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Special Education Teachers Perception of Burnout and Special Education Teacher Support

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Abstract

The purpose of this phenomenological descriptive study was to investigate special education teacher burnout and the causes that lead to burnout. This dissertation is an innovative individual research project that contributes to the field of special education practice and knowledge. Three males and 10 female special education teachers with a variety of years of teaching experience in public education represent the population for this study. The conceptual framework for this study was burnout theory. Data collection for this study included a burnout survey, an interview guided by open ended questions, and member checking. The coding process revealed the following themes: role of the special educator, years of teaching experience, other roles taken in current position, perception of special education teacher burnout and of special education teacher support, experienced stress/burnout, symptoms of burnout, contributors of stress and burnout, dealing with stress/burnout, recommendations to avoid burnout, administrators and their understanding of the role of the special educator, collaboration time, personal challenges, special educators wanting to leave their positions, and developed concerns. The findings from this descriptive study can help raise awareness of special educators' needs and struggles so administrators are able to better support them to prevent burnout. The results may also benefit the Special Education Local Plan Area to inform workshop development to support special educators.

Keywords: special education, burnout, individual learning plan, intervention, inclusive classroom, resource, special day class, emotionally disturb program, learning center.

Dedication

First, I dedicate this dissertation to my husband Vince for going through this journey with me. Second, I dedicate this dissertation to my daughters, Emily and Stephanie, and my best friend Heather, for always believing in me and encouraging me. Third, I dedicate this dissertation to all the special education teachers who took time to participate in this study. Additionally, I dedicate this dissertation to my chair professor for her dedication, guidance, and support through the dissertation process. Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to my committee for being so understanding with unexpected circumstances, encouraging me, and providing me with timely feedback on all the chapters of this dissertation.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction to the Problem

Burnout has caused many special education teachers (SETs) to prematurely leave their positions as educators (Tyler & Brunner, 2014). The estimated national rate for SET attrition is 50% within the first five years of teaching (Tyler & Brunner, 2014). Districts experiencing high rates of attrition are affected financially (Bettini, Cheyney, Wang, & Leko, 2015). Furthermore, student services are impacted by attrition (Jones, Young, & Frank, 2013). The shortage of SETs is affecting schools nationwide (Dewey et al., 2017). Special education is defined as an individualized educational program that is developed and presented by a specialist to meet the educational and social needs of students with special needs (Nuri, Demirok, & Direkto, 2017). According to the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), a special education program specialist is responsible for designing instruction to meet the needs of a diverse group of students with special needs. Recent studies have indicated that the number of SET shortages throughout the country continue to increase (Bettini et al., 2017; Dewey et al., 2017).

SET shortages are also affecting school districts financially. The cost for SETs prematurely leaving their position is between \$8,000 and \$48,000 (Tyler & Brunner, 2014). Rumschlag (2017) indicated that in general, teacher attrition can cost a school district up to \$2.2 billion per year and nationwide attrition has been estimated to cost as much as \$7.3 billion. These estimates include all educators, not just SETs. However, Rumschlag (2017), who focused in the state of Ohio, highlighted that special educators face higher levels of stress than any other position in education. Therefore, it is important to understand the reason and factors that contribute to SET shortages, specifically. Dewey et al. (2017) suggested factors such as

preparedness, ability to devote in education, ongoing public policy changes, and teacher burnout are among some of the reason for SET shortages. Cooter and Stricherz (2014) indicated that SET burnout is related to lack of administrative support, lack of staff development, lack of time for collaboration with general education teachers, and SETs feeling isolated. Other factors include teacher's incapacity to deal with challenges in special education and being measured based on knowledge, certification, experience, social context, job satisfaction, and work engagement (Minghui, Lei, Xiaomeng, & Potmesilc, 2018). Mapfumo, Mukwidzwa and Chireshe (2017) indicated that there are many other factors that have been linked to SET shortages and many of those factors have led to high levels of stress leading to SET burnout. Bettini et al. (2017) indicated that there is a need to clearly understand the role of the SETs and the factors contributing to burnout. In this descriptive qualitative study, I will focus on investigating SETs' perceptions of burnout and SETs' perceptions of special education teacher support.

Background, Context, History, and Conceptual Framework

Burnout has been an ongoing concern among special educators (Brunsting, Sreckovic, & Lane, 2014). Caputo and Langher (2015) indicated that SETs are lacking success because of the challenges they face as special educators. SET teachers have faced role ambiguity and unclear evaluation procedures (Rock et al., 2016). Role ambiguity is when SETs do not have a clear understanding of their duties and expectations as educators. Rock et al. (2016) stated that in some states SETs are evaluated based on student scores. Students' scores reflect the general educator and not the special educator. Furthermore, program structure, lack of training, work overload, lack of administrative and parent support, changing laws in special education, and lack

of collaboration with general education teachers are among other challenges that have led to SET burnout (Cambridge-Johnson, Hunter-Johnson, & Newton, 2014; Caputo & Langher, 2015; Cooter & Stricherz, 2014; Vittek, 2015). SET burnout does not just affect SETs; it also affects students with emotional and academic special needs (Ansley, Houchins, & Varjas, 2016). Ansley et al. (2016) used examples of SETs experiencing burnout and described how the chronic issues of stress they experienced impacted not only their health, but also their students. Students in special education are impacted because SETs experiencing burnout may have a hard time maintaining structure and being consistent with their students (Ansley et al., 2016).

Burnout is a mental disorder that affects the individual physically and emotionally (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 2015). Maslach et al. (2015) added that an individual experiencing burnout may feel exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduction of emotions of personal accomplishment. Furthermore, Maslach et al. (2015) indicated that individuals who experience burnout experience anger, embarrassment, fear, and despair. SETs experiencing burnout tend to avoid unpleasant situations and they do not have self-awareness (Garwood, Werts, Varghese, & Gosey, 2018). De Stasio et al. (2017) stated that burnout affects the individual mentally, emotionally, and physically. Maslach et al. (2015) studied burnout in a wide variety of human services fields such as social services, criminal justice, health care, criminal justice, and education. The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) has been identified through the literature as a tool used to measure teacher burnout (De Stasio, Fiorilli, Benevene, Uusitalo-Malmivaara, & Di Chiacchio, 2017). For example, Gong, Zimmerli, and Hoffer (2013) and Williams and Dikes (2017) used the MBI in their studies to measure SET burnout.

In this descriptive qualitative study, I investigated SETs perception of burnout and their perception of special education teacher support. The location for this study was a county in a Western U.S. state. This county had been experiencing a shortage of special educators. A school district from a neighboring county was also invited to participate in this study due to a need for more participants.

Historically, laws in special education have evolved to support and meet the needs of students with special needs. The Education for All Handicap Children Act was passed in 1975; this legislation was revised in 1990 as the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) (Lee, n.d.; Shepherd, Fowler, McCormick, Wilson, & Morgan, 2016). Another revision took place in 1997, which required whole approach inclusion. In inclusion, strategies and activities are used to provide students with special needs instruction in the general education classroom (Cambridge-Johnson et al., 2014). Currently, all students with special needs and those with attention issues must be provided with a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE) (Copenhaver, 2006).

An additional historical law that was aligned with IDEA was No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Both IDEA and NCLB mandated that all students with special needs have access to general education curriculum in LRE (Brownell, Bishop, & Sindelar, 2018; Collins & Ludlow, 2018; Glowacki & Hackmann, 2016). However, having access to the general education curriculum brought added stress to SETs and many school districts began to experience SET shortages (Brownell et al., 2018). NCLB was adapted to close an educational performance gap between different racial groups, low-income students, and students with special needs, but it did not reflect the unique needs of students in every state (Arkansas State University, 2016).

Most recently, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) replaced NCLB; this legislation outlined clear goals to prepare all students for success. ESSA mandates reflect special education because it supports literacy, students with dyslexia, and other difficulties with reading and writing. ESSA supports FAPE, which is a component of IDEA (Alvarez, 2016; Arkansas State University, 2016). These laws and other evolving laws in special education have negatively affected and continue to affect the role of SETs (Glowacki & Hackmann, 2016).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this descriptive case study was burnout theory, which was developed by Herbert Freudenberger in 1974. Freudenberger came up with his definition of burnout based on observations he made of individuals in the work environment. He stated that burnout was exhaustion by excessive work demands on energy, strength, and resources (Freudenberger, 1974). Freudenberger posited that burnout includes physical symptoms such as “exhaustion, fatigue, frequent headaches, and gastrointestinal disorders, sleeplessness, and shortness of breath” (Heinemann & Heinemann, 2017, p. 2). Freudenberger and North divided burnout theory into the following 12 phases: compulsion, working harder, neglecting their needs, displacement of conflicts, revision of values, denial of emerging problems, withdrawal, obvious behavior, depersonalization, inner emptiness, depression, and burnout syndrome (Heinemann & Heinemann, 2017). Maslach et al. (2015) built on Freudenberger’s work, but focused on measuring burnout based on the three dimensions of exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy (Heinemann & Heinemann, 2017, p. 3).

Statement of the Problem

Literature addressed that SET burnout is a concern nationwide. Burnout has caused many SETs to prematurely leave their positions (Tyler & Brunner, 2014). Additionally, Tyler and Brunner (2014) indicated that SETs are leaving their positions within their first five year of teaching. Bettini et al. (2017) further stated that it is important to understand the role of SETs and the stress factors that lead to burnout. Tyler and Brunner (2014) added that the rate of SETs leaving their positions have created a big dilemma for educational leaders. Therefore, in this qualitative descriptive study, I examined SETs' perception of burnout and perception of lack of support.

Purpose of the Proposed Study

The purpose of this descriptive qualitative case study was to investigate SETs' perception of burnout and their perception of special education teacher support. I also sought to understand reasons for SET shortages in the county of focus. A shortage of SETs is not only a concern in the county of focus, but also throughout the United States (Dewey et al., 2017).

Research Questions

The research questions for this study were as follows:

RQ1. What are special education teachers' perception of burnout?

RQ2. What are special education teachers' perception of special education teacher support?

Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Proposed Study

The growing phenomenon of SETs leaving their positions prematurely is a concern to school districts nationwide (Garwood et al., 2018). Research indicates that SETs face countless

demands and responsibilities leading to burnout (Brunsting et al., 2014). In this study, I aimed to fill the gap in research to help determine the reason for SET burnout and feelings lack of support. The findings of this study have the potential to bring awareness to district administrators and SETs in the region of focus of the disconnect of SETs feeling lack of support and the reasons for SET burnout. The results also can provide interested administrators with different approaches to support SETs. In the same way, interested SETs can learn new ways to help them cope with stress that could lead to burnout.

Research indicates that lack of training and administrative support appears to be the common denominator for SET burnout and for them leaving their positions prematurely as educators (Bettini, Park, Benedict, Kimerling, & Leite, 2016; Cooter & Stricherz, 2014; Langher, Caputo, & Ricci, 2017; Shepherd et al., 2016). The responsibility of making sure that SETs are being supported and are provided with proper training falls on the administrators (Altinay, Altinay, Dagli, & Cifci, 2018; Bettini et al., 2017; Bettini et al., 2015). Bettini et al. (2017) stated that administrators do not know how to evaluate SETs. Tyler and Brunner (2014) commented that administrators are using general education teacher evaluation guidelines to evaluate special educators. This study uncovered new ideas for interested administrators to support their SETs with the unique population of students they serve. Awareness of new ideas has the potential to help meet SETs' specific needs and reduce SET burnout, which may also support SET retention.

Additionally, both the literature review and this study's findings helped develop the general tasks, duties, and responsibilities of the SET position. Additionally, this study can provide elementary principals and vice principals who work directly in supporting SETs

information on how to evaluate them to provide them with proper guidance for professional growth. It also supported SETs in understanding any misconceptions they have, allowing them to reduce stress levels that interfere with job performance.

SETs come into their positions as special educators with minimal training on how to balance their teaching duties alongside compliance with the ever-changing laws in special education (Caputo & Langher, 2015). Many SETs are leaving their positions due to stress levels that relate to lack of support (Ansley et al., 2016; Cancio et al., 2018). Bettini et al. (2017) stated that administrators are lacking the proper training to support SETs with the many challenges they face and as a result they do not know how to evaluate SETs.

Definition of Terms

The terms included in this study are common education terms, but the definitions are provided to clarify meaning throughout the study.

Administrators: Principals, vice-principals, and other program administrators in management positions (Renner, 2019).

Mild-moderate education specialist: A resource on teacher credentialing for the study state defines this term as a special educator who teaches students with special needs, such as mild-to-moderate intellectual disabilities, attention deficit and attention deficit hyperactivity disorders, autism, and emotional disturbances.

Special education: A program that is presented and developed to provide educational and social support to individuals showing significant levels of personal and developmental differences from their peers (Nuri et al., 2017).

Burnout: A “psychological syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who work with other people in some capacity” (Maslach et al., 2015, p. 192).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB): Was an accountability federal law that provided money for extra educational support to improve academic progress of disadvantage children. NCLB ensured that all children had a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to meet or exceeded state standards in reading and math. (Klein, 2015).

Least restrictive environment (LRE): The educational placement of a child with special needs where he or she can receive special education services and be with their peers who do not receive special education services. (Wrightslaw, n.d.).

Individuals with Disabilities Act, 2004 (IDEA): A law that mandates that students with special needs receive a FAPE in the LRE. IDEA supports children from birth through age 21 (Lee, n.d.).

Collaboration: The ability to work with others in the inclusive setting to support students to succeed in the general education classroom (Shepherd et al., 2016).

Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI): MBI measures burnout syndrome through the use of three components, using a 7-point scale survey. The components are emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach et al., 2015).

Inclusion: Is a special education model program where students with special needs spend most or all their time learning with peers who do not receive special education services. In the inclusive classroom, the general education teacher and the SET work together to meet the needs of students with special needs (Killoran et al., 2013).

Learning center: A designated special education classroom in which the SET provides student with special needs with “supplementary, direct instructional services in content, learning strategies, and progress monitoring in academics, transition, or social communication skills” (Los Angeles Unified School District, n.d.).

Resource room: A designated classroom or room where students with special needs can have their special education program delivered individually or in a small group setting (Watson, 2018).

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations

Limitations are restrictions within the study over which the researcher has no control (Rudestam & Newton, 2007). Limitations in this study included sampling methods and time constraints. The sampling method only represented a small sample size of elementary SETs, which cannot be generalized to the larger population of elementary SETs. Also, the study’s population was limited to elementary SETs, meaning the results cannot be generalized to SETs who work in secondary settings. Additionally, the sample size was small. This descriptive qualitative case study data collection methods were limited to a survey, an interview, and member checking.

Delimitations

Delimitations naturally occur from specific choices made to conduct the study (Price & Murnan, 2013). This study was designed to focus only on elementary SETs. It is at the elementary level when most students are evaluated to determine eligibility for special education services. Interactions with other SETs are limited at the elementary levels and SETs rely on their

administrators such as principals or vice principals for support rather than the general education teachers. Therefore, I felt it was important in this study to focus on SETs' perception of burnout and their perception of special education teacher support. Additionally, an uneven ratio of participants was a delimitation for this case study. The research questions and the closed-ended Likert scale responses in the survey were also delimitations.

Summary

There is a phenomenon of SETs shortages nationwide. Research has indicated that SETs have a challenging job due to the ongoing changes in special education, countless responsibilities, including paperwork, and unclear job description and expectations (Garwood et al., 2018). Furthermore, SETs have reported they are not provided with the proper training from their teacher programs and their school districts (Young, 2018). SETs come into their positions as educators right out of their teacher programs and are required to take on the challenge of being a special educator. However, SETs do not feel prepared to take on these challenges and lack guidance and direction (Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2017). According to Garwood et al. (2018), SETs face job challenges and lack of support and training, which have led to high levels of stress and burnout. Garwood et al. (2018) added that burnout is known to be the main cause for many special educators leaving their positions.

The review of literature of this descriptive study suggested that a significant amount of research has been conducted in the areas of SET burnout, challenges faced by special educators, and SET shortages. However, some of the studies examining these topics are outdated. Because SET shortages and burnout continue to be a problem, the topic warranted further investigation

(Bettini et al., 2017; Garwood et al., 2018). Furthermore, very little research had been conducted on SET perception of special education teacher support.

The purposed of this study was to examine SET perception of burnout and SET perception of special education teacher support. The framework for this study was burnout theory, which was developed by Herbert Freudenberger and later applied by other psychologists, psychiatrists, and scientists (Heinemann & Heinemann, 2017). In this chapter, I addressed the causes that lead to stress and SET burnout. I also addressed how administrators can support their SETs to lessen stress levels. Burnout was defined as a psychological and emotional disorder that occurs among individuals who work with other people in some capacity.

In this chapter, I also explained the limitations and delimitations of the study. I described the research question and rationale for this study and provided definitions of of terms to help facilitate the understanding of the study. The research population consisted of public elementary school SETs. Data collection was conducted through a burnout survey sent to SETs, one interview, and member checking. Interviews were analyzed and transcribed. The sample size for this study was small. The number of participants for this case study was 13. There were three male SETs and 10 female SETs. Data analysis and findings are discussed in summative form. A summative summary of restrictions is also included.

The phenomenon of SET shortages is affecting districts across the nation (Garwood et al., 2018; Hinds, Jones, Gua, Forrester, & Biglan, 2015; Cancio et al., 2018). Research has been consistent in its findings regarding the challenges SETs face that have led SETs to leave their positions prematurely (Dewey et al., 2017; Bettini et al., 2017). Research has indicated that there are a lot of challenges and expectations put on SETs that lead to SET burnout (Bettini, Jones,

Brownell, Conroy, & Leite, 2018; Cancio et al., 2018; Garwood et al., 2018). Garwood et al. (2018) added that the most faced challenges by SETs include unclear job descriptions, lack of training, and changes in special education laws. In this study, I explored the challenges SETs face and provided additional answers to the leading causes of burnout when it relates to the research questions being explored in this research.

The survey and interviews in this study add validity to the existing phenomenon. Collected surveys are described in qualitative form. Interviews were recorded, transcribed and analyzed for accuracy. Data collected was destroyed and deleted after it was transcribed and analyzed. In this study, I provided participants with awareness of their risk for burnout, an understanding of their perception of special education teacher support, and their perception of burnout. Based on my results, I also provided recommendations on how to cope with stress and it provides opportunities for positive change to reduce stress levels that lead to burnout. This case study contributed to the field of SET burnout, but the topic needs further study. In this case study, I only addressed a small fraction of the causes of SET burnout.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This qualitative research study focused on the growing phenomenon of SET burnout. Burnout is the “inability to cope with work-related stress, and associated with deteriorated social relation, long-term exhaustion and diminished interest in the profession” (Sarıçam & Sakız, 2014, p. 423). The published literature on this subject has indicated that SET burnout is a problem. However, most of the available research examining SET burnout is not current. For this qualitative descriptive study, I focused on a specific county in a Western U.S. state where there is concern about SET shortages. In this case study, I investigated SETs’ perception of burnout and their perception of SET support. Findings provided special educators with encouragement and ideas on how to reduce stress that can lead to burnout.

SET burnout has been identified as one of the main causes for the shortage of SETs, which has cost districts thousands of dollars (Tyler & Brunner, 2014). In addition to costing the district money, it is also interfering with student services (Tyler & Brunner, 2014). For example, Tyler and Brunner (2014) indicated that districts hire SETs who are not properly prepared or trained to work with students with disabilities. Therefore, students do not receive the proper service intervention. Similarly, Williams and Dikes (2017) reported that due to the high rate of SET attrition, the quality of service provided to students with disabilities decreases because SETs are being hired from out of the field of special education (p. 337). Furthermore, Sarıçam and Sakız (2014) stated that as the numbers of SETs decrease, the quality of service provided to students also decreases. Jones et al. (2013) indicated that SETs come into the field of special education with knowledge gained from teacher preparation programs, but that they are not trained to deal with the realities and challenges that come with being special educators.

Special education is defined as a program that provides a service in either academics or social development or both to individuals who show a significance level of need compare to their peers (Nuri et al., 2017). Shepherd et al. (2016) defined special education as a free specialized instruction designed for individual students with special needs. Lavian (2015) indicated that special education is very complex because students with disabilities can have cognitive, behavioral, skills acquisitions, and other learning difficulties (Nuri et al., 2017). Additionally, Lavian (2015) stated that SETs require special skills in teaching and depth knowledge of their students' needs to develop the right service plan for each individual student. SETs must be prepared to learn how to balance their time and responsibilities and how to handle new challenges that come with special education to be able to avoid becoming overwhelmed with stress and experiencing burnout (Brownell et al., 2018). In the same way, new SETs also need to be prepared to take on the challenges of being special educators. Cancio et al. (2018) indicated that SETs that lacked experience in the profession were at a higher risk for burnout. Bettini et al. (2017) stated that in addition to challenges that come with special education, new teachers have "less access to instructional mentorship" (p. 113) because they may be the only SET at their site and their responsibilities are different than those of their coworkers.

