015). According to current research, teacher attrition, which has been defined as the voluntary departure from the education profession, occurs because of a myriad of social and emotional issues. Hence, numerous researchers have used social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), and social cognitive career theory (Lent et al., 1994) as theoretical frameworks and qualitative lenses for understanding the issue of teacher attrition (Andrews & Brown, 2015; Guerra et al., 2015; Hunter-Johnson et al., 2014; Lim et al., 2016; Tyler & Brunner, 2014). Researchers have also used Locke's job satisfaction concept as a conceptual framework for the study of teacher attrition, in combination with the social cognitive theories (Berry, 2012; Conley & You, 2015; Erdem et al., 2014).

According to research, teacher attrition among special educators is caused by factors including burnout, low levels of self-efficacy, insufficient training, lack of mentoring, and lack of administrative support (Hunter-Johnson, 2015). Special education reform begins with the consistent attraction and retention of qualified educators committed to maximizing learning outcomes for students with disabilities. Retention efforts at the school level are inarguably vital; however, such efforts should begin with proper training and preparedness of preservice teachers at the tertiary level of education. This suggests that higher institutions of learning within The Bahamas should ensure that their teacher education programs are readjusted to adequately prepare teachers for special education and inclusive education practices (Hunter-Johnson et al., 2014). Growing numbers of students with learning disabilities, coupled with a rise in ethnic and cultural diversity, imply that the term *general education* should be eliminated. The demographics of Bahamian public schools do not require generalist teachers per se, but rather educators who can instruct diverse learners in an inclusive education setting.

The research explored briefly in this chapter implies that one of the root causes of attrition lies within educators' low levels of self-efficacy to teach students with severe learning disabilities (Collie et al., 2012; Wang et al. 2015; Zhang et al., 2014). Accommodating learners of diverse disabilities in inclusive classrooms takes a toll on educators; if they are not adequately trained to deal with this effectively, individuals soon become frustrated and burnt out. This speaks to the importance of teacher support from administrators as well as parents. A successful path to special education reform includes the evaluation of special educators' performance, in addition to the evaluation and

analysis of current special education programs and practices (Johnson & Semmelroth, 2014). Inclusion is relatively new to The Bahamas, as the actual practice has not been officially implemented in schools. Although classrooms in the public schools are inherently inclusive, teachers require additional training in the practice of inclusion. In the interim, students with special education needs are not being effectively accommodated. This not only negatively impacts student outcomes, but also fosters a dysfunctional society (Berry, 2012; Johnson & Semmelroth, 2014; Mason & Matas, 2015).

Teacher attrition, particularly in the area of special education, is detrimental. Studies like this one are crucial in determining what changes are required to increase teachers' commitment to the field. Teacher support and special education training are fundamental in positively influencing teachers' decisions to remain in the field. According to Cameron and Lovett (2015), social-emotional issues arise when educators become overwhelmed by negative experiences within their working environment. Consequently, developing an understanding of what plagues special educators on a day-to-day basis is important in devising solutions to alleviate such stresses and influence educators to remain. It is crucial that all stakeholders remain focused on the big picture—the goal of education, which is to produce knowledgeable citizens who are capable of making positive contributions to their societies.

Special education reform, and the closing of the achievement gap in Bahamian education, demand a revolution of special education ideas, strategies, and policies. In the effort to make each educator's load lighter, stakeholders must reach the point where they

realize the importance of collaboration. All stakeholders have a role to play, and if each individual is effective in his or her role, the whole puzzle of special education reform will begin to come together, piece by piece. The key to achieving positive outcomes in special education is for all educators to work collaboratively with each other and with policy makers through the sharing of goals and exchange of empirically based ideas. Such an approach to school improvement and positive social change would be most effective. Preventing and resolving teacher attrition so that all students receive high-quality instruction is critical in the 21st-century economy. This is important not only for the academic and social success of all individuals, but also for the well being of society as a whole.

Chapter 2 of this study explores a larger cross-section of teacher attrition research literature, and the implications this phenomenon has for special education, education stakeholders, and society as a product of positive social change efforts.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Overview

As previewed in Chapter 1 of this research proposal, teacher attrition across public schools within The Bahamas is resulting in a significant deficit in highly trained special educators capable of accommodating the academic and social deficiencies of special-needs students (Hunter-Johnson et al., 2014). The Commonwealth of The Bahamas' National Census of Special Education (Gardiner-Farquharson, Bain, & Cooper, 2012) reported that an increasingly significant number of special educators have been prematurely resigning from The Bahamas' public education system, particularly in special education. This shortage of teachers, according to Seymour et al. (2015), implies that special education in The Bahamas is at a severe risk of failing to close the achievement gap for special-needs learners throughout the government's public schools. At present, there are more general education teachers (without backgrounds in special education) in classrooms where the special education needs of diverse learners are not being met adequately (Hunter-Johnson et al., 2014). Teacher attrition is not only a school problem, but a societal problem as well.

Drawing from the philosophies of John Dewey and Cuban (2013), the goal of education should be to transform learners into well-mannered, productive, and contributing members of society (Weisburd & McEwen, 2015; Wilson-Fleming & Wilson-Younger, 2012). Without proper educational structures, society is at risk of becoming a breeding ground for dysfunctional, illiterate, and unproductive citizens, which increases the likelihood of criminal activity.

The reasons for high levels of attrition among Bahamian special education teachers, specifically at the primary level of education, were investigated to assist Bahamian education officials in determining what initiatives are required to successfully retain teachers in the public education system (Department of Education, 2013). This investigation was also of equal importance in determining ways in which Bahamian general educators may be motivated to seek training in special education (Hunter-Johnson et al., 2014).

The purpose of this general qualitative study was to explore the influencing factors that have incited the decisions of public special education teachers within The Bahamas to resign or request premature retirement from the teaching profession. It was anticipated that through this study, education policy makers within The Bahamas' Department of Education would develop a deeper understanding as to what is required to effectively satisfy the concerns of public educators to improve teacher retention rates in special education. Additionally, it was anticipated that data obtained through this study would direct the development of teacher education programs at the tertiary level of education within The Bahamas to better equip preservice teachers with the skills and training required to enhance the academic achievement of special-needs students. Through this study, stakeholders involved in the process of education reform within The Bahamas may be able to make more informed decisions regarding teacher issues, thereby ensuring that more special educators remain in the public system to more effectively address the special education needs of all learners. This study serves as a research platform within the area of teacher attrition and retention in The Bahamas. Such data are

significantly limited, and this issue has not been previously addressed at an extensive level within The Bahamas.

Education researchers have fervently explored teacher attrition among special educators to identify the best strategies for retaining highly qualified teachers (Avalos & Valenzuela, 2016; Andrews & Brown, 2015; Cameron & Lovett, 2015; Clandinin et al., 2015; Conley & You, 2017; DeAngelis, Wall, & Che, 2013; Goldhaber & Cowan, 2014; Zhang et al., 2014). A synopsis of the current literature in teacher attrition among special educators revealed that the most common influencing factors in teachers' decisions to leave their profession are (a) burnout (due to workload), (b) lack of support (from colleagues and administration), (c) lack of teacher training, and (d) poor teacher-student interactions. Researchers have defended the importance of consistent teacher support, collaboration, and extensive professional development in retaining special educators (Glennie, Mason, & Edmunds, 2016; Lofgren & Karlsson, 2016; Tyler & Brunner, 2014).

Current research supports the assumption that job stresses and disappointment in work experiences are major contributors to high attrition levels within the field of special education (Andrews & Brown, 2015; Cameron & Lovett, 2015). According to Andrews and Brown (2015), teachers whose experiences fell short of their initial expectations were more likely to leave the teaching profession. Cancio et al. (2013) found that job-related stresses influenced educators' decisions to leave the field of special education. Berry's (2012) findings also revealed that special education teachers' working conditions contributed to teacher attrition.

According to Tyler and Brunner (2014), special educators of students with more severe disabilities tend to leave the field at higher rates compared to educators of nondisabled students. Despite yearly fluctuations in attrition levels within the United States, special education rates have often been almost double the attrition rates for general education (United States Department of Education, 1999). Attrition trends in the field of special education have indicated that in the United States, shortages of special education teachers have increased along with numbers of special-needs students (Boe, 2014). Likewise, a study conducted by Hunter-Johnson et al. (2014) found that in The Bahamas, educators held negative perceptions of inclusive education, due to the broad spectrum of disabilities they would have to address in the classroom. This factor discouraged teachers from considering careers in special education.

The trend of attrition has become a cause for great concern, particularly among new educators (Conley & You, 2016). In earlier years, it was found that older educators were the ones leaving the profession at higher rates due to burnout, illnesses, and retirement; however, current research indicates that attrition rates are becoming significantly higher among new special educators after an average of only 3 to 5 years in the profession (Berry, 2012; Cancio et al., 2013; Clandinin et al., 2015; DeAngelis, Wall, & Che, 2013). This research is supported by Dupriez, Devlvaux, and Lothaire (2015) and Struyven and Vanthournout (2014), who found that a significantly large number of beginning teachers leave the teaching profession after only a few months or a few years of work experience (p. 21). Data from a study conducted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) indicated that up to 30% of Australian

educators leave the teaching profession within the first 5 years. Researchers (Prather-Jones, 2011) have confirmed that in the United States, “the national average of special educator attrition is estimated at approximately 50% of special educators in the first 5 years of teaching” (Tyler & Brunner, 2014, p. 284).

This chapter consists of six sections, covering (a) the literature search strategy, (b) a theoretical foundation for teacher attrition, (c) the study’s conceptual framework, (d) a synthesis of current teacher attrition studies, (e) implications of teacher attrition for special education reform and social change, and (f) a summary and conclusions.

Literature Search Strategy

Library Databases, Search Engines, and Key Search Terms

Numerous library databases were extensively searched for published research pertaining to the issue of teacher attrition and best retention practices. These databases included Researchgate.net, SagePremier 2017, PsychINFO, Science Direct, Taylor & Francis, Sage Journals, Elsevier, EBSCOhost, ERIC, Walden University Library, and ProQuest. Search engines used included Google and Google Scholar. Outlined in Table 1 is a list search terms and combinations of search terms that were used to locate scholarly articles on teacher attrition, social cognitive theory, and social cognitive career theory. Also outlined are the databases used to search for specific terms.

Table 1

Key Search Terms and Databases Used

Terms	Databases used
Public school teacher attrition	ERIC, Sage Journals, Google Scholar
Special education attrition	ERIC, Sage Journals, Sage Premier 2017
Retention of special educators	Taylor & Francis, Google Scholar
Teacher turnover and student achievement	Walden Library, ERIC, EBSCO
Teacher attrition in the Caribbean	ProQuest, ERIC, Google Scholar
Bandura, social cognitive theory	Science Direct, Researchgate.net, PsychINFO
Locke, 1969	Science Direct, Researchgate.net, PsychINFO
Social cognitive career theory	Science Direct, Sage Journals
Job satisfaction theory	Science Direct, PsychINFO, Researchgate.net
Teacher attrition	ERIC, Sage Journals, Taylor & Francis
Special educators' attrition	Walden Library, EBSCO Host, Elsevier, ERIC
Teacher turnover	ERIC, Sage Journals, Taylor & Francis, EBSCO
Teacher attrition in The Bahamas	Google Scholar
Social cognitive theory	Science Direct, Researchgate.net, PsychINFO
Locke, 1969, job satisfaction	Science Direct, Researchgate.net, PsychINFO
Social cognitive theory and teacher attrition	ERIC, Sage Journals, Sage Premier 2017, Science Direct, Researchgate.net, PsychINFO

Theoretical Foundation

Description of Theories

This study's thesis is built upon Bandura's social cognitive theory and Lent et al.'s (1994) social cognitive career theory. One of the fundamental principles of social cognitive theory is that daily interactions within one's day-to-day environment have the potential to influence certain behaviors in individuals (Dukes et al., 2013). This

proposition implies that educators' workplaces play a significant role in their motivation to continue within the teaching profession. Researchers have also posited that an individual's perception of their abilities and competence play a foundational role within social cognitive theory. To this end, it is suggested that people's occupational choices and successes hinge upon their self-efficacy beliefs (Goddard et al., 2015; Lim et al., 2016). It is assumed, therefore, that the higher an individual's level of self-efficacy is, the more likely the individual will be to display a more positive attitude toward his or her occupation.

Through the social cognitive career theory originated by Lent et al. (1994), researchers have proposed that experiential factors collectively shape an individual's career-related efficacy and outcome expectations (Zhang et al., 2014). It is therefore assumed that negative experiences (i.e., heavy workloads, severe disabilities, lack of support) with special-needs students impact educators' outcome expectations, particularly if they inadequately trained to accommodate the learning needs of these students. At the same time that negative experiences with special-needs students can lead to career changes for educators, positive experiences can shape career trajectories as well. The positive encounters of some special educators have supported their decisions to remain within the teaching profession. In many instances, however, those teachers who remain in the field have adopted coping strategies that have enhanced their intrinsic motivation to serve special-education students (Andrews & Brown, 2015; Zhang et al., 2014). Through the lens of the social cognitive career theory, it is assumed that unachieved goals and disappointing outcomes may prompt educators to change careers (Lim et al., 2016).

Understanding the influence of social class is vital to the development of interventions to prevent teacher attrition and promote teacher retention (Brown & Lent, 2016).

Social Cognitive and Social Cognitive Career Theories

Understanding the nature of teacher attrition and what is required to enhance the retention of teachers begins with developing an understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of the problem. Examining why teachers pursue or leave certain careers is key to the development of attrition intervention initiatives. In a qualitative review of literature, Brown and Lent (2016) explored the applicability of social cognitive career theory (SCCT) to career development. They found that this theory is significantly useful when applied to school contexts as a way of better understanding teachers' future career trajectories. The range of populations to which the SCCT may be applied serves as validation of this theory's utility as the basis of teacher retention platforms. SCCT, which is rooted in Bandura's social cognitive theory, has been used by researchers to support the significance of social networks and interactions in predicting future decisions (Thompson, Dahling, Chin, & Melloy, 2017).

Numerous researchers (Aloe, Amo, et al., 2014 Andrews & Brown, 2015; Dicke, Parker, Marsh, Kunter, Schmeck, and Leutner, 2014) have applied social cognitive and social cognitive career theories as the basis of studies on teacher attrition of special educators like the current study. Dicke et al. (2014) applied social cultural theory as a lens through which to develop an understanding of the various social constructs that discourage teachers from continuing in the profession. They used social cognitive theory to inform how work stressors reduces educators' levels of self-efficacy in regard to

classroom management. Findings revealed that teachers who felt inadequate in their ability to show effective classroom management skills became frustrated, exhausted, and consequently less motivated. Similarly, Aloe, Amo, et al. (2014) applied social cognitive theory as a framework for understanding how self-efficacy in classroom management determined the level of burnout experienced by a teacher. Findings from this quantitative study indicated that higher levels of self-efficacy protected against teacher burnout, which enhanced teachers' intrinsic motivation to teach even the most challenging students.

Wang et al. (2015), like Aloe, Amo, et al. (2014), explored social cognitive theory from the perspective of self-efficacy. In comparison to other studies (Aloe, Amo, et al., 2014; Dicke et al., 2014), Wang et al. also found self-efficacy to be a strong predictor of teachers' motivation. These researchers proposed that motivation prompts educators to promote higher levels of learning and achievement in their students. To this end, it is reasonable to infer that teachers' self-efficacy indirectly impacts student learning. The assumptions of social cognitive theory clearly justify why teachers leave the profession when they feel as though they are no longer capable of reaching their students (Hunter-Johnson et al., 2014).

Andrews and Brown (2015) applied social cognitive theory to a quantitative study, using it as a foundation for explaining the correlation between an individual's ideal expectations and actual experiences. They proposed that when teachers' work experiences do not satisfactorily meet their preconceived expectations, they begin to experience frustration and consequently burnout. In this study, Andrews and Brown

examined social cognitive theory from the perspective of environmental factors and teachers' cognitions (p. 127). It was hypothesized that special education teachers' work experiences were influenced by their environment, perceptions, and behaviors. Bandura's social cognitive theory was used by Andrews and Brown to defend their supposition that teachers' performance and commitment decrease when their desired expectations are not met.

SCCT (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994) has been used by many researchers as a platform for theory extension, development, and research (Brown & Lent, 2016; Sheu & Bordon, 2017; Thompson et al., 2017). Lent et al. applied SCCT to predict the types of educational activities toward which people will be drawn and in which they will succeed. In Lent et al.'s study, SCCT was used to focus attention on the process of career development, rather than the destination. Inquiry was aimed toward factors that either fostered or hinders individuals' interest in a specific field. In terms of attracting individuals to a certain field of study or occupation, Fouad and Santana (2017) applied SCCT to the development of initiatives that would attract and retain more women and people of color in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) programs and careers. With regard to the social aspect of social cognitive theory, the researchers studied the influence of various social factors that would retain individuals in, or discourage persons from remaining in, such areas of study or occupation.

Thompson et al. (2017) used SCCT as an organizing framework to devise a career management model (Brown & Lent, 2017) for interpreting data on job loss and reemployment. This model is useful in identifying the various types of adaptive career

behaviors that persons exhibit during job loss or job recovery. This model was useful in the context of the current study, in which it was applied to develop an understanding of how existing educators within the public education system adapted to their stressful work environments to maintain commitment to the profession. This would undoubtedly inform teacher retention initiatives and strategies. With reference to research development, Sheu and Bordon's (2017) study applied SCCT as a platform for improving sampling and methodological issues in international research on this theory. Additionally, they advocated for more longitudinal research to illuminate the various variables related to this theory. The suppositions of these theories are similar to those of this current study, as later confirmed in Chapter 5.

Conceptual Framework

Although definitions of teacher attrition vary slightly among researchers, the essence of this issue remains consistent. Guerra, Hernandez, Hector, and Crosby (2015) defined teacher attrition as a loss and wearing down of professionals, due to the demands of service delivery (p. 334), while Ingersoll, Merrill, and May (2014) defined teacher attrition as a leave or resignation from the teaching profession years ahead of retirement. Some researchers used the terms attrition and turnover interchangeably to mean a loss from the profession (Avalos & Valenzuela, 2014; Clandinin et al., 2015; Dupriez et al., 2015). Dove (2004) defined attrition as "premature and voluntary departure" (p. 9), coinciding with Tyler and Brunner's (2014) definition, which defined attrition as the "early and/or voluntary teacher resignation (not including teachers whose employment was involuntarily terminated)" (p. 284).

The concept of job satisfaction, originated by Locke, has been used by numerous researchers (Conley, 2015; Berry, 2012; Erdem et al., 2014; Tyler & Brunner, 2014) to explain (and facilitate an in-depth understanding of) teacher attrition. This concept refers to a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction received from working in an occupation (Collie et al., 2012). Job satisfaction speaks to the feeling that an employee has toward his job (Erdem et al., 2014; Cameron and Lovett, 2015). It is posited that job satisfaction is a strong determinant of an educator's decision to quit or pursue a career in education (Glennie et al., 2016), as it is strongly associated with teachers' commitment to teaching. It is assumed that satisfied educators who are pleased with their working environment remain in the teaching profession longer than those who experience burnout, frustrations, and lack of support from colleagues or administrators (Collie et al., 2012). Another proposition of the job satisfaction concept is that teachers who are dissatisfied with their working environment are less likely to incorporate effective teaching strategies within the classroom (Erdem et al., 2014). This therefore reconfirms the association between the social cognitive theory and job satisfaction. Job satisfaction is used as the conceptual framework for this current study to allow readers to better evaluate the effect of satisfaction or the lack thereof, upon an educator's feelings about his current tasks and future career decisions. This framework is critical in understanding the diverse factors that could either limit or exacerbate the issue of attrition among special educators.

Current Issues and Trends in Teacher Attrition

The field of special education has faced significant shortages due to attrition among teachers (Cancio et al., 2013; Clandinin et al., 2015; Burke, Aubusson, Schuck,

Buchanan, & Prescott, 2015; Dupriez et al., 2015; Gallant & Riley, 2014; Heikonen, Pietarinen, Pyhalto, Toom, & Soini, 2017; Joseph & Jackman, 2014; Mansfield, Beltman, Broadley, Weatherby-Fell, 2015; Sheldrake, 2013). According to some researchers, many of the contributing factors of teachers' decision to leave the profession fall within the context of social-emotional issues (Mansfield, Beltman, & Price, 2014; Collie et al., 2012; Hong, 2012; Jo, 2014). On the other hand, other researchers purported that some of the contributing factors of attrition among educators relate to deficiencies within the professional environment (Ingersoll, Merrill, et al., 2014; Lasseter, 2013; Tyler & Brunner, 2014; Uitto, Jokikokko, Estola, 2015). While both justifications are confirmed by research to be valid, it is also affirmed that teachers' challenging work environments inevitably impacts their social-emotional wellbeing (DeAngelis, Wall, & Che, 2013; Gray & Taie, 1025; Heikonen et al., 2016). This corroborates the correlation between teachers' working conditions and their psychological state of being.

Closing the achievement gap particularly among special needs students requires the attraction and retention of educators who have received specialized training in special education and are intrinsically committed to the field despite the challenges that exist. Findings from current teacher attrition literature revealed the foremost issues found to be associated with attrition among special educators include (a) burn-out, (b) lack of support, (c) insufficient teacher training, and (d) poor teacher-student interactions. In addition to these issues which seem to catapult this educational dilemma, research confirmed attrition among early career teachers to be a new trend surfacing within the field of special education (Callahan, 2016; Clandinin et al., 2015).

Although scarce within attrition research literature, underachieving schools have been identified as a potential cause of teacher attrition. Such schools are characteristic of having large numbers of struggling learners and learners with behavioral issues. Kraft, Papay, Charner-Laird, Johnson, Ng, and Reinhorn's (2012) qualitative study found that retaining effective teachers in high-poverty schools poses a significant challenge specifically in special education. Such schools, as affirmed by researchers in the field (Gaikhorst, Beishuizen, Korstjens, & Volman, 2014; Kokka, 2016) are less attractive to educators because of the high stress factors involved from at-risk students, ineffective leadership, and lack of resources and support. Kraft et al.(2012) interviewed 95 teachers and administrators from six high-poverty, urban schools to develop an understanding of how school context influences their experience. Findings revealed that most of the teachers interviewed, despite their adverse school environments, remained at their schools because of their students. Other teachers, however, considered leaving when their schools failed to provide the necessary instructional support and resources for both students and teachers. Although this study highlights the significance of teacher support in facilitating positive student and teacher outcomes, its findings indicate that working conditions do not always influence teachers to leave.

While many researchers (Collie et al., 2012; Lindqvist, Nordanger, & Carlsson, 2014; Liu & Onwuegbuzie, 2014; McInerney, Ganotice, King, Marsh, & Morin, 2015; Sheldrake, 2013) agreed that high levels of teacher attrition are linked to a myriad of influences (i.e., teacher burnout due, student behavior, lack of administrative support and insufficient teacher training, and disruptive student behaviors), it is also argued that

attrition rates are not solely connected to one specific issue, but rather to certain types of schools. In schools located in good socio-economic areas and which experience less challenges for teachers, attrition rates are lower in comparison to schools that present greater levels of challenges for teachers. In defense of this rationale, Simon and Johnson (2015) found that teacher attrition rates are higher in high-poverty schools. In a review of six studies exploring why teachers transfer to other schools, Simon and Johnson reported that teachers do not leave because of the students; they leave because of the conditions which did not enable them to adequately meet the needs of their students. Although disruptive behaviors are frustrating for teachers, this insignificantly influences teacher attrition in comparison to a school whose overall climate is dysfunctional.

Contradictory to existing research which confirmed teachers' work environment (i.e., socio-economic levels) to be a strong contributing factor of their decision to leave the profession, Dupriez et al., (2015) findings revealed no significant correlation between work environments (which they differentiated from job conditions) and attrition rates among beginning teachers; however, these findings are suggested to be reflective of the fact that accountability pressures for students to perform within the French-speaking Belgian education system are more modest compared to the pressures placed upon teachers within the American system of education. Another explanation of Dupriez et al.'s (2015) findings as posited by the researchers is that many of the schools in Belgium that cater to disadvantaged students are located in areas that experience high demographic growth, thereby teachers are offered more stable jobs. Additional findings of this study did however show that poor job conditions (i.e., of an educational/professional nature)

contribute to high attrition rates among educators within their first four months of entering the profession.

According to Ashiedu and Scott-Ladd (2012), educators with stronger intrinsic motivation show more positive intentions toward remaining in the teaching profession, even though their working conditions are far from bearable. Findings like these indicate the importance of examining the initial reasons why individuals choose to enter the field of education. Research purported that the strength of one's passion influences the level of commitment shown. Understanding teachers' passion is useful in determining the most effective approaches for maintaining that passion.

Researchers suggested that to increase the level of retention among special educators, it is imperative that policy makers not only address teachers' professional concerns, but their social-emotional concerns as well (Collie et al., 2012; Johnson & Semmelroth, 2014; Lassetter, 2013; Martin, Sass, & Schmitt, 2012). Attrition among educators is impacted by underlying personal emotions and perceptions. This aspect of attrition has been examined by numerous educational researchers, particularly in light of theoretical principles associated with workplace decision-making (Ingersoll, Merrill, et al., 2014; Lent et al., 1994; Lim et al., 2016; Tyler & Brunner, 2014). Teachers' decision to remain in the teaching profession hinges significantly upon their overall emotions which are driven by their teaching experiences. This implies that positive attitudes play an integral part in building teachers' resilience in the classroom, which justified the increase in research on teachers' perceptions and emotions (Jo, 2014; Lofgren & Karlsson, 2016; Saunders, 2013). The issue of teacher resilience, and the significance of

developing an understanding of its basis has prompted extensive investigation considering recent discussions surrounding teacher retention initiatives (Le Cornu, 2013). Researchers have found that even in circumstances where teachers are faced with many stressors, they remain committed to their students and the profession because of their positive emotions or outlook (Kraft, Papay, Charner-Laird, Johnson, Ng, & Reinhorn, 2012; Uitto, Jokikokko, & Estola, 2015).

Beginning, and veteran teachers' resilience is tied to their emotions, more specifically to their level of intrinsic motivation. This explains why some teachers encounter daily frustrations in schools and within their individual classrooms, yet they remain committed because they are intrinsically motivated by their passion for teaching. Sustaining teachers' level of intrinsic motivation is a difficult task, especially if they feel as if they are not successfully engaging their students. This implies the need for school leaders to consistently provide some form of extrinsic motivators (i.e., incentives, recognition, awards) to build teachers' resilience and commitment. Equally important, however, is ascertaining from teachers the motivating influences behind their decision to remain or possibly remain within the field of education. Ashiedu and Scott-Ladd's (2012) qualitative study explored factors that motivated teachers to continue teaching, and drivers of their motivation to stay or leave. Participants included serving and retired teachers in Australia. Data were collected through electronic interviews and online surveys and coded for analysis of themes. Findings indicated that teachers who possessed higher levels of intrinsic motivators held a more positive intention to remain. Both groups

of teachers perceived extrinsic incentives such as increased pay, improved school environment, and better working conditions as crucial in influencing teachers' decisions.

Complex in nature, teacher attrition is impacted by many issues, and places significant pressure upon the future of special education reform (Collie et al., 2012; Darling-Hammond, Hyler, Gardner, 2017; Kaden, Patterson, Healy, & Adams, 2016; Ronfeldt, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013). Studies have revealed that addressing the issues surrounding attrition is imperative in combating this dilemma which has detrimental consequences for the educational future of students with special education needs (Joseph & Jackman, 2014).

Attrition Trends Among Early Career Teachers

Often emerging from the extensive research literature on contributing factors of teacher attrition is the high rate of attrition specifically among beginning teachers (Avalos & Valenzuela, 2014; DeAngelis, Wall, & Che, 2013; Dicke et al., 2014; Glennie et al., 2016; Heikonen et al., 2016; Hong, 2012; Johnson & Down, 2013; Mason & Matas, 2015). This high rate has been shown to be connected to several factors including beginning teachers' lack of qualifications or preparedness to teach special needs students. On the other hand, however, researchers have shown that early career teachers who do possess teaching qualifications and appropriate pedagogical preparation are more stable and less likely to quit the teaching profession in comparison to their less qualified peers (Burke et al., 2015; DeAngelis, Wall, & Che, 2013; Taylor, 2013).

Ávalos and Valenzuela (2016) conducted a quantitative study that examined the early career attrition rates in Chile that took place over a ten-year period. The researchers

also explored new teacher trajectories within the first two years of teaching. Data were collected through interviews, surveys, and narratives. Findings revealed that early career teachers' decision to leave the profession are influenced by various factors including (a) lack of administrative support, (b) stressful work conditions, and (c) a feeling of being inadequately prepared to meet the challenges of the classroom. This study, as with others on teacher attrition, support the importance of networking, mentoring, and professional development for beginning teachers. This study is consistent with other studies (Clandinin et al., 2015; Dicke et al., 2014; Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013; Lasseter, 2013; Mansfield, Beltman, & Price, 2016; Paris, 2013; Pogodzinski, Youngs, & Frank, 2013), who also found teacher support (through mentoring programs, professional development, and supportive leadership) to be a vital component of teacher retention efforts.

Clandinin, Long, Schaefer, Downey, Steeves, Pinnegar, and Wnuk (2015) conducted a phenomenological study in which they surveyed forty second and third year teachers on their experiences as teachers in Alberta, Canada. The teachers taught at different grade levels and were asked questions on seven different themes including teacher support. Data were obtained through semistructured interviews, which were analyzed thematically and by simple descriptive statistics. The approach of this study instigated discussion about ways in which beginning teachers could be supported during their early years of teaching both on a personal and professional level. This study corresponded with others which explored the experiences of educators. Such an in-depth exploration will undoubtedly yield rich data that can be used to inform teacher retention initiatives throughout departments of education.

While Clandinin et al.'s (2015) study resonated the findings of Avalos and Valenzuela (2016), it attempted to address the issue of teacher attrition from a rare perspective seen across the research literature. Clandinin et al. did not explore attrition from the view of influencing factors, but rather shifted the focus to the lives of beginning teachers. In doing this, the researchers were able to more effectively gain a deeper understanding of the sense of the experiences and identities of beginning teachers. It is this personal aspect that provided greater insight into the themes surrounding teacher attrition which emerged from the semistructured interviews conducted with the participants. Clandinin et al., unlike Avalos and Valenzuela and others (Hong, 2012; Johnson & Down, 2013), conceptualized their research around questions of sustaining rather than questions of retaining. This shift in research enables the audience to consider how each beginning teacher is different, and therefore better understand the individual supports required to sustain them while in the profession. Such an examination is important to designing retention initiatives, as this draws attention to the fact that such initiatives should not be perceived as a one size fits all solution. Just as each school's culture is different, each teacher different, and not all teachers may need identical supports particularly when considering their experiential background.

Clandinin et al. (2015) defended the rationale behind their use of the concept of experiences and personal identity with reference to Dewey's (2007) philosophy of experience. They supported the belief that the reconstruction of beginning teachers' experiences is educative and sustaining. This is rare conceptual framework found in few attrition studies including those of Ingersoll, Merrill, and May (2014) and Hultell, Melin,

and Gustavsson (2013) whose studies surrounded the lives of teachers via single life histories and longitudinal studies of mixed method approaches. Unlike these researchers who founded their research on the personal aspects of teachers in relation to their future career decisions in education, other researchers used a variety of other frameworks to support their research. The most common frameworks found among attrition studies included self-efficacy theory (Goddard et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2014), the concept of job satisfaction (Avalos, 2013), social cognitive theory (Thompson et al., 2017), social cognitive career theory (Aloe, Amo, et al., 2014; Andrews & Brown, 2015; Dicke et al., 2014), and the concept of resilience (Day & Gru, 2014; Mansfield, Beltman, & Price, 2014). These researchers argued the significance of attending to the complex lives of beginning teachers as well as the importance of accommodating both the personal and professional aspects of their identity. Like Bandura's social cognitive theory, Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory was employed by Hunter-Johnson et al. (2014) as a lens through which to understand the effect of teachers' interactions and school experiences upon their decision to pursue or quit the teaching profession.

In terms of varying perspectives from which to examine job satisfaction and teacher attrition, Lasseter (2013) and Hunter-Johnson et al. (2014) explored the importance of teachers' perceptions. Both studies found that how teachers perceived their pedagogical practices, abilities, and school environments, can negatively or positively affect their willingness to remain in teaching. Few studies addressed attrition from the perspective of teachers' perceptions, which has been found to be essential in teacher

retention efforts. Although a beneficial research, some limitations were inherent in Lasseter's study when compared to that of Hunter-Johnson et al.

Lasseter used a quantitative approach to examine teachers' perceptions of various factors impacting job satisfaction. Although this approach was plausible, it would have been more appropriate and effective to employ a qualitative approach as well seeing that individual's feelings and experiences are investigated. The use of surveys (as in this study) does not aptly produce rich and in-depth meaningful data as would interviews (as used in Hunter-Johnson, Newton, & Cambridge-Johnson [2014] study). Additionally, this limited the researchers' ability to draw strong conclusions. Another limitation of Lasseter's study is its research scope. The study explored perceived factors that impact teachers' level of job satisfaction, but it did not present an analysis of possible correlations between job satisfaction and other significant educational or professional outcomes. With reference to Hunter-Johnson et al's study, one limitation was its data source. The study setting included a country consisting of an archipelago of islands, but data were obtained from only teachers residing on one of the country's islands. It would have been more appropriate to obtain data from teachers across the country.

Researchers agreed that educators' career intentions are often forged at the beginning of their career. Marinell and Coca's (2013) synthesis report revealed findings from a three-part study on teacher turnover in New York City middle schools. Four thousand full time middle school teachers were surveyed. Consistent with other studies on attrition trends among beginning teachers, Marinell and Coca found that more than half of the middle school teachers surveyed left the profession within the first three years

of teaching. To this end, it is imperative that education stakeholders pay close attention to the concerns and challenges faced by beginning teachers and provide the necessary support systems need to sustain the retention of teachers. The future of special education lay in the hands of new teachers, as many veteran teachers eventually approach retirement or leave due to health reasons. Considering veteran educators' longevity within the teaching profession, school administrators should use them as mentors for beginning teachers. The sharing of knowledge and support are significant in building teacher resilience even in the face of adversity.

Insufficient Teacher Training

Educators who possess a strong foundation in preparation experiences were found to feel more effective in the classroom. Researchers (Podolsky, Kini, Bishop, & Darling-Hammond, 2017) posited that this feeling of self-efficacy is closely linked to improved learning outcomes for students and the teacher's desire to remain in the teaching profession for a longer period of time. To effectively design and implement individualized instruction for special needs students, it is imperative that special education classrooms are filled with highly-trained teachers who possess experience in teaching students with various learning disabilities (Johnson & Semmelroth, 2014; Mason-Williams, 2015). Unfortunately, due to shortages in special education, general education teachers are in many instances placed in special education classrooms to instruct students with disabilities (Hunter-Johnson et al., 2014). According to research, such a decision often leads to frustration as teachers complain about being untrained or deficient of specific skills required to cater to special needs students (Chestnut & Burley,

2014). One of the primary deterrents to teachers entering the field of education is the feeling of inadequacy in terms of their ability to effectively instruct special needs learners (Collie et al., 2012).

Research confirmed that the appropriate level and type of teaching training makes a difference in teachers' decisions to leave the teaching profession (Cerasoli & Ford, 2014; Goldhaber & Cowan, 2014; Lindqvist, Nordanger, & Carlsson, 2014). Researchers shared similar sentiments regarding the effect of preservice training upon retention levels among early career teachers. Ingersoll, Merrill, et al., examined whether the preservice education and preparation of beginning teachers impact their decision to leave teaching. Data for this quantitative study were obtained from the National Center for Education Statistics' teacher surveys. According to the results, the type of college attended, and degree earned were not significant; however, the content of preservice teachers' pedagogical preparation was of utmost importance. Findings revealed that teachers with more training in teaching methods were less likely to leave the teaching profession after their first year. For decades, teacher training has been cited as a crucial component of successful special education practices (Campbell-Whatley & Lyons, 2013). Stipulations outlined in various special education legislature require that only specially trained educators be used in the delivery of special education instruction (Wright & Wright, 2015). Unfortunately, this becomes unachievable when the number of special educators within public schools decreases due to unbearable challenges faced daily by educators.

It is imperative that the types of studies used to inform major decisions are carefully analyzed to ensure that potential initiatives are supported by the most accurate

and reliable data. Cerasoli and Ford's (2014) research is a meta-analysis of literature on the effect of motivation upon performance. The presentation of this data is useful in understanding how to instigate productivity among employees; however, it is equally important to bear in mind the limitation of such a study. Meta-analyses do not assure objectivity (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999). The validity of Cerasoli and Ford's findings (as with most meta-analyses) are threatened by (a) collapsing across meaningful moderators, (b) subjectivity, and (c) the inability to explore non-linear associations.

Fortunately, Cerasoli and Ford's (2014) study is not limited by its data sources. Likewise, Lindqvist, Nordanger, and Carlsson (2014) and Ingersoll, Merrill, and May's (2014) quantity of data sources enable generalizations and representativeness. Lindqvist, Nordanger, and Carlsson's research obtained unique data, as the sample used was also an entire population that was studied. A largescale data source, as used in Ingersoll, Merrill, et al. allows researchers to make greater generalizations to populations (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008). This goal was accomplished by Ingersoll, Merrill, et al., whose data source included data from the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) from the National Center for Education Statistics. Their study investigated the effects of teacher education and preparation on teacher attrition. It is important to note, however, the limitations of using measures from the SASS (a) the measures of the quality of preservice teacher education programs are likely approximate and could therefore show possible inaccuracies, and (b) limited detail is presented on the intensity and structure of various preservice teacher education programs.

Similar to Ingersoll, Merrill, et al.'s (2014) study, Mason-Williams' (2015) qualitative study on the correlation between educators' preservice preparation and their ability to function in high-poverty schools also used the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) as the primary data source. Mason-Williams' study revealed a similar limitation of using the SASS as Ingersoll, Merrill et al.'s study. This limitation spoke to the absence of measures for evaluating teacher effectiveness particularly in relation to improved outcomes for students with disabilities. It is critical to recognize and address the limitations of a study's data source in an effort to assess the possibility of generalizability. It is difficult to determine the effect of teacher education programs on teacher performance in the absence of data that speak to the relationship between teacher performance and student achievement (Mason-Williams, 2015, p. 259).

In a qualitative study conducted by Hunter-Johnson et al. (2014) it was revealed that primary school teachers possessed a negative perception of inclusive education because they were not trained in special education. This sentiment is shared across numerous teacher attrition studies, which explains the decline in the number of educators entering this area of the teaching profession. Although numerous researchers (Avalos & Valenzuela, 2014; Chestnut & Burley, 2014; Dukes et al., 2014; Hong, 2012; Mason-Williams, 2015; Zhang et al., 2014) argued that teacher training in special education enhanced teachers' commitment to the profession, Dupriez et al. (2015) found that highly qualified educators were the most mobile. They attributed this mobility to teachers' possession of advanced degrees; this meant that such educators would be able to

successfully pursue employment in other job markets and receive higher remuneration for their qualifications.

Increasing attention have been placed upon the effect of preservice teachers' preparation in relation to their intent to remain within the teaching profession (DeAngelis, Wall, & Che, 2013; Ingersoll, Merrill, & May, 2014). This issue has attracted the attention of researchers because of the current trend among beginning teachers to quit the profession within the first five years of teaching (Chestnut & Burley, 2014). Research findings have revealed that many beginning teachers do not feel as if they were adequately trained to successfully cater to the academic or behavioral needs of their students (Mason & Mats, 2015). Some teachers have reported experiencing feelings of depression due to their inability to modify their students' behavior or learning outcomes. Students with disabilities are already at a disadvantage when compared to their nondisabled peers. To this end, it is critical that educators are in place to ensure that student achievement is maximized (Campbell-Whatley & Lyons, 2013). DeAngelis, Wall, & Che (2013) found that in cases where early career teachers did not leave the teaching profession entirely, they were found to change schools. This pertained to those teachers who were satisfied with their level of preservice training (p. 351) but not with their school environment.

Zhang et al.'s (2014) findings contradicted those of most studies which revealed that teacher training and work experience has a direct impact upon educators' ability to teach special education. Further, Zhang et al. argued that preservice teachers' competency in teaching special education has no direct impact upon these teachers' career intentions

in the field of special education. Teachers' level of experience and training is of great importance to teacher and student achievement, as these factors influence teachers' level of commitment. This is congruent with Andrews and Brown's view that teachers who are confident in their teaching abilities, are more positively influenced to facilitate and maintain student and teacher success (p. 130). Research on novice teachers' superficial level of training and feelings of unskillfulness in the classroom implies that teacher retention interventions should begin at the preservice level of teaching. As conjectured earlier in this chapter, it is critical that initiatives are implemented to attract early career teachers as this is the stage at which attrition appears to be most significant. This rationalization is supported by research findings reported by Leko, Brownell, Sindelar, and Kiely (2015), who found that veteran educators tend to remain in the teaching profession longer than early career teacher with five or less years of teaching experience. Attracting older teachers to the field of special education would then seem futile, as this is not where the breakdown occurs. Consequently, this places an increased level of pressure on institutions of higher learning to revamp their existing teacher education programs to ensure that they are producing educators who are effective in delivering rigorous content instruction.

Barnatt, Terrell, D'Souza, Jong, Cochran-Smith, Viesca, and Shakman (2016) explored the career decisions (attrition, changes in schools, non-renewal of contracts) of four teachers through a qualitative, longitudinal study. To ensure that all participants shared similar experiences, they were purposefully selected. Data collected included interviews, observations, participants' assessments, and pupils' work. A cross-case

analysis was used to analyze the data. Findings revealed that there was no one specific variable that impacted teachers' decisions; however, researchers found that the teachers' perception of themselves within the field of education determines their career trajectory. This study confirms Ávalos and Valenzuela's (2016) position that preservice preparation and professional development are critical elements that must be provided to retain qualified teachers and positively impact education reform.

The issue regarding attrition among novice teachers has become a great concern. Consequently, researchers have explored current trends in beginning teachers' career trajectories (Zhang et al., 2014) to ascertain what factors are likely to enhance retention levels among this group of educators. Beginning teachers, who have less than five years of teaching experience are found to have high attrition rates within America. Glennie, Mason, and Edmunds (2016) examined whether schools within an American whole-school reform model are better capable of retaining novice teachers, compared to traditional high schools. Data were obtained through surveys. Findings revealed that novice teachers who received individualized support school administrators were more satisfied with their job, and therefore their retention rates were higher than teachers who received little administrative support.

Conley and You (2016) utilized a comprehensive selection of attrition studies to provide an historical backdrop of teacher attrition effects upon education systems. Their study found that more experienced teachers express lower intentions to leave, compared to teachers with less experience. This study's approach aimed to attract education stakeholders' attention to attrition among beginning teachers, as this trend is becoming

increasingly popular. In doing this, teacher attrition would be addressed from the perspective of preservice teacher training. Conley and You assumed that by tackling attrition at the root (i.e., teacher preparedness), teacher retention levels would possibly be enhanced. This speaks to the importance of effective teacher education programs and extensive training of preservice educators specifically in special education.

This existing data advocating the importance of extensive preservice training and early career support have ignited a revolution in education with the development of teacher mentoring and induction programs. These new initiatives have attracted the attention of education policy makers and school leaders, as they have been revealed to be effective in promoting the retention of teachers, in particular, beginning teachers. Through an explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach, Adams and Woods (2015) conducted a midcareer teacher study to identify contributing factors of teacher attrition. Through this study, the researchers also sought to determine whether the Alaska Statewide Mentor Project affected long-term teacher retention. Data were collected using teacher interviews and longitudinal retention rates. Coding was used to analyze the data for common themes and concepts. Participants included teachers from Alaska's public schools K-12. The approach of this study facilitated the proposal of numerous implications for consistent teacher retention, ongoing professional development, and mentoring and support. Findings from this study revealed that over a six-year period, teacher retention rates among new teachers increased from 67% to 77%. These findings supported the position that mentoring programs are an effective strategy for enhancing teacher retention levels within schools. Unfortunately, conflicting findings pertaining to

the effectiveness of mentoring programs have been found throughout the literature. These differences will be further discussed later in the chapter.

Teacher Burnout

Special education is a complex field which demands much accountability for performance. Special educators often find themselves taking on diverse roles in providing quality instruction to students with special learning needs. Particularly within public systems of education, where resources and personnel are limited, educators can easily become buried beneath heavy workloads, congested timetables, a wide spectrum of disabilities, not to mention added pressures from administration and education policy makers (Dukes et al., 2014). Research suggested that the multifaceted nature of teachers' diverse roles is a strong contributor to the premature departure of some teachers (Ashiedu & Scott-Ladd, 2012; Handal, Watson, Petocz, & Maher, 2013). Special educators are often stressed to the point where they end up reconsidering their initial passion for teaching (Mason and Matas, 2015). This defends the need for ample human resources in schools that cater to the diverse learning needs of students with learning or physical disabilities and supportive school administration. Unfortunately, little research has been conducted on burnout specifically among special educators (Williams & Dikes, 2015).

Among the cross section of current teacher attrition research literature, teacher burn-out has been identified as the major influence of teachers' decision to quit the field of education, and more so special education. The ramifications of teacher burn-out are far reaching and pose a significant threat to the future of special education reform. According to Yu, Wang, Zhai, Dai, and Yang (2015), job burn-out is the state in which an individual

experiences physical and mental fatigue after working under heavy pressure (p. 702). This has serious implications for teachers' health condition and indirectly school success. Research on teacher attrition due to work-related illness or death is scarce; however, evidence suggests that burn-out takes an emotional and physical toll on special educators (Wang et al., 2015). Burn-out, as research confirmed, (Bataneh & Alsagheer, 2012; Duli, 2015; Langher, Caputo, & Ricci, 2017) is the result of various conditions merging to a create inconsolable frustration for educators.

Wang et al.'s (2015) findings revealed that teachers' perceived level of ability has a direct impact upon their psychological and physical health. The researchers found that this impact significantly influences teachers' decision to quit the teaching profession. These findings are supported by Bandura's (1986) social learning theory which is used by researchers to defend the belief that individuals react, or make a certain decision based upon their experiences and interactions within their social environment; however, because Wang et al.'s interpretation of findings were informed by Bandura's social learning theory and substantive research, a limitation of the study is manifested. Thus, further longitudinal research is warranted to more accurately evaluate relationships between the variables outlined in the study. Wang et al.'s findings reflected those of Yu et al.'s study, which also revealed that burn-out results in lower self-efficacy in addition to feeling tired of working. Yankelevich, Broadfoot, Gillespie, and Guidroz (2012) warned of the seriousness of burn-out. They proposed that teachers lose their passion for teaching if their work-related stresses are not alleviated promptly.

Consistent with the current research on teacher burn-out and student achievement, Bataineh and Alsagheer (2012) found that burn-out can cause teachers to display indifferent attitudes toward their students. Such data are corroborated with the findings of Aloe, Shisler, et al. (2014) who found that teacher burn-out negatively impacts both student and teacher performance. School leaders must find ways in which to reduce teacher burn-out to prevent the occurrence of constant absenteeism among teachers. This is of detriment to students' learning, as researchers have posited that frequent teacher absenteeism harms student achievement (Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013). The exclusion of studies that did not report specifically on the three dimensions of burnout examined serves as a limitation of Aloe, Shisler, et al.'s study.

The issue of burn-out has a profound rippling effect upon various areas within the field of education. Teacher-student relations, relationships with colleagues, desire and motivation to pursue excellence in instruction and student achievement are areas that are adversely affected because of teacher burnout. Teachers are not capable of functioning the way in which they are supposed to, when they are emotionally exhausted (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). As research has shown, burn-out is not a single component of attrition but rather a complex problem which encompasses a variety of other causes. Devising effective ways of counteracting teacher burn-out will eradicate many of the challenges faced by special educators. Teachers' overall job satisfaction hinges upon their emotional and physical state of being within their workplace (Cameron & Lovett, 2015). Therefore, it is inarguable that teachers who are dissatisfied with their job due to pressures and stress will not feel a desire of commitment to the profession.

Special education reform efforts will be futile unless an antidote for teacher burn-out is included. Curriculum instruction is significantly important in education, especially considering the clients for whom this instruction is designed; however, without motivation and keen interest on the part of the educator this is negligible. Policy makers often make the mistake of focusing on the non-emotional aspects of education, not taking into consideration the personal aspects involving emotions of the stakeholders involved. This explains the reason why across various teacher attrition studies, teachers often reported that they felt taken for granted and unappreciated (Collie et al., 2012; Conley & You, 2016; Erdem et al., 2014). Studies of both Collie et al. (2012) and Erdem et al. present an identical limitation which arises from the use of surveys and questionnaires as data collection methods. Such data collection methods limit the generation of in-depth, rich data that may be used to draw substantial conclusions. In such cases, a mixed method approach should be employed.

Specifically, Conley and You's (2016) study contained several limitations which included (a) limited measures for the study's variables, (b) vague concepts that did not facilitate a broader investigation into attrition influences, and (c) special education teaching was not examined. This latter limitation serves as support for this current study, which addressed the effects of teacher attrition upon the longevity and success of special education programs within The Bahamas.

Collie et al.'s findings replicated some of those revealed by Conley and You (2016); however, the various limitations of their study should be noted: Due to the cross-section design of Collie et al.'s study, the causal relationships examined were not

supported. To this end, it was suggested that further longitudinal research was needed if causality was to be supported. This particular issue of limitation is reflected in Wang et al.'s (2015) study as previously discussed. Another limitation of Collie et al.'s study was that of single-source bias. This study utilized only self-report questionnaires, which as discussed previously in this section, are inefficient in generating in-depth responses due to the manner in which participants respond to the questions; however, the researchers attempted to reduce this type of bias by (a) informing participants that their responses would be anonymous, and (b) defining ambiguous questions accompanied by examples. The use of mixed methods design would be useful in assisting with resolving this issue.

In a sample of 276 special education teachers from secondary schools in Rome, Langher, Caputo, and Ricci (2017) explored the role of educators' perceived support for the reduction of burnout. Data were collected using the Maslach Burnout Inventory Educators Survey, and correlations were performed. Findings of this quantitative study, as confirmed by other studies (Bataineh & Alsagheer; Cancio et al., 2013; Conley & You, 2016), show that teachers' perceived support is negatively correlated with emotional exhaustion. These findings may be attributed to the assumption that the lack of collegial and administrative support is reported as being one of the primary influencing factors of burnout among special educators. In contrast to this finding, Langher et al. (2017) found a positive correlation between perceived support and personal accomplishment. This therefore suggests that teachers who collaborate with their colleagues are more likely to feel more positive toward their job and are more likely to remain in the teaching profession. Unfortunately, Langher et al. proposed that collegial support in light of

teachers' negative attitudes is less effective in reducing burnout. To this end, it is imperative that teacher stresses are reduced as much as possible to prevent them from arriving at the point of experiencing burnout.

Pepe and Addimando (2013) conducted a quantitative study in which they explored the connection between students' poor behaviors and teachers' level of occupational stress. The study included a sample of 306 Italian teachers, and data were collected through the Challenging Students Standard Questionnaire. Data were analyzed using descriptive, comparative t-tests. Findings revealed that although both special and general education teachers experience significant levels of stress due to students' challenging behaviors, the level of stress is higher among special educators. In addition to negatively affecting teachers' emotions and teaching commitment, burnout threatens the flow of students' academic performance. Time spent trying to settle students is taken away from instructional time. This results in very little being accomplished, leaving the teacher with a feeling of failure. Similar findings were reported by Yu et al. who found that burnout was significantly related to low self-efficacy in teachers. These findings support the need for extensive opportunities for enhancing teachers' mental health within education. Ignoring the condition of teachers' mental health in light of teacher burnout presents severe ramifications including absenteeism, physical and psychological illnesses (e.g., depression), and ultimately attrition.

Job Satisfaction

The issue of job satisfaction warrants thorough investigation, as this impacts educators' levels of productivity (Yu, Wang, Zhai, Dai, and Yang, 2015). If individuals

are dissatisfied with their working conditions, there are less likely to impact positive change within their classrooms and schools at large. Research purported that teachers' level of commitment to the profession hinges upon various social and emotional factors inherent in their workplace (Jo, 2014). This claim justified why teacher attrition is perceived as a social-emotional matter (Cancio et al., 2013). How teachers feel about their job (job satisfaction) is reflected in their work ethics and levels of commitment. This suggests, therefore, that when teachers lack confidence in their abilities, the greater possibility of them drifting away from education. Low self-efficacy often stems from feelings of disdain associated with one's job when stresses arise which cast doubts on a teacher's ability (Liu & Onwuegbuzie, 2014).

This denotes the need for educators to be provided with consistent psychological support to strengthen their teaching commitment. In a meta-analysis examining the effect of preservice and in-service teachers' self-efficacy beliefs on teacher commitment, Chestnut and Burley (2015) found that self-efficacy beliefs significantly impacted teachers' level of commitment to their profession. Feeling that their job as a special educator was too overwhelming, teachers begin to believe that they are unable to effectively fulfill their job description. This results in feelings of frustration. Erdem et al. reported that poor job satisfaction was significantly associated with burn-out. This study is consistent with that of Collie et al. (2012), who also found burn-out to be a determining factor in educators' decision to leave the teaching profession.

As consistent with other studies, burnout was found to be the most significant variable contributing to attrition among educators (Adams & Woods, 2015; Gray, Tais, &

O'Rear, 2015; Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012; McInerney et al., 2015). In contrast to common findings regarding teachers' decision to quit the profession due to poor job satisfaction, Leroux and Theoret (2014) found that some teachers use adverse situations as a way of challenging themselves to improve professionally. This study showed that in spite of numerous challenges associated with the teaching profession, some educators use reflection and introspection as a strategy for determining how to promote student success. This reflection, as proposed by Leroux and Theoret is key in sustaining teachers' resilience and commitment to teaching. This supposition is supported by the theory that teachers' competency in managing classroom challenges can override the possibility of burnout, thereby facilitating teacher retention, productivity, and positive job satisfaction.

Leroux and Theoret's study revealed empirical evidence of the relationship between teacher resilience and reflection from a theoretical aspect. It is interesting to note that even with the difference in cultures and education systems, Hong Kong teachers experience identical pressures in the teaching profession as do American educators. A major difference between the two studies (Leroux & Theoret, 2014; McInerney et al., 2015) lies within their research approach, and by extension their data collection methods. Leroux and Theoret utilized a mixed method approach to their study. By doing this, they were able to use two forms of data collection instruments (instead of only one), thereby facilitating the generation of in-depth data which would result in a more robust construction of meaning. On the other hand, however, McInerney, Ganotice, King, Marsh, and Morin's (2015) study utilized only one data collection method (self-reports), which may have been subjected to response bias.

Kunter, Klusmann, Baumert, Richter, Voss, and Hachfield's (2013) suppositions on the power of teachers' professional competence replicated those of Leroux and Theoret (2014), which suggested that more effective teachers are less likely to exhibit feelings of poor job satisfaction. Teacher efficacy is crucial in understanding why some teachers leave teaching while others remain. Even in poor social environments, some teachers choose to remain at their schools, and in within the profession because of their ability to promote student success (Chestnut & Burley, 2015; Djonko-Moore, 2015; Hong, 2012; Marinell & Coca, 2013). To this end, it is imperative that preservice and in-service educators receive training in behavior management. Research revealed that training in this regard reduces classroom anxieties and stress, creating more positive levels of job satisfaction among teachers (Stoesz, Shooshtari, Montgomery, Martin, Heinrichs, & Douglas, 2014).

According to the current literature, some influencing factors of teachers' job satisfaction are universal, while others are more specific to certain countries. Based upon the existing research literature, some of the universal influences of job satisfaction include heavy workloads, poor student behaviors, lack of administrative support, inadequate training, and lack of parental involvement. Some of the rarer influences of job satisfaction specific to China included simplicity and safety of campus life, parent poor attitude, unfair teacher evaluation systems, and unimplemented educational reforms. These findings were revealed in a study conducted by Liu and Onwuegbuzie (2014) who employed a partially mixed concurrent equal status design to examine motivating factors behind Chinese teachers' decision to enter the teaching profession. This study's results

also indicated that Chinese teachers were both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated to remain in the teaching profession. Consistent with research from the western part of the world, Liu and Onwuegbuzie also found that teachers' job satisfaction is also negatively impacted by high stress and bad student behavior.

In light of the common findings regarding job satisfaction levels of educators, it is imperative special education programs include components that address student behavior, especially behavior among special needs students. According to research on teacher's' job satisfaction, effectively managing student behavior has the potential of enhancing educators' levels of job satisfaction. Consequently, educators would make more positive decisions regarding their future career in education.

Lack of Support

Effective leaders should be concerned with fostering resilience within their educators (Papatraianou and Cornu, 2014). Achievement among students is significantly reduced due to the loss of highly-qualified educators (Beltman, Manfield, & Harris, 2016). In a qualitative report, Kelly, Reushle, Chakrabarty, and Kinnane (2014) described potential opportunities for improving existing support that is provided to beginning teachers. The researchers presented data retrieved from a survey of beginning teachers that was conducted in Queensland, Australia. The results of this study were used to suggest guidelines for the development of a national online community of preservice and early career teachers. A past case study was used to inform the development of the online support community. The rationale behind this online support was that social and professional support systems have proven successful in improving teacher retention.

Kelly et al. found that induction and mentoring programs play a significant role in promoting teachers' desire to remain within the education profession. Through this study, the researchers sought to address the gap in the literature pertaining to types of support for beginning teachers.

Successful schools are found to experience lower levels of teacher attrition, compared to failing schools where teachers are dissatisfied (Urick, 2012). Research on schools where teacher turnover is rare, foster strong collaborative ties between school leaders, teachers and parent (Simon & Johnson, 2015). Productive, professional relationships facilitate commitment, job satisfaction, and a passion for success. Tek's (2014) correlational cross-section study investigated the relationship between school leadership, teacher job satisfaction, and student achievement. An hierarchical linear modeling was used to analyze the data obtained. This study's findings corroborated similar studies which sought to determine whether or not a school's leadership practices impact teachers' emotions toward their job, and by extension student achievement.

Educational researchers have concurred that strong and effective leadership practices result in well-performing schools and successful students and teachers (Campbell-Whatley & Lyons, 2013; Goddard et al., 2015; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012; Tek, 2014; Urick, 2012). This undoubtedly creates a work environment that educators find appealing, which prompts them to remain within a particular school. Schools that have poor leadership and less supportive administrators tend to drive teachers away, as they are left feeling defenseless beneath the load that accompanies special education (Glennie et al., 2016). Lasseter, and McInerney et al. found that a

reciprocity exists between administrative support and teachers' commitment. This assertion has been proven specifically valid within the context of special education instruction.