The Study Topic

Prior research supports that there is a shortage of SETs related to burnout (Sarıçam & Sakız, 2014). To ensure that SETs have a positive experience in their positions as special educators, it is important to understand the exact causes behind burnout to be able to better support special educators and limit their stress. Bettini et al. (2017) indicated that it is not only important to understand the role of the SET but also the factors that contribute to the stress

causing burnout. This study investigated SETs' perception of burnout and their perception of lack of support. SETs become effective and are successful in their positions when they are supported by administrators and other colleagues (Caputo & Langher, 2015). Langher et al. (2017) indicated that many SETs feel isolated and lonely and are affected by burnout when they are not provided with the support they need.

For the purpose of this study, I was concerned with the challenges faced by SETs and how SETs view SET burnout. SET burnout is significant because burnout leads to teachers leaving their positions as special educators, affecting districts economically and negatively impacting student services and performance (Ansley et al., 2016). Garwood et al. (2018) indicated that the job of the special educator is one of the “most challenging and stressful jobs in education” (p. 30) and as a result, many special educators are at a high risk of experiencing burnout.

The Context

There is a high rate of SET turnover due to job-related stress (Langher et al., 2017). Yearly, many SET positions in districts across the Western U.S. state where this study was conducted become available and many of those positions remain unfilled throughout the school year, as confirmed through a search of Edjoin.com, a national education jobs site. The targeted county of focus is Central County (pseudo name). The Central County Office of Education's website indicated that there are 24 school districts in the county and that all districts serve a diverse group of students. The estimated student population in Central County is approximately 77,000. 78.4 % of the student population is Hispanic or Latino and 13.3% is white. Twenty out of the 24 school districts are Title 1 funded. The special educator's role is very challenging and

requires a lot of time and energy to meet endless tasks and responsibilities (Garwood et al., 2018). The demographics of the student population in Central County may account for the shortage of SETs, because meeting the needs of a diverse student body brings about additional challenges to the role for the special educator.

The Significance

Schools across the nation are experiencing a substantial problem with SET shortages due to burnout (Bettini et al., 2018). District are hiring new SETs straight out of their teacher programs and these teachers are struggling to stay in the classroom because they are not prepared to deal with the overwhelming demands and challenges of special education (Al-Hiary, Almakani, & Tabbal, 2015; Da Fonte, & Barton-Arwood, 2017). Some challenges SETs face include the increased demands of academic challenges to support students, student behaviors, and growing school responsibilities or duties (Garwood et al., 2018). Rock et al. (2016) added challenges such as workload, unclear role, and evaluation. Furthermore, SETs need to have knowledge and skills in the areas of assessment, collaboration, planning, and delivering effective intervention to students with a variety of needs (Rock et al., 2016).

In addition to the many demands, SETs are also learning to adapt to new policies and programs that deal with special education. Policies related to NCLB, IDEA, and LRE are adding extra stress for special educators (Glowacki & Hackmann, 2016; Shepherd et al., 2016).

Problem Statement

Research has shown that there is a shortage of SETs because of the challenges and demands they face as educators (Dewey et al., 2017; Langher et al., 2017). Williams and Dikes (2017) stated that the challenging role of the special educator can lead to burnout. It is important

for SETs to understand their role as special educators and identify ways to deal with stress that can lead to experiencing burnout. The problem on which this study focused is SET burnout; I explored how SETs cope with the demands of their positions and what supports are in place for them to help them with the challenges they face as educators. For the purpose of this study, I gathered information on SETs' perceptions of burnout and SET support.

Organization

To gather information for this study, I conducted a literature search. In this chapter, I discuss and synthesize the literature on my study topic, beginning with the conceptual framework that guided this study. I then review the broader literature on SETs, beginning with special education teachers and preparations for the profession. I then review literature on roles and responsibilities of special education teachers, including teaching in inclusive classrooms. I then move on to discuss literature on special education burnout. Lastly, I review literature on attrition of special education teachers, coupled with literature on support of administration and training and resources. After I review of the relevant research, I review literature on methodological issues, synthesis of research, and critique of previous research. Lastly, I include a summary of the findings from the literature review.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that guided this study was burnout theory, first introduced by Herbert Freudenberger in 1974 (Capri & Guler, 2018; Freudenberger, 1974; Heinemann & Heinemann, 2017). Christina Maslach and colleagues later further developed the theory. Freudenberger described burnout syndrome and provided preventive measures (Heinemann & Heinemann, 2017). He based his conclusion of burnout in various qualitative studies he

conducted (Zaretsky & Katz, 2019). Freudenberger's studies were based on interviews of individuals with different vocations. He defined burnout as "a state of physical, emotional, and psychological weariness of tiredness" (Zaretsky & Katz, 2019, p. 132). He also described the signs of burnout as feeling exhausted, de-personalized, having low level of interest in work, being fatigued, and having a lingering cold, ongoing headaches, gastrointestinal problems, sleeplessness, and shortness of breath (Freudenberger, 1974, p. 160; Zaretsky & Katz, 2019). Some behaviors of individuals experiencing burnout identified by Freudenberger (1974) included being quick to anger and becoming easily irritated and frustrated.

Zaretsky and Katz (2019) indicated that the teaching profession is one of the professions most characterized by burnout. Zaretsky and Katz (2019) stated that burnout is related to personal characteristics of teachers (p. 132). Teacher characteristics prone to burnout include anxiety, lack of security, nervousness, being passive, introversion, worrying about what others think, fear of making mistakes, self-criticism, becoming frustrated easily, and having little experience as a teacher. Capri and Guler (2018) indicated that SETs are at higher risk for burnout and that the numbers of special educators experiencing burnout have increased.

Christina Maslach is a prominent scholar in the field of burnout studies (Heinemann & Heinemann, 2017). Maslach's definition of burnout is "a psychological syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment" (Langballe, Falkum, Innstrand, & Aasland, 2006; Maslach et al., 2015). Maslach et al. (2015) focused on measuring burnout, whereas Freudenberger focused on behavior characteristics-based observations (Heinemann & Heinemann, 2017). Maslach et al. (2015) focused on measures of exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy, as expressed in the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) (Heinemann &

Heinemann, 2017; Langballe et al., 2006; Maslach et al., 2015). The MBI continues to be one of the most used tools for measuring burnout and has been used to measure teacher burnout (Langballe et al., 2006; Maslach et al., 2015). There are 22 items on the MBI; the inventory is designed to gather information on personal feelings and attitudes of respondents (Maslach et al., 2015).

In the fields of psychiatry and psychology, burnout syndrome is viewed as a mental disorder (Heinemann & Heinemann, 2017). However, Heinemann and Heinemann (2017) clarified that burnout syndrome has not been included in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4th ed. or the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 5th ed. (DSM-5). However, it is included as an additional diagnosis in the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems.

Special Education Teachers and Preparation for the Profession

SET programs try to make sure that SETs enter the field of special education ready to cope with responsibilities and demands; however, many SETs are challenged to put the skills they have learned into practice. Furthermore, SETs are challenged by managing the many tasks required in special education (Jones et al., 2013). Johnson and Semmelroth (2014) commented that many teachers lack preparation to deliver special education services, and those who come into the classroom with good background pre-service training struggle keeping up with instruction because preparation time is taken by other duties. De Stasio, Fiorilli, and Benevene (2017) added that special educators require special skills and resources to support students with different ability levels along with diverse socioemotional and learning needs. Johnson and Semmelroth (2014) added that SETs need to be prepared to work in different settings such as in

collaboration with the general education teachers, pulling students to the resource room for individualized instruction, teaching in a self-contained classroom, working as a consultant, and being able to provide support to general education teachers who have students with disabilities placed in their classrooms. Johnson and Semmelroth (2014) stated that in addition to being able to teach a diverse group of students and know how to individualize instruction, SETs must also be able to write Individual Learning Plans (IEPs) and set appropriate individual goals and accommodations. To produce quality special education programs, stronger preparation programs must be developed (Al-Hiary et al., 2015). SET preparation programs need to focus on how to work with heterogeneous groups of students across different settings and individualized instruction, which will prevent SET attrition and support retention (Johnson & Semmelroth, 2014).

In the past, teacher preparation programs struggled to equip SETs with strategies to deal with the realities of classroom life (Jones et al., 2013, p. 365). Such strategies included the good instructional and good classroom management skills, familiarity with curricula being used by the district, and ability to adapt to the professional norms and procedures of their school (Jones et al., 2013). More recently, Young (2018) stated that the field of special education has evolved over the years, which has also caused a shift in the complexity of the role of the special educator. Therefore, SET preparation programs are focused in specific skills to prepare their teacher and they also provide preparation for licensure (Young, 2018). Bettini et al. (2017) stated that SETs benefit from a mentoring support program after they leave their teacher preparation program. Mentoring programs support “teachers’ skills, students’ achievement, and teachers’ intentions to continue teaching” (Bettini et al., 2017, p. 112).

Most importantly, the literature has shown that current trends in education need to be evaluated by teacher programs so that they can effectively transition their SETs into the classroom (Leko, Brownell, Sindelar, & Kiely, 2015). Bettini et al. (2017) stated that “teacher preparation programs alone cannot provide SETs all knowledge and skills necessary to effectively serve students with disabilities” (p. 111). Bettini et al. (2018) indicated that SETs can experience burnout when they are not able to manage their job responsibilities and it is the responsibility of administrators to support SETs with the tools they need to manage their responsibilities. Leko et al. (2015) also indicated that Common Core State Standards (CCSS) present a significant challenge to SETs. Leko et al. (2015) stated that SETs are pressured to develop and support rigorous content instruction due to CCSS. SETs need to be proficient in the areas of intervention, assessments, and technology to support students with special needs as required by CCSS (Leko et al., 2015).

Teacher programs also seem to be “front loading” skills necessary for SETs to transition into the classrooms; however, this approach is not adequate for teachers to succeed in their positions (Nuri et al., 2017). There are many duties and responsibilities required by SETs that are not taught by teacher programs; this disconnect has led to teacher burnout (Lavian, 2015). High burnout has led to SET shortages; therefore, teacher preparation programs and other contributing factors need to be evaluated to prevent burnout within the special education field (Nuri et al., 2017).

Additionally, collaboration skills are a crucial component of current trends in education; however, consulting with general education teachers and previous methods of collaboration are not enough (Killoran et al., 2013). The type of collaboration that is needed requires much

higher focus and discipline (Killoran et al., 2013). Leko et al. (2015) indicated that collaboration needs to be effective, which will lead to coherent evidence-based tiered instruction.

Collaboration skills need to include “collecting and interpreting initial and ongoing assessment data, planning precise classroom and intervention instruction that is carefully coordinated and targets the key CCSS content skills students with special needs need to master, measuring students’ response to classroom or intervention instructions, and making changes to instructional plans based on the assessment data” (Leko et al., 2015, p. 82).

The Education for All Handicap Children Act was signed into law in 1975 and was then revised in 1990 as the Individuals with Disability Act (IDEA). In 1997, a further revision of IDEA established a whole school approach to inclusion. IDEA is a detailed and comprehensive federal law that addresses the needs of students with disabilities (Shepherd et al., 2016; Yell, Conroy, Katsiyannis, & Conroy, 2016). The shifts and changes of special education law make the role of qualified SETs complicated, bringing added stress to special educators, which has led to teacher burnout (Mason-Williams, Frederick, & Mulcahy, 2015).

Furthermore, SET shortages have been an ongoing concern, but since the inaction of IDEA many school districts have experience trouble with finding and securing certified SETs (Brownell et al., 2018). Lack of securing qualified SETs affect providing students a FAPE (Brownell et al., 2018). Furthermore, Yell et al. (2016) confirmed that under IDEA, district nation-wide have the responsibility to offer and provide FAPE to students who have been identified as students with special needs. Yell et al. (2016) provided the definition of FAPE in the IDEA, which requires further clarity. Special education and related services need to be provided at public expenses, under supervision and direction, and without charge. Standards

need to be met under the state educational agency. It needs to include an appropriate preschool, elementary, or secondary school education. and provide conformity with the individualized education program (p. 20).

Additionally, former NCLB had a negative impact on special education because the qualification for the special educator was not defined (Brownell et al., 2018; Shepherd et al., 2016). NCLB had a universal definition for a highly qualified teacher. NCLB required that all teachers attained a bachelor's degree, state certification or licensure, and competence in the core subject areas teachers teach (Brownell et al., 2018). Brownell et al. (2018) added that this universal definition of "one size fits all" did not reflect the unique role and skills of the special educator. SETs must meet the needs of a diverse population of students with a wide range of special needs, which goes beyond being competent on just one core subject (Brownell et al., 2018). NCLB focused on measuring achievement gaps of underserved students to improve and provide quality education for all children (U. S. Department of Education, 2017). Shepherd et al. (2016) stated that NCLB along with IDEA required that students with disabilities receive scientifically based instruction and intervention to ensure student success. Furthermore, IDEA and NCLB were responsible for increasing standardize testing within PK through 12th grade, which brought additional implications to the role of the special educator (Shepherd et al., 2016, p. 84). Under President Obama's administration Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) replace NCLB (U. S. Department of Education, 2017). Unlike NCLB, ESSA is meant to provide a clear goal to fully prepare all students for success for their future. ESSA include provisions that are focus on student success (U. S. Department of Education, n.d.).

Working as a special educator is not only a complex career; it is also self-sacrifice because most SETs extend themselves to support their students (Lavian, 2015). SETs are committed to support their students regardless of the complexity of their jobs, but often end up quitting their positions because of high levels of stress, burnout, and their perception of poor school climate (Lavian, 2015). In addition, Lavian stated that job complexity increases when there are many features and dimensions in one concept as in the case of a student with special needs. The concept (a student with special needs) may have many areas of needs and the special educator must provide an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) to meet every need of the student (Mason-Williams et al., 2015). The commitment and dedication to serve students with special needs requires ongoing change and adaptations (Sweigart & Collins, 2017). Features and dimensions include the complexity of the students' disabilities and achievements skills and the different age levels (Lavian, 2015; Mason-Williams et al., 2015). It includes students with cognitive disabilities, behavior problems, and other challenging difficulties. The commitment and dedication level that is put in to support their students is not the only complexity (Vlachou, Didaskalou, & Kontofryou, 2015). There is also the added complexity that comes when dealing with parents. Parents can sometimes blame SETs for their children's discrepancies in academics, social skills and emotional problems. Lavian (2015) indicated that all these complex duties can lead to high level of stress and burnout.

Roles and Responsibilities of Special Education Teachers

SETs have countless of responsibilities that need to be addressed and teacher programs are not effectively teaching what they need to enter their positions as special educators (Brunsting et al., 2014). Other responsibilities include instructional tasks, developing Individual

Educational Plans (IEP) for each individual student, IEP meetings, paperwork, collaboration, teaching, identification of strengths and weakness, monitoring progress, assessments, and many other noninstructional (Al-Hiary et al., 2015; Brunsting et al., 2014; Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2017). Garwood et al. (2018) indicated that “special education teachers have one of the most challenging and stressful jobs in public education” (p. 31).

In addition to the responsibilities, SETs need to be skilled in every area of their role as educators to be able to meet the needs of students with special needs (Collins, & Ludlow, 2018). Skills SETs need to have include having depth knowledge of strategies to support their pupils, know how to provide a supportive learning environment, reevaluate teaching methods, how to empower students and many other roles and responsibilities (Lavian, 2015). Due to the ongoing demands and responsibilities, SET are experiencing exhaustion and high level of stress leading to teacher burnout (Brunsting et al., 2014). Additionally, Langher et al. (2017) stated that SETs face diverse challenging situation and complex demands compared to general education teachers. Some of those challenges include making sure that all students’ needs are met, tasks managing, work overload, and program development and structure. Furthermore, SETs may experience felling like they lack job success. Lavian (2015) commented that SETs who enter the special education field with positive attitudes and with confidence often have a rude awaking by the day-to-day challenges and the role complexity of their jobs. Lavian (2015) stated that in role complexity an individual is expected to complete many tasks but fails at completing them all.

Another crucial role for SETs requires that they have the skills to handle student behavior challenges displayed by students who cover up for their academic challenges and those of students with emotional behavior problems (Garwood et al., 2018). Some of the most

challenging behaviors displayed by students with emotional difficulties are aggressive behaviors towards teachers. Lavian (2105) stated that SETs must have in depth knowledge of their students' needs to be successful when working with them. This includes challenging behaviors, which include aggressive behaviors. Challenging behaviors can be overwhelming for SETs and can cause teachers to experience burnout and leave their positions (Cancio, Albercht, & Johns, 2014; Cancio et al., 2018; Garwood et al., 2018).

Furthermore, new policies in education require SETs to have skills in co-teaching, which bring them different types of challenges (Hamdan, Anuar, & Khan, 2016). Responsibilities within co-teaching include being alert to the needs of students with disabilities, being prepared to teach different subjects, and understanding individual needs of students, and their welfare. Collaboration is another skill that SETs need to have as a co-teacher. Skills included in collaboration include “co-planning instruction within the class, school and staff efforts for inclusion, shared attitude toward disability, and relevance attributed to inclusion” (Caputo & Langher, 2015, p. 212). Friend, Cook, Humberger, Hurley-Chamberlain and Shamberger (2010) indicated that in collaboration teams develop appropriate educational strategies to support students with disabilities. Furthermore, collaboration requires that special education teachers have a close net relationship with parents, paraprofessionals, and other educators who work directly with students to maximize their academic learning (Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2017).

Teaching in Inclusive Classrooms

Federal laws such as NCLB and IDEA require that students with disabilities be placed in the LRE, adding on extra duties and stress on special education teachers (Glowacki & Hackmann, 2016; Shepherd et al., 2016). Under NCLB, SETs felt pressured because all

students, including those with special needs needed to be assessed in reading and math and they were required to show academic growth (Klein, 2015). NCLB and IDEA agreed that general education and special education teachers collaborate to ensure that students with special needs receive scientifically based instruction and interventions to guarantee student success (Shepherd et al., 2016). Due to the added stress, there has been higher rates of special education teacher (SET) burnout and teacher shortages (Bettini et al., 2018; Rock et al., 2016). Shepherd et al. (2016) indicated that due to the many changes with special education policies, the definition of special education under IDEA needs to be revisited and revise to include a framework that correctly defines the roles of special education that include the inclusive classroom and collaboration.

The inclusive classroom as LRE has become the most used special education program in public education (Cambridge-Johnson et al., 2014). Additionally, Cambridge-Johnson et al. (2014) indicated that the National Commission on Special Education (NCSE) defined inclusive education is “a method of educating a child in need of special education in the general education classroom, on the school that child would have attended if not disabled, with appropriate age peers, and with appropriate support and services” (p. 3). Finally, collaboration has been defined as a professional partnership between two or more coequal educators, who share responsibility, accountability, and resources” (Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2017, p. 99).

Inclusion was established by the Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA). Collins, and Ludlow (2018) indicated that in 1983 Brown, Ford and colleagues believed that children with disabilities should have the right to attend school with their same age peers that do not have disabilities, however there are barriers that exist in the inclusive setting. Ashfaq and

Rana (2015) commented that for inclusion to be successful, teachers need to be properly trained, need to have professional development, a positive attitude, be able to collaborate, and use technology. Collaboration with general education teachers and other professionals is a skill that SETs must have to make the inclusive classroom effective (Shepherd et al., 2016). Additionally, Rock et al. (2016) added that SETs need to be knowledgeable of their different roles as educators, planning, and collaboration with diverse professionals, be able to deliver effective interventions to a diverse group of students. Furthermore, additional information and different types of training should be made available to support SETs working in inclusion programs (Shepherd et al., 2016). Training should include consulting and cooperative teaching, working with instructional assistants, and other team members. Ashfaq and Rana (2015) also suggests that SETs need additional professional development training in the areas of inclusion. De Stasio, Fiorilli, and Benevene (2017) stated “Indeed, the nature of special education teaching is that it requires full use of specialized skills and resources to cater for different levels of ability and meet increasingly diverse socioemotional and learning needs on the part of students” (p. 471).

Inclusion as the LRE can be successful if SETs have the right attitude. Cambridge-Johnson et al. (2014) stated that teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion can be essential in student success, however there are many added roles that SETs have been assigned creating barriers and affecting SETs’ attitudes. Caputo and Langher (2015) stated that inclusion can include co-teaching, but most often fails because of lack of support and ineffective practices leading to burnout. Teachers’ negative attitudes towards inclusion is often developed when they are not provided with support and proper training, which can lead to teacher burnout. Caputo and Langher (2015) indicated that in inclusion programs collaboration between special education and

general education teachers is a must, however there is ambiguity when it comes to teacher role. Killoran et al. (2013) commented that policies that embrace inclusion to accommodate students with disabilities do not understand that inclusion involves a lot more than what we realize, and it is and difficult for SETs.

There are many challenges worldwide in education especially with the implementation of inclusion (Cambridge-Johnson et al., 2014; Shani & Hebel, 2016). De Stasio, Fiorilli, and Benevene (2017) focused on Italian's special education inclusive programs. Italy's special education system is not much different than in the United States. Student with disabilities are placed in mainstreamed classrooms and SETs co-teach with general education teachers. Their special education programs have different programs and strategies that are tied in with the general education curriculum. Both Italy and the United States, are concern with the availability of qualified have SETs. Many SETs are not adequately trained and are challenged with effectively meeting the needs of students with disabilities and often end up with burnout syndrome (De Stasio, Fiorilli, & Benevene, 2017).

Moreover, inclusion is an ongoing practice and there are many barriers that need to be identified to be able to effectively implement and meet the needs of student with disabilities placed in the inclusive classroom. Because of those unidentified barriers, many SETs are experiencing frustration, distress, anger, and lack poise when it comes to their ability to work with students with disabilities (Shani & Hebel, 2016). Garwood et al. (2018) indicated that SETs are overloaded with roles and responsibilities, which includes teaching in the inclusive setting. Shani and Hebel, 2016, commented that policies involving inclusion need to understand the ongoing and daily demands put on SETs to be able to remove any barriers that impede the

success of inclusion. Ashfaq and Rana (2015) indicated that research has concluded that SETs need training in inclusion because there is a disconnect between student achievement and accommodating practices. Moreover, based on Shani and Hebel's (2016) interviews, there are not many schools that focus on adequately preparing their SET teachers for inclusion programs.

Collaboration between educational stakeholders is imperative in inclusive practices because it helps design the inclusive classroom (Killoran et al., 2013). Killoran et al. (2013) added that the role of the special educator is vague, and it needs to be defined so that it supports students with special needs and their general education teachers. By defining the special educator's role, it will support in alleviating some of the stress level relating to the vagueness of their position as special educators including working with general education teachers and with students with special needs (Killoran et al., 2013; Rock et al., 2016). It is also imperative that general education teachers are knowledgeable in inclusion to be able to support students with disabilities placed in their classrooms. However, Shani and Hebel (2016) indicated that general education teachers are not prepared to be able to work in an inclusive classroom. When general education teachers are not trained in teaching an inclusive classroom, it adds stress on SETs (Killoran et al., 2013).

Additionally, collaboration is a difficult and challenging task when working with general education teachers (Ashfaq & Rana, 2015; Mason-Williams et al., 2015). Hamdan et al. (2016) stated that Friend et al. (2010) referred to collaboration as collaborative teaching or co-teaching. For collaboration to be effective, professionals need to be willingly involved and have common goals. Killoran et al. (2013) found that there is a gap on what is effective collaboration.

According to Ashfaq and Rana (2015) there are three different collaboration support systems

used by schools. They include the Consulting Teacher Model (CTM), Supportive Resource Program (SRP), and the Instructional Assistant (IA). The CTM involves co-teaching with the general education teacher. Both teachers develop curriculum and instructional strategies to support students with disabilities who are mainstreamed in the general education setting. Cancio et al. (2018) indicated that collaboration with general education teachers can be a stressful and demanding task and that SETs need the support of their administrators to avoid burnout and have for SET to have job satisfaction. Small group instruction is also part of the CTM. In the CTM, the SET acts as a consultant or a coach for the general education teacher. SRP model allows teachers to collaborate with each other on individual curriculum that gets taught in the resource room. Skills that are learned in the resource room transfer into the general education classroom. Through the IA support system, the IA works with a one-on-one student throughout the day within the general education classroom or/and alternative location. All three consulting models can be a challenging task because of the challenges that come with of collaborating with others (Hamdan et al., 2016; Rock et al., 2016).

In the same matter, Bettini et al. (2015) reported on the importance of social support through collaboration. However, Da Fonte and Barton-Arwood (2017) stated that there is fear of lack of time to collaborate by both special and general teachers. It is when there are mutual relationships with colleagues that tends to reduce teacher turnover. Social interaction and relationships build on the Vygotsky's social constructivist theory. Cambridge-Johnson et al. (2014) noted that "Vygotsky (1978) believed that knowledge is shaped or constructed through social influences and interactions within one's environment" (p. 2). Administrators must make time for SETs and general education teachers to collaborate with each other to develop mutual

relationships, encourage special and general education teachers to share equal responsibilities through collaboration, and provided time for them to meet and plan for collaboration (Cambridge-Johnson et al., 2014). Caputo and Langher (2015) talked about the importance of general education teachers supporting SETs so that SETs feel they are part of a team and for them to feel greater success. Previous studies indicate that when SETs experience lack of congenial support can lead to emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and burnout (Caputo & Langher, 2015). Shin et al. (as cited in Hamdan et al., 2016) found that lack of training, opportunities of co-plan and lack of feedback from general education teachers, negatively affects SETs.

Additionally, the role of the SETs as a collaborator extends to parents (Ashfaq & Rana, 2015). When collaboration takes place with parents, students' instructional goals, individual learning plans, and standardized testing are planned to accommodate students. Collaborating with parents requires special attention to monitor student progress and support (Shani & Hebel, 2016). In 2004, IDEA recognized parents as part of the Individual Learning Plan (IEP) team and they play an important role of their child's evaluation process (Mereoiu, Abercrombie, & Murray, 2016). Furthermore, establishing and maintaining collaborative partnerships with parents can be a challenge because it requires SETs to have "skills, knowledge, experience, and professional wisdom" (Mereoiu et al., 2016, p. 2).

Factors of Special Education Teacher Burnout

Schools across the nation have been impacted by SET burnout. Burnout has caused many SETs to leave their positions prematurely and many SET positions remain unfilled (Garwood et al., 2018; Tyler & Brunner, 2014). Burnout is related to work demands that lead to

psychological and physical problems (Ansley et al., 2016); De Stasio, Fiorilli, & Benevene, 2017). Maslach et al. (2015) stated that job burnout refers to the condition in which individuals experience physical and psychological exhaustion when working under pressure. Hinds et al. (2015) defined burnout as “(a) emotional exhaustion, in which the person feels physical fatigue and a lack of emotion; (b) depersonalization, in which the person feels a lack of personal connection with others; and (c) feeling of personal accomplishment” (p. 284). Furthermore, Gong et al. (2013) added that burnout is “a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment” (p. 970).

Furthermore, De Stasio, Fiorilli, and Benevene, (2017) continued that there are two types of burnout and both are related to physical and psychological fatigue and exhaustion. The first is work-related burnout, which is defined “as the degree of physical and psychological fatigue and exhaustion perceived by the teacher specifically in relation to his/her work” (p. 473). The second is student related burnout which “refers to the physical and psychological fatigue and exhaustion that is perceived by teacher in relation to his/ her work with students (p. 473).

Biglan, Layton, Jones, Hankins, and Rusby (2013) conducted a study to increase psychological flexibility among early childhood SETs and improve stress, depression, and burnout. Three self-perception variables were used in the study. The first variable was experimental avoidance. In this first variable, the individual tries to avoid unpleasant situations, thoughts, or sensing burnout. The second variable is mindful awareness. In this second variable, the individual is aware of 'thoughts and feelings to get a sense of self. Finally, the third variable is valued living. This last variable has to do with the individual's relationships and his or her wellbeing. This psychological flexibility study concluded that when SETs are missing the self-

perception variables of experimental avoidance, mindful awareness, and value living, they may experience emotional and physical exhaustion, which can lead to depression and burnout (Biglan et al., 2013).

Brunsting et al. (2014) indicated that burnout is related to SETs putting students first because student outcome is a priority rather than self-care. Garwood et al. (2018) stated that SETs who can set limits to added demands and put their own emotions ahead of students are able to fight burnout, which is a high level of self-efficacy and SETs are able to survive in the field of special education. Garwood et al. (2018) commented of the importance for SETs to have self-awareness about their own emotions because they can easily confuse students' problems and struggles as their own. Additionally, Hinds et al. (2015) stated that trying to avoid one's emotions can lead to developing psychological problems, which can lead to burnout or depression. The act of avoiding one's emotions is also known as experimental avoidance. Caputo and Langher (2015) indicated that SET burnout was related to how teachers view their ability levels, personal accomplishment, depersonalization, and being emotionally exhausted.

Additionally, Braun-Lewensohn (2016) stated that stress is the main cause for SET burnout. Gong et al. (2013) stated that individuals who experience burnout, suffer from being psychologically exhausted and may feel drained. Furthermore, when feeling psychologically exhausted the individual may feel used by others. Moreover, individual may feel strain or chronic fatigue from being overloaded with work. Teachers who experience psychological stress, feel job dissatisfaction and are regularly absent from work (Romanowska, 2013). Ansley et al. (2016) also indicated that burnout leads to absenteeism, which affects student academic performance and in some case students' disruptive behavior may increase due to lack of

consistency when the teacher is absent. Yu, Wang, Zhai, Dai, and Yang (2015) indicated that professionals who are experiencing burnout are not able to cope with daily job demands. Ansley et al. (2016) indicated that SETs, who are experiencing burnout, function at work by “fight or flight” (p. 177). Fight or flight is how the individual response to when he or she is under stress. When the individual experience stress, the body releases hormones such adrenaline and cortisol. These hormones increase heart rate, respiration problems, and muscle tension. The body of an individual experiencing stress can go back to normal when the stressful situation is resolved.

Furthermore, Romanowska (2013) stated that burnout takes place in the psyche of people, which affects interpersonal relationships, feeling failure, and worthless. It also affects professionalism, interpersonal and organizational skills. Additionally, Romanowska (2013) specified that burnout can be separated into active and passive categories. The active type is displayed by an increase in aggressiveness and anger. In the classroom, the active type SET may get not have patience with their students, become irritated with them, or may be hostile toward them (Romanowska, 2013). In the same way, Williams and Dikes (2017) indicated that burnout can be displayed through a change of attitude in which the individual may become negative and be short tempered. Furthermore, individuals who experience burnout display sarcastic attitudes and are negative about themselves and their job performance (Williams & Dikes, 2017, p. 339). Finally, the passive category “is characterized by a decrease in activity, social isolation and withdrawal” (Romanowska, 2013, p. 74). In the classroom the SET might display an attitude of absenteeism, reduce work performance, low efficiency (Romanowska, 2013). Romanowska (2013) added that SETs may lack bonding with their students, less praise, and quality of services

may be reduced. Hinds et al. (2015) also cautioned that stress levels of burnout can lead to professional isolation because of the many demands on special education.

Additionally, SETs who are experiencing burnout have higher rates of substance abuse, chronic fatigue, and insomnia (Garwood et al., 2018). Yu et al. (2015) also mentioned depression, anxiety, alcoholism, headaches, smoking, sleep problems, self-efficacy, and tachycardia. Furthermore, long persistent stress can result in mental health problems and low self-esteem problems (De Stasio, Fiorilli, & Benevene, 2017). Other health issues related to burnout, include “colds, recurrent flu, and musculoskeletal pain” (Brunsting et al., 2014).

De Stasio, Fiorilli, and Benevene (2017) added that burnout not only affects health, but also personal well-being, and work commitment. Hinds et al. (2015) indicated that burnout affects health with psychological and psychosomatic symptoms. Moreover, physically stress induces hormones that cause hypertension, insomnia, depression, and gastrointestinal disorders. Also, psychologically stress affects the digestive system (Ansley et al., 2016). In the same note, Mapfumo et al. (2017) suggested that stress related to work is physiological and psychological interfering with headaches, indigestions, sleep problems, chest pains, obsessive behaviors, indigestion, sleep problems chest pains, obsessive behaviors, inability to concentrate, heart disease, stroke, hallucinations, and depression.

Furthermore, Romanowska, (2013) concluded that socio-professionals which includes teachers, can experience three stages of burnout. All three stages have symptoms and they can be detected. In the first stage the individual can experience chronic flu, headaches, sense of irritation, and other health issues. In the next stage, the individual can experience irritation, outburst, derogatory behavior towards others, and poor performance. In the last stage, the

individual may experience chronic physical, mental, and psychosomatic symptoms. Ansley et al. (2016) also reported that SETs have high levels of stress and they may experience headaches, stomachaches, muscle pain, develop fears, worrying, and feel apprehension. Other health factors that are affecting SETs who are experiencing burnout include escalation of heart rate, respiration problems, and muscle tension (Romanowska, 2013).

Moreover, Ugwoke et al. (2018) indicated burnout can be categorized into dysfunctional and functional distress. Dysfunctional distress refers to maladaptive and negative feelings that can lead to depression and anxiety, as previously discussed. On the other hand, functional distress is less severe because even though individuals experience some level of burnout they can function. The individual may experience sadness and respond ineffectively to stressful situations, but it does not lead to depression.

The United States is not the only country experiencing SET burnout. Other countries where SETs have been found to experience burnout include SETs in Nigeria and Israel. Nigeria has high rates of SET burnout (Ugwoke et al. (2018). Some of the symptoms Nigerian SET experience include “frustration, depression, insomnia, low appetite, suicidal ideation, job ineffectiveness, anger, exhaustion, boredom, irritability fatigue, helplessness, cynical attitude, alcoholism, and substance abuse among others” (p. 1). Braun-Lewensohn (2016) stated that SETs in Israel also experience high levels of stress. The connection of SET burnout in Israel is due to chronic work overload and change in policies.

Moreover, burnout has been connected to work overload and role ambiguity (De Stasio, Fiorilli, & Benevene, 2017). Additionally, some SETs who experience work overload and role ambiguity may experience feeling emotionally exhausted or lack accomplishment (Brunsting et

al., 2014; Caputo & Langher, 2015; Garwood et al., 2018). In which case, stress from burnout can be experience in many ways. Conley and You (2016) also stated that stress affects mental and physical health. Individuals can become depersonalized, and lack sense of personal accomplishment (Garwood et al., 2018; Hopman et al., 2017). It is when SETs become overwhelmed with frustration that they begin to experience negative emotions and begin to feel exhaustion (Brunsting et al., 2014; Garwood et al., 2018).

Just as important, Brunsting et al. (2014) indicated that SETs may also experience role ambiguity. Role ambiguity can impact job performance because responsibilities become difficult to fulfill (Garwood et al., 2018). Role ambiguity and role conflict experienced by SETs can be overwhelming and cause stress that leads to burnout.

Also, SETs who experience emotional exhaustion or burnout may lack personal accomplishment and experience depersonalization. However not all SET teachers experience the same effects of emotional exhaustion (Dubbeld, de Hoog, den Brok, & de Laat, 2017; Hopman et al., 2017). Those experiencing emotional exhaustion may feel depleted of their own emotional resources. When feeling depleted individuals may experience feeling like they have nothing left to give to others (Dubbeld et al., 2017). “Depersonalization is described in terms of the development of indifferent and negative attitudes towards students in particular” (Dubbeld et al., 2017, p. 2). Moreover, depersonalization can lead teachers to distance themselves from their students (Dubbed, de Brok, and de Laat, 2017). Teachers detach from their students to cope with feelings emotionally exhausted (Dubbed, de Brok, and de Laat, 2017). Additionally, Gong et al. (2013) stated that when individuals feel depersonalized, they may be impacted with emotions of feeling calloused and unresponsive towards others.

Moreover, depersonalization is also categorized as skepticism, insignificance, or a detached attitude towards one's work. It is difficult for SETs who suffer from burnout to be effective in their jobs and have a positive attitude towards their work. Depersonalization is caused by burnout and it interferes with meeting student's needs, developing quality, IEPs, and problem solving (Brunsting et al., 2014). SETs are less sympathetic and less tolerant towards students (De Stasio, Fiorilli, & Benevene, 2017). The overall job performance is impacted when SETs experience burnout and it can lead to SETs leaving their profession as educators (Ansley et al., 2016; Braun-Lewensohn, 2016). Ansley et al. (2016) stated that job performance is impacted when SETs become overwhelmed with testing requirements, lack of autonomy, maintaining caseload, and mental and emotional demands of making sure that they are meeting the unique needs of their students. Furthermore, the multiple roles of the SETs require them to maintain high levels of mental and physical energy (Ansley et al., p. 177). Jones et al. (2013) stated that SETs experiencing burnout is due to lack of administrative support. Relationship with students is impacted, quality of student services and paperwork decline when SETs lack the support from their administrators.

To summarize, SETs who experience high levels of stress due to lack of job clarity and work overload experience high levels of stress that lead to teacher burnout (De Stasio, Fiorilli, & Benevene, 2017). Furthermore, SETs who experience burnout, experience psychological and physical health problems (Conley & You, 2016; De Stasio, Fiorilli, & Benevene, 2017). Consequences of burnout lead to depersonalization, affecting job performance, problem solving, and student services and performance, among other. Additionally, Garwood et al. (2018) and Yu et al. (2015) stated that many physical problems arise and interfere with teachers' health in many

ways. Moreover, some SETs who experience physical and psychological problems can be impacted by alcohol or substance dependency, especially with those SETs working with students with behavior challenges (Garwood et al., 2018; Ugwoke et al., 2018). Garwood et al. (2018) stated that burned-out SETs who stay teaching are at risk for negative personal outcomes and are at higher risk for experiencing “chronic fatigue, depression, insomnia, and substance abuse” (p. 31).

Attrition of Special Education Teacher

Tyler and Brunner (2014) found that the national rate of SET attrition is at an estimate of 50% within the first 5 years of teaching. Additionally, attrition rates for SET is at a high 13% and that about 1/3 of new SETs leave their positions because of the countless demands in special education, which bring high levels of stress that lead to burnout (Garwood et al., 2018; Langher et al., 2017; Williams & Dikes, 2017). Hinds et al. (2015) agreed that stress is related to SET attrition. According to Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (as cited in Cancio et al., 2018), 90% of open teaching positions in the Western U.S. state where this study took place were created by teachers who left the field of education. When comparing the healthcare work force with teacher turnover, the healthcare employee’s turnover in 2017 it was 20.5% (Rosenbaum, 2018), which is a high percentage, but the teacher rate continues to be a higher rate. In the business field, software tech companies also had a high rate of employee turnover in 2017 and the estimated numbers continue to rise (Booz, 2018). Maslach et al. (2015) defined burnout as a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depression, depersonalization, and reduce of personal accomplishment that occur among individuals who work with directly with others (p. 192). Bettini et al. (2015) stated that more than half of SETs leave their positions within the first four

years of teaching. Furthermore, districts experiencing high SET attrition rates are losing thousands of dollars. For example, Tyler and Brunner (2014) stated that attrition related cost can cost between \$8,000 to \$48,000 “per beginning teacher who departs” (p.286).

Furthermore, there is a chronic shortage of SETs and school districts experiencing SET attrition and it is affecting student services (Jones et al., 2013; Tyler & Brunner, 2014). The dilemma many school districts are facing due to SET attrition is that students in special education are receiving little to no special education services or they are receiving their special education services from teachers that are not properly trained in special education (Tyler & Brunner, 2014). Williams and Dikes (2017) stated that SET high rates of attrition makes it difficult to adequately train qualified SETs because novice teachers are getting hired without the field experience. Also, SETs coming into the teaching field “face double jeopardy for attrition” not only because they are new, but also because of the demands of working with general education teachers (Jones et al., 2013, p. 366). Likewise, Sweigart and Collins (2017) found that new SETs leave their positions because of countless challenges and responsibilities they face. In like manner, Jones et al. (2013) explained that among all the challenges new SETs also have higher burnout rates because of the struggles of building relationships with other teachers.

Besides, working conditions is another factor for SET attrition, which includes lack of administrative support, job design, teacher team efficacy, student with discipline problems and socioeconomic (Conley & You, 2016). Langher et al. (2017) stated that perceived administrative support can impact SET burnout. When SETs do not feel supported by their administrators, they may experience stress, feel isolated and lonely (Langher et al., 2017). SETs feel supported when administrators provide support by giving them opportunities for staff development and training,

classroom ownership support, access to curricula, principal awareness of care and understanding, availability, support with paraprofessionals and general education teachers, emotional support, instrumental support, informational support, paperwork and appraisal support (Cancio, Albrecht, & Johns, 2013; Garwood et al., 2018).

SET job design lacks clarification (Conley & You, 2016). Garwood et al. (2018) indicated that the SET role lack clarity because there are a lot of unrealistic expectations, paperwork understanding of caseloads, and available supports. De Stasio et al. (2017) and Rock et al. (2016) agreed that role ambiguity is a concern among SETs. Lavian (2015) stated the role of the special educator is complex and unclear because it requires multiple roles and tasks. Rock et al. (2016) indicated that SETs experience role ambiguity because of the many requirements they must have, such as teach in a variety of settings, collaboration with different professionals, and provide direct instruction to students with a variety of needs across different grade levels.