Numerous researchers cited the critical role of supportive leadership in the attrition/retention dilemma which has consistently plagued special education (DeAngelis, et al., 2013; Erdem et al., 2014). In light of this, it is implied that leadership grounded in a strong knowledge base of special education practices is more effective in producing positive outcomes for students with learning disabilities (Guerra et al., 2015) thereby improving teacher retention rates. Special educators surveyed in current attrition research identified support from school leaders and professional colleagues as being a strong indicator of their future career intentions (Hong, 2012; Hui, Jenatabadi, Ismail, Azina, Radzi, & Jasimah, 2014; Johnston-Anderson, 2016). The field of special education, in contrast to general education, consists of even more diverse challenges with which educators grapple each day. To this end, it is imperative that special educators receive the needed support (professional or emotional) from colleagues and administrators in order to alleviate some of the stresses associated with their day-today tasks and responsibilities (Beltman et al., 2016; Cancio et al., 2013).

It is evident, based upon findings revealed by Hong (2012) and DeAngelis et al. (2013) that teachers who decide to remain within the profession tend to display different resilient attitudes compared to those who quit. Both studies revealed that teacher support, independent of other types of support systems are ineffective in retaining educators at higher rates. As with similar studies that focus on teachers' perceptions (Goldhaber &

Liddle, 2012; Kee, 2012), DeAngelis et al. indicated the limitation of their study which involved the use of teachers' perceptions (via surveys) as the sole indicator of teacher education program quality. Teacher self-reports, as posited by researchers (McInerney, Ganotice, King, Marsh, & Morin's 2015), are inadequate in effectively facilitating an understanding of the differences among various teacher education programs. Considering this limitation, however, teacher self-reports are useful in providing insight into teacher education program improvements (DeAngelis, Wall, & Che, 2013, p. 351).

School environments play an integral part in attracting and retaining educators. Upon entering the field, it is important that teachers maintain their resilience. This is often not always a simple goal to achieve, as many educators become disillusioned by various factors that occur within their workplace. Researchers have postulated that teacher resilience is often maintained due to social support received within the school environment (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). Teacher resilience is vital to student achievement because without it, educators would not be motivated to push their students to higher levels of success. Beltman, Mansfield, and Harris (2016) found that teacher resilience is closely connected to positive student outcomes and impacts teacher retention. In light of existing research that defend the importance of strong leadership and collegial support for teacher retention, this general qualitative study explored the role of school psychologists in enabling teacher resilience. Data were obtained from trained Australian school psychologists and teachers, and findings revealed that school psychologists directly and indirectly sustain teacher resilience in schools. This study is a

part of a limited research base on the roles of school psychologists, and therefore further research into their impact upon alleviating teacher burn-out is warranted.

Cameron and Lovett (2015) reported on factors that sustained or inhibited primary and secondary teachers' commitment to making a difference in the field of education. The study included 34 teachers (10 primary, 21 secondary, 3 teachers did not respond to the surveys). Data were obtained from surveys and interviews. Collegial relationships, coupled with respect and appreciation received from administrators enabled teachers to maintain their commitment to their students. Findings also showed that after 6-9 years of teaching, teachers were still highly motivated to continue in the profession due positive job satisfaction. Although findings were favorable among both groups of teachers, primary teachers were found to be more satisfied with their work conditions, than secondary teachers.

This study is beneficial to the expansion of current research on the role of effective leadership in teacher retention and the enhancement of teachers' job satisfaction. Cameron and Lovett's findings, in comparison to those of Adams and Woods (2015) found that teachers who are most committed to the teaching profession are those who are a part of professional and collaborative support systems within their schools. This study's findings are limited, as is common among attrition studies, in terms of generalizability due to a small sample size. Another limitation of this study lies within the participants included; early career teachers were not included in the study, but rather mid-career teachers (teachers within the teaching profession for more than five years). Such teachers would possibly be more effective in managing difficult classroom

situations and other stressors within education, compared to early career teachers.

Further, considering the current trend of attrition among beginning teachers, it would have been more useful to explore influences of teachers' commitment among beginning teachers.

Conley and You (2016) reported on a previous study that examined the impact of teachers' workplace conditions on their intentions to leave the teaching profession. The study that was examined included a sample of 2,060 secondary school special education teachers within the United States of America. Data were collected from the 2007-2008 Schools and Staffing Survey data set and was analyzed through structural equation modeling. The foundation of this report is grounded in the conceptual framework of job satisfaction (Locke, 1969) and teacher commitment, as these were assessed as mediators of teacher attrition within the field of special education. Findings revealed that administrative support and teacher team efficacy significantly affected special education teachers' intentions to leave. As discussed previously, however, data obtained from Schools and Staffing Survey does not speak to the quality of instruction provided by teachers within the context of student achievement. More exhaustive data would be retrieved from an additional data collection method such as semistructured interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Papatraianou and Cornu (2014) examined the significance of informal teacher relationships, as a way of facilitating resilience in beginning teachers. The researchers examined this topic from the perspective of two previous qualitative studies conducted on teacher attrition and resilience. This article explored the various types of support

provided for early career teachers through personal and professional relationships. The researchers were successful in providing a solid foundation for the study, thereby impressing upon the audience the importance of such an investigation. Findings revealed that early career teachers received support both from inside and outside of their work environments. Both types of support were found to be vital to the retention of beginning teachers.

Kelly and Antonio (2016) described six ways in which teachers support each other through social network sites (SNSs). Evidence was presented from a study that was conducted with a large, open group of teachers online over a period of twelve weeks and repeated a year later within multiple groups of teachers. Findings suggested that large open groups in social network sites are a constructive and useful source of advice for teachers. Findings showed, however, that the social network medium rarely promotes reflection or feedback on teaching practices. Bandura's social cognitive theory is referenced as the basis for this research, because research has confirmed that individuals react based upon interactions within their social environments (Lim et al., 2016; Thompson et al., 2017).

The social atmosphere of the network sites provides opportunities for teachers to adjust their strategies, according to specific advice they may receive. The suppositions of the proposed dissertation research also align with Vygotsky (1978) used his socio-cultural theory to defend the belief that individuals learn through interacting within their daily social environments. This proposed dissertation coincides with current research which purported that social support is a powerful coping mechanism particularly for

individuals who work or study away from their native home or within new or challenging workplaces.

Jo's (2014) study of the connections between teacher commitment and their relationships inside and outside of their school community revealed that a lack of support for teachers results in higher levels of teacher turnover. This study's findings reflected those of Peters and Pearce (2012), who also found that teachers who did not receive positive support from their administrators were less committed to promoting school effectiveness. Likewise, Hoppey and McLeskey (2013) confirmed that teachers who lacked support or did not feel as if their contributions were valued, place minimal effort on trying to improve learning outcomes for their students. Such teachers were also found to remain in the teaching profession for a shorter tenure than those who received consistent teaching and emotional support from their school leaders (Park & Jeong, 2013). Saunders (2013) contributed poor administrative support to high levels of attrition among special educators. He proposed that due to the increasing demands of special education, teachers require assistance in the form of mentoring and induction programs.

According to DeAngelis et al. (2013), the feeling of helplessness and frustration often result in teachers (particularly early career teachers) losing motivation to pursue a career in special education, or education entirely. This suggests that schools should be a community where all stakeholders feel a sense of belonging, purpose and worth. The school system should meet the social, academic, and professional needs of all involved (students and teachers) in an effort to ensure that it continues to function as it should (Campbell-Whatley & Lyons, 2013). Hoppey and McLeskey supposed that educators will

not do their best work unless they receive adequate support from both administrators and parents. Their supposition was supported by Sebastian and Allensworth (2012) who also postulated that the influence of principal leadership is key to enhancing student achievement, parent-community ties, and the overall learning climate of a school. It is imperative that special educators feel valued in their workplace, if they are expected to make a difference in the lives of their students and their schools. Showing care and concern for their staff, defending them from pressures stemming from external pressures (such as high-stakes accountability), and providing high-quality professional development are the major forms of support that reduce the possibility of attrition among special educators (Clandinin et al., 2015; Glennie et al., 2016; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012).

While some researchers (Guerra et al., 2015) considered teacher-colleague relationships to be less influential on teachers' career trajectories, Dupriez et al. (2015) found that support from peers enabled teachers to better overcome the difficulties inherent in entering the education profession. Guerra et al. found teacher-administrator relationships more critical to the enhancement of teacher retention. They found that teacher support programs and teacher preparation programs are vital in facilitating teacher commitment to both their school and the profession. Like Guerra et al. (2015), DeAngelis et al. (2013) found that preservice preparation and early career support are effective teacher retention efforts. These studies' findings revealed that teachers who felt as if their mentor was effective in assisting them with their challenges, possess a more positive attitude toward the profession, and consider remaining in the field for a longer

length of time. This emphasizes the emotional aspect of teacher attrition and suggests that policy makers and school leaders must be innovative in implementing more social-emotional strategies for addressing the emotional concerns of educators.

With added stresses and workloads placed upon special educators, it is crucial that they have an outlet for expressing their feelings. To this end, researchers suggested that schools provide support groups as a means by which teachers can engage and interact with their colleagues, without receiving any form of negative feedback or criticism. The field of special education demands consistent collaboration, and the exchange of ideas is useful in assisting teachers who may feel as if they have approached a dead end with their students (DeAngelis et al., 2013). Like DeAngelis et al., Mason and Matas (2015) also purported that the development of social networks among educators is essential to fostering positive feelings of teacher commitment. According to Mason and Matas, teachers who felt isolated are more likely to leave their current school, thereby placing student achievement at risk.

In addition to the lack of administrative support, Mason and Matas and Joseph and Jackman (2014) concurred that the lack of parental support also contributed to attrition among educators. They posited that parent-teacher relationships are invaluable to the teacher retention process. The culture of a school, according to Mason and Matas, can be felt automatically by new teachers entering a school. Sebastian and Allensworth (2012) defended this idea, as they perceived parental support as an integral part of building a positive and more attractive school climate for educators. Papatraianou and Cornu (2014), like Mason and Matas and Sebastian and Allensworth found that teacher

resilience was strengthened by the support of parents. According to Papatraianou and Cornu, teachers feel affirmed when parents show appreciation for their efforts. Unlike some researchers (Joseph & Jackman, 2014) who found the lack of parental support to be a valid reason why teachers decide to leave the profession, Taylor (2013) and Day and Gru (2014) found the lack of parental support an insignificant contributor to attrition among educators; however, in correspondence with Sebastian and Allensworth and Papatraianou and Cornu, Taylor and Day and Gru concurred that some type of support system is vital for teacher resilience.

Examining the relationships between the collegial climate and teacher retention has major policy implications. It is the responsibility of school leaders to build a positive school culture, not only by executing strong leadership but by also allowing educators to feel a part of the decision-making processes. Researchers have shown that educators want to be respected by their administrators and allowed to provide their input toward education reform in their schools (Pogodzinski, Youngs, & Frank, 2013). Educators' emotions towards their workplace should not be taken lightly, as this weighs heavily upon their intent to remain in the teaching profession. Encouraging teacher collaboration influences teachers' retention decisions as well as their desire to promote student and school success. Although this is something that takes time to be accomplished, it is a necessary step in the direction of reducing attrition rates among educators.

Poor Teacher-Student Interactions

There is nothing more discouraging to a teacher than the inability to bring their students to some level of academic success. The field of special education is one in which

educators are faced with a myriad of disabilities in the classroom including learning, behavioral, attention, language development, and mild to severe cognitive disabilities (Campbell-Whatley & Lyons, 2013). Students who possess such disabilities tend to take a longer time to grasp concepts and skills taught. This therefore leads to frustration on the part of the teacher, and the student as well. According to researchers (Cameron & Lovett, 2015; Joseph & Jackman, 2014), teachers tend to lose their resolve to remain in special education when they begin to feel as if they can no longer get through to their students. This feeling of failure negatively impacts educators' level of self-efficacy, which in turns decreases their motivation to continue in the profession.

The concept of self-efficacy has often been used to explain why beginning teachers leave the profession prematurely (Chestnut & Burley, 2014; Hong, 2012; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). Commitment to the teaching profession hinges upon educators' sense of ability to produce successful students. Teachers' belief in their competency is often daunted by the poor academic performance of their students (Collie et al., 2012). According to Cameron and Lovett, many teachers become dissatisfied with their job because of limited available assistance for working with challenged learners. Recent studies have shown that attrition rates among less effective teachers are higher than those among highly effective teachers (DeAngelis et al., 2013; Hong, 2012). In contrast to Collie et al.'s (2012) conclusion that student performance and teacher self-efficacy impacted educators' decision to leave the profession, Zhang et al. (2014) found that such factors have no direct impact on teachers' decision to pursue a special-education related career (pp. 65-66).

Poor teacher performance has been found to result in teacher disengagement (Chestnut & Burley, 2014). This suggests therefore that the more success a teacher makes with students, the stronger their commitment to the profession. Klassen et al. (2013) found that successful teachers showed greater levels of commitment to their careers than those who were less than successful with their students. Chesnut, Siwatu, Young, and Tong (2015) argued that weak self-efficacy beliefs (instigated by constant student failure) are damaging to an educator's prolonged commitment to the teaching profession. This rationale served as the basis of their proposition that teacher self-efficacy be studied in detail to design appropriately effective interventions for teacher attrition. According to Kokka's (2016) study on reasons behind teachers' decision to remain in the profession, the "aha" moments experienced by students are what keep teachers motivated – in particular, teachers within poor socio-economic schools with low student success rates.

Research findings on student and teacher successes are an indication of the social emotional needs of educators and students alike. Success for teachers and students promotes a productive school environment and enhances individuals' level of intrinsic motivation to pursue academic and professional learning goals. This sense of achievement is powerful in reinforcing teachers' resilience, regardless of the existing flaws in the education system. Feelings of enjoyment resulting from positive student attainment have been found to vital in promoting teachers' longevity in education (Kokka, 2016, p. 171). The receipt of appreciation from administrators, students, and parents, also play a critical role in teacher resilience and retention decisions.

Kokka approached the issue of teacher retention from the theoretical perspective of the self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), which supposed that motivation plays an integral role in teacher commitment, and by extension, teacher-student relationships. Motivation (within a school setting) however, is impacted by teachers' daily experiences. Consequently, there exists an overlapping of two theories (self-determination and social cognitive theories) which may be used to create an understanding of what keeps teachers committed to teaching even in the face of difficult student interactions. The significance of intrinsic motivation, as postulated by Kokka is reverberated in Le Cornu's (2013) study which investigated various individual, contextual, and relational relationships that hinder or promote teacher resilience. Unlike Kokka, Le Cornu addressed the reciprocal aspect of teacher-student relationships, positing that positive teacher-student relationships are beneficial to both parties involved. Both studies Kokka and le Cornu proposed that teacher-student relationships are vital in enhancing teachers' intrinsic motivation and longevity; however, increasing the sample size of Kokka's study and including additional interviews would enhance the study's potential in generating more enriched data.

The need to feel appreciated and valued indicates the emotional basis of attrition. Researchers (Aloe, Amo, et al., 2014; Dicke et al., 2014; Kunter, Klusmann, Baumert, Richter, Voss, & Hachfeld, 2013; Saunders, 2013; Uitto, Jokikokko, & Estola, 2015; Yu, Wang, Zhai, & Dai, 2015) have delved into teacher attrition and retention from the perspective of emotions, in an effort to show its correlation with the concepts of job satisfaction and burnout. From an examination of 70 articles on teachers and emotions,

Uitto et al. (2015) identified major themes that spoke to the impact of teachers' emotions on their future career decisions in education, and student learning. The articles spanned a period of 29 years and highlighted trends and changes in the field of education during this time. Data analysis of the articles revealed the following themes: (a) teachers' emotional exhaustion, (b) teachers' emotions and relationships, (c) teachers' impact on students' learning, (d) teachers' emotions and professional learning. This review impacts attrition by illustrating the gaps in literature pertaining to the association of emotions and teacher attrition, thereby directing future research on the topic.

Uitto et al. (2015) found that teachers' emotions affect students' emotions and levels of engagement. This speaks to the importance of educators controlling their emotions in light of frustrating school circumstances. The emotional demeanor of the teacher sets the tone of the classroom, and thereby the flow of the learning process. These findings reflected those of Dicke et al.'s (2014) study, which also examined the effects of teachers' emotions on student learning and teacher commitment. This study analyzed the source of specific emotions, and how this generalizes across early career teachers. Dicke et al. hypothesized that teachers' level of self-efficacy in the area of classroom management predicts their level of emotional exhaustion. This hypothesis was tested in a quantitative study which included a sample of 1,227 German teacher candidates. This study tested the impact of teachers' self-efficacy upon their emotional well-being in the presence of poor student behavior. Findings confirmed the researchers' hypothesis and revealed that teachers with poor classroom management skills are prone to higher levels

of emotional exhaustion than those who are skillful in managing their classroom situations.

The quality of teacher-student interactions hinges significantly upon teachers' emotions, which are influenced by their existing classroom environment. With the feeling of frustration endured as a result of poor student success, teachers begin to doubt their abilities, and thus their level of perseverance within the education profession is negatively impacted. Unfortunately, some teachers tend to give up not only on the profession, but on their students as well. Without the need to meet high teacher expectations, students lack the drive needed to achieve at higher levels. Researchers have found that successful schools set high expectations for their students, thereby prompting them to surpass the surface of their true potential (Gershenson, Holt, & Papageorge, 2016; Liou, Marsh, & Antrop-González, 2017).

Researchers have shown that teacher-student relationships can be both emotionally inspiring, and at the same time also draining (de Vries, Jansen, & van de Grift, 2013; Pyhalto, Pietarinen, & Soini, 2012; Toom, Husu, & Karvonen, 2013). Heikonen, Pietarinen, Pyhalto, Toom, and Soini's (2016) findings confirmed those of de Vries et al. (2013), who found that instructional and social challenges experienced with students significantly affect teachers' motivation and consequently their work engagement. This lack of motivation, as research posited, impedes students' learning outcomes (Howells, 2014; Vermeulen, Denessen, & Knoors, 2012). Teacher-student relationships are reciprocal in nature. Both parties possess the power to positively or negatively influence the emotions of each other. Researchers asserted that academically

and behaviorally challenging students contribute to the loss of special educators (Etelapelto, Vahasantanen, & Hokka, 2015; Fresko & Alhija, 2015; Uitto, Jokikokko, & Estola, 2015). This implies that educators of students with special education needs should be adequately trained in both the academic and psychological aspects of special education to efficiently address their diverse needs. This also speaks to the importance of having the necessary personnel in schools to assist educators with students of challenging disabilities. Satisfying these needs would eliminate some of the pressure off special education teachers and facilitate the development of a more positive professional outlook from their perspective.

Current research justified that enhancing student learning in the absence of a positive teacher-student relationship can be challenging for educators (Heikonen et al., 2016). Without genuine passion and enthusiasm coupled with agency, levels of teacher commitment are slight (Mansfield, Beltman, Broadley, Weatherby-Fell, 2016). Keogh, Garvis, Pendergast, and Diamond (2012) defended Heikonen et al.'s (2016) justification along with Cameron and Lovett (2015) who agreed that agency and resilience work together to positively enhance teacher commitment. With teacher commitment, Cameron and Lovett posited, student learning outcomes are likely to be increased. Being aware of the potential challenges faced by a special educator enables educators to better prepare emotionally for their future role (Gibbs & Miller, 2014). According to Gibbs and Miller (2014), students' lack of motivation, poor academic achievement, and misbehavior would be more effectively addressed if educators develop coping, stress management, and problem-solving skills. Gibbs and Miller's position presents implications for teacher

education programs and special education leaders. Preservice teachers should be adequately prepared for the emotional and social challenges of the special education classroom. This is particularly crucial when considering a public education school system where there is likely to be larger numbers of challenged students (Hunter-Johnson et al., 2014).

Further, the role of special education leaders including principals and education policy makers should ensure that all teachers receive professional development in all pertinent areas of special education so that they are better equipped to handle the daily pressures of providing instruction to special needs students. Research (Jo, 2014; Andrews & Brown, 2015) suggested that some teachers enter the teaching profession unaware of what to expect, while others enter the profession with unrealistic expectations. When teachers' expectations are unmet in the classroom, they become disillusioned and rethink their future career intentions. In light of this revelation, further research on special educators' teaching expectations versus their actual teaching experiences is warranted. Such research would provide insight into the vital components of the special education teaching experience.

Similarities Among Research Findings

Poor Student Behavior and Teacher Burnout

Existing research confirmed that attrition rates among beginning teachers are higher than those among veteran teachers (Andrews & Brown, 2015; Beltman et al., 2016; Gibbs & Miller, 2014; Conley & You, 2016; Dukes et al., 2013). It is posited by some researchers that this trend among beginning teachers is the result of insufficient

training and preparedness to teach students of varying learning needs. Other researchers attributed poor student behavior and insufficient or inappropriate teacher support to the cause of attrition. This is found to be especially valid in special education research literature (Guerra et al., 2015; Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013; Johnson & Semmelroth, 2014; Langher et al., 2017) which proposed that the field of special education poses more complex challenges for teachers, as opposed to general education.

Researchers (Aloe, Amo, et al., 2014; Critchley & Gibbs, 2012; Gibbs & Miller, 2014; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015) who have conducted similar studies on the impact of teacher burnout on attrition levels among special educators revealed corresponding findings. According to current research, one of the common contributors of burnout among special educators is disruptive student behavior. Researchers concurred that educators become frustrated when they are unable to effectively manage students' behavior in the classroom. Using a multivariate meta-analysis Aloe, Amo, et al. (2014) examined 16 studies for evidence connecting classroom management self-efficacy (CMSE) to three dimensions of burnout including (a) emotional exhaustion, (b) depersonalization, and decreased personal accomplishment. Findings from this quantitative study indicated that there is a positive relationship between classroom management self-efficacy and burnout. This implies that teachers who have higher levels of CMSE are less likely to experience teacher burnout. In a similar study, also using a multivariate meta-analysis, Aloe, Shisler, et al. (2014) explored the correlation between student misbehavior and teacher burnout. Results, obtained from 21 independent samples, revealed that student misbehavior is significantly linked to teacher burnout.

These studies' approaches confront the issue of teacher attrition from the perspective of special education best practices, one of which involves the use of paraprofessionals. Special education programs entail specific components which must exist cohesively to ensure success (Campbell-Whatley & Lyons, 2013). Exploring the issue of student behavior in association with teacher attrition speaks to the importance of behavior specialists and school psychologists on staff to assist special educators with students who display challenging behaviors (McLeskey, Rosenberg, & Westling, 2013). The propositions of these studies defended those of Beltman et al. (2016) who acknowledged the vital role of school psychologists in alleviating some of the pressures off classroom teachers. These findings echoed those of Shernoff, Frazier, Marinez-Lora, Lakind, Atkins, Jakobsons, Hamre, Bhaumik, Parker-Katz, Neal, Smylie, and Patel (2016), who found that teachers assume a more positive outlook toward remaining in special education as long as opportunities for professional assistance with behavior management are provided.

This means that policy makers and education stakeholders must focus on all aspects of special education, including that of human resources. In a qualitative study of teachers' perceptions of inclusive education (Hunter-Johnson et al., 2014), primary educators held negative perceptions towards the practice because of the lack of personnel available to assist them with disabled students. This study's approach addressed the problem of limited special educators by examining teachers' perceptions towards the field of special education. Only through understanding why teachers hold certain perceptions, can policy makers ascertain what needs to be done within the education

system to change or improve teachers' perceptions and make them more likely to remain within the profession. Positive behavioral interventions and supports are crucial to the success of special education instruction and are found to be more effective when executed by a trained professional instead of an educator with little experience or skill in behavior management (Shernoff et al., 2016). With one less challenge to deal with, special educators are likely to feel less burnt out, thereby strengthening their resilience.

The aim of any retention initiative should be to cultivate strategies of maintain teachers' levels of positive job satisfaction. Research has shown that teachers' emotions can make or break the success of a school. Special educators are the expert service delivery personnel expected to produce results in very challenges conditions. Creating a community of collegial collaboration and fostering exchange of ideas among staff are crucial steps in attrition reduction levels. Studies (Saunders, 2013; Wang et al., 2015) have found that special educators become disengaged and less motivated under extreme pressures. The concept of teacher burn-out has therefore become a significant contributor to attrition among educators, but especially those in the area of special education. Jacobson's (2016) qualitative study on teacher burnout revealed that burn-out among educators results from several factors including educational mandates and classroom management issues. This study mirrored those conducted by Williams and Dikes (2015) and Yu et al., (2015). This reverts attention to the issue of the school environment (Beltman et al., 2016). Researchers proposed that one issue, once effectively addressed, is not a significant contributor of a teacher's decision to leave the education profession.

This therefore speaks to the leadership ability of school administrators to effectively handle issues that can potentially influence educators to quit.

Teacher Support

Teachers' professional lives must be individually motivated and supported by their organizations if they are to remain committed to the teaching profession (Le Cornu, 2013). Instructional, emotional, and professional support from school leaders and colleagues are vital in maintaining teacher commitment and fostering resilience amidst classroom challenges. Collaboration fosters stronger professional ties and facilitates a level of consistent networking. The sharing of classroom management strategies, opportunities for ongoing professional development and early career teacher training and mentoring are found to be successful in reducing attrition. Researchers advocated that strong and effective leadership combined with innovative motivational initiatives enhance retention rates among educators. Although administrative support is important, certain research findings indicate that some types of administrative support are more important than others.

Kokka (2016) investigated the reasons behind long-term urban teachers' commitment to the teaching profession, and their job satisfaction. Participants included teachers from an under-resourced public school in the United States. Fortunately, this school boasts of high retention rates among science and mathematics teachers, most of whom are teachers of color. Findings suggested that certain types of administrative support are more important than others. The researchers found that administrative support for disciplinary issues were more important to teachers' longevity, compared to support

for instructional guidance. This study directs attention to another area worthy of investigation, which is that of attrition trends by teachers' race. Such an exploration would be useful in informing teacher retention platforms for urban educators.

School ecologies can positively or negatively impact teacher resilience (Beltman et al., 2016). Researchers suggested that beginning teachers are often faced with difficult classroom and school situations which exceed their capabilities due to inadequate training and support (Le Cornu, 2013; Shernoff et al., 2016). It is this reality that defends current research findings which imply that effective administrative support and preservice (and early career) teacher training are vital to increasing teacher retention rates. Administrative support in terms of professional development and training seminars for teachers, mentoring programs, and facilitating shared leadership, have been cited as crucial components of an achieving school.

According to Le Cornu (2013), not only do supported teachers feel more confident and positive about their future as an educator, student achievement is also maximized. This connection between teacher resilience and student success is a common finding among teacher attrition and retention literature. Le Cornu found that teacher-student relationships are significantly impacted by teachers' emotions and sense of efficacy. To this end, it is imperative that both beginning and veteran teachers receive ongoing instructional support to enhance their pedagogical practices. This study has also confirmed the importance of positive teacher-student relationships to early career teachers' development as professionals. Le Cornu's conclusion is supported by Johnson, Down, Le Cornu, Peters, Sullian, Pearce, and Hunter (2012) who also posited that teacher

identity is pivotal in sustaining teachers' resilience. Such resilience, according to Johnson et al. (2012) depends greatly upon teachers' level of self-efficacy which is directly affected by their level of training and instructional support. The effect of teacher support and training underscores the self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1997) as an underlying principle of teacher retention approaches. This supports the rationale of examining teacher attrition from a theoretical perspective to better devise preventative measures.

Like their counterparts (Morrison, 2012; Papatraianou & Le Cornu, 2014), Peters and Pearce (2012) found that school administrators are responsible for providing teachers with more than simply emotional support, but also with a level of professionalism that focuses on constructive learning. Peters and Pearce's supposition is reflected by those of Day and Gu (2014) who concurred that administrators have a responsibility to ensure that a school culture of collaboration and community (i.e., belonging) are developed. Support, recognition, and the opportunity to exercise autonomy are strong contributors to teachers' level of resilience and motivation to teach. Supportive communities where teachers are consistently provided with professional development and social-emotional support produce educators who are likely to thrive at high levels within the teaching profession. School administrators and fellow teachers are not the only source of support within the school's community.

Paraprofessionals are also very important sources of support, particularly in the field of special education (Campbell-Whatley & Lyons, 2013; Langher et al., 2017; Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013). Beltman et al. (2016) found that teachers who received regular support from their school psychologists felt less pressured. Findings also revealed

that due to sharing the work load (particularly poor student behavioral issues) with the psychologist, they became more knowledgeable as new skills were generated and shared. In comparison to Beltman et al.'s findings, Gibbs and Miller (2014) also revealed the importance of collegial support in enabling teachers to more effectively manage behavioral issues presented in their classroom. Gibbs and Miller associated the resulting self-efficacy with enhanced levels of teacher resilience. Such studies speak to the importance of exploring the role of school psychologists and other special education paraprofessionals in teacher education and mentoring programs. If administrators are to attract and retain committed teachers, it is imperative that they invest effort, time, and resources in shaping their schools' community to foster a spirit of resilience among teachers (McInerney et al., 2015).

The lack of specialized training especially in special education poses a threat to teachers' interest in, and commitment to the teaching profession (Hunter-Johnson et al., 2014). Researchers argued that many beginning teachers become discouraged within months of entering the profession because they find themselves incapable of effectively meeting the academic and behavioral needs of their students (Chestnut & Burley, 2015; Goldhaber & Cowan, 2014; Mason-Williams, 2015; Zeichner, 2014). On the other hand, in some instances, veteran teachers lose their resolve to pursue a career in education since many of them find themselves in special needs or inclusive classrooms for which they have insufficient training to instruct. Poor self-efficacy has been identified by numerous researchers as a strong influencing factor of teachers' decisions to quit the teaching profession. To this end, researchers proposed that quality training is likely to enhance the

retention of good teachers (Heikonen et al., 2016; Ingersoll, Perda, et al., 2014; Johnson & Down, 2013).