Finally, SETs who work with students with challenging behaviors experience burnout, which impacts teacher efficacy (Garwood et al., 2018; Langher et al., 2017; Sweigart & Collins, 2017). SETs need to be prepared and be able to handle unpredictable behaviors that student with special needs may display (Langher et al., 2017). Some student behaviors challenges that are commonly dealt with when working with students with special needs include students being more active and distractible, needing more attention to meet goals, and destructive or antagonistic behavior (Langher et al., 2017). Disrespectful behaviors that are of most concern include dishonesty, physical aggression, rudeness, talking back (Garwood et al., 2018).

Rock et al. (2016) stated that SET attrition rates are higher in rural communities. Rural schools experience higher rates of shortages and SET turnover because of the challenges special

educators face. Among challenges include workload, unclear SET role, extra pressure due to low standardized scores, and SETs need to be more knowledgeable on available community supports (Cancio et al., 2018; Rock et al., 2016). Additionally, SET attrition rates are higher when SETs work with student with emotional behavior disabilities than when working with students with other disabilities (Cancio et al., 2014; Tyler & Brunner, 2014). Also, Rock et al. (2016) indicates that SET attrition affects not only student performance, but also SETs because pressure is on them to performed extra duties. As a result, SETs experience a sense of ineffectiveness leading to lack of motivation and commitment (Rock et al., 2016).

Tyler and Brunner (2014) used Vroom's (1959), Skrtic's (1991), and Miller, Brownell, and Smith's (1999) structure models to explained attrition in education and to develop a model to support special education attrition. First, Vroom's structure model is focused on psychological studies and it deals with how decision making can affect the individual. There will be more job satisfaction when there is more freedom in decision making to further goals and enhance social interaction. Locke (as cited in Conley & You, 2016) defined job satisfaction as "pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences" (p. 524).

Second, the Skrtic structure model includes three organization structures (Tyler & Brunner, 2014). The first part of the structure is the machine bureaucracy, which is dominant because it is rule orientated and workers are controlled, which has negatively affected SETs. The second part is the organizational structure is professional bureaucracy which is developed in schools. It includes inner, standard, and performance measures such as testing and progress monitoring (Tyler & Brunner, 2014). The third part of structure is adhocracies, which is not consistent with the first structure. Adhocracies is viewed as its own entity, which can describe

special education because special education is its own entity within the school system.

Adhocracy is non-standard, collaborative, and it includes problem solving.

Finally, Miller et al.'s (1999) model is made of three layers. The first layer is exosystem, which includes teacher-district, teacher, state, and teacher federal interaction. The second layer is the mesosystem and it includes teacher and school interaction. The last layer is microsystem which includes teacher and classroom interaction (Tyler & Brunner, 2014). Tyler and Brunner (2014) indicated that all three layers of Miller's model were identified as attrition contributors. The more concerning layer was the microsystem variable at the classroom or caseload level. Microsystem concerns include "insufficient student contact time, inadequate instructional technology, insufficient classroom resources, and caseload size" (Tyler & Brunner, 2014, p. 295).

All three models "Vroom, Skrtic, and Miller" put together to create a model that focuses on SET attrition. The new model included three variables to support administrators and provide guidance for research (Tyler & Brunner, 2014). The first variable is exosystem, which is focus on professional development, due process paperwork, and curriculum and instruction. The second variable is mesosystem and it is focus on scheduling students, availability of instructional assistance, and consultation/collaboration time. The third is the microsystem variable, which is focus on student contact time, classroom technology, classroom resources, and caseload size. Every part of the new model will support in reducing SET attrition (Tyler & Brunner, 2014).

Support of Administration

Special Education Teacher (SET) burnout has been linked to lack administration support (Cancio et al., 2014; Cancio et al., 2018). Jones et al. (2013) stated that it is common that SETs

hardly receive guidance on managing their routines and tasks related to teaching as special educators. Administrators do their part by providing their staff with the support they need, but they lack knowledge on how to provide SETs with adequate support and training that will help them to keep up with the continuing evolving changes in special education (Tyler & Brunner, 2014). Altinay et al. (2018) commented on the many roles and responsibilities that school administrators need to have to effectively run their schools. Altinay et al. (2018) mention that administrators need to have skills in behavior conduct, supervision, provide teacher training, maintenance of school building and equipment, discipline and other related administrative duties. Administrators are also responsible for providing SETs with the support they need to make sure that students in special education are provided with proper services (Altinay et al., 2018; Bettini et al., 2017). However, many administrators do not know how to provide SETs with proper support and guidance because they are not trained in special education (Bettini et al., 2017). Conley and You (2016) found that administrative support and student behavior are the most influential factors in preventing burnout. Bettini et al. (2015) indicated that when administrators provide SETs with social support, autonomy, feedback, task significance, and task interdependence their jobs become meaningful and they feel committed. Bettini et al. (2016) suggested that when administrators cultivate effective SETs when they provide collaboration time with colleagues, effective instructional practices, and professional development. When administrators provide SETs with the training and support, they need to become effective and knowledgeable educators, students' behaviors decrease and student achievement happens (Glowacki & Hackmann, 2016). However, if administrators do not provide SETs with the support they need, SETs may experience burnout and many teachers leave their positions.

Furthermore, Bettini et al. (2015) and Conley and You (2016) advised that it is important for administrators to identify factors that will support SETs to stay in their positions. Yet, it is difficult to identify those factors because most states do not require administrators to take special education courses or they need more training in special education and laws of special education (Glowacki & Hackmann, 2016). As a result, administrators do not feel that they are prepared to provide special educators with the support they need (Altinay et al., 2018).

Moreover, Bettini et al. (2017) indicated that “principals play an important role in cultivating effective SETs” (p. 111). To cultivate effective SETs, administrators need to be skilled in developing a common vision for special education and provide their special educators with resources, support to minimize paperwork demands, and professional development opportunities. Professional development will support SETs to excel as educators, but administrators need to make sure that professional development is extensive in duration, provide implementation support, and that content has extended SET knowledge to improve instructional practice and increase student performance (Bettini et al., 2017). Altinay et al. (2018) found that SETs have a need for their administrators to be good listeners, good communicators, have empathic, and be respectful. Additionally, administrators are responsible for making sure that SETs see their job as meaningful, which will encourage and motivate them and in return they will be committed to their positions (Jones et al., 2013). Feeling valued and appreciated will prevent burnout. Humphrey, Nahrgang, and Morgeson (2007) specified that design theorist identified social support, autonomy, feedback, task significant, and task interdependent as crucial administrative roles that support SETs. When administrators implement these five crucial roles SETs feel valued and supported (Humphrey et al., 2007). Without the support of administrators,

SETs may find themselves “frustrated with their job and harbor negative feeling towards their profession” (Brunsting et al., 2014, p. 682). When administrators interact with their SETs and provide them with support it builds trusting relationship and SETs feel competent about their given responsibilities (Bettini et al., 2016).

Tyler and Brunner (2014) concluded that burnout is due to several factors, including lack of administrative support and professional development. Vittek (2015) also indicated that lack of administrative support has a negative impact on SETs. Brunsting et al. (2014) suggested that the focus should not be on recruiting SETs, but to focus on how to best train and support SETs that are already in their teaching positions. Tyler and Brunner (2014) indicated that a good administrator is able to provide their staff with good support when they first provide them with a clear school vision, review expectations, meet regularly to review instructional practices, recognition for doing good work, enforce rules for student conduct, and demonstrate appreciation and encouragement towards their teachers. SETs perceive that there is a need for these administrator qualities to be put in to practice with special educators and that this lack of support can contribute to SET attrition (Tyler & Brunner, 2014). Likewise, Bettini et al. (2016) commented that “administrative support is essential for SETs efforts to learn, enact, and maintain effective instructional practices (p. 178). Young (2018) stated that many SETs feel that administrators sometimes do not understand the nature of their role as special educators. SETs are independent professionals because of their unique position. As independent educators SETs work separate from other teachers and they must learn to adapt to the organization and its structures, which increases the complexity of their positions (Lavian, 2015).

Additionally, Cancio et al. (2014) focused on SETs working with students with emotional behaviors and the need for administrators to focus on retaining credentialed special educators. Brunsting et al. (2014) stated that working as special educators is challenging enough, but those teachers who work with students with emotional problems need even more support because of behaviors displayed with this population of students. It is the lack of administrative support with behavior management that negatively impacts SETs working with students with emotional behaviors.

Finally, administrators need to provide SETs with training, mentoring programs, outside resources, support, professional development, acknowledgement, and availability of resources (Cancio et al., 2014). Additionally, administrative support should include emotional support so that SETs feel respected and appreciated, instrumental support in which administrators assist the SET with work-related task, and informational support where administrators provide SETs with information they can use to improve classroom practices (Cancio et al., 2013).

Training and Resources

SETs jobs are constantly changing because of federal mandates which brings challenges to educators (Nuri et al., 2017). Romanowska (2013) stated that it is important to provide SETs with the proper professional training to prevent teacher burnout. Moreover, when provided with proper training and tools, SETs “can develop positive attitudes towards their professions, feel rewarded and minimize the burnout risk” (Sarıçam & Sakız, 2014, p. 424). Unfortunately, many SETs do not feel they are supported by their principals and they also feel lack training and resources for them to keep up with the daily demands of their positions (Brunsting et al., 2014).

Bettini et al. (2016) stated that professional development in using evidence-based practices and support in implementing those practices were successful strategies used by some districts to reduce stress levels that can lead to burnout. Moreover, opportunities for SETs to teach learned evidence-based strategies to other staff was important because it made SETs feel engaged and appreciated (Bettini et al., 2016). Additionally, Bettini et al. (2016) added that SETs who are also provided with materials to implement evidence-based practices and ongoing communication to monitor implementation of those practices have been proven to support in reducing burnout. Additionally, Brownell et al. (2018) stated that administrators who provide SETs with positive feedback, mentors, and scheduled time to collaborate with general education teachers help in reducing SET burnout.

When focusing on SETs teaching at the higher level, they need extra administrative support because of evolving educational mandates to increase focus on standards for college and career readiness (Shields, Scirri, Michael, & Klump, 2016). Shields et al. (2016) indicated that districts should support SETs by providing them with multi-occupational courses and other training so that they are able to support students as they transition out of high school. Additionally, Vlachou et al. (2015) indicated that relationships between general education and SET are so important especially in the secondary level, along with problem solving skills, differentiating instruction, modifying curriculum, and many other duties are proven to be challenging, but SETs are not getting the support they need from administrators to be able to successful in their positions. Williams and Dikes (2017) indicated that school leaders should be engaged in job design practices to identify areas of job-related stress to support middle and high school SETs.

Lastly, when focusing on new SETs there needs to be more focus on field experience to provide them with the tools, they need to be effective teachers. Al-Hiary et al. (2015) stressed that “field experiences are usually achieved through practicum training that are devised from preparation programs” (p. 129). However, field experiences through practicum training is not enough. Al-Hiary et al. (2015) indicated that most SET programs are more focus on acquisition of knowledge and theoretical issues rather than field experiences. Therefore, it is important that teacher programs provide wide-range, well-planned and well-supervised field experiences. Without a strong field experience, SETs go into their classrooms with a lot of knowledge, but they struggle to put their knowledge into practice (Sweigart & Collins, 2017). Because they lack the ability to put their knowledge into practice, they become overwhelmed and eventually experience burnout that may lead them to leave their positions. Therefore, it is importance for administration to support them to help alleviate some of the stress they experience (Vitteck, 2015). Administrators who are actively involved in providing guidance and support to new SETs have a higher chance of retaining their special educators (Bettini et al., 2017).

Bettini et al. (2015) indicated that SETs leave their positions within the first four years of teaching. Those SETs who leave teaching stay active and engaged for at least the first three years before they begin to feel that their workload becomes unmanageable and they become emotionally exhausted (Bettini et al., 2018). Cancio et al. (2018) and Garwood et al. (2018) found that SETs are actively engaged until they begin to feel overwhelmed and stressed because of their unmanageable workload. Stressed SETs who experience lack of enthusiasm and motivation may eventually not finding meaning in their work and leave their positions (Cancio et al., 2018).

In summary, SET burnout has led to high attrition numbers of SETs, which has impacted special education programs across the United States (Langher et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2013; Tyler & Brunner, 2014). Additionally, attrition has led to SET shortages costing districts thousands of dollars yearly and hurting student services and academic achievement (Tyler, & Brunner, 2014). Many SETs who are currently providing special education services to students are not qualified to take up the challenges that come with being special educators, therefore many end up leaving their positions within the first five years of teaching (Williams & Dikes, 2017). Lastly, to help administrators, deal with SET attrition. Tyler and Brunner (2014) created a structure model based on Vroom, Skrtic, and Miller's structure models. The model has three functions, which include exosystem, mesosystem and microsystem. Within the functions there is a focus on professional development, due process, paperwork, curriculum and instruction, scheduling students, availability of instruction, student contact time, classroom technology, classroom resources, and caseload size. When administrators are provided with support on how to prevent attrition, SETs will have self-efficacy to overcome obstacles and challenges of special education.

Summary

There is a shortage of special educators across the nation due to high burnout rates. SET burnout is due to stringent ongoing demands of special education. Because of SET burnout, student services and performance are being impacted because either the SET is not able to affectively meet the needs of the students because of other unending tasks of special education, or because the teacher providing services to students with disabilities are not properly trained to meet the needs of students (De Stasio, Fiorilli, & Benevene, 2017).

Furthermore, SETs need the support of their administrators and their colleagues to help them cope with stress the leads to burnout. Studies have shown that when SETs have the support of their colleagues and administrator, they feel connected and valued (Cambridge-Johnson et al., 2014). When SETs feel connected and valued by their colleagues and their administrators, they are more likely to experience job satisfaction and their motivation increases, by this means increasing job effectiveness (Bettini et al., 2016). It is through teacher collaboration that SET feel supported and connected, especially with inclusion programs.

Additionally, burnout rates have been connected to SET attrition (Rock et al., 2016). Finally, it is important the SET teacher programs provide proper training for teachers to be able to handle demands of special education and it is also crucial that SETs get ongoing support with teacher training and staff development to lessen the stress level of the special educator.

Methodological Issues

There are many ways researchers can go about to choosing the best method, design, and procedures for their study and the framework. Choosing what works best requires a lot of time and dedication and it is a big responsibility. The designs found in this literature review includes qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. Each study in this literature review addresses issues associated with SETs' perception of special education teacher support and SET burnout. Strengths and weaknesses were identified through the process of this literature review.

The review of literature includes qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method studies. However mixed method studies were few. All literature review had many strengths and weaknesses. Research questions were clear across collected literature. Most of the research questions in this literature review were focused on the role of SETs, SET burnout, and/ or

administrators' role and support. For example, Cambridge-Johnson et al. (2014) had three focused research questions dealing with SETs' attitude toward the inclusive setting and an explanation of each why the research questions were developed. Lavian (2015) had only one focused question on how SETs see and interpret their role. Data collection was another strength in literature review. Most of the data collection across literature review was done through surveys, some type of interviews process or both. For example, Lavian (2015) used open ended life-story interviews. Protocols were developed for structure of the interview process in the literature review. It was also stated that interviews were recorded and transcribed. Creswell stated that interviews bring validity to qualitative studies. Other strengths in data collection that were used include coding, members check, and deviant case sampling, which is studying a case that is unusually successful. Furthermore, each study had a thorough and descriptive paragraph of the findings.

The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) is an instrument identified through this literature review to measure teacher burnout (Caputo & Langher, 2015; Gong et al., 2013; Young, 2018). Caputo and Langher (2015) used the Maslach Burnout Inventory and an Educators Survey (MBI-E), which is a 22-item survey that uses a 7-point scale. Additionally, Ilgan, Parylo, and Sungu (2015) indicated that their study included 800 teacher job satisfaction paper surveys in two different cities. Other strengths I found within the studies included data collected through Likert scale surveys containing between five to seven measures of agreement, rating scales using numbers were also strengths.

Limitations within the literature review were time constrains and sample size in some of the studies. Sample sizes were between eight (Cambridge-Johnson et al., 2014) to 47

participants (Mereoiu et al., 2016). Additionally, the some of the participants that were expected to participate in the studies were not available. For example, in one study 54 participants were expected to participate in the study, but only 36 participated (Vlachou et al., 2015). Sariçam and Sakız (2014) on the other hand had 118 participants and Braun-Lewensohn (2016) had 634 participants, which was a strength of the studies.

In mixed methods studies within the review of literature were a blend of quantitative and qualitative methods, which provided a more complete and comprehensive approach of the research problem (Creswell, 2014). For example, Garwood et al. (2018) used a survey (quantitative) and a follow-up interview (qualitative) to understand issues of burnout. Additionally, mixed methods involve using a design that may include philosophical beliefs and theoretical frameworks. According to Creswell (2014), weakness of mixed methods studies may lack a clear presentation of procedures and findings because research procedures are more complicated. It is especially when researcher is stronger in one area of the type of study. Garwood et al. (2018) stated, “A primary concern on the design is to which phase of the study to give more weight” (p, 33). Mixed methods also tend to be more time consuming, which make have impacted interpretation of data collection. Researchers doing mixed methods studies need to know how to connect qualitative and quantitative phased and how to integrate the results (Garwood et al., 2018). Mixed method review of literature identified concerns related to SETs burnout, perception of SETs’ on administrative support, and concerns of SET shortages in the nation.

Synthesis of Research Findings

Different themes were seen throughout this literature review. One of the most important issues that surfaced was the increasing numbers of SET positions that need to be filled throughout the nation (Jones et al., 2013; Tyler & Brunner, 2014). High stress levels are a contributing factor to the shortage of special educators (Cancio et al., 2014). Stress levels are caused by lack of training, lack of support, and/or unclear job descriptions (Cancio et al., 2014). The research findings also indicated that changing laws in special education can increase levels of stress among special educators (Cancio et al., 2014). Another focus was that SET preparation programs are not providing enough classroom preparation for SETs to be successful as special educators (Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2017; Mason-Williams et al., 2015; Young, 2018). Many SETs do not stay the course as special educators because of the lack of training from their teacher training programs and staff development available from their districts (Bettini et al., 2015; Langher et al., 2017; Scott, 2017). It is within the first five years of teaching that SETs often end up leaving their positions (Cooter & Stricherz, 2014; Sweigart & Collins, 2017; Tyler & Brunner, 2014). Furthermore, researchers indicated that SETs have very demanding jobs and that their job description is continually evolving (Buchanan, Hinton, & Rudisill, 2013). Demanding skills of special educators that were a focus throughout research included the ability to collaborate with others and being able to keep up with changing laws in special education (Braun-Lewensohn, 2016; Cambridge-Johnson et al., 2014; Mulrine & Huckvale, 2014). Additionally, research indicated that lack of administrative support was identified as one of the causes for SETs burnout. Research noted that many administrators lack experience in special education and that they do not know how to evaluate or support their SETs (Gong et al., 2013).

Lastly, Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) was a reoccurring screening tool that was used to measure SETs stress levels that lead to burnout (Brunsting et al., 2014; Garwood et al., 2018; Young, 2018). Maslach and Leiter's (1997) definition for burnout was also often used throughout research (Gong et al., 2013; Hopman et al., 2017; Maslach & Leiter, 1997; Williams & Dikes, 2017). Generally, all these themes were seen across the research process.

Critique of Previous Research

The literature review indicates that research has been done to understand the causes of SET shortages and many reasons are given for the shortages. What we know from research is that SETs have stressful jobs and burnout rates of special educators is higher than general education teachers (Langher et al., 2017; Williams & Dikes, 2017). Some causes of burnout known based of research include the role of the special educator not been clearly defined and SETs coming into their careers without knowing clear expectations (Al-Hiary et al., 2015; Bettini et al., 2016; Brunsting et al., 2014; Buchanan et al., 2013). Previous research also indicates that SET programs are not properly training and preparing SETs to enter into their careers as educators (Al-Hiary et al., 2015; Ashfaq & Rana, 2015; Bettini et al., 2017; Young, 2018). Furthermore, many special educators do not feel that they are getting the proper support from their administrators and they also feel isolated in their positions because of the countless of responsibilities, including paperwork and keeping up with changes in special education laws (Altinay et al., 2018; Bettini et al., 2016; Bettini et al., 2017; Bettini et al., 2015; Cancio et al., 2014; Glowacki & Hackmann, 2016).

Moreover, research indicates that the MBI has been used as a tool to evaluate SET burnout (Brunsting et al., 2014; Gong et al., 2013; Hinds et al., 2015; Hopman et al., 2017;

Langher et al., 2017; Maslach & Leiter, 1997; Nuri et al., 2017). What we know as a result of the MBI is that burnout is a real concern among special educators (Brunsting et al., 2014; Caputo & Langher, 2015; De Stasio et al., 2017). Based on research, we know that administrators play an important role in providing SET support (Bettini et al., 2015; Gong et al., 2013). Finally, despite all we know about the challenges SETs face and the rates of burnout, more research needs to be done in relation to how SETs perceive administrative support and burnout when it relates to special education, which are the research questions being investigated in this study. Further, more research needs to be done to find ways of supporting SETs and how to prepare them to be ready to take up the challenges in special education.

Chapter 2 Summary

Special education programs have become an important part of public education within the general education setting. According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), students with special needs have the right to be provided services in the LRE, which is the inclusive classroom with non-disable peers. As a result, SETs are expected to know how to provide a FAPE within the general education setting and every other special education placement option. SET teacher programs are doing their best in training their teachers to be able to take on the challenges that come with providing services to students with special needs within the general education setting. However, SET programs are not providing enough field experience to prepare their teachers for the reality of classroom experiences and many SETs end up prematurely leaving their positions (Al-Hiary et al., 2015). Teacher programs are more focused on acquisition of knowledge and theoretical issues rather than field experiences (Al-Hiary et al., 2015). Additionally, some SETs are not being provided with support they need from their

administrators to facilitate pressure and demands that come with the job of special educators. Therefore, many SETs are becoming overwhelmed and experiencing burnout. The research indicates the importance of the role of administrators as a support provider for SETs (Bettini et al., 2015). To lessen the stress levels, research states that SETs need opportunities for staff development and collaboration with general education teachers. Furthermore, the literature reviewed emphasizes the need for strong special education teacher programs to be able to enable new SETs to be successful in their careers as special educators (Al-Hiary et al., 2015; Ashfaq & Rana, 2015; Bettini et al., 2017; Young, 2018).

There are many reasons identified by research that are connected to SET shortages throughout our nation. Research points to administrators as not knowing how to properly support their SETs (Kaufhold, Alvarez, & Arnold, 2006). However, more research still needs to be done to identify the right strategies and support needed by administrators and teacher programs to prepare SETs to be successful in their careers as educators. Despite all we know about SET burnout and the connection burnout has with lack of support, further research needs to be done to find how to maintain SETs in their positions as educators and how to prepare administrators to support SETs.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction & Problem and Statement

Burnout is a mental disorder that affects individuals emotionally and physically (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). When suffering from burnout, individuals experience exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Brunsting et al., 2014; Maslach & Leiter, 1997). Special education teachers (SETs) find themselves overworked, unclear of their role as special educators, and overwhelmed with the ongoing changes in special education laws. SETs who are experiencing burnout are unable to function effectively in their jobs, which affects students. Student achievement, self-efficacy, academic motivation, and creativity may be impacted by having an SET who is experiencing burnout (Gong et al., 2013). Others affected by SET burnout include administrators, general education teachers, and other staff members who support students with special needs (Ashfaq & Rana, 2015; Lavian, 2015).

Furthermore, SET burnout is a concern because schools nationwide are impacted by high rates of burnout and many novice SETs are prematurely leaving their positions (Tyler & Brunner, 2014). Tyler and Brunner (2014) reported that the national estimated rate for SET attrition within the first five years of teaching is approximately 50%. Additionally, Dewey et al. (2017) stated that currently there are 48 states experiencing special education teacher shortages. Therefore, it is important to investigate how SETs perceive burnout and how they perceive special education teacher support.

I determined that qualitative descriptive case study was the most appropriate method to investigate SETs' feelings about their support and their perception of SET burnout. Through data collection and analysis, descriptive case study design provides answers for the research

questions of a study (Mills, Durepos, & Wiebe, 2010). This methodology allowed an in-depth analysis of the research questions for this study that relate to SET support and burnout.

In this chapter, I cover the research questions, the purpose and design, the population and sampling methods, instrumentation, and data collection. I also discuss the identification of attributes, data analysis procedures, limitations and delimitations, validation, expected findings, and ethical issues.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study were as follows:

RQ1. What are special education teachers' perceptions of burnout?

RQ2. What are special education teachers' perception of special education teacher support?

Purpose and Design of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive case study was to investigate SETs' perception of burnout and their perception of SET support. Bettini et al. (2017) indicated that administrators have an important role in cultivating effective SETs. Administrators are responsible for making sure that SETs are provided with professional development, necessary resources, and minimized paperwork demands (Bettini et al., 2017). In this study, I attempted to uncover more about SETs' own perceptions of, assumptions about, and insights into SET burnout.

According to Garwood et al. (2018), special educators are at high risk for burnout because they have one of the "most challenging and stressful jobs in public education" (p. 30). Burnout is defined as a "psychological syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization,

and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who work with other people in some capacity” (Maslach et al., 2015, p. 192). Learning how to balance time and cope with challenges and responsibilities that come with the role of being a special educator can be crucial to avoiding becoming emotionally exhausted, which can lead to SET burnout (Bettini et al., 2018). Even though SET burnout is a broad topic that has been explored in research, no research has yet been conducted with a focus on understanding SETs’ perceptions of burnout and lack of support.

Design of the Study

I selected a descriptive qualitative study to answer the research questions of this study, which are focused on SETs’ perceptions of burnout and teacher support. Data was collected through a survey and interview. The data collected through the surveys was in descriptive form. The framework for this study was burnout theory, first introduced by Herbert Freudenberger in 1974 (Heinemann & Heinemann, 2017). Freudenberger described the symptoms of burnout and listed personality factors of those individuals at risk for burnout. Those who are at risk for burnout are those who are dedicated and committed to their work (Heinemann & Heinemann, 2017). Freudenberger’s work was later followed by many other psychological and medical studies, which included Maslach and colleagues (Heinemann & Heinemann, 2017). The collected data, analysis, and findings support understanding SETs’ perception of burnout and their perception of SET support. This study also provided an understanding of how SET shortages are related to burnout and answered questions regarding how SETs manage their time to have a healthy balance at work to achieve job gratification. Furthermore, the results shed light

on supports available to SETs and generated ideas for how to cope with stress that can lead to burnout.

Research Population

Special Education Teachers

Participants in this case study were public elementary school SETs who taught in a Western U.S. state. I sent a total of 213 invites to SETs, principals, and directors of special education. Only 19 responded to the invite, including 16 SETs, one principal, and two directors of special education services. The total number of participants for the study was 13, which met my goal of achieving a sample size of between 12 and 15 SETs. The specific roles of the SETs who participated included resource specialist, learning center (LC) teacher, emotional disturbed (ED) teacher, and special day class (SDC) teacher. The participants all supported students with special needs in the inclusive classroom. The participants had between 2 and 20 years of teaching experience and a variety of teaching backgrounds. Some of the participants also had experience working as instructional assistants. The SETs who participated in this study possessed a mild/moderate Education Specialist Instruction credential from the Western U.S. state where this study took place. Originally, I intended to focus on only one county for this study, but because of the lack of responses to invites, I also sent invites to two schools from a neighboring county. Ten of the participants in this study were from the county of focus and three of the participants were from the neighboring county.

Purposive Sampling

Participants were identified through the use of purposive sampling. In purposive sampling, the researcher selects the topic of concern and finds individuals who are willing to

provide information based on their experience (Tongco, 2007). The topic for this study was selected because, according to a credentialing resource for the state, the Western U.S. state where this study took place is experiencing a shortage of SETs. Selected participants fit the targeted population for this study. Creswell (2014) emphasized that in qualitative studies the researcher chooses participants that best support the problem of focus and the research questions.

Participants in this study were elementary SETs who supported students with special needs through resource intervention, inclusion support, and some contained support. The selected SETs were surveyed and interviewed. The targeted SETs were not itinerant SETs. They were resource specialists, LC teachers, ED teachers, and SDC teachers. The purpose for selecting the focused SETs was because they all provided special education services to students in the general education classroom, with some resource support or support in a little more restrictive environment. Classroom and resource support are considered part of the LRE. Inclusion allows SETs to team teach and collaborate to support students who receive special education services.

Even though SETs were recruited from a neighboring county to make sure there were enough participants in this study, Central County was the county of focus. Central County contains 24 school districts that serves a diverse population of students. The majority of students educated in Central County are Latino or Hispanic. The percent of Latino or Hispanic students is estimated to be 78.4%, while 13.3 % are White. Of the 22 districts in the county, 20 are Title 1 funded. Neighboring counties have similar student demographics. The targeted sample for this qualitative descriptive case study was between 12 and 15 elementary SETs. Of the 14 participants who volunteered, only 13 actually participated. Ten of the participants were from Central County and three were from the neighboring county.

This case study research was a part of an investigation, but was not meant to describe the phenomena or test propositions (Yin, 2018). The purpose of the study was to understand SETs' perception of burnout as it relates to special education and SETs' perception of special education teacher support. Purposive sampling was appropriate for this study because the selected population best fit the purpose of the study (Lewis-Beck, Bryman, & Liao, 2004).

Instrumentation

Instrumentation is a component that will provide a valid means of obtaining data that can be analyzed, interpreted, and discussed. A 5-point Likert scale burnout survey was used to measure SET burnout (MindTools, n.d.). The survey results from this study are described in qualitative terms which includes the use of a table and a description of the results. Individual survey responses were submitted via the MindTools website. Participants were provided with the MindTools survey link and given instructions on how to take the survey, how to score it, and how to save a PDF copy of the survey results. A descriptive summary on how many participants responded to individual questions and their total score is provided in the results section of this study. Interviews were scheduled after participants returned their survey results. All participants who turned in their surveys were interviewed regardless of their level of risk for burnout. Interviews were driven by open ended questions. Member checking took place for accuracy of data collection and it provided participants with an opportunity to ask further questions (Hatch, 2002). For the protection of the participants, collected data from the survey and the interviews were kept in a locked file cabinet until they were analyzed.

Data was collected for this study via surveys and interviews. A total of 213 email invites were sent to SETs, principals, and directors of special services. Because of the lack of responses

to the email invites, I placed 15 phone calls to some of those principals and directors, but there was no response. My hope was to have at least 20 SETs respond to the invite, but only 19 responded via email, which included administrators. The burnout survey was sent via email to those who responded, along with instructions on how to fill them out. When participants returned the surveys, they were printed and stored in a locked file cabinet until all surveys were returned. Emails containing the surveys were deleted after the surveys were printed to protect the participant identities. When all surveys were collected, they were manually coded using the following codes: no sign of burnout, little sign of burnout, at risk for burnout, severe risk of burnout, and very severe risk for burnout. Followed by the coding, a table was developed using Microsoft Word to organize the participants' responses. All teachers who took the survey participated in the interviews, regardless of their risk for burnout. My goal was to have between 12 and 15 teachers participate in the study, but I was only able to find 13 participants. The Burnout Self-Test from MindTools was used as the survey for this study. The survey was taken and scored online as required by the MindTools policy. It is important to note that this survey or self-test is not a diagnostic tool, but is used as an informal approach to assess burnout (MindTools, n.d.). Permission to use the survey in this qualitative descriptive study was sought from MindTools and was granted (see Appendix A). Survey results were reported in descriptive qualitative form. Coded surveys and data analysis were kept in a locked file cabinet throughout this study.

Field Testing

Data collection through interviews took place at a convenient location based on participants' availability. Interviews included demographic questions and semistructured open

ended questions (see Appendix A). Semistructured interviews served as a guide to prompt the course of questioning (Mills & Birks, 2014). Open ended questions provided different responses that served as open door opportunities to ask other questions. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. After each interview, the recordings and field notes that were taken were kept in a locked file cabinet until transcriptions were done. A notebook computer was used to record the interviews. Rev.com was used to transcribe the interviews. Rev Voice Recorder was uploaded to an iPhone with the attempt to record the interviews, but the attempt was not successful. Interview recordings were eventually uploaded from the notebook computer into Rev.com for transcription. Once transcriptions were received, they were first printed for manual coding, and then saved on a password protected computer. After manual coding was completed, the electronic copy of the transcribed interviews was coded using MAXQDA, which provided more structure and accurate coding (Lewins & Silver, 2014). Thematic coding was used to code data collection. According to Gibbs (2007), in thematic coding, the data is analyzed and categorized to find patterns or themes within data. Through the coding process all data was kept in a locked file cabinet.

Member Checking

After transcribing the interviews, I conducted member checking. The transcribed interviews were shared with each individual participant for accuracy of the transcription. Furthermore, the resulting themes of the manual coding were shared with the participants to allow them to ask further questions. Creswell (2014) stated that sharing the analysis with participants allows them an opportunity to comment and ask questions about the findings.

Member checking also took place during the interviews because it allowed participants to comment on their survey results.

Data Collection

Survey

After participants were recruited for this study, the Burnout Self-Test (MindTools, n.d.) link was sent to them through email with instructions on how to take the survey and how to score it. The Burnout Self-Test used a 5-point Likert scale survey. Returned surveys were printed and kept in a locked file cabinet until the coding process began. Emails containing the surveys were deleted to protect the participants. All special education teachers who took the survey were interviewed. Surveys were shredded after they were analyzed.

Interview

The researcher scheduled an interview with each participant upon receiving their completed surveys. Interviews were scheduled through email and phone numbers were exchanged with those participants who chose a phone interview or a face-to-face interview outside their workplace. All participants chose the place, date, and time for the interview. According to Hatch (2002), the researcher needs to be flexible and adaptable during the interview process, and the interviews need to take place where the participants feel comfortable. All emails were deleted after interviews were scheduled.

During the interviews, participants were informed that interviews were going to be recorded and then transcribed. It is important to note that a recorded interview captures the emotions and revelation of the interviewee in an uncomplicated way (Lee, 2004). Interviews were recorded using a notebook computer and transcribed using MAXQDA. Data collection

throughout the interview included two parts: semistructured demographic questions and open ended questions. Rudestam and Newton (2007) stated that open ended interviews that are recorded have little structure and promote trustworthiness. Probing during the interviews supported in prompting further information related to the research questions. Probing used during interviews can be very effective because the interviewer actively and effectively listens to the interviewee to capture accurate meaning concerning the topic being investigated (Given, 2008). All collected data from interviews were kept in a locked file cabinet to secure the identity of the participants.

Field Test

The open ended questions that guided the interviews brought validity to this study. Field notes were taken during the interview to strengthen the interview and to write down further questions that came up as a result of comments made by the participant or for clarification of answered question. The developed questions gave participants a voice as they responded and expressed thoughts, concerns, or ideas. The field test participants were 13 elementary SETs. They were able to provide their perceptions of the research questions of focus. Field test data collection provided a synopsis of SETs' perception of burnout and their perception of special education teacher support. It also provided types of administrative supports that are available to SETs and how SETs manage their time to have a healthy balance for job gratification. The purpose of the interviews was to obtain insight into what is working for those participants at low risk for burnout and what is missing for those at risk for burnout. Through the interviews, it was especially important to focus on the disconnect between the perception of SETs not feeling supported. It was also important to identify SETs' perception of burnout when it relates to

special education. Participants provided information that could be researched in the future that can support special education. for future research in the field of special education. All collected data was locked in a file cabinet for confidentiality. Identities of the participants were protected by assigning them a pseudonym.

Member Checking

Member checking was used to ensure accuracy and validation of the interviews. Member checking allows the participants to have an opportunity to consider and respond to their comments in the data collection or to the researcher's interpretations (Frey, 2018). Probing was also used during member checking to capture and interpret the interviewees comments and responses. Field notes were taken during member checking to ensure my understanding and interpretations of the study. The goal of field notes is to learn how to interpret what others are saying and to explore the nature their emotions (Johnson, 2011). All notes taken during member checking were secured in a locked file cabinet.

Furthermore more, a table was developed using Microsoft Word with interview findings to share with participants. The table was shared via email, which allowed participants to review for accuracy and resonance with their experiences. Member checking through sharing of findings allowed for validation and trustworthiness.

Identification of Attributes

For the purpose of this research study, the definition of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was used to define an SET. IDEA defined the SET as an educational specialist who specializes in designing instruction of students with a wide range of disabilities.

However, McLoughlin and Lewis (2008) commented that there is no clear definition for an SET as there has been a shift in their complex role.

SETs have been identified as having one of the most challenging and demanding positions in education (Tyler & Brunner, 2014). The challenges and demands of special education have negatively impacted many SETs, causing them to experience burnout (Garwood et al., 2018). Administrators can be influential in building strong relationships that can minimize the stress level of SETs (Altinay et al., 2018). Furthermore, Bettini et al. (2015) stated that administrators play an important role in providing support to SETs to help reduce the level of stress. Support that can be provided includes social support, autonomy, feedback, task significance, and task interdependence (Bettini et al., 2015). Administrators can also guide SETs in reflecting to bring about self-awareness of their main causes of stress, which will help prevent SET burnout.

The attributes for this study were SETs who have taught in one or more public elementary schools or those who have different teaching experiences. SET burnout was another attribute of this study. Burnout is defined as an individual experiencing psychological problems and emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of personal accomplishment (Maslach et al., 2015). Burnout relates to the stress levels experienced by SETs. Public mild-moderate special education programs were the targeted group for this study. Atama (as cited in Nuri et al., 2017) defined special education as a “programme that is presented and developed by specialist in order to provide educational and social requirements to individuals showing significant levels of personal and developmental differences from their peers” (p. 160).

Data Analysis Procedures

In this qualitative case study, I explored SETs' perceptions of lack of support by their administrators. It also investigated SETs' perceptions of burnout as it related to special education. The data analysis process involved a methodical approach to determine meaning of data collection (Creswell, 2014). It is especially important that data analysis procedures are clear and transmittable because data analysis can be challenging and labor intensive (Hatch, 2002). Due to challenges in data analysis, data needs to be organized throughout the process. Hatch (2002) recommended starting interpretive analysis by carefully reading data to get an initial sense of what is being portrayed in the data. Data analysis will allow a researcher to "identify patterns and themes, discover relationships, develop explanations, make interpretations, mount critiques, or generate theories" (Hatch, 2002, p. 148). For this study, data was synthesized into coherent categories and patterns.

Survey

The data collected from the 5-point Likert scale survey was scored, analyzed, and the responses were described in qualitative form. The surveys were first manually coded and analyzed by reoccurring themes. They were then coded through MAXQDA, an online coding program. MAXQDA software is used to support with the organization of data collection. It also supports analysis, visualization, and publishing data in different frameworks.

Interviews

Both interviews were recorded and transcribed. A protected password computer notebook was used to record the interviews. Transcription of interviews took place after each individual interview. Rev.com was used to record and transcribe the interviews for accuracy.

After interviews were recorded, they were submitted to Rev.com for transcription.

Transcriptions from the first set of interviews were used to developed questions for the follow up interviews. Member checking took place in the follow up interview. Interviews were first manually coded by reoccurring themes; then they will were coded using MAXQDA for accuracy.

Coding

After each set of interviews was transcribed, coding took place. Coding is the process of classifying data into categories. Coding served as a platform for organizing each individual interview. Hatch (2002) indicated that coding is important in data analysis because it helps with maintain focus in an organized way. Coding is also part of interpretive analysis, which framed the analysis of this study in a meaningful way that others could follow and understand. Data was labeled and categorized, which helped develop a framework for this study (Hatch, 2002).

Microsoft Word facilitated the process of manual coding. Copy and paste functions in a Word document allowed me to discovering recurring patterns (Suter, 2014). Additionally, MAXQDA was used to code interview data. MAXQDA results gave a more accurate reading of reoccurring themes. Coded data of the first interview was shared with the participants in the follow up interview.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Research Design

Limitations

There were several limitations to this qualitative case study. It is important for a researcher to be aware of a study's limitations. Rudestam and Newton (2007) stated that limitations are restriction in the study in which the researcher has no control. The sampling

methods and time constraints may have impacted the results of this qualitative case study (Rudestam & Newton, 2007). Additionally, generalizability and time in the field also were limitations. Finally, the study may not represent the view of a larger population. The location and the population were also limitations. It is important to keep in mind that limitations can weaken a study; however, all studies have limitations.

Delimitations

Delimitations are a “system bias intentionally introduced into the study design by the researcher” (Price & Murnan, 2013, p. 66). Delimitations are results that come from specific choices made by the researcher. The design of this study was delimited because it focused only on elementary school SETs within a county. The participants were elementary SETs because elementary school is when many students are evaluated and determined to have learning needs. In this study, I did not focus on middle school or high school because most students of those ages with learning needs have already been identified with special needs and have an individual learning plan (IEP) in place. It is especially significant to focus on the elementary level because there is usually only one SET on site and in the upper levels there is more than one special educator. When there is more than one special educator it is easier for them to collaborate and support each other, but at the elementary level SETs often do not have that type of support. Furthermore, the role of the SET looks different at upper levels because academic goals change from building foundational academic skills to transition related goals (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2006). This study was a snapshot of the phenomenon of focus. Even though there were limitations to the study, personal reflection and coding supported the validity of the study.