Teachers' perceptions of themselves hinge on their level of self-efficacy. Poor perceptions of their abilities to produce successful students often result in discouragement and thoughts of leaving the education profession. With the steady decrease in highly qualified special educators, attracting quality special educators has become of great importance. Unfortunately, in some instances, educators are disappointed by their teaching experiences upon entering the field. This is primarily due to their tendency to hold certain perceptions of the field, which prove to be invalid. In a comparative study, Andrews and Brown (2015) examined special education teachers' ideal perceptions of teaching in comparison to their current teaching experiences. Data were collected using the Perceptions of Success Inventory for Beginning Teachers. A sample of 14 special education teachers from one school system in southeastern United States was included in the study. Data were analyzed using sample *t*-tests. Findings revealed that special educators' current experiences rated lower than their ideal perceptions. This research is crucial in assisting school administrators with determining the most vital components of special education instruction.

DeAngelis et al. (2013) found that the quality of teachers' perceived quality of preparation is closely linked to teachers' decision to leave teaching. Such findings imply the urgency in revising teacher education programs to produce future educators equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge needed to effectively manage inclusive classrooms. Similarly, Zeichner (2014) concurred that teacher education programs must

be designed with the pertinent elements that would adequately prepare teachers to successfully promote student learning even in challenging school settings. To accomplish this, Zeichner proposed that teacher education programs included more methods courses and opportunities for preservice teachers to be exposed to real classroom environments on a more frequent basis. The rationale behind this proposition is that many beginning teachers are often stunned by their actual experiences, in comparison to their initial perceptions of the teaching profession. Zeichner justified this as a way of enabling preservice teachers to become more mentally prepared for real-life teaching.

The Effectiveness of Mentoring and Induction Programs

Researchers argued that teachers require adequate support in order to promote their commitment to the teaching profession. Attrition and retention research revealed that teacher support comes in many forms, including professional development, teacher collaboration, and mentoring and induction programs. Among existing research, mentoring and induction programs appear to be a new trend evolving in the field of education as an approach to retaining educators (Adams & Woods, 2015; Dukes et al., 2014; Fresko, Alhija, 2015; Loughry & Normore, 2013; Papatraianou & Le Cornu 2014; Paris, 2013). According to Kent, Green, and Feldman (2012), mentoring involves the use of a master teacher, or more experienced teacher to guide new teachers during their probationary period and provide them with instructional support and feedback. Mentoring programs, according to DeAngelis et al. (2013), are more effective when merged with ongoing induction programs. Induction programs are designed to ease beginning teachers into the profession as they transition from college.

During such programs, school leaders familiarize new teachers with procedures and other elements of their school's dynamics and culture. Loughry and Normore (2013) found induction programs effective for both beginning and veteran teachers. In their qualitative study on the components of effective mentoring and induction programs, they found that induction programs facilitate reflection upon practice on the part of veteran teachers. This reflection, as posited results in the improvement in the quality of education.

While some researchers concurred that mentoring and induction programs are effective in providing the needed instructional and social support, other researchers purported that these programs are effective to a certain extent. DeAngelis et al.'s (2013) findings regarding the correlation between the quality of early career teachers' training and their future career intentions support the importance of mentoring and induction programs for beginning teachers. School leaders should not assume that teachers entering the profession are on the same professional level as veteran educators who would have gained more experience than novice teachers. DeAngelis et al. supported the implementation of mentoring programs. They posited, however that such programs are more effective if teachers are paired with mentors from the same subject area. Their findings also revealed that mentoring programs alone (in isolation from additional induction support) are not effective in changing new teachers' intentions to leave the teaching profession (p. 351).

In terms of effectiveness and their impact upon teacher attrition, Fresko and Alhija (2015) argued that mentoring programs are only effective in promoting the retention of teachers if mentors are well trained to provide the needed support for new

teachers. In a quantitative study conducted by Paris (2013), findings revealed that mentoring (provided in the form of a residency) made a significantly positive impact upon beginning teachers' transition experiences. This study investigated the impact of reciprocal mentoring on teachers' transition to the teaching profession. The study included 11 Western Australian beginning teachers who attended a reciprocal mentoring residency in 2010. Additional findings reflected those of Fresko and Alhija and DeAngelis et al. (2013) which confirmed that teachers who participate in mentoring programs become more committed to their jobs, thereby positively influencing student achievement.

In Callahan's (2016) review of literature on the effect of mentoring strategies upon teacher retention, current research defended the importance of beginning teachers receiving content-specific support in order to maximize the effectiveness of the mentoring process (Kent, Green, & Feldman, 2012). This corroborated Ingersoll, Merrill, et al.'s (2014) findings which confirmed that mentors should be knowledgeable in the areas in which they are providing support; however, Callahan argued that data on the effectiveness of established mentoring programs within schools are still lacking. She questioned whether or not these existing programs are successful in giving new teachers the confidence they need in the classroom. While researchers (Fresko & Alhija, 2015; Hughes, 2012; Loughry & Normore, 2013) agreed about the significance of mentoring programs for beginning teachers, they cautioned that such programs must be able to instill and enhance the confidence needed by teachers to competently carry out the various functions of their job.

From a theoretical perspective (Goddard et al., 2015), mentoring and induction programs are justified in being beneficial to beginning teachers as they predict lower attrition rates; however, the practical aspect of these programs is crucial and should be highly considered. This speaks to the importance of appropriate planning and organizing so as to produce positive outcomes to enhance teacher retention. A lack of informed planning may result in failed efforts. According to Kutsyuruba, Godden, Matheson, and Walker's (2016) study on the role of induction and mentoring programs in teacher attrition and retention, a variety of factors contribute to the efficacy or failure of support programs. In comparison to findings of DeAngelis et al. (2013), Kutsyuruba et al. found that successful mentorship programs depended greatly upon appropriately matching mentors with mentees. It is undoubtedly futile to provide a mentee with a mentor who is incapable of providing the required support. This therefore implies that administrators must know their teachers well enough to identify the area or areas in which support is required.

Researchers proposed that the role of administrators is to build their school's culture, facilitate shared leadership, and promote professional relationships between beginning teachers and veteran teachers. Consequently, regardless of the quality and quantity of mentoring programs they are likely to be ineffective if administrators are not supportive and committed to ensuring that teachers receive the professional support required to positively enhance their confidence and future career decisions (Callahan, 2016, Cancio et al., 2013; Collie et al., 2012; Conley & You, 2016; Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013). In contrast to this belief, Long et al. (2012) found limited empirical

evidence that directly associates the role of principals with teacher retention. Such contradictions therefore warrant further investigation into the role of administrators in teacher retention.

Teacher support may be provided in a variety of ways including mentoring and induction programs, professional development, supportive communication from administrators, and additional human resources (e.g., teacher's aide). With such support however, it is imperative that they are designed to produce desired results. Kang and Berliner (2012) found that having a teacher's aide resulted in lower migration and attrition rates. These findings were contradicted by those of Ronfeldt and McQueen (2017), which showed no significant relationship between the presence of a teacher's aide and teachers' decision to remain in the education profession. Ronfeldt and McQueen argued that combined induction supports were more effective in encouraging teachers to remain in teaching, compared to only one type of support (p. 406). This position is reflected in Kutsyuruba et al.'s (2016) study which revealed the effectiveness of teacher mentoring if used in conjunction with other components of the induction process. Nevertheless, the quality of any type of support program is of equal importance.

Papatraianou and Le Cornu (2014), like other researchers (Ingersoll, Merrill, et al., 2014; Ingersoll, Perda, et al., 2014; Johnson, Kraft, Papay, 2012; Podolsky, Kini, Bishop, & Darling-Hammond, 2017), affirmed that mentoring programs are effective approaches to alleviating teacher stress and sustaining early career teachers' resilience (p. 101). The findings of this qualitative study which explored the role of personal and professional relationships in early career teachers' resilience, reported findings similar to

those of Kutsyuruba et al. (2016), Fresko and Alhija (2015), and DeAngelis et al. (2013) which revealed that effective mentoring programs are those of high quality provided by well-trained educators. This suggests that prior to the implementation of any mentoring program, all mentors should be adequately trained for the task. Adams and Woods (2015) and Dukes et al. (2014) supported Papatraianou and Le Cornu in the rationalization that teachers feel less stressed when they receive support from professional relationships with colleagues. Adams and Woods confirmed Collie et al.'s (2012) findings which speak to the importance of addressing teachers' social-emotional needs in the battle against attrition. It is assumed that through mentoring programs which foster teacher collaboration and interaction, social-emotional support systems are established which serve as sources of refreshment during times of frustration.

Differences Between Research Findings

Gender and Teacher Attrition

Teacher burnout is perceived as a normal occurrence in the field of special education. As discussed earlier in this chapter, teacher burnout is one of the primary causes of attrition among educators. Teachers' ability to effectively manage the stresses accompanying special education greatly determines teachers' commitment to the field. Research (Ross, Romer, & Horner, 2012; Langher et al., 2017; Tunde & Oladipo, 2013) has shown that some teaching experiences are handled better by one gender, in comparison to the other. In Erdem et al.'s study it was discovered that female teachers experience more positive feelings toward their job than male teachers and were less impacted by burnout. Perhaps these results could be attributed to the innate motherly

disposition of females; however, Williams and Dikes's (2015) findings regarding gender and attrition contradicted those of Erdem et al.'s study. Williams and Dikes found that female teachers are more prone to burnout than male teachers. Their study also showed, however, that male teachers require more support from colleagues than do female teachers. Consistent with Williams and Dikes' study, Langher et al.'s (2017) quantitative study reported that female secondary teachers experienced more burnout than male secondary teachers. This finding was defended by the rationale that female teachers are more likely to become more emotionally involved with their students (p. 137). This therefore suggests that female teachers require more emotional support than their male counterparts.

In terms of attrition among males compared to females, Williams and Dikes did not find any significant correlation between gender and rates of attrition. Research conducted on the connection between gender and teacher attrition is rare. This is an area that warrants further research because few researchers have found gender to be an important variable in teacher attrition, specifically among special educators.

Student Misbehavior and Teacher Motivation

Significant amounts of research revealed that student misbehavior is one of the major contributors of teacher attrition; however, some researchers (Aloe, Amo, et al., 2014; Aloe, Shisler, et al., 2014; Beltman, Mansfield, & Harris, 2016) differed in their opinion regarding this theory. While Dicke, Parker, Marsh, Kunter, Schmeck, and Leutner (2014) concurred that poor student behavior is cause for frustration among teachers, they found that this was negligible in cases where teachers displayed strong and

effective behavior management skills. This is an indication of the importance of teacher preparedness to effectively manage challenges within their perspective classrooms.

Regardless of the challenges that present themselves, Dicke et al. (2014) proposed that if teachers were skillful in managing or addresses these issues, early departure from the teaching profession would not become a concern. This philosophy is shared by several other researchers who proposed that teachers' lack of efficacy in the classroom, rather than the actual issues encountered, is what results in burnout and lack of motivation to pursue a career in special education or teaching entirely (Chesnut & Burley, 2015; Collie et al., 2012; Goddard et al., 2015; Jo, 2014).

It is this hypothesis that perhaps supports research findings which show that veteran teachers remain in the teaching profession longer than early career teachers. It stands to reason that this is because veteran teachers have gained more experience than teachers just entering the service. At one point, however, veteran teachers were new to the profession. Therefore, it would be of much motivation to the younger teachers if they could explain why they remained in the teaching profession beyond five years. This knowledge could prove to be supportive, providing younger teachers with a sense of hope for a future in education for years to come.

Contrary to Dicke et al.'s (2014) assumption justifying a correlation between high teacher efficacy and teacher motivation, other studies' findings (Fernandez, 2015) revealed that high levels of teacher efficacy did not always result in student engagement particularly among special needs students. Consequently, educators begin to rethink their profession. Fernandez's (2015) quantitative study measured the extent to which teacher

certification impacts student achievement in Guam public high schools. The Stanford Achievement Test was used as the measuring tool, and data were analyzed using Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and *z tests*. A total of 156 math and reading teachers were included in the study, and students from five high schools in Grades 9 through 12 who took the SAT 10 student test. Findings revealed no significant difference between student scores and teacher certification. In contrast to common findings that revealed disruptive student behavior as a major contributor of attrition among educators, Langher et al. (2017) found the lack of teacher support to be a more significant influencing factor of teacher attrition than student behavior.

Summary and Conclusions

Teacher attrition is a complex matter, which hinges upon a variety of significant factors. This cannot be truly explained until the experiences of Bahamian public special educators are critically and deeply analyzed. Due to the multi-faceted characteristic of teacher attrition, policy makers and school leaders must devise creative and innovative initiatives that will prove effective in attracting and retaining educators for many years. Research has shown that retention efforts are especially vital in the case of beginning teachers, who, according to recent findings, tend to leave the teaching profession within their first five years of teaching (Kelly et al., 2014; Paris, 2013; Clandinin et al., 2015; Pogodzinski, Youngs, & Frank, 2013). The issue of teacher attrition has plagued special education for decades. This issue has negatively impacted the field by limiting the possibility for positive academic outcomes for students with special education needs.

Educational researchers revealed that attrition poses an even greater problem within the field of special education, in comparison to general education. Addressing the issue of teacher attrition begins with identifying the factors that influence teachers' decisions to leave special education or the teaching profession. It is imperative that education stakeholders and policy makers examine the causes of attrition among special educators, to make informed decisions regarding the organization and implementation of more effective strategies that would reduce attrition by improving teacher retention rates. The research literature supported the importance of providing special needs students with quality instruction at the hand of highly trained educators who possess the training and knowledge to cater to the special learning needs of students with disabilities (Hunter-Johnson et al., 2014; Glennie et al.; Paris, 2013).

A myriad of factors, as revealed by the current research, has been found to contribute to increasing levels of attrition among special educators, and educators in general. Such factors include (a) teacher burn-out, (b) lack of support from colleagues and administrators, (c) lack of, or insufficient teacher training in special education, and (d) poor teacher-student interactions. The research supported the correlation between social cognitive and social cognitive career theory and the conceptual framework of job satisfaction (Chestnut & Burley, 2015; Liere-Netheler, Vogelsang, Hoppe, & Steinhuser, 2017; Lim et al., 2016). Research findings indicated that an individual's level of satisfaction with this working environment influenced his future career decisions. It is assumed that less satisfied educators rarely incorporate effective teaching strategies, which consequently negatively impacts student learning (Cameron & Lovett, 2015). The

current literature defended the importance of examining the contributing factors of teacher attrition, in an effort to devise more effective ways of retaining highly qualified educators within the field of special education (Glennie et al. 2016).

In light of special education mandates and legislature such as the Salamanca Statement, special education within The Bahamas will not function as it should if appropriate instructional practices are not applied within all of the public schools across the country. The practice of inclusive education in Bahamian public schools will only thrive if all of the necessary components are not only in place, but well understood. According to the research examined, at the root of attrition lies unresolved social and emotional issues of overworked, unsupported, and unprepared educators. Examining the social-emotional contexts of their work environment is vital to the success of future teacher retention efforts.

The Gap in the Literature

The review of literature explored in this chapter reported several fundamental causes of attrition among special educators. Based upon the numerous studies conducted on teacher attrition, it is evident that the underlying reasons behind this phenomenon have been exhaustively reviewed. What is unknown, however, is if there is a correlation between gender and teacher attrition among Bahamian special educators. Does attrition take place only among educators of a certain age category? At present, research on the trend of attrition among special educators within the Caribbean is scarce. This scarcity in data applies to The Bahamas as well.

To this end, it was intended that through this current study, the existing gap in literature from a Bahamian perspective, would be deeply explored by highlighting and informing the issues that special educators experience on a daily basis (Burke et al., 2015; Cameron & Lovett, 2015; Johnson & Semmelroth, 2014; Tyler & Brunner, 2014). Another gap in the research is a comparison of special educators' ideal perceptions of teaching and their current teaching experiences. Such an exploration is useful in emotionally and mentally preparing preservice special educators for the field. This would result in educators entering the field with a clear understanding of what to expect, thereby reducing the possibility of disillusionment and regret (Andrews & Brown, 2015).

According to researchers, getting to the root of why special educators are leaving the teaching profession is critical (Andrews & Brown, 2015; Conley & Sukkyung You, 2017). Teacher attrition is not only a school dilemma but a social one as well. Teacher attrition in special education within the Bahamas' public education system should be explored, if achievement among all learners is to be pursued and maintained, and the quality of life enhanced for citizens (Hunter-Johnson, 2015; Joseph & Jackman, 2014; Mason-Williams, 2015). The data obtained through this study serve as a platform for the redevelopment of teacher education programs at The Bahamas' higher institutions of learning and informs design of new teacher mentoring and induction initiatives. The gap in the literature was addressed via the research questions outlined in Chapter 3. The purpose of this study, which was framed in alignment with the research questions, were satisfied via a semistructured interview as discussed in the following methods section.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Study Purpose

The purpose of this general qualitative study was to explore the influencing factors that have incited the decisions of public special education teachers within The Bahamas to resign or request premature retirement from the teaching profession. Through this study, it was anticipated that education policy makers within The Bahamas' Department of Education would develop a deeper understanding as to what is required to effectively satisfy the concerns of public educators to improve teacher retention rates in the area of special education. Additionally, it was anticipated that data obtained through this study would direct the development of teacher education programs at the tertiary level of education within The Bahamas to better equip preservice teachers with the skills and training required to enhance the academic achievement of special-needs students. Through this study, stakeholders involved in the process of education reform within The Bahamas may be able to make more informed decisions regarding teacher issues, thereby ensuring that more special educators remain in the public system to more effectively address the special education needs of all learners.

This study served as a research platform within the area of teacher attrition and retention in The Bahamas. Such data are significantly limited and have not been previously gathered at an extensive level within The Bahamas (Bahamas Government, 2016; Seymour et al., 2015). The major sections of this chapter address the research design and rationale, my role as the researcher and potential biases, the methodology of

the study, and issues of trustworthiness and ethical procedures. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Research Design and Rationale

Research Questions

- What are the influencing factors that have incited the decision of public special education teachers within The Bahamas to resign or request premature retirement from the teaching profession?
- How does job satisfaction influence teacher retention within The Bahamas' public education system?

Teacher Attrition

The central problem that served as the focus of this study was teacher attrition in relation to The Bahamas' public education system. This was explored specifically from the perspectives of special educators. Definitions for *teacher attrition* vary among researchers, but its fundamental description is voluntary departure from the teaching profession (Conley & You, 2017). The terms *attrition*, *transfer*, and *exit* are used interchangeably across the spectrum of teacher attrition studies to mean "exit teaching." Job satisfaction (Locke, 1969) served as the conceptual framework upon which this study was based. It has been posited that an individual's perceptions motivate a particular behavior or response.

Researchers (Andrews & Brown, 2015; Cameron & Lovett, 2015; Dukes et al., 2014) have proposed that educators react in different ways according to their day-to-day experiences in the classroom. Such reactions have the potential to positively or negatively

impact the education system, particularly in the area of special education, where professional responsibilities may be demanding. It is proposed that individuals make decisions based upon their feelings, which are determined by their level of satisfaction and comfort deriving from social interactions within their given environments. This supports the suggestion that special educators' feelings of dissatisfaction within their work environments may influence their decision to leave the profession.

Research Tradition

The research tradition chosen for this study was general qualitative study. This tradition can be traced back decades to the early work of Wolcott (1982), Denzin and Lincoln (1994), and Creswell (2013). A qualitative research tradition was chosen because it was well suited to this research study's exploration of individuals' perceptions, which inevitably arise from their experiences (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). The tradition of qualitative research involves the study of reality as it appears to individuals, which aligned with this study's purpose. Such an approach to exploring the contributing factors in teacher attrition enables a researcher to better understand and express how participants' daily experiences dictate their reflections and perceptions.

Another rationale for the selection of this tradition involves the fact that qualitative studies employ the method of interviewing (including focus groups) as a form of data collection. The method of interviewing is instrumental in facilitating the researcher's ability to understand how a specific aspect of a participant's social life is constructed or perceived by that individual. Interviews combined with statistical information (i.e., from teacher databases) are appropriate for a general qualitative study

because they facilitate a deeper understanding of the problem studied and lend the study to the development of more robust data (Creswell, 2013).

Role of the Researcher and Potential Biases

Researcher Role

Qualitative enquiry demands that the researcher maintain an objective perspective from which to construct understanding and meaning from data obtained. In qualitative research, the roles of the researcher are diverse. The qualitative researcher operates in the capacity of an interpreter of data and becomes involved in the experiences of the participants on a sustained and intensive level (Creswell, 2013). In this study, my initial role as the researcher was to identify and contact participants. Additionally, I assumed the role of observer in conducting interviews with the study participants. The issue of gaining entry to a research site did not apply because participants were not interviewed at a school site or within any type of professional setting relating to the study. To invite individuals to participate in the study, I contacted them by telephone. I retrieved potential participants' contact information from my personal database of colleagues with whom I had previously worked. When a prospective participant agreed to participate in the study, I extended an official telephone invitation. Finally, I also operated in the capacity of an analyst as I analyzed data obtained using the process of open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 2010).

Potential Biases

As a reading specialist having served 15 years within The Bahamas' public education system, I brought potential researcher bias (Creswell, 2013) to this study.

There was a possibility that participants in this study would be former colleagues who had been under my supervision for 4 years. This was expected because such individuals were added to the list of potential participants. I served as those individuals' immediate supervisor (i.e., grade level coordinator) prior to my resignation from the public service. To this end, my perceptions of teacher attrition have been shaped by my professional experiences as both a reading specialist and primary educator. My past experiences as a reading specialist and full-time classroom teacher within a public education system enhanced my awareness and empathy regarding the challenges and issues plaguing special educators within my country's public education system. These biases had the potential to impact the way in which I interpreted or perceived the collected data. Further, due to the closeness of the researcher-participant relationship, I could have inadvertently led or guided participants in their interview responses.

Addressing biases in research is crucial in ensuring the validity of a study (Creswell, 2013). To this end, the potential biases of this study were managed by (a) asking only open-ended questions during interviews, (b) transcribing tape-recorded interviews to ensure validity of the data, and (c) using member checking to enhance the validity process, particularly because I knew the participants.

With regard to the issue of my relationship involving power over the participants, informed consent forms were given to all participants. I explained that their participation in the study was not mandatory and that they were at liberty to withdraw at any time should they desire to do so. No incentives were provided in exchange for participants' involvement in the study.

Methodology

Study Setting

The Bahamas are an archipelago of over 700 islands and cays. Located in the Atlantic Ocean, north of the Caribbean, this country has a population of approximately 397,000. This study took place in The Bahamas' capital city. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology is the institution responsible for governing education within The Bahamas. This governing body has responsibility for more than 50,000 K-12 students in approximately 170 public educational institutions within The Commonwealth of The Bahamas, which are dispersed over 14 districts in the major islands. The total number of 170 public schools is distributed as follows: 13 all-age schools (Grade 1 through 12), 13 special schools (including schools for the physically disabled, teen mothers, at-risk adolescents, and struggling learners), 10 preschools (age 4 through 5), 10 junior high schools (Grade 7 through 9), 21 high schools (Grade 7 through 12), nine senior schools (Grade 10 through 12), and 94 primary schools (Grade 1 through 6). In addition to 170 public schools within The Bahamas, there are approximately 50 private schools.

The idea for the delineation of special education services for students with special education needs came to fruition on the heels of the establishment of The Bahamas' Education Act (1962). Other significant events also led to a revolution in special education in the country: In 1994, The Bahamas, along with 91 other governments, signed an agreement known as the Salamanca Statement, which mandated countries to provide inclusive education in all schools. The revelation of the number of children with special education needs within The Bahamas, as outlined by the National Commission on

Special Education (Stubbs, 2013), was the impetus behind the government's decision to allow special-needs students to access the general education classroom. To further facilitate inclusion throughout its schools, the government of The Bahamas attached special education units to some of the primary and secondary schools in its capital city. Depending upon severity and type of disability, students who attended this unit were later allowed to be mainstreamed.

The issue of teacher training, or rather the lack thereof, particularly in special education, posed a barrier to successful inclusive education practices in schools across the country (Hunter-Johnson et al., 2014). Due to general education teachers' concerns regarding their feelings of inadequacy to cater to the needs of students with disabilities, the government of The Bahamas offered a grant to educators (primary and secondary) to pursue a Master of Science degree in reading with a concentration in inclusive education at the country's local university. This initiative, which started in 2011, was the first of several initiatives to prepare public schools for inclusion. Although training in inclusive education has been made available to public educators, some remain disinterested in the practice and associated training. Consequently, with the increasing demands of diverse classrooms consisting primarily of struggling learners, public educators have been resigning from the teaching profession, leaving special education at a loss.

Participants

A total of 17 individuals were recruited for this study. From this number, 12 were randomly selected. This ensured an excess of five individuals from which to draw if attrition became a problem. In qualitative studies, unlike quantitative studies, researchers

focused more on generating a deep understanding that is facilitated by rich cases than on generalizing to large populations (Creswell, 2013). Consequently, the number of participants selected for this study was justified, as it was sufficient to arrive at saturation. This study's topic was not broad in scope; therefore, a small sample size was warranted. It has been posited (Creswell & Poth, 2017) that the larger the scope of a study, the larger amount of data required. Morse (2015) recommended that qualitative studies include no fewer than six participants to effectively discern the essence of experiences. Creswell and Poth (2017) suggested a minimum sample size of five participants. In view of these recommendations, this study's sample of 12 participants was reasonable. The important task to consider is ensuring that the meaning of the phenomenon is described for a small number of persons who have experienced it.

Participants included in this study met the following inclusion criteria: formerly taught in The Bahamas' public education system as a special education teacher, resource teacher, or reading specialist ($n = 8$), and currently teaching in The Bahamas' public education system as a special education teacher, resource teacher, or reading specialist ($n = 4$). Additionally, participants needed to have at least three years of teaching experience within the public education system, as well as a minimum qualification of a bachelor's degree in primary education, high school education, or special education from an accredited university. Participants were known to meet the criteria because I was familiar with their career experience. Participants were selected using the method of convenience sampling. According to Andrews and Frankel (2010), this method is highly appropriate in

qualitative studies because of its feasibility and access to study participants. It was on this premise that convenience sampling was employed.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

After receiving approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (approval number 02-13-18-0477766), I approached persons who met the inclusion criteria by telephone and asked them to participate. Due to my past professional liaisons within the public education system, personal telephone contact information for potential participants was readily accessible.

An interview protocol was designed and served as a guide for both the individual interviewing process and the focus group interview (see Appendix A for individual teacher interview protocol and interview questions). The interview protocol and interview questions for the focus group are in Appendix B.

Once contact was made and individuals agreed to participate in the study, dates and times for each of the individual interviews were determined. Data on the work experiences of special educators were collected through semistructured interviews (see Appendix C for interview questions by categories). This instrument, according to Creswell (2013), is consistent with qualitative studies, and is appropriate for collecting reliable and comparable qualitative data (Irvine, Drew, & Sainsbury, 2013). The open-ended interview questions allowed for a more in-depth understanding of contributing factors in teacher attrition, reflecting several and perhaps new perspectives.

Because The Bahamas has membership in the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM), free movement of labor between The Bahamas and other

member countries is common. This exchange of skilled professionals provides individuals from CARICOM countries the opportunity to obtain employment within The Bahamas (CARICOM Caribbean Community, 2017). Educators represent a significant percentage of foreign human resources. To this end, The Bahamas' Ministry of Education's teacher population consists primarily of educators from Caribbean and South American countries (English- and non-English-speaking countries). Consequently, the demographics section of the interview protocol for this dissertation was designed to provide limited ethnic options inclusive of Black, Caucasian, Hispanic, and Other, which is typical of how The Bahamas' Ministry of Education uses ethnic classifications.

The interviews were conducted in a coffee shop—a neutral setting not associated with any school or with education. The individual interviews were conducted over a period of four weeks (three interviews per week), with an additional week for a follow-up session involving member checking. The interviews lasted for a maximum of 50 minutes. The focus group interview was conducted within one two-hour session on a day and at a time agreed upon by all participants. All interviews were tape recorded and immediately transcribed verbatim. I developed the interview used in this study to ensure that the questions were consistent with the context (purpose, research questions, and problem) of this specific study (Zohrabi, 2013). Using a customized interview plan allowed for greater depth in participants' responses (Flick, 2006), compared to using a published instrument that might not effectively facilitate the purpose of the study.

Prior to the start of each interview, the participant was presented with an informed consent form and advised that participation was voluntary, anonymity would be enforced,

no incentives (e.g., stipend) would be provided for participation, and withdrawal was allowed at any stage in the study. The participants were also informed of the audio tape-recording of the interview. They were asked if they agreed to be recorded. Upon advising participants of their rights, they were asked to sign the informed consent form as an indication that they fully understood the contents outlined. After obtaining informed consent, the interview process commenced. Participants were contacted for a follow-up interview, to ensure content validity. During the time of the follow-up session, participants reviewed the transcripts of their individual interviews, so they could indicate if the information was accurate or not (i.e., member checking process). At the time of the focus group interview, I reviewed the contents of the informed consent form and presented participants with a final opportunity to withdraw from the study. Finally, the participants completed a debriefing form, signifying the completion of the study.