Validation

In qualitative research, validation is the process in which researchers evaluate trustworthiness of reported observations, interpretations, and generalizations (Rudestam & Newton, 2007). To promote trustworthiness, five steps must be taken by the researcher. The steps that need to be taken include credibility transferability, dependability, conformability, and reflexivity (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Credibility is the most important factor in establishing trustworthiness (Devault, 2018). Triangulation was used to establish credibility and trustworthiness of this study. Triangulation is used in qualitative research that involves multiple data collection sources and procedures to evaluate the extent to which all evidence comes together to answer research questions (Shenton, 2004). The survey, initial interview, and the follow up interview were the components of triangulation for this case study.

Furthermore, member checking was also used to promote credibility. In member checking, the researcher schedules a follow up interview and shares findings with the participants, which provides participants with an opportunity to comment and ask questions about the findings (Creswell, 2014). In this study, member checking took place during the field test and was followed by sharing findings via email and through phone conversations as needed after data was transcribed and manually coded. Transferability provides a rich description of the participants, their behaviors, experiences, and their context (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Selected participants were those who work in the profession of focus. A background description of each of the participants was provided and a thick description of their answers and comments was kept during each interview.

Trustworthiness occurred through dependability and confirmability and through the provision of a clear and honest step by step description of the research from beginning to end. Korstjens and Moser (2018) indicated that dependability relies on the consistency of data reporting. Confirmability relies on accurate interpretation of data and not on personal opinions or viewpoints (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The instrumentation used for this study and the process of data analysis supported the research interpretations.

Finally, reflexivity requires self-examination of assumptions, preconceptions, and values (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The researcher needs to be mindful of his or her own assumptions, preconceptions, and values through all phases of the study to promote accurate interpretations. The collected knowledge and other information provided validity to the study. All collected data such as notes and transcriptions were used for accuracy of interpretations, which gives validity to the study. Participants were informed of the focus of the study to ensure a clear understanding and avoid any misleading information. Participants were always treated with respect and had the opportunity to express any concerns regarding the study. All information collected from the interviews and observations made during the interviews was kept confidential. Pseudonyms were assigned to participants as part of confidentiality. A careful analysis and rich written description of data collection increased validation of this study.

Expected Findings

I expected findings would be meaningful because of the responses given by each individual participant. According to the literature I reviewed, I felt I could expect to uncover that SET burnout is connected to the unlimited responsibilities and complicated and unclear role of the SET. I expected these findings to support other special educators, directors of special

services, principals, and other stakeholders who were experiencing concerns in the area of SETs burnout. Furthermore, I expected that findings of this study would support educating or reminding districts of the complicated roles and responsibilities of the special educator. Therefore, I expected my findings to possibly serve as a tool to provide SETs with the support they need to help alleviate some of the stress they experience, which could in turn help prevent teacher burnout.

Ethical Issues of the Study

Conflict of Interest

I had no financial interest or expectation of personal gain through this research study that could possibly be construed as a conflict of interest. The purpose for conducting this study was because special education is such a controversial and broad topic that keeps evolving, which can have an impact on the role of the special educator (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2006). This study served as a tool to share knowledge gained with other educators and stakeholders associated with special education services.

Recruited participants were informed of the purpose of the study and made aware that there was no personal interest of any kind or gain from the study on my part. Being open with the participants helped me avoid any misunderstandings (Creswell, 2014). I also presented an informed consent form to the participants and reviewed it with them.

Researcher's Position

I am an SET by profession. It is possible that, because of my experience in this profession, there could have been a potential conflict in the interview process. To avoid personal input and any other possible conflict, I recorded all interviews. I focused only on the

participants' responses and any field notes taken, setting aside personal views and refraining from any comments that could have negatively impacted my findings. I also spent time reflecting on data collection to gain meaning and accuracy of what was said and the feelings and emotions of the participants.

Furthermore, I acknowledged any personal connection I had to the research participants to mitigate any potential conflict. Creswell (2014) stated that even though it may be convenient to collect data from the researcher's own environment, collected data might not be accurate, and it may jeopardize the role of a researcher and the participants. If there are participants from a researcher's district, the researcher has the responsibility to explain how collected data will not affect them. My aim in this study was to collect data as a researcher and put aside any bias that could come from personal connection.

Ethical Issues in the Study

There were other potential ethical issues that could have arisen in this case study. Therefore, I took steps to obtain permission from the institutional review board (IRB) of Concordia University. The purpose of the study was reviewed with the participants, and they were given a consent form to sign. Pseudonyms were assigned to the participants and their school districts. All collected data was kept in a locked file cabinet, and no one had access to the collected data. To avoid issues, all collected documents from the participants were masked to avoid displaying the participants' identities or their districts.

Bias of the Study

Mathison (2005) described bias as prejudice or preference, or something is subjective, unfair, or partial. Everyone has biases and the researcher needs to put aside any biases that come

from own experiences relating to the topic. Data from interviews were evaluated solely on the responses of the participants. The role of the interviewer for this study was to be a listener. As a listener, I avoided giving my own personal thoughts to avoid bias. This approach also allowed participants to freely express themselves. I did, however, openly answer any questions the participants had about my own knowledge and experiences as a special educator. My field notes also helped me avoid bias in the study.

Conclusion

There is an ongoing phenomenon of special education teacher shortage. There are many factors that contribute to this shortage which includes SET burnout. In this study, I investigated the disconnect between SETs not feeling supported by their administrators and administrators thinking they were providing appropriate support. This study also investigated how SETs perceive burnout as it relates to special education. Qualitative data collection was appropriate for this study because it was problem based, the sample size was small, and because interviews are a source of data collection in qualitative studies (Rudestam & Newton, 2007).

Within this chapter, the purpose and design of the study, research population, the sample size, and instrumentation were described. Data collection was described, which included a survey, and interview, and member checking. . Research questions and problem statement were provided. Finally, identification of attributes, procedures of data analysis, limitations and delimitations of the research designed, validations, expected findings, and ethical issues were also reviewed as part of this chapter.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the descriptive qualitative research case study's sample population and size, the research methodologies used, and the study's results. I developed this research case study to identify special education teacher perception of burnout and special education teacher support. During this case study, I also explored reasons why teachers are experiencing burnout and why they feel they have or lack support. Data was collected through a survey to measure risk for burnout developed by MindTools, as well as through interviews and member checking. In this chapter, I will detail the results of the data collection and analyze the 15 survey questions and the 10 open ended questions that I asked during the interviews. Additionally, I will describe how I applied Freudenberger's burnout theory to the data attributes to determine if SETs who are at risk for burnout are experiencing any of the twelve phases described by Freudenberger.

Description of the Sample

The special education teacher participants were recruited from two different counties a Western U.S. state. The target population was elementary special education teachers. The purposive sampling targeted the same demographic because of the similarities in student population in both counties, with no probable bias associated with the recruitment method.

Race and Gender Demographics

The participants fell into a variety of race and gender demographics. Three of the participants were male and 10 were female.

Years of Teaching Experience

A benchmark for considering special education teacher burnout is the number of years teaching in the field of special education. Bettini et al. (2018) indicated that new special education teachers often feel overwhelmed with their unmanageable workload. Being unable to keep up with workload can lead to emotional exhaustion, which is a characteristic of burnout, and many special educators leave their profession prematurely. In general, Cancio et al. (2018) expressed that special educators who become overwhelmed with the stressors caused by their workload, many times leave their careers as educators.

The participants' special education teaching experiences ranged from special day class teachers (SDC), resource specialists (RSP), learning center teachers (LCT), and emotional disturbance transitional teachers (EDT). Five out of the 13 SETs had experience in both SDC and RSP positions. Other teaching experiences held by the participants prior to becoming special education teachers were as follows: three SETs reported that they were instructional assistants, two reported that they were general education substitute teachers, one was an applied behavior analyst and administrator for a private behavior analysis program, and seven SETs did not specify other teaching experiences. Table 1 provides an overview of the years of teaching experience in the field of special education by the participants.

Table 1

Years of Special Education Teaching Experience

Number of participants in category	Number of participants in category
1-5	3
6-10	3
11-15	4
16-21	3

Caseload Numbers and Paperwork

Another benchmark for considering special education teacher burnout is caseload number and the amount of paperwork required by each individual student. Caseload numbers range from six through 38 students. Services provided to students include intergrade services such as mainstreaming/inclusion, resource support, and separate setting. Each individual student with disabilities is required to have an individualized educational program (IEP) that is developed and supported by their SET. The IEP is documented in writing and it gets implemented by the SET. Paperwork is not limited to IEPs, reports or other services received by students requiring additional paperwork. Cancio et al. (2018) and Bettini et al. (2017) stated that large caseload and paperwork are connected to burnout. Figure 1 shows the distribution of students per teacher caseload.

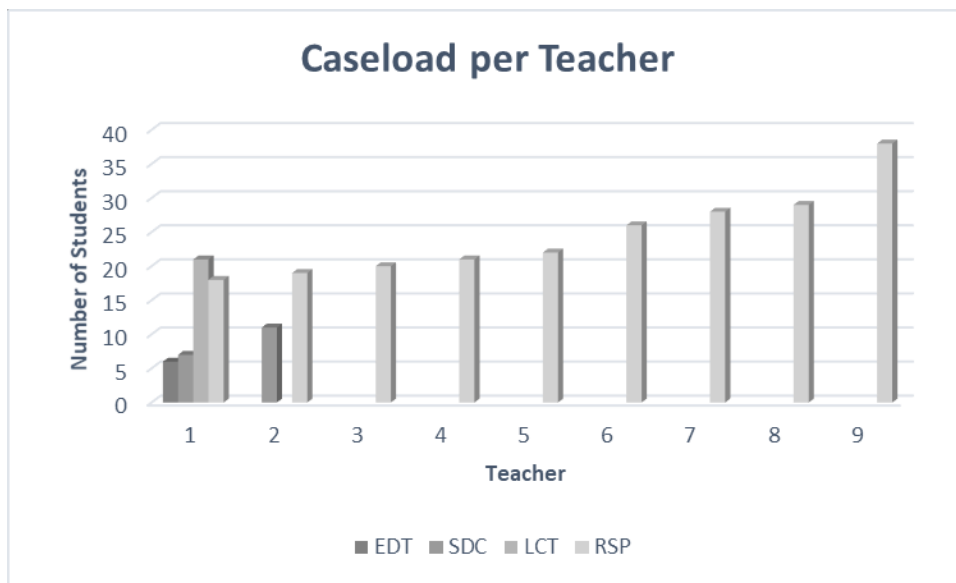


Figure 1. Distribution of students per teacher caseload.

Summary of Sample

The participants in this study were elementary special education teachers. To investigate SETs' perception of burnout and perception of SET support, the participants took an online burnout survey; they were interviewed, and member checking was used to verify accuracy of interview. In member checking, also known as validation, the researcher shares collected data of findings with the participants to verify accuracy (Hatch, 2002). In this descriptive study, teacher demographics such as gender, years of teaching experience, and teacher caseload were purposefully selected. Hatch (2002) described Patton's framework of purposeful sampling for selecting participants. The homogeneous sample of purposeful sampling best describes the sample for this study in which the "samples are made up of individuals with similar characteristics or experience" (Hatch, 2002, p. 98). Table 2 shows a summary of special education teacher participants. This sample provided insight into SETs' perceptions of burnout and their perceptions of SET support.

Table 2

Summary of Special Education Teacher Participants

Teacher Demographics

<u>By Gender</u>	<u>Number of SETs</u>
Male	3
Female	10
<u>Years Teaching Special Education</u>	
1 – 5	3
5 – 10	3
11 – 15	4
16 – 21	3
<u>SPED Teacher Classroom Type</u>	<u>Caseload</u>
EDT	5
EDT	6
SDC	6
SDC	11
RSP	16
RSP	18
RSP	19
RSP	20
LCT	21
RSP	22
RSP	26
RSP	28
RSP	38

Research Methodology and Analysis

Upon approval by the Concordia University Internal Board (IRB), MindTools was contacted via email to request permission to use their Burnout Self-Test. Once permission was granted to use the Burnout Self-Test, the research investigation got started. In this descriptive qualitative study, Freudenberger's burnout theory was used to investigate special education teacher burnout. Freudenberger (1974) based his burnout theory on patient observations, and as a result, he defined burnout as exhaustion by disproportionate work demands on energy, strength,

and resources. In conjunction to Freudenberger's burnout theory, Maslach's work was also considered in this study because she adopted Freudenberger's work and furthered burnout theory (Heinemann & Heinemann, 2017). Maslach, along with her colleagues, are leading researchers in the field of burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). They focused burnout in three dimensions which include exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy. Maslach developed the Burnout Self-Test marketed by MindTools (MindTools, n.d.), which was the survey used in this study.

For this study's investigation, SET participants were surveyed, interviewed, and then it was followed by member checking. The goal of the study was to investigate SETs' perceptions of burnout and their perceptions of SET support. All recruited teachers participated in the survey and regardless of their scores for at risk for burnout, they participated in the interview process. Finally, member checking/ validation took place for accuracy of collected data. After taking the only survey, SETs submitted their survey and immediately they were able to see their survey results. Completed survey results were returned to the investigator. SETs were then contacted to schedule a face-to-face interview. Those SETs who were not available for a face-to-face interview were scheduled for a phone interview. Interviews were crucial as a follow up of the survey and to further investigate burnout and the research questions in this study. Even though this study is a small fraction concerning special education teacher burnout, it supports previous findings as addressed in the literature review. The interviews were the primary source of data collection. The survey brought SETs awareness of their level for risk for burnout and it served as a self-evaluation tool.

Researchers suggested there is a shortage of special education teachers due to burnout, therefore it is important to continue to investigate this phenomenon. The survey, the

interviews and member checking were helpful tools to investigate special education teacher burnout and to explore reasons why it is affecting so many special educators. The survey brought SETs awareness of where they are with their level of stress; the interviews were the main source of data collection for answering the research questions, and member checking brought validation to data collection as it provided an opportunity to asked further questions (Hatch, 2002). The research questions for this study were as follows:

RQ1. What are special education teachers' perceptions of burnout?

RQ2. What are special education teachers' perception of special education teacher support?

Participant Survey

Thirteen of the 17 SETs who responded to the recruitment email invites agreed to participate in the research study. The researcher purposefully selected SET participants to attain utmost accuracy of the topic being investigated. Creswell (2014) suggested researchers focus on years of experience in profession, ethnicity, and gender when collecting data.

When each individual participant agreed to participate in the study, they were emailed a link to the online survey along with instructions on how to take the survey, how to score it, and how to save it so they could email it back to the researcher. The consent form was also attached to in the same email. The consent form described the purpose of the study and the participant's right to withdraw from the study at any time. Participants were informed in the same email that their identity, their school, and their district would be kept confidential and stored in a password-protected computer. They were also informed that all collected data would be destroyed at the end of the study. Participants were encouraged to ask any questions they might have about the

study before signing the consent. Once individual surveys were completed and returned along with the signed consent form, an interview was scheduled in a place and time of convenience for the participants. See Appendix B for the MindTools Burnout Self-Inventory survey questions. A table was created using Microsoft Word to record teacher responses, by gender and frequency. All returned surveys and consent forms were saved in a password protected computer notepad.

Participant Interviews

Upon agreement of time and date that worked best for the SET participants, the interviews were scheduled. Six of the interviews were face-to face interviews, and seven were phone interviews. Four of the face-to-face interviews took place in the SETs' classroom, and two took place in an agreed location suggested by the participants. Before the interview questions got started, each individual participant was thanked for participating in the study. The reason for the study and a reminder of the confidentiality of the study were reviewed. SET participants were also asked if they had any questions before starting with the interview. Answers were given to those participants with questions. Furthermore, before starting the open ended set of questions, permission was requested to start the audio recording (See Appendix A for interview questions). Questions that were not included as part of the open ended questions include years of experience teaching in special education, caseload number, and suggestions to prevent burnout. Additionally, at the end of the interview, participants were made aware that the recording was going to be stopped. A protected password computer notebook was used to record the interviews.

The open ended questions outlined in Appendix A were used as a guide for the interviews. These questions were part of the developed instrument for measuring SETs'

perception of burnout and their perception of SET support. The participants, as the respondents to the interview questions, were in control of their responses, and they had the flexibility to expand on their responses as needed. The interview instrument was designed to find out what contributes to SET burnout and what helps in dealing with burnout. The interviews lasted between 30 minutes to an hour, with the longest interview lasting about two hours. The recording for the two-hour interview was stopped after all of the interview questions were answered. During the interview, participants were informed when the recording was going to start and when it was going to be stopped.

During the interview, the teachers were first thanked for completing the burnout surveys, and they were asked if they were surprised of the outcome of their score. They were also asked if they had any questions regarding the survey. Furthermore, the interviewer briefly reviewed the agreement form, the purpose of the study, and asked if they had any questions. Following their responses, the interviewer continued with the instrument developed containing the open ended questions. Additionally, the participants were made aware that the interview was being recorded. The developed instrument supported in maintaining order and focus of the interviews. Each individual interviewee explained their current role as special educators, years in current position, and experience as special educator.

When all interviews were completed, the researcher uploaded each of the 13 password-protected interviews into Rev.com, which is an online transcribing program. Upon receipt of each of the transcribed interview, the researcher simultaneously listened and reviewed transcription for accuracy. Names of the participants, their school site or their district were deleted if they accidentally showed up in the transcripts. When all interviews were reviewed for

accuracy, the researcher then forwarded each participant a summary of their interviews for them to verify further accuracy and authenticity (Hatch, 2002). This authentication allowed member checking to take place. Upon email response and verification of accuracy by the participants, emails containing transcriptions were deleted. Participants also deleted emails containing their transcriptions. Additionally, the Rev transcriptions were saved as Word documents, and a file was created to save the documents in the password protected computer notebook. Once transcripts were saved, the researcher printed each transcription, saved them in a locked file cabinet, and deleted the recorded interviews from the protected password computer notebook. The printed interviews were then manually coded one at a time. Tables were created using Microsoft Word to organize the codes by interview questions, themes identified, and recommendations given to reduce stress and avoid burnout.

Upon completing of the manual coding, further coding was done using an online data analysis tool MAXQDA. MAXQDA provided accuracy and validation of manual codes and added additional information that was not captured through the manual coding. When MAXQDA coding was completed, the codes were then automatically transferred from MAXQDA to Microsoft Word and Excel, which supported with organization and evaluation of codes. MAXQDA allows researchers to transfer coded data collection into Microsoft Word and Excel. Both manual coding and the online coding were time consuming, but supported with discovering recurring patterns (Suter, 2014).

Member Checking

The transcribed interviews were summarized and shared with each individual participant via email for them to review them for accuracy. Once interview summaries were reviewed for

accuracy, the researcher started the manual coding using different colors for each answer of individual focus questions. Upon completion of the coding, a couple of tables were developed using Microsoft Word to organize the coded interviews by questions, themes, recommendations to avoid burnout, and symptoms of burnout. Additionally, a table was developed by gender and on how the participants responded to each individual question in the survey. Tables of collected data were also shared with participants via email for them to review findings and to ask questions as needed. Additionally, the MAXQDA online coding was also shared with the participants to allow them to ask further questions. The burnout surveys, the interviews, transcriptions of the interviews, and the coding process took over a period of 17 weeks.

Methodological triangulation occurred through the different sources used for data collection to improve confidence in reporting findings and develop a comprehensive understanding of the topic of study (Hatch, 2002). Hatch (2002) described triangulation as a method of collecting data through various sources. This descriptive study was the product of social interaction through, emails, phone interviews, and face-to face interviews. A survey was also part of this study, to prompt readiness for the interviews. Survey findings are reported in a detailed descriptive form. The researcher front loaded the SET participants with the survey, interview questions, and a description of the process of this study, which allowed participants an opportunity to ask questions or voice concerns. For accurate findings of data collection, the researcher used the online data analysis programs Rev.com and MAXQDA to transcribe and code the data collected for this qualitative descriptive study.

Data Analysis and Results

The participants took an online 5-point Likert scale Burnout Self-Test from MindTools. The self-test contained 15 questions. Upon completion of the burnout survey, participants submitted their survey for scoring. MindTools immediately scored the surveys upon submission. Once participants received their score results, they forwarded them to the researcher for analysis of the results. Four out of the 13 participants were able to provide their scores, but they had trouble retrieving how they answered each independent question. The Burnout Self-Test is a tool that supports with self-examination, work emotions, and experiences to get a feel for at risk for burnout. In this descriptive study, the results of each of the Burnout Self-Test are reported in descriptive form, which support with identifying frequency of themes.