Content validity. Content validity pertains to demonstrating the accuracy of a study's findings, and convincing the reader of such (Creswell, 2013). The content validity of the researcher-developed interview was established through the application of the following strategies:

- Member checking (Creswell, 2013): Participants reviewed the interview transcript to confirm that it accurately depicted what they had said. Participants were further allowed to comment on the findings that I shared.
- Peer debriefing (Rubin & Rubin, 2012): At the time of the follow-up interviews, participants were asked questions about the study. This enhanced

validity, as this strategy involved an interpretation of the findings that went beyond the researcher (Creswell, 2013, p. 192).

Data Analysis Plan

Data Analysis Procedure

The focus of this research approach was the generation of meaning from experiences of Bahamian public special educators. To this end, an emergent strategy was used to analyze the data obtained. Such a process began with me reading and rereading interview transcripts and notes to get the gist of what was said by the participants. After doing this, data obtained from the semistructured interviews and one focus group were analyzed through the process of open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 2010). This process involved reviewing the collected data for themes or common concepts that arose across a group of participants who shared the same experiences. Also known as a thematic analysis, this process facilitated the development of issues (Stake, 1995). This “development of issues” satisfied the purpose of the qualitative analysis as I facilitated an in-depth construction of understanding through interpretation of data descriptions. In addition to the open coding, the NVivo9 software was used to assist me in organizing, storing, and graphically analyzing data obtained from the semistructured interviews. This software was efficient in identifying codes and themes concisely.

Bracketing (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013; Cope, 2014; Polit & Beck, 2012) is a process in which a researcher sets aside any personal perceptions, biases, or experiences to take a fresh look at the collected data. This dissertation research included bracketing to ensure that the perceptions of the participants were not manipulated or swayed due to my

personal experiences or biases. This process was done during the data collection and data analysis stages of the research process.

Issues of Trustworthiness and Ethical Procedures

Issues of Trustworthiness

Validity is considered a significant strength of qualitative research (Polit & Beck, 2012). This is because it determines the accuracy of research findings and interpretations from perspectives other than mine alone (i.e., researcher, participants, and readers of the research). To establish internal validity (i.e., credibility) of this study, the following strategies were applied (a) member checks (Creswell, 2013), and (b) reflexivity (Patton, 2014). These strategies ensured that the study's findings were accurate and acknowledged (and clarified) any researcher bias. According to Cope (2014), findings show transferability if they can be applied to other groups of people or settings (p. 89). The issue of transferability (also known as external validity) was addressed in this study by providing a thick, detailed description of the participants' work experiences which they had in common as educators within The Bahamian public education system, in addition to a presenting a rich description of their day-to-day work environment (i.e., setting). If readers who have no connection to the study are able to construct meaning from data presented, transferability would have been met. The final issue of trustworthiness addressed in the study was that of confirmability (i.e., objectivity). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, objectivity (also referred to as confirmability) was established by ensuring that I was reflexive in disclosing any and all potential biases (such as familiarity with

participants, or former affiliations) that may have affected the way in which data were analyzed, interpreted or viewed.

Ethical Procedures

Researchers must ensure that their participants, and the integrity of their study are protected. Further, it is vital that researchers take the necessary steps to safeguard against misconduct that might negatively reflect upon their organizations or institutions (Creswell, 2013). One such safeguard was to apply to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for permission to gain access to participants and data. Following the approval of the research proposal, an application was forwarded to the IRB to request participant access.

Ethical Concerns

Data collection/intervention. In addition to the twelve participants that were recruited for this study, an additional list of five substitute participants was drafted in the event that any of the participants decided to withdraw from the study prematurely, initially refused to participate at the onset, became ill, or was faced with a tragedy of some sort.

Confidentiality of data. It is imperative that participants are assured that what they say to the researcher is kept in confidence, particularly in cases where they may discuss information “off the record” (Patton, 2014). To this end, study participants were reassured of confidentiality regarding the information that was obtained via the informed consent form that was provided. It was stipulated that participants would not be identified, no real names of schools or other educational institutions would be used

(pseudonyms were applied instead), and participants were free to withdraw from the study at any time. The participants were asked to sign the informed consent form. Kvale (2007) found that interviewing in qualitative research is becoming more of a moral inquiry (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, study participants were allowed to peruse the interview transcripts in order to ensure accuracy. Data were stored in a safe at my residence. Data were stored in a hard copy form, as well as electronically, using the NVivo9 software. I was the only individual with access to the safe's combination. The data would be kept for five years, after which it would be destroyed. The only individuals who were able to peruse the findings were the study participants, peer debriefer, and myself.

Conflict of interest. Considering the researcher's familiarity with the participants, reflexivity was exercised, and all relationships and past connections with the participants were disclosed. The possibility of bias in terms of data analysis and interpretation were inhibited by a peer review of the study by an external expert.

Summary

Alignment of a study's tradition, research questions, and purpose must occur, to ensure accuracy and efficacy of the research study. These elements, as supported by researchers (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2014) in this chapter, must be consistent with each other if the researcher's outcome is a to produce a robust study worthy of replication. This speaks to the significance of knowing and understanding one's role as a researcher. In this chapter, various elements of the research proposal were discussed, including the role of the researcher, methodology of the study, and issues of trustworthiness and ethical

procedures. It is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that consistent effort is made to ensure that not only are the rights of the participants protected, but the integrity of the study as well. Anticipating potential biases, possible setbacks, and ethical concerns that could negatively impact a study's ability to successfully satisfy purpose, is a fundamental aspect of qualitative research. The only way in which to adequately manage these issues is to first anticipate them, then plan a strategy for addressing them.

As shown, themes and concepts, which are further discussed in Chapter 4, are the essence of the open coding process (Strauss & Corbin, 2010). The development of constructs serves as the backbone of qualitative studies, like this one. It was anticipated that data obtained in Chapter 4 would assist me and other readers in constructing a more in-depth understanding of teacher attrition and retention to evoke change and challenge the status quo within the field of special education within The Commonwealth of The Bahamas.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this general qualitative study was to ascertain the influencing factors that prompt Bahamian special educators to leave the profession. This study was designed so that its findings could be used to inform best teacher retention practices; however, the retention of special educators is not an isolated problem. In fact, through the exploration of the daily experiences of Bahamian special educators, the findings will indicate what components are vital to an effort to attract more teachers specifically to the field of special education. This study is crucial because of the rising levels of teacher attrition within The Bahamas' public education system. According to the current literature in addition to this study's findings, which are discussed in this chapter, teacher attrition is of great detriment to the educational status of the Bahamian society. In an effort for students to become productive, contributing citizens of The Bahamas, their academic needs (regardless of any cognitive disabilities) must be met in the classroom by effective and highly trained educators.

The purpose of this study was achieved by seeking answers to the following research questions:

- What are the influencing factors that have incited the decision of public special education teachers within The Bahamas to resign or request premature retirement from the teaching profession?
- How does job satisfaction influence teacher retention within The Bahamas' public education system?

Several consistencies between this study's findings and the current literature on teacher attrition presented in Chapter 2 were evident. The consistency between this study's results and those emphasized in the literature validates the concerns expressed by this study's participants, thereby justifying their decision to leave or remain within the area of special education. Unexpectedly, student progress was found to be a stronger motivator for educators to remain in special education compared to a personal love for children, and as expected (based upon existing literature), a lack of support from administrators was found to be the most prevalent contributing factor of attrition among the participants. Through the process of open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 2010), which I performed manually as well as digitally using NVivo9 software, predominant themes similar to those identified within the review of literature were produced. As may be inferred from current research in combination with this study's results, positive social change is negatively impacted by extensive teacher shortages.

One surprising result from the interviews was that large class size was not a challenge for most of the participants. This finding opposed Hunter-Johnson et al.'s (2014) findings from a qualitative study on Bahamian teachers' perceptions of inclusive education. Hunter-Johnson et al. found that one of the major reasons that Bahamian primary educators did not possess a positive outlook toward inclusion was overcrowded classrooms. Only 42% of this study's participants cited large class size as a "possible" reason for educators leaving special education. Interruption of remedial classes was another rare finding, which did not emerge for the existing literature. In fact, this finding was unique, thereby expanding the research base of current teacher attrition research.

With reference to the conceptual framework of this study, findings confirmed that educators' level of job satisfaction (Locke, 1969) plays an integral part in their future career decisions. Analysis of the interview data evolved within a three-step process involving (a) precoding, (b) coding, and (c) postcoding, as discussed in more detail in the data analysis section of this chapter. Based on the findings of this study, the behaviors displayed by Bahamian special educators can be logically explained through the application of social cognitive and social cognitive career theories.

Interview data returned the following findings: Bahamian educators leave the field of special education as a result of four major factors: (a) poor leadership of school administrators, (b) large class sizes, (c) insufficient training in special education, and (d) lack of support from colleagues and administrators. These factors, along with other contributing factors, are discussed in this chapter, which consists of sections on setting, demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and results, concluding with a chapter summary.

Setting

This study took place in The Bahamas' capital city. This is the most populated city within the archipelago and contains approximately one third of its public schools. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology is the institution responsible for governing education within The Bahamas. During the time at which this study was conducted, there were no occurrences of personal or organizational conditions that influenced the participants or their experiences that might have influenced interpretation of the study's results. Interviews were not conducted at any school or educational site

because I sought to ensure that all participants were comfortable freely expressing their responses. Additionally, interviews were conducted during teachers' midterm breaks; therefore, there was no possibility of exhaustion, which might have been an issue if they had engaged in the interviews after a long day at work. Eleven of the 12 individual interviews were conducted at a local coffee house. Due to lack of available transportation, one of the individual interviews were conducted via telephone; this individual was at her home during the interview. The entire conversation was placed on speaker phone to facilitate audio recording. This did not pose any threat to the quality of the participant's responses.

Demographics

Study participants included 12 ($n = 12$) Bahamian educators (see Table 2) who satisfied the following inclusion criteria: (a) formerly taught in The Bahamas' public education system as a special educator ($n = 5$), resource teacher ($n = 1$), or reading specialist ($n = 2$); (b) currently teaching in The Bahamas' public education system as a special education teacher ($n = 3$) or reading specialist ($n = 1$); (c) minimum teaching experience of 3 years; and (d) minimum qualification of a bachelor's degree in primary education, high school education, or special education from an accredited university.

Table 2

Demographics of Study Participants

Professional title	Area(s) of professional training	Number of years teaching	Highest educational level	Level taught
	SpEd only: 3			
Special educator: 8	SpEd & social work: 1	5-10 years: 2		Primary: 9
Reading specialist: 3	Kinesiotherapy: 1		Bachelor's degree: 3	
	SpEd & intervention specialization: 1	11-15 years: 2		High school: 2
	Primary education only: 2			
	SpEd & primary education: 1			
Resource Teacher: 1	Reading with inclusive education & high school education: 1	16-20 years: 2		
	Reading with inclusive education & primary education: 1		Master's degree: 9	Other: 1
Total participants: 12	Reading with inclusive education, high school education, & tourism management: 1	> 20 years: 6		

Sixteen percent of the study participants held a bachelor's degree, while the remaining 83% (10 out of 12) participants held both a bachelor's and a master's degree. In addition to special education, primary, and high school education, areas of professional training among the participants included (a) social work ($n = 1$), (b) kinesiotherapy ($n = 1$), (c) intervention specialization ($n = 1$), (d) reading with inclusive education ($n = 3$), and (e) tourism management ($n = 1$).

Participants were selected using the method of convenience sampling because of its feasibility, as well as easy access to participants (Andrews & Frankel, 2010). Due to my past professional liaisons within the public education system, personal telephone contacts for the prospective participants were readily accessible. Initially, a total of 17 individuals were recruited for this study, and from this number, 12 individuals were randomly selected. This ensured an excess of five individuals from which to draw if attrition from the study became a problem.

Data Collection

The data collection process went according to plan, as outlined in the previous chapter. Potential participants were invited via telephone to participate in this study, and upon their agreement, they were asked to provide a date and time that would be most convenient for them to engage in the individual interview. The telephone invitation was guided by a script (see Appendix D). Because the interviews were conducted during the participants' midterm break, a maximum of three participants were interviewed during the same day but at different times. Data were collected from 12 participants using semistructured, face-to-face interviews. Data collection was carried out on three

occasions for each participant: (a) the individual interview, (b) a member-checking session, and (c) the focus group interview (held 4 weeks after all individual interviews were conducted). Interviews were conducted at a Starbucks coffee shop at Harbour Bay Shopping Center.

Prior to the start of each interview, the participant was presented with an informed consent form and advised that participation was voluntary, that anonymity would be enforced, that no incentives (e.g., stipend) would be provided for participation, and that withdrawal was allowed at any stage in the study. The participants were also informed of the audio recording of the interview. They were asked if they agreed to be recorded. After advising participants of their rights, I asked them to sign the informed consent form as an indication that they fully understood the contents outlined. After obtaining informed consent, I began the interview process. At the end of each interview, participants were informed that they would be contacted again to arrange a date for the follow-up member checking session. The individual interviews were completed and transcribed within 4 weeks and member-checked within 1 week. The duration of the individual interviews ranged from 40–55 minutes.

Two accommodations were made during the actual data collection process: (a) interviews were digitally recorded using a voice recording application on a cellular phone instead of the original tape recorder, due to a technical malfunction with the tape recording device; and (b) one of the individual interviews were conducted via telephone (with a participant at home) because of the participant's lack of transportation; this participant's informed consent form was taken to her prior to the telephone interview so

that she could sign it. In addition to audio recordings, I made field notes during the interviews. One unusual or rather unexpected circumstance that was encountered during data collection was the noise level in the coffee house. The background noises did not seem loud until the interviews were played back during the transcription process; however, the noise did not affect the quality of the recordings, as all responses were audible.

After the transcription of individual interviews (4 weeks later), participants were contacted by telephone a second time to arrange a time and date for the follow-up member checking session. During this session, participants reviewed their interview transcript to ensure that it was accurate and in alignment with what they had said during the interview. One member-checking session was conducted per participant and lasted 15 minutes. At this time, participants were reminded again of the terms on the informed consent form and were then presented with their interview transcript for perusal. At the end of the follow-up sessions, the participant was given a date for the focus group interview to be conducted and was asked to confirm this date at his or her earliest convenience. Within 1 week after the follow-up session, all participants had confirmed their attendance at the focus group. All participants met at the same Starbucks location where the individual interviews had been held. In an effort to make all participants comfortable, I made introductions and then proceeded to review the study topic again, along with the parameters of the informed consent form that had previously been signed. Additionally, I presented participants with a final opportunity to withdraw from the study. No one chose to withdraw from the study.

After introductions and a review of the study topic (to refamiliarize everyone), the focus group interview began. It lasted 1 hour and 15 minutes. At the end of the focus group interview, the participants completed a debriefing form, signifying the completion of the study.

Data Analysis

Thematic Analysis

The data analysis plan incorporated in this study was a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This plan consisted of six phases, one of which involved the coding of the interview data. In the first stage (familiarization phase), I became more familiar with the interview data through the transcription process. Due to my familiarity with some of the study participants, I made extensive field notes during and after each interview to limit the possibility of researcher bias. These notes provided a fresh look at the data in an effort to facilitate validity. The participant interviews and the focus group interview were first transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy. They were then saved electronically in Microsoft Word application. Each transcript was saved under a unique letter code to protect participants' identity. The file in which the transcripts were saved was protected by a password known only by me to ensure confidentiality of data.

The transcription process enabled me to identify the predominant topics discussed by the participants. Following the transcription of the interviews, the second phase of the thematic analysis was conducted; this involved the coding of the interview data. Open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 2010) was used to identify common codes (words and short phrases) from the units of data in participants' responses. This process facilitated the

development of issues (Stake, 1995), which satisfied the purpose of the qualitative analysis as I facilitated in-depth construction of understanding through interpretation of data descriptions. The codes were highlighted (color coded) in an effort to identify similarities for categorization. The types of codes that emerged from the interview responses (i.e., descriptive, in vivo, and process codes), were used to create categories. These categories included (a) special education instruction, (b) administrative support, (c) parental support, (d) collegial support, (e) burnout/stress, (e) retention initiatives, and (f) positive social change.

The third phase of this study's thematic analysis then involved the creation of themes that arose from clusters of codes that had similar relationships; these clusters of codes were those that emerged most frequently from the responses of participants who shared the same experiences as special educators. The creation of themes (i.e., labels for code clusters) continued until there was no further clustering possible. To ensure the accuracy and validity of the themes generated, I then reviewed the themes against the interview data (from the transcripts); this was the fourth stage of the thematic analysis. After this was done, I then defined the themes that were generated (fifth stage); the definition assigned to each theme was a summary of the content discussed by participants within the theme (i.e., code cluster). The final stage of the thematic analysis was the presentation of the final report that disclosed the study's findings and provided an interpretation of the findings. This study's findings are outlined in the section of this chapter labeled Results, and an interpretation of these results is provided in Chapter 5 of this dissertation.

Data Coding Using NVivo9

The coding process for this study was carried out in two ways; manually (thematic analysis), and with the use of the NVivo9 software. Although the NVivo09 software was used, it was crucial to also manually open code data as this software is incapable of naming themes or determining whether or not the themes made sense. The data analysis process using the NVivo9 software followed the same pattern as with the thematic analysis; of course, the major difference was that data were entered into the computer to be digitally processed. Using the NVivo9 software, three basic steps were carried out to analyze the interview data (a) step one – precoding stage, (b) step two – coding stage, and (c) step three – postcoding stage. The first thing that was done at the beginning of the data analysis process was to import the interview data into NVivo via the “sources” navigation pane. Prior to doing this, however, a file was created for the storage of the interview transcripts. After the interview data were imported, the query command tool was used to show which words were used by the participants and the frequency. The text search command was also used to generate word trees; this function assisted me in knowing the context in which certain words were used. This first step within the precoding stage was equivalent to the familiarity phase of the thematic analysis process.

In the second step of the data analysis process using NVivo9 (coding stage), labels (i.e., themes) were assigned to the codes which in NVivo9 are referred to as “nodes.” The consistency of the nodes as seen during the first step, made it easier for me to identify the relationships between the nodes, thereby determining the underling

meanings among them. The final step was the postcoding stage, which involved presenting the study's findings.

By examining the categories, overarching themes were created, thereby showing an inductive transition from coded units to larger representations of categories and themes (see specific codes, categories and themes that emerged from the data in Figure 2). In addition to employing the process of open coding, the NVivo9 software was used to assist me in organizing, storing, and graphically analyzing data obtained from the semistructured interviews. Although few participants highlighted rare reasons for attrition among Bahamian special educators, there were no discrepant cases, as everyone reported similar views pertaining to teacher attrition and retention trends with The Bahamas' public education system.

Specific Codes, Categories and Themes Emerged from Interview Data
<p>Theme: Training</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Category: Special Education Instruction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Code: self-efficacy ● Code: “student progress” ● Code: professional development ● Code: “collaboration” ● Code: funding for conferences & workshops ● Code: “instructional strategies”
<p>Theme: Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Category: “Administrative Support” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Code: decision-making/input from teachers ● Code: respect ● Code: appreciation for / understanding of special education ● Code: social-emotional ● Code: “resources (teaching and human)” ■ Category: Parental Support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Code: “appreciation for teachers” ● Code: involvement in children’s education ■ Category: Collegial Support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Code: “respect for special education programs” ● Code: “collaboration” ● Code: networking/exchange of ideas
<p>Theme: Job Satisfaction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Category: Burnout/Stress <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Code: large class sizes ● Code: no aides ● Code: “substitutions & interruption of program” ● Code: “work load” ● Code: “leadership styles of school administrators” ● Code: student behavior
<p>Theme: Teacher Retention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Category: Initiatives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Code: “salary increase” ● Code: “exposure & training” ● Code: curriculum revisions ■ Category: Positive Social Change <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Code: education policy change ● Code: “crime reduction” ● Code: citizens’ productivity improved quality of life

Figure 2. Specific codes, categories, and themes that emerged from interview data.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility of this study was established through the implementation of member checks and reflexivity. All interviews were transcribed verbatim upon completion, and participants reviewed the scripts to confirm that the information aligned with what they had said during the interviews. By acknowledging possible bias due to researcher familiarity, I used bracketing to review field notes made during interviews by comparing them to participants' interview responses; this was done to ensure that any personal bias would not interfere with my interpretation of the data obtained. Further, all interviews were recorded digitally, and each participant received an individual copy of their interview along with a copy of the recorded focus group interview.

Research findings show transferability (i.e., external validity or generalizability) if they can be applied to other groups of people or settings (Cope, 2014). In this study, transferability was implemented by providing a thick, detailed description of the participants' work experiences which they all had in common as educators within The Bahamian public education system. Additionally, a rich description of their day-to-day work environment (i.e., setting) and its connection with teacher attrition was presented in an effort to enable readers to make transferability judgements themselves; and thereby make meaningful connections between the data that are collected and the social context in which it was collect. If readers who have no connection to the study are able to construct meaning from the data presented, transferability would have been met. To ensure dependability of this study's findings, as mentioned in Chapter 3, a peer debriefer (i.e., an outside researcher) was used to conduct an external audit. This process involved

reviewing the raw data, as well as the processes of data collection and analysis to confirm the accuracy of the findings. In addition to being reflexive in disclosing all potential biases (such as familiarity with participants, or former affiliations), an audit trail was kept during the data collection process; unique and interesting topics were recorded along with common codes that arose from the raw data. Further, details pertaining to the data collection, data analysis processes, and data interpretations were described.

Results

Factors Influencing Attrition Among Bahamian Special Educators

Several of the findings of this study predictably echoed those of the current teacher attrition literature. According to the interview data analyzed, Bahamian special educators, like those in public schools globally were faced with enormous challenges from various areas within the field of special education (see Table 3). Lack of administrative support (100%), poor leadership skills of school administrators (92%), lack of support from fellow educators (42%), insufficient special education training (83%), poor levels of parental support (50%), and large class sizes (42%) were found to be the most prevalent issues plaguing public special educators within The Bahamas' Ministry of Education. Surprisingly, in contrast to current teacher attrition research, few educators (25%) emphasized burnout and stress as a major factor of attrition among special educators. This rare finding could be attributed to public educators' familiarity with working with large class sizes over a period of many years to the point of becoming accustomed to it.

Table 3

Factors Influencing Attrition Among Bahamian Special Educators

Influencing factors	Number of participants citing this factor	
Lack of support from school administrators	12	100%
Poor leadership skills of school administrators	11	92%
Insufficient special education training	10	83%
Lack of parental support	6	50%
Large class size	5	42%
Lack of support from colleagues	5	42%
Less common factors identified		
Poor student behavior	4	33%
Diversity of disabilities	3	25%
Substitutions/interruption of programs	3	25%
Salary ^a	12	100%

Note. Influencing factors are ranked in order of significance, according to study findings. They are ranked from most influential to least influential.

^aAlthough all study participants identified teachers' salary as a discouraging aspect of being a special educator in the public education system, this was not identified by participants as a cause for attrition among Bahamian special educators; however, participants posited that an increase in salary would attract and retain more special educators.

Some participants (33%) mentioned how being a special educator in the public education system was a lot of work and the job can lead to a lot of stress; but this was not the primary source of the participants' frustration. Poor administrative support (reported by 100% of study participants), and leadership skills (92%) were the most common complaints among the educators. According to study participants, these issues were strong causes of attrition among Bahamian educators. Other surprisingly results of this study revealed that poor student behavior (33%), diversity of disabilities (25%), interruption of remedial programs (i.e., frequent substitutions) (25%), and salary (100%) were cited as less influencing factors of attrition. It is important to note, however, that while 100 % of the participants suggested that an increase in teachers' salaries would attract and retain more special educators, they did not cite salary as a reason why educators have left the public education system or special education in recent years.

The results of this study are organized by the common themes that emerged from the interview data, in response to the following research questions (a) What are the influencing factors that have incited the decision of public special education teachers within The Bahamas to resign or request premature retirement from the teaching profession, and (b) How does job satisfaction influence teacher retention within The Bahamas' public education system? Data to support the findings outlined in this section were obtained from twelve semistructured, individual teacher interviews and one focus group interview. Interpretation of these findings are discussed in Chapter 5.

Lack of Special Education Training

The disillusionment of being a special educator was evidenced when study participants expressed their frustration about not being prepared to effectively handle the inclusive or special education classrooms set before them. Not only were there academic challenges, but behavioral challenges as well. Special educators were often faced with challenged students for whom there was very little recourse due to the severity of their disability. Unfortunately, due to teacher shortages throughout Bahamian public schools, some study participants ($n = 3$) who possessed no background in special education or inclusive education were forced into classroom settings where their classes were comprised of large numbers of special needs students within the primary and secondary levels of education. Interview data revealed, however, that although 9 out the 12 participants (75%) had a degree in either special education or inclusive education, they still struggled to bring their students to some level of achievement. What was even more challenging was knowing how to motivate their students who had given up in the aftermath of constant failure. Educators attributed their ineffectiveness in the classroom to the lack of formerly extensive exposure to special education settings and inadequate preservice training.

“I wasn’t train to teach special needs students,” was a common cry among general educators; what’s even more unfortunate is that this was also the complaint that could be heard among some special educators who believed that had they been better trained at the tertiary level, they would be more successful in reaching their students with learning disabilities. Study participants with a degree in special education explained that although

they were certified in special education, they did not receive the level of exposure and training need to effectively meet the special learning needs of students found within the public education system. “Special education has evolved tremendously since I obtained my degree. There is still much more for me to learn.” “Anyone can have a degree, but the training, exposure, and acquired skills are what matters,” stated one of the participants. Low levels of self-efficacy combined with failure in the classroom are strong influencing factors of teacher attrition. “When I cannot get through to my students, I just feel like giving up,” reported one of the participants. Higher institutions of learning must ensure that preservice teachers are inundated in special education best practices and are exposed to various special education settings. According to one of the primary special educators,

I was trained in special education in the United States, yet I still wasn't prepared for the students I encountered when I returned to The Bahamas. Colleges and universities must be careful with the “text book” strategies and approaches. Yes, practice should be driven by research and empirical evidence but after entering special education, I have come to realize that not all “text book” methods are applicable to certain educational cultures. Data can be used to guide instruction, but we as educators must remember that every classroom is different, and we won't always (and sometimes never) come into contact with that exact “scenario” we read about in our text books.

A conflicting finding emerged during the focus group interview. Participants (83%) who were adamant about the importance of special education training and professional development in perfecting one's classroom instruction, reexamined their

position when the argument of training versus experience arose. Educators deliberated on which was more important. One of the reading specialists argued, “You can read all of the special education books that exist, but without the actual experience working in the classroom, that information is useless.” Twenty-five percent of the participants acknowledged that while special education training is helpful in enhancing the efficacy of educators, experience is equally important. One of the special educators argued,

No amount of training can prepare a teacher 100%; in special education, experience is the best teacher. I don’t feel as if you could ever be prepared, because you don’t know what you will encounter when you enter a classroom. In teaching, a lot of what we do is trial and error.

Another participant shared similar sentiments about the issue of training versus experience. “We can be trained in all the “best practices” out there, and I am sure that most of us have tried a lot of them, yet we still don’t see any results in the classroom.”

Other participants (42%) admitted that there is a genuine need for training in special education, but it should be hands-on. Educators argued that special education training should simulate the experiences of an actual special education classroom. This perception therefore further affirmed the significance of this current study and others like this, in showing that managing the challenges within special education first begins with understanding what those challenges are. Teacher training will not meet the professional and instructional needs of special educators until those providing the training have experienced what educators experience daily.

We should not be made to sit down for hours simply listening to someone talk to us about strategies and approaches; we should be actively engaged in the training, in a real special education classroom with real special needs students. Learning about an approach is one thing, but actually practicing it is another.

Findings of this study revealed that a lack of special education training, or insufficient training is a strong impetus behind special educators' attrition from both the public system of education as well as the field of education. The inability to promote success among their students took a toll on educators emotionally, according to one of the participants. Participants stated that it can be stressful for both the special needs student and the teacher when neither can meet their learning or professional goals. Based upon interview data obtained from the participants, a lack of adequate training resulted in dire ramifications for special education students. As noted by some of the educators, students were easily turned-off from school when they felt as if they were unable to excel academically. This discouragement, according to the high school educators, led to future drop-outs among students.

This is the reason why many public-school students drop out of school as soon as they enter the tenth grade; they are overwhelmed because of consistent failure, and unfortunately the teacher is unable to assist them in the ways in which they need. Special educators' lack of preparedness for effectively facilitating student learning among special needs students was traced back to the educators' college education and training as preservice teachers. Half of the participants (6 out of 12) cited their tertiary training as being less than adequate. According to one participant,

During my training at the college, we were only exposed to private special schools that provided basic remediation or treatment for autism and ADHD, and the school for the mentally retarded; but compared to the level of special schools in the States [United States], this was nothing much when you consider how much special education and learning disorders have evolved since I first entered college.

The issue with on-going special education training and professional development, according to participants, was not always a matter of willingness to be trained, but rather a matter of finances. It was posited by 67% of the participants (during the focus group interview) that more educators would remain in the profession and choose to enter special education if on-going funding was provided for training and certification. One participant remarked,

We [special educators] are already not valued, and then to be expected to pay for our own training? The government should be willing to invest in its educators if they want more teachers to enter the field of special education.

With regards to enhanced exposure to various special education settings, one participant proposed that The Bahamas' Ministry of Education provide international internships for educators entering the field of special education. This position was supported by other study participants who suggested that the Ministry should also develop a career path system as a way of encouraging special educators. This idea was deemed an effective one, particularly with regards to those special educators who planned to further their career into the realm of school administration. Career development was found to be a concern of one of the special educators who felt that she would not be able

to advance any further in education because she would always be seen as “just a special educator.”

Professional development workshops, conferences, and seminars within schools (especially special needs schools) must be meaningful to the educators. Special educators require training in specific areas which should be addressed through training and development. In this 21st century of special education, all educators must understand that they are a special educator. Bahamian classrooms are innately inclusive; therefore, it did not matter if the special educators’ degree was in primary or high school education. They were still faced with various types of struggling learners.

Insufficient special education training was reported through this study as one of the top three influencing factors of teacher attrition. On the other hand, it was argued that a special educator’s experience in the field is just as important, if not more important than any amount of training received. Acquiring the knowledge of how to do certain tasks, like completing an IEP, or executing various intervention and remedial plans were needed, but as expressed by study participants, without the hands-on experience to complement what was learned, this knowledge was futile. When educators cannot find success in the classroom, they doubt their competence, lose motivation, and decide to venture into a different career. “Special education is a lot of work, and requires a lot of planning,” said one of the special educators, “but we and our students can achieve success with the right knowledge, experience, preparedness, motivation, and willingness to try.”

Lack of Support

Findings revealed that one of the most discouraging aspects of being a special educator in The Bahamas' public education system is the lack of support (see Table 3). Lack of administrative support was cited as the most significant influencing factor of attrition among Bahamian special educators. Interview data revealed that 100% of participants agreed that lack of support from administration was the cause of educators requesting transfers to other schools, leave special education, or quit the teaching profession entirely. Several participants acknowledged that support was needed in many forms and was vital to teachers' resilience and commitment to the profession and students' academic welfare. Educators expressed the need to feel appreciated in their efforts, instead of criticized, blamed, or ignored. According to the findings of this study, support wasn't only providing special educators with an aide in the classroom; although this physical support was imperative, participants concurred that support should transcend into meeting the social, emotional, and professional needs of educators. According to participants, three areas from which teacher support was needed included (a) administrative support (100%), (b) parental support (50%), and (c) collegial support (42%).

One of the major failures of most public-school administrators, according to interview data, was that they did not try to build relationships with teachers. Out of the 12 participants, 10 of them experienced this during their teaching career. "Administrators are a big part of the reason why teachers are leaving special education, and in fact, general education for that matter." To this end, it was proposed by seven participants (58%) that

school administrators be mandated to receive human resources management training to develop their “people skills”. Participants posited that administrative support involved showing respect and empathy for their teachers. Educators expressed that most administrators they encountered during their career often spoke to them (and other teachers) as if they were children – dictating to them as if they were not regarded as professionals. This was a common sentiment expressed by study participants in response to why Bahamian educators leave special education. “Special education is a field that requires collaboration, support, and networking,” argued on the participants. “It is a field where all stakeholders must come together for the good of the students and the school’s overall productivity,” shared another participant.

Data obtained from the focus group interview revealed that administrators would receive more cooperation from educators if they showed more empathy and genuine concern. “Very rarely are we asked how everything is going in our classrooms. They [administrators] are quick to demand lesson plans or fuss about unimportant things, but never about our feelings.” Some participants shared the sentiment regarding the importance of educators knowing that they had an administrative team that they could turn to whenever they were faced with struggles in the classroom. As one of the participants retorted,

We are not allowed to administer corporal punishment in the class, so I would often just send the children with behavioral issues to my senior mistress [assistant to the vice principal]; the next thing I knew – when I received my end-of-year evaluation, I received a very low score in the area of classroom management. It is

things like that which make teachers want to leave. We don't have a behavior intervention specialist or school psychologist, so we expect that administration should assist us with our discipline problems, instead of marking us down.

Two reading specialists agreed that administrators did not “buy into” their reading programs, as they constantly interrupted sessions when they needed a substitute for absent teachers. “I am expected to substitute every time a teacher is absent, but at the end of the day, they expect to see results with my kids. This was unfair and very frustrating.”

One of the high school special education teachers concurred,

This is a prime example of how administrators do not really understand the importance of special education programs, reading programs, or intervention programs. They should support us by helping us as much as they can, in ensuring that our programs are run effectively. Lack of support from school leaders has been cited by participants as a significant problem in relation to teacher attrition.

Bahamian special educators have been found to request transfers from schools and early retirements because of ineffective, apathetic, and unknowledgeable administrators who executed dictatorship-style leadership. This style of leadership, as expressed by participants did not foster comradery, collaboration, or cooperation among teachers. “We are all educated professionals, yet we are treated as if we are the children – do as I say. They (administrators) should be more open to suggestions from teachers,” stated a resource teacher. The abuse of power by some leaders in Bahamian public schools often caused a deterioration in educators' intrinsic motivation. To this end, focus group participants expressed the need for public school administrators to be trained not

only special education, but in human resources as well. “They have to know how to talk to people with whom they come into contact – teachers and parents,” remarked one of the reading specialists. Educators called for the establishment of stronger, more supportive and reciprocating relationships between administrators and teachers. In this vein, one special educator posited, “I believe that more teachers would remain in special education and in the public system of education if school administrators were more respectful to teachers.”

A resource teacher expressed her concern about administrators not including teachers in some of the day-to-day decisions including types and levels of professional development opportunities. “We are forced to attend workshops that are not helpful to us; we are hearing the same things over and over, but we are not receiving the professional help that would improve our instruction for special needs students.” In contrast to this statement, one of the primary special education teachers stated that she was more fortunate at her previous school, where the administrators asked the teachers what topics or areas they wanted to be presented during their teachers’ professional days. “My principal often asked the teachers what they needed help with in the classroom – what they wanted to engage in during our workshop. We often said that we needed help with reaching children with disabilities in a diverse setting. I feel that this makes the workshop more meaningful to the teachers, because it is something that they could appreciate more, and take back to their classrooms.”

One high school reading specialist indicated that school administrators were ineffective in actively supporting the efforts of special educators because they did not

have a vision for special education or intervention programs. While public schools are innately inclusive, the actual practice has yet to be established in schools due to lack of human resources, teacher training in inclusive education, materials, and infrastructure (Hunter-Johnson et al., 2014). In light of the country's plans for fully inclusive classrooms, there are still special schools that stand apart from regular public schools (i.e., school for the deaf, blind, and those with intellectual disabilities), which contradicts the guiding principle of inclusive education. To this end, there is no plain direction for administrators to follow in terms of special education advancement, hence their nonchalant attitudes towards educators striving to make a difference in the lives of special needs students. According to one of the former special education teachers, "Administrators in these schools are not trying to build a relationship with their teachers. There is always a disconnect and somewhat of a tug-of-war as it pertains to what is considered best teaching practices for special needs students." A current special educator stated,

They [administrators] don't know what to do, but instead of allowing us [the teachers] to do what is best for the students, they keep us back by not allowing the freedom to implement what we think is best in our classrooms.

Participants argued that administrators did not understand how special education worked, or what was needed for teachers to be effective in this practice. "They do not promote collaboration and networking. They do not see the importance of teachers being provided with opportunities to share and exchange ideas in relaxed, social contexts." One of the primary special educators stated that although her relationship with her colleagues

was a good one, she was disappointed with their leadership styles. According to one study participant,

Only he who feels it, knows it; sometimes I think administrative decisions impact the special ed. unit or attachment to the school in negative ways. They don't understand that the needs for the special education department are not always the same needs that the general education department would have; we need more, but when things are donated, it's not given to the special ed. unit – they find somewhere else in the school where the stuff can go.

One of the primary special educators currently in the public education system stated that if administrators are not cooperative and understanding, special education practices won't work because they do not truly understand the need for it in the schools. "If administrators valued the need for special education practices, they wouldn't give teachers a hard time when it came to the implementation of new and out-of-the-box ideas."

On the other hand, some participants revealed that while some administrators did express a vision for their school, they did not evaluate the school or students' progress in relation to the vision. Educators expressed that the vision of a school should be reevaluated from time to time, in response to how well the school's goals were being achieved. This, according to one of the participants, demanded consistent monitoring of the school's productivity in terms of teacher success and student achievement. Data revealed that school principals should be willing to revisit their school's vision and mission, and if a particular approach was not working, then be openminded enough to

change approaches. “It’s not about us, or our egos, or our title of authority; it’s about the children and ensuring that our delivery of special education services is effective,” stated one of the secondary reading specialists.

During individual participant interviews, some participants stated that it is the responsibility of school principals to facilitate mentoring programs, especially for new teachers. They posited that mentoring programs are useful in providing support for new teachers coming out of college; however, discussions about mentoring programs during the focus group interview shed a different light on the effectiveness of these programs. Other participants (67%) revealed that although mentoring programs do exist in some public schools, they are not effectively executed. One participant stated, “The mentoring programs that exist now in schools involve new teachers going to a meeting place to sit and listen to a presenter. How is this useful?” Another participant remarked, “Mentoring should assist in teachers’ growth and provide support; therefore, it should be conducted by persons who can relate to the issues of teachers, and especially beginning teachers.” Echoing these points, another participant interjected,

Having teachers meet once a week to listen to someone talk – someone who isn’t even in the classroom anymore [or never was], is an ineffective approach to mentoring. Coordinators of mentoring programs should utilize teachers with proven records of classroom efficacy and student success to mentor both new and veteran educators; and these mentors should come into the schools. Teachers need support within their given environments – not outside of where their challenges exist.

Synonymous with the current research, this study's findings confirmed that early career teachers were not motivated to remain within special education or the public education system because they felt at a loss, without the required help to become more effective special educators. Comments from special educators also confirmed the existing research which disconfirmed the efficacy of mentoring programs for educators. In comparison to the research literature which did confirm the benefit of mentoring programs in schools, this study's findings indicated that only if such programs are properly managed and executed, would they be more useful to special educators.

Parental support. Considering extensive research (Atnafu, 2013; Bastiani, 1993; Castro, Expósito-Casas, López-Martín, Lizasoain, Navarro-Asencio, & Gaviria, 2015) regarding the importance of parental involvement in schools and in the home, it was no surprise that participants of this study cited a lack of parental involvement as a deterrent for teachers from the teaching profession. Special education should consist of partnerships between the school, home, and the society. Achieving schools are those who have strong relationships with their parents, teachers, and students (Atnafu, 2013); however, it is imperative schools ensure that parents feel welcomed to engage with the teachers. In some cases, according to one of the participants, parents felt like outsiders because some schools did not warmly or genuinely make parents feel as if they were capable of making a valuable contribution to their child's education process.

Parental support is a two-way street; while parents should take on an active role in their child's educational life, their presence must also be embraced. Speaking from the perspective of a parent, one of the participants argued that some educators displayed a

feeling of annoyance when parents came around too often. “We are all in the children’s education together,” defended another participant. “We as educators owe the parents our support and time, just as the parents owe their time to their children.”

With reference to this study’s findings it was evident that parental support and involvement was an area that required much improvement. While many educators were eager to collaborate with parents of students with special education needs, many parents did not show the same enthusiasm. According to one of the high school reading specialists, “This is frustrating, when parents are not involved in their child’s education.” Another participant remarked, “Some parents expect the teachers to do all of the work; we need their help in the home as well.” Findings revealed that the study participants employed several methods by which to keep in close contact with parents (a) via social media (created parent groups), (b) called parents, (c) sent home notes, and (d) spoke with them when they arrived to pick up their child.

One participant who described her relationship with her students’ parents as a “good” one, revealed that she ended up having less behavioral problems with her students the more she kept in close contact with her parents. Sixty-seven percent (8 out of 12) of the participants reported that parental involvement was a problem for them because very few parents showed an interest in their children’s education. These participants expressed that the only parents they see on a regular basis were the ones whose children are performing well in school. “The parents of the struggling students very rarely, if ever come to see me, or attend PTA meetings, stated one of the participants.

One educator reported that she did very little to promote parent involvement because of the administration's lack of support, "I don't encourage this [parental involvement] because the administration does not support my ideas regarding this." Another educator stated, "Parental involvement is a very weak area; It is very discouraging because parents do not get involved and they overly depend upon the teachers. Everyone has a role to play in education." Students must see that their parents are in close partnership with the school and the classroom teacher. Researchers concurred that students whose parents are actively involved in their education tend to perform better than those students who are not involved. Participants cited parental support as being just as important as administrative support; one educator reported, "I feel motivated, when a parent tells me that he is appreciative of the work I do with his child." Another participant shared similar sentiments, "When a parent tells me 'thank you' for what I've done, I feel as if I am making a difference, and this feeling of self-worth drives me to do more with my students."

Considering the importance of special education, educators concurred that parents should be made accountable for their activity or lack thereof in their children's education process. This speaks to the need for a revision of The Bahamas' laws pertaining to special education and students with disabilities. The existing legislature, or rather official document in place to protect the rights of the disabled – The White Paper on Education – speaks only to legal ramifications that parents will face if they do not ensure that their children attend school; however, this mandate needs to be taken to a higher level. Education policy makers need to implement stricter punishments for delinquent parents.

Focus group interview data revealed that educators support the view that there needs to be a family reform initiative implemented by the Ministry of Education, in association with The Bahamas' social services department. "Change needs to take place in the homes – until then, no change will take place in the schools or by extension, the community," purported one of the participants. This revelation speaks to the awareness of teacher attrition and education form as societal issues that are only resolved or managed effectively if all stakeholders collaborate to find the best ways of improving the system of education in the country. The "chain" of special education is only as strong as its weakest link. If a link is missing, that makes the achievement gap even wider.

Collegial support. Educators, regardless of the area in which they serve, should affirm each other's programs and initiatives, and give support or constructive feedback without making each other feel inferior, discouraged, or incompetent. A school, like many companies, is one organization comprised of various levels, departments, and differing responsibilities; but one goal remains the same for partners, and that is to ensure student achievement. Individual, and focus group interview data revealed that some special educators left the field of special education because their programs were not given the respect they deserved. Forty-two percent of the study participants (five out of twelve) disclosed that they are often discouraged when their own coworkers acted as if what special educators did was not important or effective.

One participant stated that her colleagues treated her as a "babysitter" if they needed someone to watch a class. Special education is an area that can be stressful, exhausting, and lined with roadblocks and dead ends. The last thing any educator needs is

added criticism or hindrance from fellow educators. Some participants expressed that they only remained at their school because of their coworkers – because there was a sense of family, belonging, and a strong comradery. Others stated that the support from coworkers was powerful in boosting teachers’ resilience in the workplace.

Special education programs are only as successful as the support and investment given to it by its stakeholders. Teachers’ perceptions of a program go a long way in either helping the program succeed or allowing it to fail. One special educator reported,

My principal shut down my special ed. pull-out program because some teachers complained that it wasn’t working. Now, these special needs students have been forced into the mainstream where they are struggling more than before.

Findings revealed that special education programs failed, when teachers did not “buy into” the programs. In situations like this, as purported one of the participants, school principals must foster a spirit of collaboration and support among the faculty. Although the dictatorship leadership style was not popular among special educators, school leaders should be proactive in firmly ensuring that all departments within the school affirm each other. Collaboration and networking with one’s colleagues was found to be crucial to improving the craft of teaching. When asked about collaborative activities, one participant state that when her grade level met, that was an opportunity for them to share any difficulties they were having in the week or discuss any concept that they struggled with getting across to the students.

One participant stated that in her grade level, the teachers taught the subject that was their strongest to the entire level. “This improved the students’ performance at the

end of the school year,” she added. Another participant posited that if they did not have opportunities for sharing and exchanging ideas and tips, they would not have learned as much as they did.

What we learn within one hour of planning and sharing, is more beneficial than what we would be lectured about during a teacher’s professional development seminar. The difference is that we [the teachers] understand each other’s problems and struggles, and therefore, are more likely to suggest more meaningful strategies, remarked one of the participants.

Participants revealed that meeting with colleagues regularly to collaborate on examinations, teaching strategies and approaches, co-teaching activities, and lesson planning was beneficial in alleviating some of the burden felt by special educators in the classroom. Some participants stated that they did not have the opportunity to meet with their colleagues on a regular basis, and this created a disconnect within the department. One participant mentioned that due to the crowded teaching timetable, very little time was available for collaborating and planning, and therefore this would have had to be done after school hours. Spending an entire day with struggling learners, then meeting after school hours for planning with colleagues had become frustrating for special educators, and consequently, they found themselves leaving the area of special education, where the work load is demanding. One participant said, “Although meeting after school hours can be tiring, my team and I enjoy it because half of the time we just end up venting. It’s a good stress releaser.”

This statement was defended by another participant who added, “Yes, teachers need time to vent in a setting where they won’t be judged.” To reduce the amount of after-school planning, teachers suggested that planning sessions be placed within each timetable; of course, this would take a lot of planning to organize, because students would have to be supervised at all times. One participant suggested,

Each teacher within a grade level should have their planning time at the same time of the day to allow for collaboration. To ensure that classes are covered, students can attend their specialist classes during teachers’ planning time.

According to one educator, “Strain on relationships with colleagues can negatively affect one’s productivity.” Study participants reported that support from colleagues was vital to educators’ professional survival. Collaboration among colleagues fostered positive communication, facilitated the exchange of teaching ideas and strategies, and provided an avenue by which support, and motivation could be obtained. Participants suggested that school leaders must recognize and understand the importance of allowing time for teachers to work together on projects, socialize outside of school, and lead professional development seminars. One participant stated that she valued her collegial relationships more than any relationship with an administrator. Findings revealed that through social interactions with their peers, special educators found the social-emotional support which was often not provided by school administrators.

Class Size and Diversity of Special Needs

These issues were two of the least common challenges expressed by study participants, though when considered within the context of a special or inclusive

education classroom setting, they are significant enough to deter educators from the profession. Five educators (42%) mentioned that they often became discouraged due to very large class sizes, in the absence of a teacher's aide. "This is why teachers get so burned out and stressed. Working with special needs students in a class ranging from 35 to 40 students is a lot for one person." In a general education classroom setting, large class sizes created a heavy workload for teachers; in a special education class, this workload was doubled, if not tripled, when taking into considerations additional documents that must be prepared (e.g., IEP's) and the variety of learning disabilities. "In the public system, large classes are the norm, and so it is something that most teachers are accustomed to, but when the idea of diverse learning disabilities come into play, it's enough to make a teacher leave."

Regardless of the service delivery, special needs students require much more planning and preparation than nondisabled general education students. During the focus group interview, participants reported that the existing general education curriculum was not conducive to the acquisition of skills for students with learning disabilities, but teachers were still expected to make this curriculum accessible to the disabled child. Not only were they expected to make it accessible, but they were also expected to finish the entire curriculum by the end of the school year. This was burdensome for special educators, whose students should be acquiring skills at their own pace, and not be compared to their nondisabled peers. Accomplishing this task in a class of over 35 students with multiple learning needs and learning styles was overwhelming, especially for educators not adequately trained in inclusive education instruction.

On the other hand, seven out of twelve participants (58%) did not cite large class sizes as an influencing factor of educators' decision to leave special education. Although acknowledging that many students with varying disabilities in one class posed a strain on the classroom teacher, participants also purported that organization and planning were key to preventing unnecessary stress. These individuals stated that the size of their class did not matter, as long as they were equipped with the necessary materials needed to maximize student learning. One high school reading specialist said that to effectively manage large classes, the classroom teacher must be very organized, and possess some expertise in the area of classroom and behavior management. "It all comes down to planning. Special ed. demands much planning. So, if you're not an organized person, you will struggle with a large class." According to another participant, the ability to manage large, diverse classrooms stemmed from a teacher's training and experience; the less knowledgeable and skillful an educator was at designing differentiated lessons, the more likely that individual would not want to remain in teaching. A more skillful teacher, however, would feel more positively about remaining, due to the level of competency possessed.

During the focus group interview, participants agreed that educators in general allowed themselves to be burdened unnecessarily and, in some cases, taken advantage of because they did not speak up about what was going on. One participant reminded the group that as public servants, they should make more use of their teachers' union as an ally and a channel through which to voice their concerns. "That is what we have a union for," posited one of the participants, "but teachers, especially the primary teachers, are

too afraid to speak their minds because of threats from administration.” Participants agreed and acknowledged that they did take a lot of pressure and sometimes unfair treatment from school leaders and their colleagues, but they were often threatened to receive low ratings on their annual performance evaluation whenever a union meeting was suggested. According to this study’s findings, class size was not a significant issue among special educators as a strong contributor of attrition; however, the thought of leaving the field arose when teachers had to find creative and effective ways of reaching students with diverse learning needs, and varying learning disabilities. This situation was compounded, by the fact that very few classes had a teacher’s aide in them.

Twenty-five percent (3 out of 12) of this study’s participants cited diversity of disabilities in one classroom as a motivator to leave the field of special education. “Catering to multiple learning disabilities in one class is extremely difficult when there are not human or teaching resources.” According to participants, the execution of differentiated instruction required the skill in knowing how to effectively engage all students with a variety to learning needs and learning styles. Participants argued that although many of the newfangled teaching strategies and approaches existed for many years, they were not as popular when they were in their preservice training; therefore, there were still some strategies they had to learn, even with possessing a degree in special education. This reiterated the importance of life-long, ongoing teacher training and professional development. Teaching trends change, and special education is evolving every day; it is therefore imperative that educators remain current in their field and in their practice.

The reality is that, yes, Bahamian special educators are plagued with many challenges each day in their workplace; but on the other hand, the harsh reality is that if they are truly passionate about their career, they would choose to do whatever it took to perfect their craft. Unfortunately, some educators found themselves unable to go the extra mile with their students due to a lack of motivation. At that point, their level of job satisfaction had been negatively affected thereby prompting them to rethink their career choice. According to participants' responses about the connection between teachers' job satisfaction and attrition, once that inner peace, contentment, passion, and drive had been damaged due to becoming burned out and stressed, teachers decided to venture into a different area in which they would feel more satisfaction. The correlation between attrition and retention trends and the concept of job satisfaction will be discussed further, toward the end of this chapter.

Student Behavior

Four out of the twelve educators interviewed (33%) indicated that poor student behavior can be a discouragement to educators, although, such behavior would have to be very excessive to cause an educator to leave the profession. The other eight participants (67%) did not cite poor student behavior as an influencing factor of teacher attrition. The resource teacher proposed that as long as students were engaged, they were less likely to be disruptive. One of the special educators in the focus group argued that (a) students were only engaged when the assignments were at their level of ability, (b) when students cannot complete a given task, they would be disruptive in class, and (c) very few special

needs students were capable of completing assignments independently; hence, there was always a possibility of disruptive behavior at some point.

One of the high school reading specialists who cited poor student behavior as an influencing factor of attrition among special educators clarified her position:

When I say poor student behavior [is a cause for attrition], I don't mean the ordinary antics of a student, like talking or arguing with another student; I mean more serious behaviors like physically attacking a teacher or another student, throwing furniture, and violent outbursts – behaviors like that which are common among some students with certain psychological disorders.

When considering the paper work involved in special education, trying to reach a diverse group of learning disabled students, and on top of that, managing disruptive behavior in the absence of a behavior intervention specialist, participants agreed that these were very valid reasons why special educators left. What was even more frustrating for educators with no experience in behavior modification in special needs students, was the nonchalant and sometimes negative attitudes students displayed toward their work.

According to one of the high school special education teachers,

I am lenient with the ADHD students, autistic students, or those with some form of psychological disability which would affect their behavior, but those students who are simply functioning below grade level, they have no excuse for misbehaving.

Regarding students' behavior toward their class work, three participants mentioned that a lack of interest in learning pushed teachers to leave the teaching

profession. “When students show a lack of interest in learning, I feel as if I am wasting my time. I shouldn’t be more excited about their education than they are,” expressed one participant. To this end, several participants conveyed the importance of educators using varied teaching methods, hands-on activities, and engaging tasks to enhance students’ motivation to learn. “In my special needs class, we do a lot of singing and dancing – anything to get the students moving.

This is especially important for ADHD students and some autistic kids,” explained one of the primary reading specialists. Student behavior would not be an issue, if we found creative ways of limiting adverse behaviors in the classroom. To this end, one of the former primary school special educators stated,

...when I would’ve come across a child that is not really interested [in learning/school], or there seems to be some disconnect, I would try to find out what’s going on, because there is usually something going on to cause that child to be in the state that they’re in.

The issue of behavior management is indicative of the importance of special educators becoming trained in all aspects of special education, not only instructional approaches. Keeping students motivated, whether they are disabled or not, is critical in alleviating disruptive behavior. According to one of the participants, “Students feed off the teacher’s energy; if the teacher displays an attitude of not caring, the students won’t place any interest in his work. Students need to feel supported just as teachers do.” Very little can be taught in a special needs class amidst consistently disruptive students. The inability to successfully maintain a controlled classroom setting required the skill

knowledge that came through training and experience combined. Participants proposed that educators who struggled significantly with behavioral problems in their classrooms would logically become less satisfied with their job, and in fact, their entire profession. This spoke to the need for certain paraprofessionals to be in place to make the homeroom teacher's job a little lighter. This was one of the reasons why study participants concurred that the successful implementation of inclusive education throughout Bahamian public schools would only occur when all the necessary elements are cohesively in place (Hunter-Johnson et al., 2014).

Interruptions of Special-Needs Programs

Like all professionals, regardless of the occupation in which they serve, educators appreciated operating within their area of expertise with little restraints. Unfortunately, some special educators found themselves unable to efficiently and effectively carry out their duties due to constant interruptions in their respective remedial programs due to frequent substituting for absent teachers. "It is clear that administrators don't value what we do, because if they did, special educators should be the last person to substitute." One reading specialist remarked, "How am I supposed to be effective with my students, if I hardly see them?" One primary special educator expressed her concern about the cancellation of her reading program that was used within her special education pull-out groups:

According to the Minister of Education, there is no more funding for this program, so it has to be cancelled. If this was of priority, school leaders should

find a way of soliciting funding to keep the program going. It was very effective with my students, but now my students will be at a disadvantage.

Special needs students, due to their disabilities, required additional time to grasp concepts, when compared to their nondisabled peers; their instructional formats consisted of repetition and continuous practice. To this end, it was imperative that they spent as much time in instructional activities as was possible. Unfortunately, according to three of the special educators (25% of participants), administrators often interrupted remedial classes because they refused to cancel other specialist classes for fear of an uproar from teachers due to lost “free, non-teaching periods.” This practice, according study participants was the norm throughout public schools within The Bahamas. School leaders must find more suitable alternatives for covering the classes of missing teachers, other than interrupting the remedial and interventions sessions of special needs students. Autistic students, and those with ADHD must have structure in their daily learning; if this structure was interrupted or thrown out of order, this created a setback for those students. This is an implication of the need for school leaders to have a background in special education; by being aware of what accommodations and patterns are needed by special needs students, they would make wiser decisions.

The issue of session interruptions was not a common code that emerged from the interview data; however, those participants who experienced interruptions on a consistent basis, described the process as frustrating. “I can’t make progress with my students if I do not see them on a regular basis. In some cases, I substitute for one week at a time; meanwhile my students are losing valuable contact time with me.”

Decisions made by administrators in schools, particularly in regard to special education services, should not be taken lightly; these decisions can make or break a school's productivity and consequently, students' learning outcomes. School leaders must become more serious about the struggling learners within their schools. The issue of teacher absenteeism must be addressed, and accommodations (other than pulling special educators for substituting) must be put in place, so as to limit the frequency of special education program interruptions and cancellations.

I feel that if you put me in a position, I'm expected to do the job, but you have me here, there, and everywhere else, but at the end of the day, you still looking for results? It's impossible.

Although only 25% of the study participants reported interruption of programs and substitutions as an influencing factor of attrition among Bahamian special educators, it is an issue that needs attention because accountability should be the foundation of any special education program. Just because a child has difficulty learning, does not mean that he cannot learn; therefore, every effort must be given to assist the child. Hindering the progress of special needs students by preventing them from engaging in programs designed specifically for them contradicted the Bahamian legislature (Bahamas Education Act) which states that all students (including those with special education needs) will have full access to education designed to meet their needs. There needs to be more accountability in special education, and until this is enforced, special needs students will continue to receive ineffective, mediocre levels of instruction.

Job Satisfaction and Teacher Retention

In alignment with the current literature, findings from this study revealed that happy teachers were more committed to the profession, regardless of the flaws which may exist within their schools, or the overall public education system. Findings revealed that some educators were capable of mentally and physically pushing through the imperfections and struggles of the public education system if they were intrinsically contented with the daily operations within their work environment. These findings confirmed those of the literature explored in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, which supported that an individual would become (or remain) attracted to a certain area or discipline based upon their level of satisfaction with the experiences and encounters surrounding that specific task. This therefore justified why study participants indicated that they would not remain in a profession where they felt unhappy, disrespected, and undervalued. Some of the participants' responses in relation to the role of job satisfaction and teacher retention were:

“I left government because I didn't feel appreciated. “I'm satisfied, so I am absent less.”

“A high level of job satisfaction made me more effective as a teacher; I actually wanted to research ways of making my teaching better.”

“When teachers are not satisfied, I don't think they would want to stay in the profession.”

If they [teachers] don't feel comfortable, if they're not satisfied about some issues that are not being resolved, if teachers are feeling disrespected, then it's gonna cause them to leave the profession and branch out to where they feel is better.

In response to how teacher retention levels could improve (see table 4), participants identified the following as effective strategies for not only retaining quality teachers but attracting them to the field of special education (a) provide more monetary incentives for educators, (b) provide schools with more resources, including human resources (i.e., paraprofessionals), (c) school administrators and parents should show educators more respect and appreciation, and (d) funded professional development and training opportunities in special education.