Interviews were transcribed using Rev.com, which is an online transcription program. Upon receipt of the transcribed interviews, member checking took place for accuracy. Summary of transcript reviews were shared with each individual participant for verification of accuracy. Once transcribed, interviews were reviewed by the participants; the researcher manually started the coding process and created a table using Microsoft word and organized data. After manual coding took place, the researcher used the online MAXQDA coding software for more accurate coding (Olsen, 2014). MAXQDA supported coding because it allowed a search of explicit and literal phrases within the transcribed interviews (Olsen, 2014). The researcher coded the interviews response using the explicit phrases from the responses given by the developed instrument used in the interviews. Additionally, other topic coding developed as a result of the explicit phrases. Olsen (2014) suggested that explicit phrases support analytical coding, which is the analysis of meaning and capturing emerging themes.

A total of 14 codes were identified and 10 of the codes were explicit phrases from the interview questions. For example, the question “Can you describe your role as a SET, and long have you been in this role?” The explicit phrase codes were “role of the special educator” and “years of teaching experience.” Analytical coding then followed, which helped identify the type of special education teacher, years of teaching in education aside from the role of the special educator, and other descriptive phrases such as student support in the general education classroom or intervention out of the general education classroom, developing individual learning plans (IEP) for students, paperwork, training staff, assessing students for academic difficulties and so forth. Many of the emerging analytical themes that were identified through data analysis, were identified in literatures review, which brought validity to this study.

Descriptive Topic and Themes of Survey

Survey. The burnout survey was a 15-question, 5pt-Likert scale survey. The possible answers to each of the survey questions include: *not at all, rarely, sometimes, often, and very often.*

Feeling run down and drained. One male participant answered *rarely* to the question, “I feel run down and drained of physical or emotional energy. Another male participant and three female participants answered *sometimes*. One male participant and one female participant answered *often*, and two female participants responded that they feel run down and drained *very often*.

Negative thoughts about their job. One female participant answered *not at all* for having negative thoughts about her job. One male and one female answered *rarely*; one male

participant and three females responded *sometimes*; one male and one female participant responded that they *very often* have negative thoughts about their job.

Harder and less sympathetic. Two female participants answered *not at all* to being harder and less sympathetic with people. One male and three females answered *rarely*; one male and one female answered *sometimes*, and one female responded *often*.

Gets easily irritated by small things or people. One male participant and three females responded *rarely* to getting irritated by small things or people. One male and three females responded *sometimes*, and one male participant responded *with often*.

Feels misunderstood or unappreciated. Two male participants and one female answered *not at all* to feeling misunderstood or unappreciated by their co-workers. One male and one female answered *rarely*, two female participants answered *sometimes*, and two females responded *often*.

Feel they have no one to talk to. Two male participants and three female participants answered *not at all* to feeling like they have no one to talk to. One female answered *rarely*; one male and one female answered *sometimes*, and one female answered *often*.

Feeling like they are achieving less. One male participant answered *never* feeling like he is achieving less than he should. Two females answered *rarely*; one female answered *sometimes*, two males; two female participants answered *often*, and one female answered *very often*.

Feeling under unpleasant pressure to succeed. One male and one female participant answered *not at all* to feeling under unpleasant pressure to succeed. One female participant

answered *rarely*; one male participant and two female participants answered *sometimes*; one male and one female answered often, and one female answered *very often*.

Feeling like not getting what wanting from job. One female participant answered *not at all* for feeling like she is not getting what she wants from her job. Two male participants and one female answered *rarely*; two female participants answered *sometimes*; one female answered often, and one male and one female participant answered *very often*.

Feeling like they are in the wrong organization or profession. Two male and two female participants answered *not at all* for feeling like they are in the wrong profession. One male participant answered *rarely*; two females answered *sometimes*; one female participant answered often, and one female participant answered *very often*.

Frustrated with parts of job. One female participant answered *not at all* to feeling frustrated with parts of her job. One male participant answered *rarely*; one male participant and two female participants answered *sometimes*; two female participants answered often, and one male and one female participant answered *very often*.

Organizational politics and bureaucracy causes job frustration. One female participant answered *rarely* to feeling that politics of bureaucracy frustrate her ability to do a good job. Two male participants and one female answered *sometimes*; one male and one female answered often, and three females answered *very often*.

Feels there is more to do than their ability. Two female participants answered *rarely* to feeling like there is more work to do that they practically can do. One male participant and one female answered *sometimes*, and two male and three female participants answered *very often*.

Lack time to do quality work. Two male and two female participants answered that *sometimes* they feel like they do not have time to do many things that are important to doing a good quality job. One female participant answered *often*, and one male and two female participants answered *very often*.

Do not have time to plan. One female participant answered *rarely* to not having time to plan as she would like to have. One male and one female participant answered *sometimes*; two male and two female participants answered *often*. Two female participants answered *very often* to not having time to plan as they would like to have.

Burnout self-test summative. All the 13 participants took the online burnout survey and only two of the of the participants scored at little sign of burnout. Four of the participants scored at risk for burnout, and seven participants scored severe risk for burnout. Score interpretations are as follow: 15-18 no sign of burnout, 19-32 little sign of burnout, 33-49 at risk for burnout, 50- 59 severe risk of burnout, and 60- 70 very severe risk of burnout (MindTools, n.d.).

Descriptive and Topic Themes of Interview

Role of the special educator. In response to the first interview question, asking the interviewee to describe their role as a special educator and how long they had been in that role, eight of the 13 interviewees responded that they were resource specialists (RSP) teachers and provided a brief description of their job as an RSP teacher. One of the 13 participants indicated that she was a learning center special education teacher. She described the learning center as a hybrid program with a modified inclusion program for students who traditionally are placed in resource, which includes occasional moderate disabilities students needing one-on-one support. One teacher indicated that he was a teacher for an emotionally disturbed (ED) transition class,

and he provided a short description of his job. Two of the 13 participants indicated that they were special day class (SDC) teachers, and one teacher indicated that his role was to educate students and use an individualized approach, behavior intervention and mainstreaming students in the general education classroom. All special education teachers indicated to some degree that they had students mainstreamed in the general education classroom.

Years of teaching experience. The number years of teaching experience in the field of special education of the participants ranged from three to 21 years of experience. Some of the participants had experiences in different areas of special education, which included both the role of an RSP and SCD teacher, instructional assistant for special education, applied behavior analyst (ABA), and administration for a private special education program in ABA. Some SET also had substitute teaching experience. Two RSP teachers did not indicate other SET teaching experiences, but one stated that she substituted prior to her position as a special educator, and the other stated she worked in administration. Three SETs indicated that they had experience teaching RSP and SDC, and one of those three teachers also had been a special education instructional assistant prior to becoming SET, and one had substitute taught. Two other RSP teachers indicated that they were instructional assistants before they became RSP teachers. One of those teachers taught previously as an RSP middle school teacher. Two RSP teachers indicated that they taught in other countries. One SDC teacher indicated that his previous experience as a special educator was ABA therapist and as an administrator for the ABA program. One SDC teacher and the Learning Center Teacher did not specify other teaching experiences, and another special educator did not specify his current job title or his previous

experience as a special educator. Analytical analysis indicates that participants have a variety of years of experience teaching in special education, including different titles as educators.

Other roles taken in current position. When participants were asked if they took on other roles besides the role of the special educator, six of the 13 responded that they take the role of advocates for the children and their families. They indicated that they take the role of an advocate because they care for their students; it is in the best interest for their families and students, or because no one else will advocate for them. Four of the participants indicated that they must take the role of behaviorist for non-SPED students because their school sites do not have a behaviorist. Two participants indicated that they must train instructional assistants (IAs) because the district does not provide training for them. Four participants stated that they are required to be part of one of their district's committees, such as strategic, curriculum and instruction, administrator committees, and playground committees. Six of participants indicated that they have yard duty responsibilities. One participant indicated that she is required to be part of the student study team (SST), which is not a function of special education. Another participant stated that she is required to provide response to intervention (RTI) to English language development (ELD) students or other students who are struggling academically. Three of the participants indicated that they take the role of mentors to support other special educators because their districts are not providing the support. Other roles mentioned by the participants include counselor for other staff, behavioral health for student support, social work, and other unexpected roles that a special educator takes that show up unexpectedly.

Perception of special education teacher support. When the participants were asked about their perceptions of special education teacher support, the responses given by the

participants were no support, lack of support, or very little support. Their answers also varied from individual administrators and other school staff. Some participants gave more than one answer. Eight participants indicated that they do not have support from any of their administrators, and four of those participants added that financial support is also a concern. Four of those eight participants stated that they are left alone most of the time, and they appreciate the hand off from administrators, since they are not provided with support. Two individuals stated that their special education local plan (SELPA) did not provide any support and are only focused on demands and paperwork, rather than supporting students. Two participants stated that the staff which include their administrators are not supportive, lack special education knowledge, and are demanding when they need student support for students that do not have an IEP. Three participants indicated that there is no support and that they feel ignored and isolated. Only one participant stated that their special education director was supportive but not their principal. The supporting director has expectations and demands but is understanding and fair-minded. Two participants stated that they have supporting principals and that they are hands on with the children in the program. Six of the participants stated that the only support they receive is from their school psychologist, and four indicated that they feel supported because they have good IAs. The main theme that developed with the perception of special education teacher support was that the director of special education is the less supporting administrator.

Perception of special education teacher burnout. When the participants were asked what their perceptions of special education teacher burnout were, nine of the 13 participants stated that the demands of paperwork were the main cause for special education teacher burnout. Five participants included that lack of administrative support also adds to burnout. Four stated

that all the demands that come with the role of being a special educator are the cause for burnout, especially the paperwork. Other themes that developed as a result of perception of burnout include not knowing how to disconnect from work, working long hours, working with toxic people, unreasonable expectations and demands, making sure that students are making progress and meeting their goals, large caseload numbers, not feeling respected, and lack of communication.

Experienced stress or burnout. All participants stated that they have experienced some level of stress and or burnout. Table 6 breaks down the participants' responses of experiencing burnout. Themes that developed as a result of experiencing burnout include; working with difficult IAs, teaching wrong grade levels as a RSP, teaching an SDC class, being ignored or not being supported by administrators, lack of team work, being under staffed, and the demands and emphasis that is put on paperwork. Two of the 13 participants indicated that the survey that was part of data collection for this study was a supporting and reflecting tool. The survey brought awareness to participants of their stress levels and made them think of those things that were bringing stress in their roles as special educators.

Symptoms of burnout. As a result of asking SETs if they have experienced stress/burnout, the theme of symptoms of burnout developed. Two participants indicated that they have experienced health issues related to stress. One indicated having regular stomach aches and getting sick before getting to work. Three participants stated feeling exhausted and overwhelmed daily. One stated that lack of sleep was a result of feeling burnout. Two indicated that they have experienced lack of motivation to get up and go to work, and three participants

indicate that they have experienced alcohol dependency. One participant stated that the alcohol dependency caused family negligence.

Contributors of stress/burnout. Reoccurring themes that cause burnout include paperwork, large caseload numbers, lack of administrative support, lack of time to get work done, and not knowing how to balance their time to get all job requirements done. Other given responses that were not reoccurring themes include feeling isolated, lack of communication, lack of training and materials, working with difficult SPED, staff, and the mandates and laws of special education.

How participants deal with stress/burnout. How participants deal with stress / burnout was a sub-code developed from having experience stress/ burnout. The responses that were given by the participants varied, but themes developed as a result of this question. Participant one indicated that working directly with children and focusing on their needs was a way of coping with stress. Participant two stated that yoga, meditation, getting enough sleep, and trying to understand her limitations is a way of coping with stress. Participant three stated that medication and therapy is currently helping her to deal with burnout. She added that she often deals with unexpected stress by drinking. Participant three also stated that she has learned how to disconnect from her phone after work hours. Participant four deals with stress by doing outdoor activities and disconnecting from work when possible. Music, walking, and knowing her own limitations are what support participant five. Setting time aside for paperwork and walking is what helps participant six. Participant seven stated that having cheat sheets to keep her on track, seeking support, walking away from stressful situations, having a life away from work, and having expectations from others including administrator is what helps her to avoid feeling stress.

Participant eight stated that she is at a burnout stage, and she does not know how to deal it. She indicated that she does not have time to focus on herself because she is never caught up, and when she goes home, she must focus on her family. She has tried to get up early to exercise, but she is too exhausted. Participant nine indicated that physical and outdoor activities and spending time with his own children has helped him with stress. Participant nine was previously dealing with stress by drinking after work, but he stopped because it started affecting his interactions with family. Participants 10 and 13 did not state how they deal with stress or burnout. Participant 11 stated that when he was at the burnout level, he was drinking a lot, and it was having a negative impact on his marriage. He was able to cope with it by getting closer to God, reading his Bible, and going to church. He added that he is also doing physical activities and interacts with others instead of isolating himself like when he was drinking. Themes that developed when coping with stress and burnout included learning how to disconnect from work, learning own limitations, physical activity, walking, and alcohol dependency.

Recommendations to avoid burnout. Recommendations to avoid burnout resulted from participants' responses to how they cope with stress/ burnout. Four participants suggested disconnecting from work when you are at home; three recommended physical exercises; three recommended having a good support group or team; three recommended having an additional RSP teacher at the same site to split the load with do not stay at work past contract hours, and two suggested mindfulness. Other recommendations suggested by single individuals included; setting boundaries for yourself, recognize you cannot fix everyone's problems, take a mental health day, take time for self, staff development geared towards special education teacher, training for instructional assistants, having more instructional assistants, healthier eating habits,

having a routine, keeping a positive attitude, being open to suggestions, finding different approaches to do thing, walking away from stressful situations, having expectations of others like timelines to respond to emails, phone calls, and returning paperwork, building a good relationship with your staff, and learning how to balance your time,

Administration and their understanding of the role of the SET. The participants were asked if they felt that their administrators understood their roles as special educators and 10 of the 13 participants responded that administrators do not understand their roles. Reasons why participants felt that administrators do not understand their role was because when they do provide them with support, the support is not generated to support special education teachers, administrators are not hands on administrators, they have unreasonable expectations, provide wrong intervention programs that do not meet the needs of their students, and they are more concerned about paperwork than meeting the needs of students. Three of the participants indicated that some administrators understand only on the surface and they do not know the children. Five of 13 participants added that their principals have a better understanding of their role when compared to directors of special education because they take time to get involved with their program.

Collaboration time. Participants were asked if they had time to collaborate with others. Four participants indicated that there was no time to collaborate because paperwork and prep time used up all their time. Six participants indicated that they must make time in order to support their students. Three of these participants indicated that most of the collaboration is done on the fly. Participants indicated that briefly popping into the general education classroom, a short conversation during lunch or hallways, touching basis after school with general education

teacher, popping in during grade level meeting, emails, and text messages are ways counted for collaboration. One teacher indicated that staff meetings before an IEP meeting have been a good way to collaborate and it brings down stress levels. Another participant stated that there is no way a special educator can be successful at their job if they do not take the time to collaborate with both the general education teachers and the instructional assistants. All 13 participants indicated that not having time to collaborate does affect work performance and contributes to stress.

Personal challenges faced by the participants. When participants were asked what their personal challenges were as special educators, they gave several responses. However, paperwork was the reoccurring response for personal challenge. Seven participants indicated that keeping up with paperwork was their main challenge. Four participants reported feeling isolated. Four participants stated that they are challenged by not having enough time to get things done at work. Three indicated that their health due to stress is a personal challenge, and one added anxiety. Three stated that they are challenged by not being able to disconnect from work and they struggle balancing their home and work life. Three indicated feeling burnouts is their personal challenge, and two added that training their instructional assistants to work with students was a challenge. The following responses that were not a theme include not having family in this country, not having someone to talk to about challenges faced at work, not feeling prepared to teach students, having students who are at different academic levels, supporting other special educators with paperwork, making sure it's done correctly, lack of training, working in a toxic environment, administrators not showing up to IEP meetings, making sure placement in the

general education classroom for students with disabilities is appropriate, and needing more instructional assistants.

SETs wanting to leave their positions. As a result of asking participants about their personal challenges, a sub-code was developed of SETs wanting to leave their positions as special educators. One participant is planning to go back to school and focus on another career. One teacher is looking to retire early but has held back from retiring because of the shortage of special education teachers in her district, and another wanted to retire two years ago because she was dealing with burnout. Another participant stated that she fears for the wellbeing of her students if she retires. Other participants stated that she almost left because she had a very difficult instructional assistant. One participant indicated that she resigned before because of burnout, but she decided to come back after taking a long break, and another indicated that she almost left her position 2 years ago because she was dealing with burnout. One participant indicated that working with unsupportive administrators has led her to thinking of retiring early. Another participant stated that if their RSP program changes, she will leave her positions, and another participant stated that he is tired and wants to leave because of the yearly updates and the added paperwork requirements. Finally, one participant was given involuntary leave of absence for the rest of the year because district did not want to accommodate the burnout recommendations given by her physician.

Developed concerns. Some themes developed as future concerns of the participants. Administrators in a couple of school districts are looking to making changes to RSP programs to inclusion programs or Learning Center programs. Two participants have been added extra students to their caseload from other schools because of the shortage of special educators in their

districts. A participant was split between two schools because of a shortage of SETs in her district. One participant experienced negative attitudes from a couple of the professors from his special education teacher program. The professors often said they anyone going into special education were doomed to fail in their careers because of the demands in special education. As a result, he switched to another teacher program. One participant indicated that they have high numbers of unfilled special education positions because of SET shortages. He added that students are being served by substitute teachers who do not have cleared credentials or by SETs from the Phillipines contracted to teach for 3 to 5 years in the Western U.S. state where this study took place. Four participants from different school districts indicated that their district is recruiting SETs from the Philippines. Finally, one participant stated that their district starts the year off with all special education positions filled, and within months, many SETs leave. She states that for the last few years their district has experienced a high overturn of special educators.

Summary of interviews. The interview questions were designed by the researcher and were tested with the recruited participants to capture an understanding the phenomenon of special education teacher burnout and to answer the research question, “What are special education teachers’ perception of burnout?” The interview questions also supported answering the second researcher questions which is, “What are special education teachers’ perceptions of special education teacher support?” As the interview questions were asked, other questions developed and reoccurring themes were identified.

Summary

The purpose of this descriptive qualitative study was to explore special education teacher burnout and the reasons behind burnout. This chapter comprehensively detailed this research study's sample population, its research methodologies, and the findings were analyzed using Freudenberg's burnout theory, which is focused on the symptoms of burnout and nature factors that influence people to suffer from burnout (Heinemann & Heinemann, 2017). The MindTools Burnout Self-Test developed by Christina Malasch (1997) was used as a tool to focus on Freudenberg's theory. Malasch followed Freudenberg's work and continued examining burnout by measuring burnout. This qualitative study sought to identify the causes behind special education teacher burnout and how special education teachers are coping with the stress that leads to burnout. The research questions for this study were as follows:

RQ1. What are special education teachers' perceptions of burnout?

RQ2. What are special education teachers' perception of special education teacher support?

The research questions were analyzed through this case study's burnout inventory survey and the interviews. The burnout inventory survey supported evaluating the level of stress experienced by each individual participant. The interview questions supported answering the research questions of this qualitative study, as they supported uncovering meaning, themes, and structure of collected data (Hatch, 2002).

Working as a special educator is a challenging job because of the many requirements and responsibilities they face. All the participants of this study indicated that they have experienced stress, some stated that they have experienced burnout, and they also indicated that stress is an

ongoing event in the role of a special educator. Participants expressed that there are other roles that they take on besides the role of special educators that can add stress. Additionally, feeling isolated, lacking administrative support, not having time to collaborate with others, lack of staff, not having a good team, and the demanding and overwhelming paperwork all contribute to stress levels that can lead to burnout.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

This descriptive qualitative case study examined special education teachers' (SET) perceptions of burnout in the field of special education and the reasons behind burnout. Through this research, I found that there is an ongoing phenomenon of stress and burnout in the field of special education. Research within the field of special education supported in generalizing the phenomenon of special education teacher burnout. SET burnout is a concern nationwide, and it has caused a shortage of special educators (Dewey et al., 2017). Cancio et al. (2018) stated that 90% of vacant SET positions in the Western U.S. state where this study took place were due to SET resignation. Some of the special educators who left their positions left because they were not satisfied with their positions. The results of my study can help administrators focus on the gaps that exist and provide adequate support to help reduce SET burnout. This chapter provides a summary and discussions of the results and the connection with the literature review. The limitations of the study, conclusions of findings through the lens of burnout theory, and recommendations for future research are all discussed in this chapter.

Summary of the Results

This descriptive qualitative study targeted elementary special education teachers in two counties in a Western U.S. state. There were a total of 13 SETs who participated in this study. A literature review supported the findings of this study.