Special Education Teacher Attrition and Positive Social Change

Teacher shortages in Bahamian public schools pose a threat to the educational welfare of all Bahamian students, in addition to the hope and future of Bahamian societies. Improving an individual's quality of life and possibilities of becoming a constructive, contributing member of society starts within the classroom. Regardless of a child's learning disability, all students are entitled to educational opportunities without restriction. Instigating and maintaining positive social change becomes a difficult task, when the youth of a nation did not receive the quality education needed for survival in a global society. To this end, it is critical that education stakeholders and policy makers delve into teacher attrition to determine what needs to be done to attract and retain special educators. Education is the panacea for all societal ills; without this, societies will become overrun by individuals answering the call of crime while weakening the fabric of

a functional Bahamian society. The key to achieving positive outcomes in special education, is for all educators to work collaboratively with each other, and with policy makers, through the sharing of goals, and exchange of empirical-based ideas.

The job satisfaction concept is applicable to teacher retention and attrition, as an understanding of this concept is useful in determining how teachers' work performance, commitment, and motivation collectively affect their disposition toward their job, and their concern for facilitating positive student outcomes. As defended by participants, teachers did not stay where they were unhappy, contented, or appreciated. In comparison to the current research, this study's results revealed that educators performed their duties based upon their emotions or feelings; if they were frustrated or stressed, they did the bare minimum. It is therefore logical to assume that special educators who were less satisfied with the conditions of their working environment were less likely to remain in the field.

According to study findings, participants recognized that in order for positive social change to occur within The Bahamas, there must first be the establishment of a stronger partnership between the school, teachers, families, and community leaders; just as schools are expected to support the family, families should support the school as well. "...such partnerships help to facilitate the stability of the educational system and schools within the communities throughout the country." Students must be able to function in society, if they are to invoke positive social change for all citizens. "If attrition among Bahamian special educators continues to rise, students will not receive a quality education at the hands of highly trained, quality teachers."

Participants reported several impacts on positive social change in light of teacher attrition (a) increased levels of drop-outs, (b) higher crime rates and criminal behaviors, (c) lack of educators to carry out the task of special education reform, and (d) lack of future teacher mentors for beginning teachers. Some participants argued that The Bahamas' Ministry of Education would be more effective in education reform if the Minister of Education was not affiliated with any political party. According to one of special educators, "Politics shouldn't be involved in decision making pertaining to education." Another participant agreed that, "The Minister of Education should be a neutral individual, not politically connected; and the Department of Education should be run by a board of directors." "Positive social change involves students; therefore, I feel that students should be allowed to voice their opinions, and have a say in educational changes," said another participant.

For centuries, philosophers and researchers alike have identified a good education as a cure for many societal ills. This implies therefore that effective education programs are crucial to the development of communities, and by extension, countries as well. Walden University defines positive social change as a "deliberate process of creating and applying ideas, strategies, and actions to promote the worth, dignity, and development of individuals, communities, organizations, institutions, cultures, and societies." Such a definition speaks to the role of special education reform. Education reform can be seen as a deliberate process of applying research-based ideas and strategies to promoting the development of communities.

By implementing teacher retention initiatives devised from the input of data obtained through this proposed research, special education reform will begin to take shape across public schools within The Bahamas. According to this study's findings, reducing attrition will undoubtedly improve the status of the society, as student achievement will increase. Participants indicated that teacher attrition significantly harmed student achievement. This supported the rationale that retaining highly qualified and effective educators is vital to producing an achieving school, as it is has been purported that successful schools will produce successful communities.

Education that transforms learners into productive citizens has the potential of impacting positive social change by alleviating dysfunctional activities and behaviors within the community, thereby facilitating the growth of quality lives. While the population of special needs learners and students with disabilities may be in the minority, this is still a part of the community which cannot be allowed to fall through the educational cracks. These individuals have contributions to make to society just as much as those without a disability. Therefore, all measures must be taken to ensure that special education programs are facilitated by knowledgeable, high quality, and high-performing special educators. To facilitate this, consequently, policy makers must endeavor to ensure that special educators are continuously attracted to and retained within the field of special education. This speaks to the significance of studies aimed towards informing best practices for reducing attrition among special educators.

Table 4

Influencing Factors in Teacher Retention Among Bahamian Special Educators

Influencing factors	Number of participants citing this factor	
Student progress/achievement	10	83%
Strong administrative leadership	7	58%
Collegial support/relationships	7	58%
Appreciation of teachers	6	50%
Special educators are needed	4	33%
Less common factors identified		
Love for children	3	25%
Love for teaching	2	17%
Reduce class sizes	2	17%

Summary

As this study's results revealed, special education is only as successful as the partnerships built to sustain it. This is a practice that requires team work, commitment, and skill. School leaders set the tone of the school, and it is this tone which determines how productive the organization will be in assisting special needs students in achieving positive learning outcomes. The problems faced by Bahamian special educators have been reported as valid reasons for educators choosing to leave the area of special education or the teaching profession. It was also revealed through the findings, however, that some of the problems could be resolved, or rather minimized, with the application of effective strategies and management skills; for example, one solution identified by some

participants, in reference to poor student behavior is to simply ensure that student remain engaged. How is this done? According to comments shared by participants during the focus group interview, this is done by providing hands-on activities for the students, assigning tasks that are at their level of competence, and motivating the students by showing that you care.

Supported by this study's findings, teacher attrition is significantly complex in nature. It is an issue that transcends the walls of educational institutions, into the personal and social lives of educators and the community alike. Attrition of effective educators, particularly within special education produces not only a dysfunctional system of education, but a dysfunctional society as well. Consistent with the review of literature in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, it has been revealed that not only the professional or academic aspects of educators should be taken into consideration, but the emotional, physical, and social aspects as well. According to findings, Bahamian special educators were influenced to either leave the profession, or remain, because of their emotional state of being within their daily working environment. Cries such as these were echoed and reiterated by participants:

“It [teaching special needs students] is time consuming.”

“Dealing with a mixture of students with learning disabilities in one class with over thirty students is stressful.”

“The parents aren't interested in their children's education.”

“Administrators expect the teacher to do everything; they are not open to change.”

“Colleagues do not buy into the special education programs.”

“Administrators are unsupportive, and parents are not involved.”

“I have not been prepared enough for this [special education].”

“I need more training in special education, but who will pay for this training?”

Feelings of inadequacy, low levels of self-efficacy, poor job satisfaction, frustration due to large class sizes, and stress were all emotionally-driven factors that participants identified as valid reasons to leave special education or the education profession entirely. The physical aspects of teacher attrition included fatigue and burnout, which were found to result in educators losing their motivation and dropping their high expectations for the students. The social facet of attrition was found to be just as important as the other facets of this phenomenon. Educators who remained in special education, or within the public education system, did so because they felt a sense of comradery among their colleagues. This spoke to the significance of educators having a sense of belonging and feeling valued and appreciated. Those who were undervalued, disrespected, or unappreciated chose to transfer to different schools, or leave the area of special education entirely.

These influencing factors of attrition surround the concept of job satisfaction. The formula is simple: unhappy educators do not remain in schools and systems where they plagued with discomfort, frustration, stress, and even anger. Arriving at the point where they no longer enjoyed their job or career was the turning point for most educators in this study. Job satisfaction plays a vital role in teacher attrition and retention trends.

Professional who sincerely care about advancing in their careers and fostering success in their students, will not remain where they feel stagnant and futile. The key to retaining

teachers especially in a complicated area as special education, is to ensure that they are provided with the necessary skills, environment, human and non-human resources that will alleviate much of the burdens accompanying the profession. Educators must feel as if their concerns are not falling on deaf ears, but rather they are being addressed or are in the process of being addressed. All educators are not alike. Possessing a love for children and children's progress may be enough to retain some educators within special education, but for others, more is needed to make their daily encounters more meaningful, productive, and pleasant.

Special education reform begins within the classroom, and with the educator. Excessive teacher shortages due to attrition must be addressed to enable education policy makers to design and implement practical and effective retention initiatives to reduce the loss of teachers from an already challenged education system. There has to be a revolution in Bahamian special education, where administrators, teachers, parents, and community leaders form strong partnerships to improve the education of all learners. Special educators must be seen as more than persons to call on for substitutions in cases of teachers' absences. Until a respect for special educators and what they do is shown, Bahamian societies will continue to suffer from a lack of productivity and poor quality of life resulting from inadequate academic intervention. The competency and efficacy of Bahamian special educators, according to findings, hinge upon the quality and intensity of their preservice training. Focus group findings revealed that educators believed that they would be better capable of managing inclusive or special education classes if they had received more exposure to such educational settings during preservice training.

While research is indeed crucial to any practice, especially that of education, it is also important to take into consideration the social context to which certain strategies and approaches are applied.

Education officials and policy makers must make a concerted effort to thoroughly examine public schools throughout the country to develop an understanding of the existing cultures in each school; only then, could more effective retention programs and policies could be drafted, which would more efficiently suit the culture of each given school environment. Special education reform starts at the classroom level, with the educator. Little progress can be made in this field if teachers' concerns are not considered and addressed efficiently. As presented in the results, attrition and retention trends are a societal issue, and not only a school problem. The future education of the country's citizens is at stake if education policy makers do not implement school-level changes designed to curb attrition. Special education training, knowledge, and leadership are needed by all school leaders and teachers to facilitate success of all special needs students and their nondisabled peers. Further discussions, recommendations, and implications of attrition for special education reform, positive social change, and instructional practice relative to findings presented are outlined in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Teacher attrition refers to educators leaving the field of education prematurely and voluntarily. This is a dilemma that has serious implications for special education instruction, student learning, teacher efficacy, and positive societal development. In order for special-needs students to be provided with the most effective strategies for academic achievement, retention rates of special educators must be enhanced. The purpose of this general qualitative study was to explore the factors that significantly contribute to increasing rates of attrition among special educators within The Bahamas' public education system. This study serves as a research platform upon which teacher retention initiatives may be built by education policy makers within The Bahamas' Ministry of Education. Attracting high-quality, committed special educators is a formidable feat, if attempted without first ascertaining why educators are prematurely leaving the field of education.

This study adopted a qualitative design, which facilitated an in-depth examination of the issues surrounding attrition and retention of special educators. Data were collected using semistructured individual interviews and one focus group interview, which were all audio tape recorded. The primary focus of this dissertation was enabling the reader to clearly understand why Bahamian special educators lose interest in special education, and in many instances, education as a whole. Open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 2010) was used to analyze the qualitative data collected in an effort to establish major themes.

The interviews provided insight into the influencing factors in special educators' decisions to prematurely leave or continue in their profession. Such insight may prove

beneficial to the development of future teacher retention initiatives by The Bahamas' Ministry of Education, as well as the restructuring of teacher education programs in higher institutions of learning.

This study achieved its aim of identifying the primary factors contributing to teacher attrition among Bahamian special educators by addressing the following research questions:

- What are the influencing factors that have incited the decision of public special education teachers within The Bahamas to resign or request premature retirement from the teaching profession?
- How does job satisfaction influence teacher retention within The Bahamas' public education system?

Attrition among special educators, specifically beginning teachers, is cause for great concern within the field of special education as students with disabilities are at risk for not achieving positive learning outcomes. The future of special education programs within The Bahamas is bleak if highly trained special educators continue to exit the profession, leaving in their stead general educators who are not trained to effectively cater to the learning needs of students with disabilities or teach in inclusive classroom settings. Studies such as this one are imperative in facilitating in-depth understanding of the daily stressors of special educators, in addition to identifying gaps in teacher education training. Education reform starts within the classroom and with the teacher; understanding how a special educator's job satisfaction impacts future career goals is key in making the field of special education more attractive to future educators. Only through

attracting special educators will teacher retention rates improve and achievement among special-needs students increase.

Key findings resulting from this study revealed that Bahamian special educators leave the area of special education, and the field of education entirely, simply because they are fed up, burned out, and stressed out with the public education system, which negatively affect their job satisfaction. Poor job satisfaction was found to be the paramount reason for teacher attrition among Bahamian educators. It was found that the contributors to excessive stress that led to poor levels of job satisfaction among the special educators were (a) poor leadership practices of school administrators, (b) large class sizes, (c) insufficient training in special education, and (d) lack of support from both colleagues and administrators. Relevant minor factors found to influence attrition among Bahamian special educators included teachers' salaries, lack of resources, and the diversity of learning disabilities within classrooms; however, responses from some of the participants suggested that despite these minor issues, special educators are still willing to remain in the education system and make a difference in the lives of their students. One participant rationalized,

Teachers will teach whether they have materials or not. We know that teachers do not make any money, so evidently, we did not enter education for that. As long as we can see our students progressing, it doesn't matter the disabilities in our classroom.

Another participant responded, "Yes, we would like more pay, but that is a small issue, compared to the lack of respect and support shown to us by administrators and

some colleagues. As long as teachers are intrinsically motivated, they will stay.”

Similarly, other participants agreed that a lack of materials to work with is not a strong influencing factor in teacher attrition, in comparison to teachers’ inability to effectively meet the special learning needs of their students.

The assumptions of the job satisfaction conceptual framework have been validated by the findings of this study, which revealed that educators’ feelings toward their job experiences determine their commitment to their career and their longevity within it. Findings confirmed research literature indicating that educators who have become disgusted with their jobs do not remain in those jobs for much longer. This validation also covers the assumptions of the social cognitive and social cognitive career theories, which purport that an individual’s interactions and social experiences determine attitudes expressed toward such encounters. It stands to reason, when considering the basis of the job satisfaction concept, that educators would leave special education when they begin to perceive their efforts as futile.

Based upon findings and the current literature, teacher retention action plans should incorporate a socio-emotional component, in that educators’ career actions are determined significantly by their emotional state of being. Getting to the socio-emotional root of why special educators feel the way they do is effective in beginning the steps toward reducing attrition.

This final chapter contains an interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, implications, and a conclusion. Within this section of the dissertation, study findings are analyzed and interpreted in comparison to those within the

review of literature found in Chapter 2, and implications for positive social change are discussed.

Interpretation of the Findings

This study's findings confirm those highlighted in the review of literature in Chapter 2 of this dissertation. In alignment with recent research, this study's findings confirmed that the concept of job satisfaction does play a significant role in determining educators' future career decisions. Through this study, it was revealed that teachers who are uncomfortable within their working environment, who are unhappy due to heavy workloads, who have poor relationships with colleagues and administrators, and who struggle with teacher and student successes in the classroom become less committed to the teaching profession and decide to leave. In accordance with the research presented in the review of literature, this study's findings showed that educators are less concerned about the monetary aspects of the teaching profession compared to professional, social, and academic concerns. While salary increases, and more teacher incentives were cited by most of the participants as means of attracting larger numbers of teachers to special education, they all agreed that these were not significant issues for teachers presently in the education system.

Lack of support from school administrators and colleagues was found to negatively impact Bahamian special educators' level of job satisfaction in the classroom; however, contrary to the current research, several of this study's participants remarked that this lack of support did not deter them from remaining committed to the profession. One administrative issue revealed in this study that was not found in the cross-section of

literature was that of disrespect toward educators. Several participants stressed how their former administrators often blatantly ridiculed, belittled, or disrespected their suggestions, teaching methods, and initiatives. This occurrence extends the existing knowledge base on factors influencing teacher attrition.

Much of the literature explored in Chapter 2 of this dissertation pointed out lack of administrative support in terms of professional development, training opportunities, and provision of resources; however, the research did not reveal any specifics pertaining to the attitudes of administrators. “We [the teachers and administrators] are all professionals, and therefore we should be treated as such. It is not about us and our egos, but about the children ensuring student success,” stated one of the participants. Other participants shared similar sentiments, expressing that many administrators lead without including teachers in decisions or showing that they value teachers’ input regarding new strategies. According to one participant, “If the idea didn’t come from an administrator, then it is highly unlikely that it would be considered.” This observation about the bureaucracy within the Bahamian public education system, as in many other education systems around the world, unveils a new perspective from which to explore the issue of teacher attrition.

Contrary to literature supporting the effectiveness of mentoring programs in curbing attrition among educators, participants within this study did not suggest this form of support as a strategy for promoting the retention of teachers. In fact, study participants expressed that they valued the relationships that they had forged over the years with their colleagues more than any type of structured support program. This disconfirms existing

research pertaining to effective forms of teacher support systems. Although recent research has revealed that mentoring and induction programs appear to be a new trend in the field of education (Adams & Woods, 2015; Fresko & Alhija, 2015; Loughry & Normore, 2013), participants in this study believed that teacher collaboration, especially at grade levels, is more effective. They believed that collegial relationships are more informal and are thus a more comfortable way of developing social relationships that extend beyond the walls of a school. All participants currently teaching in special education ($n = 4$) stated that one of the major reasons that they decided to remain in the profession was the friendships they made while at their schools. Participants appreciated the support they received from their colleagues more than the efforts of their administrators.

According to recent research, cries of burnout, stress, and exhaustion are common among educators (Dukes et al., 2014; Handal et al., 2013; Mason & Matas, 2015). Such findings outlined in the review of literature were echoed by this study's findings. Although little research has been conducted on burnout specifically among special educators (Williams & Dikes, 2015), this study's findings revealed that Bahamian special educators identified burnout as the most significant reason why educators leave not only special education, but also the public education system. According to study participants, the most common challenges contributing to teacher burnout are large class sizes (ranging from 30 to 40 students without the assistance of a teacher's aide), monthly assessments, testing special-needs students in the same way as regular students, behavioral issues, record keeping, meetings, and planning for special school events.

These challenges have been found to be common among general educators; findings from this study indicate that general and special educators experience similar challenges but at different levels of intensity.

Prevalent within this study' findings, as within the review of literature, is the challenge of inadequate teacher training (Hunter-Johnson et al., 2014; Johnson & Semmelroth, 2014; Mason-Williams, 2015; Podolsky, Kini, Bishop, & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Study participants acknowledged that although they possessed a bachelor's or master's degree, they did not feel as though they had been trained sufficiently for teaching special-needs students in a public-school environment. Like the teacher perceptions disclosed throughout studies within the review of literature, Bahamian special educators felt that if they had a stronger training foundation, they would feel more confident in the classroom and remain in special education. Four of the study participants who were trained reading specialists pointed out that many of the students with whom they came into contact required more than just reading interventions; they needed special education services as well.

We [the reading specialists] were expected to run a reading program or a resource program, but the children we were teaching needed special education instruction.

It was often frustrating having to remind my principal that I was not a special education teacher. People didn't seem to understand that there is a difference between the two.

The placement of general education teachers in inclusive or special education

classrooms is a common trend, as mentioned in the review of literature. This practice is not uncommon in Bahamian public schools, where generalists are educating students who require special education instruction. Findings from this study also confirmed those from the review of literature, which indicated that the appropriate level and type of teaching training make a significant difference in teachers' decisions to leave special education and/or the teaching profession. Such data are crucial in defending the need for more mentoring and induction programs, ongoing professional development specifically in special education, and the creation of more effective teacher education programs.

The Bahamas' Ministry of Education must seek innovative ways of generating funding so that more education professionals can be hired. Such professionals should include special educators, teachers' aides, speech therapists, behavior specialists, intervention specialists, school psychologists, and physiotherapists. If additional personnel were hired, classroom teachers would be less stressed and burnt out to the point of exhaustion and lack of motivation; furthermore, with added personnel, intervention programs would operate more effectively, thereby yielding higher achievement rates among special-needs students. In a complex field such as special education, the more support that educators can receive, the more likely they will be to feel satisfied with their jobs.

Support for educators comes in many forms, such as professional development, training, and collaboration; human resource support is equally crucial to the success of any education plan. The practice of inclusive education within The Bahamas will not be successful unless all of the required components are in place. Prior to anything else,

attrition among special educators must be curbed. Progress among special educators is limited without the support of paraprofessionals, particularly when these educators face large class sizes ranging from 30 to 40 students. While the issue of class size was reported as being an insignificant influencing factor compared to more pressing challenges (i.e., support and teacher training), some educators felt that large classes could result in teachers becoming overwhelmed, especially in the absence of additional assistance.

The inability of special educators to effectively assist their students in achieving positive learning outcomes can prove very frustrating for both the educator and the student (Cameron & Lovett, 2015; Joseph & Jackman, 2014). According to the research literature, teachers tend to lose their resolve to remain in special education when they feel as if they are incapable of getting through to their students (Chestnut & Burley, 2014). This feeling of frustration, as purported by researchers, results in a reduced level of self-efficacy. For the teacher, quitting may appear to be the best option; for the student, simply giving up and refusing to try may be attractive choices. Poor teacher-student relationship was one of the least common teacher challenges revealed in this study's findings, contrary to the studies explored in the review of literature.

Although only 25 % of the participants cited this challenge as a cause for teachers leaving special education, it is one that should be seriously reviewed, especially when educators are assessed based upon student performance. According to one teacher, "It is unfair for my administrator to assess me based on how my students perform, when there are so many factors impeding their learning process." Another teacher added,

There was talk some years ago about the [Bahamas'] Ministry of Education implementing merit pay for teachers. If this happens, many teachers will leave education because how can teachers be blamed if a student isn't learning, when they have no resources to work with, no support from administration, and are not trained in special education, but expected to teach special needs students?

High expectations of educators are not unreasonable; however, what is unreasonable, as indicated by this study's findings are having high expectations for teachers when they are not prepared to meet the challenge of the students with learning disabilities. As one teacher remarked, "Seeing my students achieve, motivates me to keep going." Without some level of success, teachers will begin to feel as if what they are doing in the classroom is a waste of time. Consequently, they start to rethink their career.

While some researchers argued that student failure is a strong impetus behind teacher attrition (Cameron & Lovett, 2015; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015; Wall & Che, 2013), others (Dicke et al., 2014; Goddard et al., 2015) argued that poor behavior among students was also a discouragement for educators; however, in comparison to Dicke et al.'s findings, this study's results revealed that although students' poor behavior can be frustrating, it was not an influencing factor of special educators' decision to leave the profession. According to three participants who mentioned student behavior in connection with attrition, they agreed that this was not a major issue because they had often implemented strategies within the classroom to curb disruptive behavior. This finding proved Goddard, Goddard, Sook, Kim, and Miller's (2015) hypothesis that teachers who have been in the profession longer than early career teachers would've

gained more experience which equipped them to execute more effective behavior management strategies. This finding disconfirmed that of Aloe, Amo, et al. (2014) and Aloe, Shisler, et al. (2014), who purported that student misbehavior is one of the major contributors of teacher attrition.

Findings of teacher burn out, the inability to effectively accommodate the special learning needs of students, and teachers' displeasure within their school environment all validated the relationship between teachers' levels of job satisfaction and the assertions of the social cognitive and social cognitive career theories. According to the assumptions of the social cognitive career theory, an individual's academic interests and intentions are determined by his daily experiences and interactions. To this end, it is understandable why study participants reported a loss in interest in special education or discovered that after several years their attraction to the education field has waned. The unfortunate reality, according to the findings presented, is that educators are discouraged from remaining in their current occupation when faced with unrelenting challenges for which they receive little or no support. According to findings, teachers become discouraged with education when they begin to doubt their self-efficacy and ability to promote student success. All participants interviewed revealed that student success motivated them to remain in education, and specifically special education. It is logical to assume, therefore, which was confirmed by few of the participants, that constant failure in the classroom made teachers rethink their career choice. This therefore supported the basis of the social cognitive career theory, providing a clear understanding of why attrition in education is on the rise within The Bahamas.

Bahamian educators' decision to leave special education validated the literature in Chapter 2, which revealed that teachers leave the field because they do not feel as if they are competent enough to teach special needs students. Eighty-eight percent ($n = 7$ out of 8) of this study's participants stated that they left special education because they "needed a change and couldn't do it anymore." They were frustrated because they didn't know what else to do with the students to "get them learning." Participants revealed that simply having a degree in special education did not mean that they were always effective or should be effective in reaching every child with special needs. As one of the participants pointed out, "Anyone can have a degree, but what matters is how well you were trained to handle the diversity of a special needs classroom." Although 3 of the educators who left special education are untrained in the field and attributed this lack of training to their decision to leave, the other 63% of participants who are trained in some area of special education also indicated that "teaching in a special education classroom with students of diverse learning disabilities can be frustrating, even if you are trained." This is a distinct example of how an educator's feeling of incompetence influences future career decisions, thereby validating the assumption of Lent et al.'s (1994) social cognitive career theory.

Underpinnings of Bandura's social cognitive theory imply that individuals exhibit certain behaviors in response to interactions within their individual environments. Educators who participated in this study revealed that they were often motivated to do more, or less with their students, based upon how pleased they were with their working conditions. This issue indicates a strong connection between educators' emotions and their decision to leave or remain within special education. As the literature has shown,

emotions play an integral part in teacher attrition and retention trends; educators leave the profession because of how they feel, in response to their school setting. For this reason, it is imperative that school leaders and education policy makers are intentional about the conditions and concerns that plague educators physically, mentally, and socially.

Findings defended the theories of the social cognitive and social cognitive career theories, as many participants commented that their actions were driven by the way they felt. According to one participant,

The more support and appreciation I received from my administrators and parents, the more I was motivated to go the extra mile. When you are treated as if your opinion doesn't matter, and you're left to fend for yourself without any form of help through professional development or some form of collaboration, that high level of commitment just won't be there anymore.

While some participants expressed that having a genuine interest in their students is important, they also added that many times that love is not enough to make a teacher want to stay in the profession or in special education. The four participants who currently teach in special education credited their decision to remain in the field to the passion they possess for their students. "What makes us feel differently from the special educators who left the field is the fact that perhaps we had a greater level of exposure to the practice [of special education] than they did," commented one of the special educators.

"Experience makes all the difference," she added. According to another participant,

"Teachers become dissatisfied with their jobs because of the working conditions. When they are dissatisfied, they either go another school or leave education altogether."

Attrition and retention patterns hinge on educators' emotions and behaviors in response to their daily environment. This cause and effect relationship illustrates how the social cognitive, social cognitive career theory, and the concept of job satisfaction are entwined and should be used as the basis upon which teacher retention platforms are based.

Uncommon among study participants was the issue of excessive substitution required of special educators. According to three of the study participants, it was often very discouraging when their remediation classes were cancelled because administrators needed them to substitute a class for an absent teacher. Intervention and remedial programs should be carried out consistently if student progress is to be achieved. In cancelling special education classes, it may be misconstrued by educators that administrators do not value such classes. This speaks to the need for school leaders to be knowledgeable about special education best practices or have some background in the field of special education to ensure that its services are efficiently carried out within their schools. Special education must be a priority, and educators must feel as if what they do is valued. When special educators feel as if their job is insignificant, compared to that of the general education teacher, they begin to rethink their role as a special education teacher, and in fact, their role within their education system. The probability of educators remaining in special education increases when they are treated by administration, colleagues, and parents as if what they do really makes a difference.

Another rare, yet important finding pertaining to educators' decision to leave special education was educators' feeling of stagnancy within their career. Having a sense of failure, or rather a lack of accomplishment, was revealed to be a cause of

discouragement among special educators. Special educators are highly motivated by feelings of success and fulfillment, and in the absence of these elements, intrinsic motivation begins to decrease, thereby prompting a reevaluation of one's career decision. Professional growth was an unexpected result, considering the more common patterns of attrition as revealed within the review of literature. One of this study's participants acknowledged the fear of being "labelled" as a special educator indefinitely without ever receiving the opportunity to advance into a higher position within the department of education. Due to the limited number of special educators within the public system, those that are there, tend to remain there and find it very difficult to transfer into other departments. The mundane cycle of being a special educator eventually takes a toll on some educators who after a few years are ready to try something new.

Limitations of the Study

Upon the execution of this study there were two limitations to trustworthiness that arose. These included (a) generalizability, and (c) poor replicability of the study. Generalizability was considered a limitation of this study, because the sample was limited to only one island (out of approximately 17 populated islands) within The Bahamas. Secondly, qualitative studies like this do not lend themselves well to replicability, because data were derived from specific individuals' personal experiences. To prevent the occurrence of researcher bias (due to the relationship between myself and some of the participants as former colleagues), (a) only open-ended questions were asked in the interviews, (b) all data were collated and evaluated equally, (c) interviews were

transcribed to ensure validity of data, and (d) the study was reviewed by a peer reviewer in an effort to sustain objectivity.

Recommendations

To extend this current study, and simultaneously satisfy future generalizability, one recommendation is to include special educators from the other islands (referred to as Family Islands) within The Bahamas instead of only using educators from one island for the sample. Such a study would produce varied and more extensive responses and thus richer data. Additionally, this data collected could be used to form a comparative study to explore the experiences of special educators in the capital city versus those in the rural settlements of the other islands. With regards to the gap in literature discussed in Chapter 2, it is recommended that research is conducted to examine beginning special educators' ideal perceptions of teaching within The Bahamas' public education system (prior to entering the profession), in comparison to their actual teaching experiences. This research is useful in providing stakeholders at the tertiary level of education valid information that would assist in preparing preservice teachers mentally and emotionally for real classroom settings. Research in this area is limited, but some studies have shown that by enhancing the experiential background of preservice special educators, the chance of disillusionment and regret may be reduced. With the existence of scarce literature on student misbehavior and attrition among special educators, it is also recommended that future research explores this factor and its impact upon Bahamian special educators' decision to leave the profession.

Another recommendation for future research is to include males in the study. Showing comparisons and contrasts of opinions pertaining to teacher attrition from the aspect of gender would lend this study to the generation of data that would confirm or disprove some of the research literature which implied that gender plays a role in attrition and retention trends. It would be interesting to see which factors male educators contributed to their decision to leave the teaching profession. Some researchers purported that due to females' "motherly" demeanor, they tend to remain in education longer than males; however, extensive research in this area is warranted due to the fact that this claim was debunked by this study's finding, which revealed that "motherly" demeanor or love for kids did not significantly influence educators to remain in special education.

Researchers concurred that effective leadership is critical in special education. To this end, a third recommendation for future research is to examine Bahamian administrators' perceptions of the impetuses behind special education attrition. Such a study would yield very robust data that can be used to compare and contrast the perceptions of special educators versus those of school administrators; in addition to a further examination into administrators' perceptions of their role in special education reform.

Implications

Positive Social Change

Research has revealed the dire repercussions of teacher losses in schools, particularly those that cater to the special education of students with learning disabilities: Lower student achievement rates, poor delivery of special education services, and added

stresses upon educators working in environments lacking the required personnel to assist with the academic and social challenges of students with severe disabilities. Not only do these issues negatively impact an education system, but they also have a profound influence upon the society as a whole. What future does a society have without a well-educated population? What future awaits a country whose citizens are driven to pursue an anti-social way of life due to minimal options for employment because of unresolved learning deficiencies? It is imperative that all learners, particularly those who struggle with intellectually disabilities, be given the opportunity to receive an education at the hand of specially trained, committed educators.

Philosophers and researchers alike perceived a good education as a panacea for many societal ills (Cuban, 2013; Dewey, 2007). This implies therefore that effective education programs are crucial to the development of communities, and by extension, countries. Walden University defines positive social change as a “deliberate process of creating and applying ideas, strategies, and actions to promote the worth, dignity, and development of individuals, communities, organizations, institutions, cultures, and societies” (Walden University, 2017, p. 32). Such a definition speaks to the role of special education reform. The essence of education reform is seen as a deliberate process of applying research-based ideas and strategies to promoting the cognitive and social development of communities. Reducing attrition improves the status of a society, as student achievement will increase (Mason-Williams, 2015). Teacher attrition significantly harms student achievement (Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013). This defends the rationale that retaining highly qualified and effective educators is vital to

producing an achieving school (Leko, Brownell, Sindelar, & Kiely, 2015). This philosophy supports the position that successful schools produce successful communities (Weisburd & McEwen, 2015; Wilson-Fleming & Wilson-Younger, 2012).

Positive social change is fostered through the transformation of learners into productive citizens. According to crime analysts, educated individuals are less likely to display criminal tendencies, or anti-social behaviors (Weisburd & McEwen, 2015) The population of special needs students with disabilities is an important part of the community which cannot be allowed to fall through the educational cracks. Life should not end after high school for students with disabilities. Special educators are essential in ensuring that these students are adequately prepared to transition from high school, to college, and eventually into the work force. These individuals have contributions to make to society just as much as those without a disability. Therefore, all measures must be taken to ensure that special education programs are facilitated by knowledgeable, high quality, and high-performing special educators. To facilitate this, consequently, policy makers must endeavor to ensure that special educators are continuously attracted to and retained within the field of special education. This speaks to the significance of studies aimed towards informing best practices for reducing attrition among special educators. Teacher attrition is not only a school problem, but a societal one as well.

Teacher Education Programs

Lack of teacher training and adequate preparedness to effectively address the learning needs of students with disabilities and behavioral challenges are two of the many reasons Bahamian special educators choose to leave the teaching profession. Without the

ability to effectively promote student success, teachers are faced with feelings of low self-efficacy and frustration. This implies that preservice educators must receive ample experience in the field of special education and in classrooms of learners with diverse learning needs and styles. This speaks to the structure and development of teacher education programs offered by higher institutions of learning; these programs must expose preservice teachers to various aspects of the “real” classroom. This is because some career teachers quickly become disillusioned upon entering the service only to find that their preconceptions are invalid. It is important that a culture shock is prevented.

To this end, induction and mentoring programs are vital to the longevity of beginning teachers. Such programs are considered effective in reducing attrition rates among this particular group of educators. These educators who are less experienced than those who would have served longer, require support from colleagues and administrators who are knowledgeable in classroom management approaches that maximize student learning. With regards to exposing preservice teachers to various aspects of special education, they should be heavily engrossed in (a) special education legislature, (b) best special education practices (e.g., inclusion) and pedagogical strategies, (c) behavior management for special needs students, (d) various intellectual and behavioral disabilities, and (e) special education leadership. It is important for educators to be exposed to various aspects of special education because in many public schools, there is an absence of paraprofessionals who would normally assist teachers with their students. Therefore, having some knowledge of other areas within the field of special education better enables teachers to assist their students achieve positive learning outcomes.

Educators, especially special educators, are only as effective as their level of experience and expertise in executing student-centered, efficient lessons. Teaching a normal lesson presents enough challenges its own, without the need to ensure that every child's instruction is differentiated and in alignment with his IEP; to this end, it is crucial that preservice educators are exposed to a variety of teaching styles, strategies and approaches for disabled and nondisabled students. Although there are no picture-perfect classrooms, beginning teachers should not be made to experience a sense of shock or dismay upon the teaching profession. Participants of this current study recalled their first year of teaching, stating that they were in no way mentally or emotionally prepared for what they had to face. Teacher education programs should simulate as much as possible the real class-room setting, because some preservice educators possess a certain perception of the teaching profession, which is proven invalid upon entering the field. Consequently, they are left feeling a sense of regret regarding their chosen career.

Special Education Practice

Issues pertaining to low levels of positive job satisfaction among educators stem from stressful working conditions (Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012). Long hours, class sizes, severity of students' disabilities, lack of resources, and heavy workloads contribute to unpleasant working conditions for educators thereby negatively impacting their decision to remain within the profession. Teachers' working conditions impact student learning. Therefore, major stakeholders including governments, states, and school districts must find ways to cohesively work towards reducing some of the stresses that inevitably result in high teacher turnover rates. Student success hinges on the efficacy,

motivation, and commitment of educators within the classroom. Feelings of disdain, frustration, and burnout hinder the effectiveness of the teacher and by consequent students' learning outcomes.

Although attrition rates are higher among early career teachers, this concern should not be overlooked or underestimated with regards to veteran teachers. These educators, although more experienced, should also be exposed to ongoing professional development and seminars on the current and expanding trends in special education. It is imperative that educators are aware of what special education entails; it is a service geared toward a diverse population of students, inclusive of gifted students. To this end, teachers must be encouraged to continue to be life-long learners and maintain a level of expertise within their discipline. Special education is a dynamic field and therefore trends are constantly changing. To be effective in reaching all students, it is vital that educators are allowed opportunities for networking with other professionals in the field to share ideas and gain insights into maximizing both student and teacher success (Podolsky, Kini, Bishop, Darling-Hammond, 2017). Receiving support from colleagues, and actively collaborating with other teachers are key to overall school success and teacher satisfaction.

This suggests that school administrators must take a proactive approach towards the problem of attrition among teachers. They must buy into the idea that teachers not only require support from professional development opportunities, but also to be included in the role of leadership. Teachers become discouraged within their workplace because they are not included in the decision-making process. This speaks to the significance of

shared leadership, effective organization development, and consistent evaluation of schools' educational services and program. According to Cummings and Worley (2013), stakeholders should be included in some level of decision making, if organizational change is to be facilitated and sustained.

With the steady decrease in the number of special educators attracted to, and entering the field, general educators are faced with the task of providing special services to students with disabilities and diverse learning styles. Often these educators do not possess a background knowledge of special education, and therefore struggle to meet the demands of accountability for student achievement. This has implications for school boards and departments of education, with regards to ensuring that funds are provided for special education training. Within the context of special education law (e.g., Individuals With Disabilities Education Act [IDEA] and No Child Left Behind [NCLB]), educators are required to be highly qualified and deemed competent in the instruction of students with disabilities (Wright & Wright, 2015). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act mandates that high-quality, intensive preservice preparation and professional development be provided and supported for all personnel who work with students with disabilities (Campbell-Whatley & Lyons, 2013, p. 20).

In light of special education teacher shortages, these legal mandates undoubtedly present a challenge for schools in meeting the requirements of teacher training. This suggests, therefore, that schools become creative in providing solutions for challenges encountered daily by special and general educators. The practice of co-teaching is an effective way of facilitating collaboration and support, particularly among struggling

educators. The practice of inclusive education has also been cited as an effective special education practice for educating students with diverse disabilities in one classroom (Cushner et al., 2012; Hunter-Johnson et al., 2014). Joint professional development of special educators and general educators must be facilitated by school leaders to strengthen collegial collaborative efforts and foster cross-training in content and adaptations. With more knowledge and higher levels of self-efficacy among teachers, retention levels among special educators are likely to increase.

Factors influencing attrition among educators imply that the problem is associated with the social-emotional feelings of educators. The concept of job satisfaction and social cognitive theory are used to provide insight into reasons why educators make certain decisions. To this end, school leaders should ensure that educators not only receive academic support and training, but psychological support as well. An avenue should be provided whereby teachers can express their feelings of frustration without condemnation or judgement. Addressing the mental, physical, and emotional needs of educators, especially special educators, is vital to improving their job perceptions and level of teaching commitment. In meeting the diverse needs of special educators, the important role of paraprofessionals becomes evident (e.g., school psychologists in the successful execution and maintenance of special education program within schools). Support systems in various forms are beneficial in alleviating some of the many stresses experienced by special educators.

Leadership is crucial to the productivity of any given organization. This implies therefore that school administrators should adopt effective special education leadership

practices to ensure the smooth operation of the school (Atnafu, 2013; Campbell-Whatley & Lyons, 2013). What is equally important is that school administrators include teachers in some aspects of decision-making within the school. Schools administrators of special needs schools are expected have a strong background (i.e., knowledge and experience) in special education practices, laws, and service delivery methods and procedures. To lead a school in best special education practices, administrators must have some knowledge of such practices in order to accurately evaluate their effectiveness. To this end, school districts should provide opportunities for school leaders to engage in ongoing leadership training and professional development in special education leadership. Such leadership differs from that of general education, as it addressed a broader spectrum of challenges, laws, and requirements.

Education Policy Reform

Given the challenges faced by special educators, policy makers must devise strategies that would keep educators in the field. Although the processes of attracting and retaining are similar, they are also very different. Educators are attracted to the teaching profession for different reasons; however, their commitment hinges significantly the experiences they encounter. Increasing teachers' salaries and offering incentives (e.g., rewards for student achievement, sponsor teachers' professional development conferences, tokens of appreciation) are a step in the right direction toward increased teacher retention rates. In light of research which revealed that highly trained educators remain in the teaching profession longer than lesser trained educators or those with

limited experience, it is logical to propose that governments hire high-quality teachers based on future need projections.

The use of special educators as substitute teachers, when classroom teachers are absent, is a practice that should be discontinued. Special education and reading intervention programs are interrupted because this practice, thereby reducing the possibility for more positive results and consistent progress with struggling learners. To this end, the Ministry of Education should have a group of individuals on call, specifically for the purpose of substituting. Should a need arise, the special educator, reading specialist, or resource teacher should be the last choice for substitution. This needs to be a policy implemented to ensure that special education or remedial classes are not interrupted. This therefore requires education policy makers and school administrators to take special education programs seriously and respect the work that special educators are doing with their students. Support at all levels within an organization facilitates productivity and efficiency (Waddell, Creed, Cummings, & Worley, 2016).

The existing legislature which supports the rights of Bahamians with disabilities (and without) (a) Bahamas Education Act, (b) Bahamas White Paper on Education, and (c) Persons with Disability (Equal Opportunity) Bill (2014) are void of any stipulations pertaining to the mandatory involvement of parents in their children's learning. The Bahamas Education Act stipulates that parents must ensure that their children attend school; unlike the IDEA (2004) within the United States, however, this document does not emphasize any details regarding home-school collaboration. These laws do uphold

the rights of parents in terms of a free public education, ensuring that their children receive equal opportunities for education, and accommodations for special education instruction; however, what is lacking in these laws are guidelines and consequences for delinquent parents who do not support their children in their education process. Such involvement ranges from simply ensuring that homework is done, to attending parent-teacher conferences, to upholding discipline in the home. Teachers, and in particular, special educators, need support from parents – they are teachers’ second pair of hands in the home.

The mere fact that participants within this study identified parental support as a strong determinant of special educators’ future career decisions, implies that Bahamian education law should be revised to make parents of all students (disabled or non-disabled) more accountable for their children’s academic performance. Just as parents can demand results from schools, schools should be allowed to demand support from parents as well (Booth, Butler, Richardson, Washington, & Henfield, 2016). Parental involvement is fundamental in special education; special education, because of its complexity, requires strong partnerships between the school and home. It is through this relationship that more can be accomplished in the lives of students with learning disabilities. Unfortunately, for some parents, it will take more stringent approaches to ensure that they do their part in assisting their special needs children from both a social and academic perspective.

Special education programs are only as successful as the efforts that are invested into them by the pertinent stakeholders at all levels within the education system. To this

end, it is equally important for parents of students with disabilities to understand their role in their children's education. Consistent parental involvement facilitates achievement in students with special education needs (Kyzar, Haines, Turnbull, & Summers, 2016; Martinez, 2015). With continued lack of parental support, the burden upon special educators and students alike becomes significantly unbearable. Consequently, students are placed at a disadvantage, as teachers either leave the area of special education, the teaching profession, or simply remain, but perform at subpar levels. Results of this study show that the lack of parental support is discouraging to both teachers and students. Students who require special education instruction must receive support at school and at home in an effort to maximize students' learning outcomes. When teachers feel as if they have no support from the home, as revealed by this study, they are more likely to give up their efforts in the classroom; similarly, when students see that their parents are not concerned about their academic progress or achievement, they become less motivated (Morse, 2014; Murray & Mereoiu, 2016).

While it is not the responsibility of parents to ensure that educators remain in the profession, their support goes a long way in enhancing retention rates among special educators. Successful schools (i.e., achieving schools) are those that foster strong partnerships between the school, students, and parents (Stanley, 2015; Strickland, 2015). Collaboration between teachers and parents is crucial, particularly in special education. Just as teachers require support from the students' family, the family requires support from the teachers as well. Parents become the teacher at home, therefore it is imperative that teachers share their strategies, tips, and resources with parents so that they are better

able to assist their disabled children. In this way, much burden is alleviated off the classroom teacher, parent, and student.

Methodological Implications

Studies such as this one (i.e., pertaining to school-related issues), present implications for data collection venues. Depending on a study's scope and focus, interviewing teachers in their natural environment (i.e., at school) may be comfortable for them; however, for studies in which the educators' school is viewed from a negative perspective, participants may not feel comfortable to express more open and honest responses to adequately satisfy the interview questions. Although the interviews for this study were conducted in a neutral environment, some participants still felt guarded in some of their responses. In such situations, participants should be granted a brief recess, reassured of confidentiality as outlined in the informed consent form. Following this, they should be asked if they want to continue, or if there was anything they would like to retract.

Conclusion

Attrition among Bahamian special educators is a serious problem, considering the academic future of students with special learning needs. Special education is a field which demands expert instruction and efficient delivery of services at the hand of highly trained, specialized educators. Teacher attrition is not only a problem for The Bahamas' public education system, but it is a problem for the entire Bahamian society as a whole. All children, regardless of their learning needs, deficiencies, or physical and intellectual shortcomings, must receive a quality of education that will enable them to rise above

their challenges to become productive, contributing members of society. This cannot be achieved if quality special educators continue to leave the teaching profession, specifically the area of special education, where much reform is needed. The findings obtained through this study revealed the significance of preventing attrition among special educators in an effort to facilitate not only positive social outcomes, but to effectively instigate education reform throughout Bahamian public schools. These findings, which echoed those presented in the review of literature in Chapter 2, are useful in supporting the argument that intensive and consistent focus must be placed on teacher retention initiatives in special education throughout The Bahamas. These initiatives, however, must be informed by the input of Bahamian educators. It is negligible to frame teacher retention action plans without first understanding the plight of special educators. According to the evidence presented, teachers who choose to stay in special education are those who feel appreciated and supported by administrators and parents, and those who feel as if they are capable of bringing their students to some level of success.

On the other hand, teacher burnout, frustration due to poor student behavior, lack of parental, administrative, and collegial support, large class sizes, and inadequate training in special education are major influencing factors of Bahamian special educators' decision to leave the field. These factors are the cause for low levels of job satisfaction among Bahamian special educators, thereby validating the social cognitive and social cognitive career theories, around which this study was framed. Unhappy, frustrated teachers who feel as if they are fighting a losing battle, will leave the teaching profession if they no longer find satisfaction within their career. Beginning educators are

disillusioned upon entering the field of education, when they realize that they were not prepared for the real-life classroom consisting of students from diverse backgrounds with diverse learning and behavioral needs. Not only does The Bahamas' Department of Education have a very serious job to do, in terms of alleviating some of the ills educators experience daily, but institutions of higher learning must also revise their teacher education programs to provide accommodations for the culture of the typical Bahamian classroom. As current research has shown, attrition levels are even greater among early career teachers. How is this, when these individuals would've spent less than five years in the profession? This is a clear indication that their pedagogical foundations are not as strong as they should be, which speaks to the efficacy of their preservice training and the level of exposure to inclusive classroom settings.

Education reform begins in the classroom with the educators. The educators are the ones on the front line, therefore, if they are ineffective, incompetent, or dissatisfied, their students will not achieve their best. School leaders must be aware, however, that they have a very important role to play to ensuring that their teachers perform at their best. Education reform is not a task for one person or one group of persons, but all involved stakeholders. Stakeholders at the macro level of the Bahamian education system (inclusive of policy makers/government officials) must make intentional efforts to bring about solutions to the problems that are chasing teachers away from the education profession. Unfortunately, solutions cannot be wisely devised until policy makers listen to the teachers, and actually go into the schools to investigate and observe. Special education reform is a process – it will not happen overnight, but all stakeholders must be

committed to bringing about change in an effort to improve the quality of life for the citizens of The Bahamas. It must be reiterated that teacher attrition is also a social problem; when children are not educated, drop-out rates increase, lack of productivity escalates, and criminal activities become more prevalent. Special education reform starts in the classroom and ends in the community.

Taking into account the input of educators is the foundation of any teacher retention action plan. This is the most crucial step in the planning process of effective retention initiatives because educators are the individuals on the front line making the education system work. Policy makers do not experience the daily stresses that special educators do, therefore they are not able to plan a successful retention program without an understanding of what needs to take place in schools to begin the education reform process. Decisions designed to reduce attrition among special educators should be informed by their experiences within the public schools. This speaks to the importance of collaboration and networking among education stakeholders in education reform initiatives. To this end, it is also vital that educators are allowed to engage in the decision-making process pertaining to the development of education policies and practices.

The most effective teacher retention initiatives originate with developing an understanding of why teachers leave the education profession, and the role that their level of job satisfaction plays in future professional decisions and behaviors. Special education is a unique and multi-faceted field which requires the presence of highly trained, effective and passionate educators, strong school leaders who are knowledgeable and intentional

about special education best practices, and above all consistent and informed retention strategies of education policy makers. Teacher attrition and retention trends hinge upon a myriad of contributing factors, which must all be cohesively examined and addressed if special education within Bahamian public schools is to effectively meet the learning needs of all students with disabilities.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol With Interview Questions

Dissertation Topic: Examining Attrition Among Bahamian Special Education Teachers: Implications for Special Education Reform

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer: Norrisa Newton

Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee:

Research Questions:

- What are the influencing factors that have incited the decision of public special education teachers within The Bahamas to resign or request premature retirement from the teaching profession?
- How does job satisfaction influence teacher retention within The Bahamas' public education system?

Introduction of Interviewer: My name is Norrisa Newton, PhD student at Walden University. I will be conducting an interview with you for the purpose of my doctoral dissertation. During the interview, I would like to discuss the topic of teacher attrition among primary school special educators within The Bahamas' public education system. By extension, I would also like to discuss implications for special education reform, in light of this phenomenon. With these topics in mind, here are some questions for which I would like for you to provide your input, but before we begin, do you have any questions or concerns? Are you ready to begin?

Interview Questions Section A: Demographics

Gender: Female _____ Male: _____

Age: 20-30 years _____ 31-40 years _____ Above 40 years _____

Ethnicity: Black _____ Caucasian _____ Hispanic _____ Other _____

Highest Education Level Obtained:

Bachelor's Degree _____ Master's Degree _____ Doctorate Degree _____ Other: _____

Years in Teaching Profession: 1 – 3 years _____ 4 – 5 years _____ More than 5 Years _____

Area of Professional Training/Certification: Early Childhood Education _____
 Primary Education _____ High School Education _____ Special Education _____
 Reading Specialist _____ Resource Specialist _____ Other _____

Section B: Special Educators' Day-to-Day Experiences

Question 1a

Interviewer: Let's begin with what you can tell me about your experiences as a special educator at the primary level of The Bahamas's public education system.

Interviewee:

Question 1b

Interviewer: What are the circumstances surrounding your decision to leave/remain within the teaching profession/field of special education/public education system?

Interviewee:

Question 1c

Interviewer: Tell me about a typical day.

Interviewee:

Question 1d

Interviewer: Can you expand a little more on this?

Interviewee:

Question 2a

Interviewer: Interviewer: What are the most rewarding/motivating aspects of being a special educator in the public education system?

Interviewee:

Question 2b

Interviewer: What are the most challenging/discouraging aspects of being a special educator in the public education system?

Interviewee:

Section C: Job Satisfaction and Teacher Commitment**Question 3a****Interviewer: What attracted you to the teaching profession?**

Interviewee:

Question 3b**Interviewer: How was this meaningful to you as an educator?**

Interviewee:

Question 3c**Interviewer: Can you expand a little on this?**

Interviewee:

Question 4a**Interviewer: What attracted you to special education?**

Interviewee:

Question 4b**Interviewer: What does this experience mean to you?**

Interviewee:

Question 4c**Interviewer: What specific experiences kept this attraction alive?**

Interviewee:

Question 5a**Interviewer: How has your experience as a special educator impacted your initial passion for the profession/field?**

Interviewee:

Question 5b**Interviewer: Can you share an example of how your job satisfaction has influenced student learning outcomes?**

Interviewee:

Question 5c

Interviewer: Can you share an example of how your job satisfaction has influenced teacher efficacy?

Interviewee:

Question 6

Interviewer: What role does job satisfaction play in teacher attrition?

Interviewee:

Section D: Implications for Teacher Retention Initiatives

Question 7a

Interviewer: Can you give me a specific example of a decision, change, or implementation your administrators made in the past that contradicted your beliefs in terms of best special education/teaching practices?

Interviewee:

Question 7b

Interviewer: Tell me about your relationship with your administrators.

Interviewee:

Question 8a

Interviewer: Tell me about your relationship with your colleagues.

Interviewee:

Question 8b

Interviewer: Can you give me a specific example of occasions when teacher collaboration occurs, or is necessary?

Interviewee:

Question 9a

Interviewer: Tell me about your relationship with your students.

Interviewee:

Question 9b

Interviewer: Can you give me a specific example of how you facilitate their engagement?

Interviewee:

Question 10

Interviewer: Can you expand on how you encourage parental involvement?

Interviewee:

Question 11

Interviewer: Walden University defines positive social change as a “deliberate process of creating and applying ideas, strategies, and actions to promote the worth, dignity, and development of individuals, communities, organizations, institutions, cultures, and societies.” With this thought in mind, in your opinion, how does special education attrition and retention of teachers impact the process of positive social change?

Interviewee:

Section E: Conclusion of Interview/Closing Statements

Interviewer: Do you want to add anything on teacher attrition and retention trends or contributing factors?

Interviewee:

Interviewer: Thank you for choosing to participate in this interview. Your input is invaluable to this study, and I am confident that your contribution will significantly enhance the knowledge base of teacher attrition and retention in The Bahamas’ public education system. Is there anything else you would like to share with me before we finish this interview?

Interviewer (regarding peer debriefing): Upon completion of the data analysis, you will be contacted for a follow-up interview, in an effort to confirm accuracy of the data obtained from you. Following this session, the data will be reanalyzed, and forwarded to a peer debriefer to be evaluated for accuracy and consistency.

Appendix B: Focus Group Interview Protocol With Interview Questions

Dissertation Topic: Examining Attrition Among Bahamian Special Education Teachers: Implications for Special Education Reform

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer: Norrisa Newton

Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee:

Research Questions:

- What are the influencing factors that have incited the decision of public special education teachers within The Bahamas to resign or request premature retirement from the teaching profession?
- How does job satisfaction influence teacher retention within The Bahamas' public education system?

Introduction of Interviewer: My name is Norrisa Newton, PhD student at Walden University. I will be facilitating a focus group interview with you along with other special educators for the purpose of my doctoral dissertation. During the interview, I would like to discuss the topic of teacher attrition among primary school special educators within The Bahamas' public education system. By extension, I would also like to discuss implications for special education reform and positive social change in light of this phenomenon. With these topics in mind, here are some questions for which I would like for you to provide your input, but before we begin, do you have any questions or concerns? Are you ready to begin?

Focus Group Interview Questions

Section A: Interview Questions

1. What aspects of your profession as a special educator have contributed to your decision to remain within the public education system? / Describe the specific experiences that led to your decision to leave the public education system and the teaching profession entirely.
2. How important is job satisfaction in preventing teacher attrition? What would convince you to remain within special education (and in the public education system) despite poor levels of personal job satisfaction?
3. From your perspective, what is positive social change, and how is this affected by teacher attrition within special education?
4. What experiences, exposure, or training would have better prepared you as a preservice educator for operating more effectively within your capacity of special education teacher specifically within the public system?
5. What do you consider to be the limitations of existing special and/or inclusive education programs within The Bahamas' Department of Education schools?
6. If you were given the task of formulating a teacher retention action plan, what components would be included, or issues addressed?
7. In your experience, how effective are teacher mentoring programs in reducing attrition among educators?

Section B: Conclusion of Interview/Closing Statements

Interviewer: Do any of you want to add anything on teacher attrition and retention trends or contributing factors?

Participant:

Interviewer: Thank you for choosing to participate in this focus group interview. Your input is invaluable to this study, and I am confident that your contribution will significantly enhance the knowledge base of teacher attrition and retention in The Bahamas' public education system. Is there anything else you would like to share with me before we finish this interview?

Interviewer (regarding peer debriefing): Upon completion of the data analysis, you will be contacted for a follow-up interview, in an effort to confirm accuracy of the data obtained from you. Following this session, the data will be reanalyzed, and forwarded to a peer debriefer to be evaluated for accuracy and consistency.

Appendix C: Interview Questions by Categories

Special Educators' Day-to-Day Experiences

Main Questions	Additional Questions	Clarifying Questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Let's begin with what you can tell me about your experiences as a special educator at the primary level of The Bahamas's public education system. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the circumstances surrounding your decision to leave/remain within the teaching profession/field of special education/public education system? What are the most rewarding/motivating aspects of being a special educator in the public education system? What are the most challenging/discouraging aspects of being a special educator in the public education system? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tell me about a typical day. Can you expand a little more on this?

Job Satisfaction and Teacher Commitment

Main Questions	Additional Questions	Clarifying Questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What attracted you to the teaching profession? What attracted you to special education? How has your experience as a special educator impacted your initial passion for the profession/field? What role does job satisfaction play in teacher attrition? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How was this meaningful to you as an educator? What does this experience mean to you? Can you share an example of how your job satisfaction has influenced student learning outcomes? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can you expand a little on this? What specific experiences kept this attraction alive? Can you share an example of how your job satisfaction has influenced teacher efficacy?

Implications for Teacher Retention Initiatives

Main Questions	Additional Questions	Clarifying Questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tell me about your relationship with your administrators. Tell me about your relationship with your colleagues. Tell me about your relationship with your students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can you give me a specific example of a decision, change, or implementation your administrators made in the past that contradicted your beliefs in terms of best special education/teaching practices? Can you give me a specific example of occasions when teacher collaboration occurs, or is necessary? In your opinion, how does teacher attrition and retention in special education impact positive social change? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can you give me a specific example of how you facilitate your students' engagement?

Conclusion of Interview/Closing Statements

- Do you want to add anything on teacher attrition and retention trends or contributing factors?
- Thank you for choosing to participate in this interview. Your input is invaluable to this study, and I am confident that your contribution will significantly enhance the knowledge base of teacher attrition and retention in The Bahamas' public education system.
- Is there anything else you would like to share with me before we finish this interview?
- After I have completed the analysis of the interview data, I will contact you to arrange a debriefing session. The purpose of this session is to confirm the accuracy of the data collected during the interview. At that time, I will share with you the general themes generated from our discussion.
- Once again, thank you for your time.

Appendix D: Invitation to Participate—Telephone Script

**INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE
TELEPHONE SCRIPT**

Researcher: (ringing tone; someone answers the telephone) Good morning/afternoon.

May I speak with _____ please?

Participant: This is he/she.

Researcher: Hello. I hope that you are doing well.

Participant: I am well. Thank you.

Researcher: As you know, I am a student in the Walden University PhD program, and as part of my doctoral requirements I am expected to conduct a research study which will be compiled in the form of a dissertation. Would you be interested in participating in an individual interview, as well as a focus group interview?

Participant: Yes, sure.

Researcher: Great! Prior to the start of the interviews, you will receive an informed consent form which outlines the nature of the study as well as advises you of your right to withdraw from the study at any time. Your participation is entirely confidential, and you will remain anonymous. You will be expected to sign this document as an indication that you understand the contents outlined. The individual interview should take no more than 90 minutes of your time. The focus group interview should take no more than 2 hours. There are no incentives provided in exchange for your participation; however, your contribution to this study will significantly impact the future of special education reform in The Bahamas.

Participant: Sounds great!

Researcher: Upon approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board, I will call you again to arrange a date that is convenient for you to engage in the interview. I look forward to interacting with you on this study. Thank you for agreeing to participate.

Participant: You're welcome.