In this study, I showed that special education teachers are experiencing high levels of stress and even burnout due to the ongoing demands of their position as special educators. I also revealed that lack of administrative support, paperwork, lack of time to get daily work done, large caseloads, feeling isolated, not knowing how to disconnect from work, and lack of

collaboration time with general education teachers and instructional assistants were all factors that contribute to burnout.

Discussion of the Results

Based on the findings of this study, I suggest that special education teachers experience high levels of stress and burnout as a result of the demands of special education and the lack of administrative support. The demands of special education and the lack of support make it difficult for special educators to feel successful in their careers as educators. The methodological triangulation used in this study supported answering the two research questions.

Research Question 1

The first research question that guided this study was as follows: “What are special education teachers’ perceptions of burnout?” Results from this study revealed that elementary special education teachers, regardless of gender and years of teaching experience, face many challenges that lead to burnout. All 13 participants expressed that they have experienced high levels of stress as special educators; five of the participants expressed that they have experienced burnout in the past, and four expressed that they are currently burnt-out.

Special educators who have experienced burnout expressed that their burnout was due to not feeling supported by their administrators and feeling ignored when they seek support. Other reasons given for experiencing burnout include feeling overwhelmed with the demands of paperwork, lack of resources, lack of staff to support students, dealing with students who have challenging behaviors, dealing with difficult instructional assistants, and teaching the wrong age group.

All 13 participants expressed that all of the SET job requirements can lead to burnout. However, when the focus was targeted to more specific reasons for their perception of burnout, all the participants expressed that the amount of paperwork was the primary cause for burnout. Other answers that followed the overwhelming task of paperwork included not knowing how to balance their time to get things done, lack of administrative support, feeling isolated, and large caseloads. Some of the participants also expressed that working with difficult staff, lack of communication, lack of training and materials, and the mandates and laws of special education contribute to burnout.

Research Question 2

The second research question that guided this study was as follows: What are special education teachers' perceptions of special education teacher support? All participants expressed that there is a lack of support for special educators. Reasons given for lack of support include administrators not understanding the reality of the special education program because the focus for administrators is paperwork. Some of the SETs expressed that districts want to look good based on the quality of the paperwork due to the legality aspect of it. Some of the participants added that administration forget that what is in the paperwork also needs to be implemented to support and monitor student progress.

Eight of the 13 participants expressed that they do not have support from any of their administrators. For example, one participant stated, "We've gotten some pushback from administration because they want to avoid giving us support." Another participant declared, "Oh my God! There is no support, not at all!" A third participant stated, "All they care about is paperwork; they don't care about supporting you." Lack of administration support expressed by

the participants included lack of financial support, administrators demanding implementation of general education curriculum without proper training to meet students' individual needs, and administrators not knowing special education programs because they are not hands-on administrators. Additionally, SETs expressed that administrators provide support using general education teachers on special assignments (TOSA). One participant stated, "TOSAs who support us are trained to provide support to general education teachers. They are nice, and they try." Another participant stated, "The TOSA that comes to provide me with support doesn't have experience in special education, but it gives me someone to vent to." Furthermore, some participants indicated that administrators do not understand the role of the special educator because they have them supporting students with behavior problems or students who are second language learners who are not identified as students with learning disabilities. Other indications that lead to administrators not understanding the role of the SET are because they are requiring SETs to do other duties that are not related to special education. Those duties include response to intervention for low performers and attending response to intervention meetings.

Four participants added that their principals try to provide some support when possible because they understand the program a little more. The understanding of the program is because they are physically present at the site. Two of the participants expressed that administrators and school staff do not provide support because they lack knowledge in special education. Three other participants expressed that they feel ignored and isolated. They expressed that they feel isolated because administrators are always busy, and they do not have another special educator to collaborate with like the general education teachers do. Six participants expressed their gratefulness because they had a supporting school psychologist who provided guidance and

support with their caseloads. Finally, four of the participants expressed how fortunate they were to have good instructional assistants who go the extra mile to support them and the students.

Discussion of Results in Relation to the Literature

Perception of Special Education Teacher Burnout

The first research question dealt with SET perception of burnout. All participants of this study expressed that all the demands and responsibilities that come with the role of being a special educator can contribute to burnout. Lavian (2015) reported that the countless duties and demands of special education are causing SET burnout, and many special educators have left their positions prematurely. Garwood et al. (2018) claimed that SETs have the most difficult and challenging jobs in education. According to De Stasio, Liorilli and Benevene (2017), SET demands can lead to psychological and physical problems which indicates that the individual is dealing with burnout. Maslach et al. (2015) indicated that burnout symptoms include physical and psychological exhaustion when an individual works under extreme pressure. SETs of this study, who have experienced burnout or who are currently experiencing burnout, have experienced feeling overwhelmed, exhausted, defeated, experienced feeling sick, and experienced lack of accomplishment. All the described experiences expressed by the participants defined the definition of burnout as defined by Hinds et al. (2015).

Additionally, it is important to recognize that burnout can cause health issues (Freudenberger, 1974). Freudenberger (1974) stated that lingering cold symptoms, headaches, gastrointestinal problems, lack of sleep, and breathing problems are all symptoms of burnout. Some of the health issues conveyed by participants when they experienced burnout include nausea before going to work, lack of sleep, headaches, stomach problems, mental health

problems, anxiety, and some participants expressed that existing health conditions got worse. The symptoms as described by the participants who have experience burnout were identified in the literature review (De Stasio, Fiorilli & Benevene, 2017; Garwood et al., 2018; Yu et al., 2015).

Lack of administrator support was identified as the main cause for burnout. Cancio et al. (2018) stated that SET burnout has been linked to a lack of administrative support. Participants of this study expressed that administrators lack knowledge in special education. Therefore, it disqualifies them to be able to provide the support special educators need. Tyler and Brunner (2014) and Bettini et al. (2017) stressed that administrators do what they can to provide staff with support, but they lack knowledge in special education to adequately provide special educators with the support they need. Altinay et al. (2018) claimed that administrators do not feel prepared to provide special educators with the support they need because they have not been trained in special education. As a matter of fact, Glowacki and Hackmann (2016) stated that most states do not require administrator to take special education courses.

Additionally, participants expressed that due to the lack of knowledge of special education by administrators, administrators provide them with the wrong support and often are not involved with their program, which makes them feel isolated. Cooter and Stricherz (2014) stated that lack of administrative support leads to SETs feeling isolated. Bettini et al. (2017) stated that administrators must know what their SETs need to be able to provide them with the right staff development. Romanowska (2013) claimed that is it important for administrators to provide SETs with proper staff development to prevent SET burnout. Administrators who are

good listeners, good communicators, and are empathic, are respectful to the needs of their special educators can provide proper training and support (Altinay et al., 2018).

Moreover, SETs expressed that due to the lack of special education knowledge, administrators have unrealistic expectations and put a lot of pressure on tasks that take away from student services. Leko et al. (2015), commented that SETs are under a lot of pressure to develop and provide rigorous content instruction due to Common Core Standards (CCSS). Also, Rock et al. (2016) stated the SETs are under a lot of pressure because they have many other extra duties aside from special education. Most of the participants indicated that in addition to their special education duties, they are required to do extra duties such as yard duty, be on committees, manage non-special education student behavior, participate in student study teams (SST), and provide academic intervention support to non-special education students.

Aside from all the job demands of special educators and lack of administrative support, paperwork was identified as a contributor to burnout. Paperwork was not identified in the literature review as the main cause for burnout; however, it was found to be a concern. Jones et al. (2013), indicated that it can take up to five hours a week just to get paperwork done, and 12% of the special educators' time during their work hours is spent on paperwork. Garwood et al. (2018) reported that SETs are overwhelmed with the expectations and demands of paperwork. Finally, Bettini et al. (2017) focused on how important it is for administrators to support reducing the amount of paperwork required by SETs, which will support preventing burnout.

Lack of resources to support students was viewed as a cause for SET burnout. Those SETs that expressed their need for resources indicated districts are demanding them to implement programs and modify curriculum without giving them the support and resources they

need. Tyler and Brunner (2014) advocated that if SETs are provided with the resources they need, they will be able to support students, and it will also prevent burnout. Therefore, SETs will stay in their positions as educators. Additionally, Jones et al. (2013) stated that when administrators provide SETs with the resources they need, they will excel in their positions as special educators. Bettini et al. (2016) stated that administrators who communicate with their SETs and provide them with material support, have a positive influence on their SETs, and it increase their motivation. One of the participants expressed, “I don’t stress a lot knowing that my principal supports me.” Another participant stated, “If I need support with something I’m struggling with, my director encourages me to do my best.” Bettini et al. (2015) stated that it is important for administrators to encourage their SETs and provide them with frequent feedback because it makes special educators feel that their work is important, and it motivates them. Finally, Brunsting et al. (2014) indicated that SETs can keep up with the daily demands of their positions when they are provided with the resources they need. Some of the SETs who expressed their concerns with not having the resources stated that they have requested support, but they feel like they are ignored and disrespected. Cancio et al. (2013) stated that SETs who do not feel supported, do not feel respected or appreciated, which has an impact on their emotional state.

Perception of Special Education Teacher Support

Research question two dealt with how special educators perceived support. Ten participants indicated that there is a lack of support, and three of the participants expressed that there was no support at all. Ansley et al. (2016) indicated that SETs are leaving their positions because of stress levels that relate to the lack of administrative support. Three SETs expressed

that they wanted to leave their position last year because of lack of administrative support; two expressed that they plan to retire early; two expressed that they are planning to go back to school to change their careers; one expressed that she will leave her position if the district changes their program from an RSP program to a Learning Center program, and another expressed that she changed from being a special day class (SDC) teacher to a resource specialist (RSP) teacher. The participant explained that an SDC class is self-contained with some mainstreaming in the general education classroom. She also explained that in an RSP program students are supported in the general education classroom, but that those students who need intervention in specific areas get pulled from their classroom for intervention support. As an SDC teacher, the participant felt that her students were not getting the services they needed due to lack of funding for the program. She had students that were at different grade levels, and curriculum was not available to meet students' individual needs. She stated, "I tried to modify that general education curriculum, which was impossible because it was time consuming, so I left." She also stated that as an RSP teachers she also does not have the intervention programs needed to support the individual needs of her students. Therefore, she is seeking to go back to school to become an occupational therapist. Finally, four of the participants express that administrators are very demanding, but that they demand without giving any support. Caputo and Langher (2015) indicated that in inclusion model programs, SETs are required to carry out different tasks such as co-teach, but proper implementation of required duties fail because of lack of administrative support. All the SETs in this case study provided students with different levels of inclusive support.

Four SETs expressed feeling supported by their principals, but not their special education directors or other higher administrators. SETs indicated that they felt supported by their principals because they are hands-on with their program. Being that they are hands-on principals, they understand the program better than other administrators. Bettini et al. (2017) suggested that principals play an important role in cultivating effective SETs when they provide them with support. Unfortunately, not all the participants felt that they had supporting principals. Sariçam and Sakız (2014) expressed that many SETs do not have supporting principals, and as a result, SETs are not able to keep up with daily job demands.

Some of the SETs expressed that other staff members, which did not include administrators provided them with support. For example, six participants expressed that they appreciate the support they have from their school psychologists. Other participants expressed that they have some support from instructional assistants or general education teachers. Caputo and Langher (2015) indicated that it is important for general education teachers to support SETs. When SETs feel supported by general education teachers, they feel like they are part of a team, and as a result, SETs will have greater success in supporting special education students. Ashfaq and Rana (2015) and Tyler and Brunner (2014) also indicated that when SETs have a good consultation team such as general education teachers and other team members, SET stress levels are minimized.

Limitations

Participants

The limitations of this study can support establishing a groundwork for future research. The research findings may be impacted by the sample size, the limited time of data collection,

and location. Purposeful sampling method was used for data collection. It took 17 weeks to complete data collection. SETs took longer than expected to respond to the invite to participate because they were busy. Data collection was collected between the middle of October and the first week of January. Both the report card period and the holiday season made it difficult for data collection.

Research Method

Purposeful sampling method was used to identify the participants for this study. The participants were elementary special education teachers who work in public education. The selected participants were from two neighboring counties in a Western U.S. state. Student demographics of both counties were similar. Fourteen SETs agreed to participate in the study, but one out of these did not participate. The participants sample included males and females and different ethnic backgrounds. They all had different special education teaching experiences, and years of teaching in special education varied from three to 21 years. The sample size provided good detailed information relevant to the purpose of the study. A larger sample size can provide a more comprehensive and rich examination of the topic being investigated. However, the sample size of this study did not restrict the ability to generalize the results of the study or identify common patterns of data collection.

Implications of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory

Implications for Special Education Teacher Support and Practice

Through this study, I provided ideas on how to support SETs to minimize stress that comes with being special educators. SETs come into the field of special education prepared to teach and implement what they learned in their teacher programs, but they are not ready to deal

with realities and challenges of their job as educators (Jones et al., 2013). In this study, I revealed that SETs need support from their administrators to lessen stress levels that can lead to burnout. All 13 participants expressed that they lack support from their administrators. When SETs are provided with administrative support, they feel empowered, and it promotes self-efficacy, which builds SET's self-confidence. SETs indicated that if they had administrative support and a good line of communication with them, they would feel appreciated and valued for their efforts as special educators. They expressed that feeling appreciated and valued for their effort would empower them and as a result would reduce some of the unnecessary stress that builds from not having their support. Bettini et al. (2017) stressed how important it is for administrators to support their special educators because it cultivates effective SETs. Jones et al. (2013) indicated that administrators are responsible for making sure that special educators find their jobs meaningful, and in return, SETs will be motivated and encouraged.

Implication of the Policy and Practice of Support

Based on the results of this study, administrators may provide SETs with the support they need to prevent burnout, and as a result, retention of special educators will not be a concern. Retention of SETs will have a positive impact on student with disabilities because they will be provided with quality and proper intervention support. The level of support received by special educators from administrators interferes with their ability to perform effectively in their positions as educators. Rock et al. (2016) indicated that lack of support from administration not only affect SETs, but also students they support. In this study, I demonstrated that SET burnout is a concern and that SETs perceive that there is a lack of administrative support. Furthermore, I indicated that the number of years of experience in special education or the type of position as

special educators does not make a difference with experiencing burnout. Nine of the participants in this study expressed that they have experienced burnout. Four of the nine participants indicated that they are currently at the burnout level. Dewey et al. (2017) indicated that the ongoing public policy changes are responsible for SETs burnout, and administrators need to be prepared to support SETs with policy changes. Several SETs expressed that they understand that administrators are busy with their jobs and new policies, but they need to be able to support them with those changes and not just demanding added requirements without the support. My data shows that SET burnout is a concern, and administrators need to focus on finding what types of training special educators need to reduce stress levels caused by their job demands.

Implications for Theory

My results aligned with the theoretical impact of burnout theory presented by Freudenberger. Freudenberger (1974) described the symptoms of burnout “as the feeling of exhaustion and fatigue, being unable to shake a lingering cold, and suffering from frequent headaches and gastrointestinal disturbances, sleeplessness, and shortness of breath” (p. 160). SETs who expressed experiencing burnout reported headaches, exhaustion and fatigue, stomach aches, and sleeplessness, which align with Freudenberger’s symptoms of burnout. For example, one of the participants stated that she was experiencing nausea before going to work, and she regularly felt physically tired. She stated that when she could not accomplish what she needed to do, she would get easily irritated and started experiencing anxiety. Her doctor diagnosed her with anxiety disorder because she started experiencing panic attacks. Another example, the participant expressed she was missing a lot of work because she was not sleeping at night. She expressed that she had sleeping problems. She often woke up in the middle of the night thinking

of things she needed to do at work. She explained that her brain was not resting, and she was having daily headaches. A third example, the participant expressed that she knows she is burnout because she feels she is in a “state of crisis.” She stated, “I can’t think straight; I have breathing problems; I’m always tired.” One last example, the participant expressed that she is emotionally exhausted and feels that she is never caught up at work. Maslach and Leiter (1997) described burnout as a “psychological syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a feeling of reduced professional accomplishment” (p. 192). Maslach and colleagues built on Freudenberger’s burnout theory. The SET participants expressed feeling depersonalized with a lack of accomplishment and feel a lack of job satisfaction. Depersonalization is the feeling of exhaustion, which has impacted the participants by making them feel a lack of sense of accomplishment or inefficacy which has affected their job performance (Langballe et al., 2006).

Recommendations for Future Research

In this study, I examined special education teacher burnout and how it has impacted special educators. Recommendations given by the participants to reduce stress levels that led to SET burnout are provided to support other special educators and for future research. Future research of suggested recommendations will support reducing the risk for SET burnout.

Additionally, an area of need expressed by SETs was the need for collaboration with other staff and with the other SETs. Cooter and Stricherz (2014) expressed that when special educators are provided time to collaborate with general education teachers, they can support their students better and not feel isolated. Leko et al. (2015) indicated that the type of collaboration needed between general educators and special educators is of a higher level than meeting on the fly as expressed by the participants of this study. In collaboration, both general educators and

special educators need to focus on the targeted skills and intervention instruction that needs to be carefully aligned with common core state standards (CCSS). Caputo and Langher (2015) indicated that through collaborations, the special education teams can develop appropriate education strategies to support students. The need for collaboration identified in this study can also support future research by finding ways to facilitate collaborations between general education teachers and special educators to better support students with special needs

Furthermore, SETs expressed they struggle with balancing their time because of the many demands of their profession. As a result of not knowing how to disconnect, SETs stay long hours at work or bring their work home. Jones et al. (2013) reported that special educators are challenged with time management. Garwood et al. (2018) reported that special educators have one of the most challenging careers in education and require a lot of time and energy to meet the endless responsibilities. Future research on how special educators can have a balanced life at work and at home will support special education teachers to be successful in their careers as educators.

Lastly, further research is needed on the limitations discussed in this study. Limitations of this study will serve as a base for future research. The study can be done with a larger population of special educators to identify further challenges that lead to SET burnout. The larger population of participants will also provide more recommendation to support with reducing SET burnout.

Conclusion

In this study, I provided an overview of special education teachers' perceptions of burnout and special education teacher support. Freudenberger's burnout theory was described in

detailed as it related to SET burnout. Burnout theory proved to be accurate with the participants of this study. Special education teacher participants were able to express that they all have experienced high levels of stress that relate to their jobs as special educators. Nine of the 13 participants expressed that they have experienced burnout. Participants gave their perceptions of special education teacher burnout and their perceptions of special education teacher support. All participants expressed that burnout is related to all the duties and demands put on special education teachers, lack of administrative support, and demands of paperwork. Other individual reasons for burnout were given which include large caseloads and the lack of collaboration. All the participants expressed that there is a lack of special education teacher support. Those SETs who expressed having some support indicated that the support comes from school psychologists, some general education teachers, instructional assistants, and in some cases their principals because they are more hands-on administrators than directors of special education and other higher administrators.

The findings of this study validated that administrative support is crucial for a positive change in the positions of SETs. Special educators who lack administrative support are at risk for burnout and could result in special educators leaving their positions (Garwood et al., 2018). Finally, participants were able to provide ideas for future recommendations to avoid burnout. They were also able to reflect on their current level of burnout for them to start thinking of ways to cope with their current stress.

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Appendix A: Open Ended Question Interview

Interview Questions

- 1) Can you describe your role as a SET and how long have you been in this role?
- 2) Do you feel that you take on other roles besides the role of the special educator?
 - a) If so, what are those roles?
 - b) And why do you take on those roles?
- 3) What is your perception of special education teacher support?
- 4) What is your perception of burnout when it relates to special education?
- 5) Have you felt you have experienced stress or burnout?
 - a) If so, what did you do to deal with it?
 - b) If not, what prevents stress or burnout?
- 6) What do you feel contributes to your stress or feeling burnout?
- 7) Can you describe some ways you feel supported and ways you do not feel supported?
- 8) Do you feel that your administrator clearly understands your role as a SET and why do you feel the way you do?
- 9) What are some of your personal challenges as a special education teacher?
- 10) Do you have time to collaborate and plan with others and does this affect your performance and stress levels?

Appendix B: Survey Instrument

This instrument was developed by MindTools (2019).

Instructions: For each question, place the corresponding number in the column that most applies.

Questions #	Statements to Answer	Not At All (1)	Rarely (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)	Very Often (5)
1	I feel run down and drained of physical or emotional energy.					
2	I have negative thoughts about my job.					
3	I am harder and less sympathetic with people than perhaps they deserve.					
4	I am easily irritated by small problems, or by my co-workers.					
5	I feel misunderstood or unappreciated by my co-workers					
6	I feel that I have no one to talk to					
7	I feel that I am achieving less than I should.					
8	I feel under an unpleasant level of pressure to succeed.					
9	I feel that I am not getting what I want out of my job.					
10	I feel that I am in the wrong organization or profession					
11	I am frustrated with parts of my job.					
12	I feel that organizational politics or bureaucracy frustrate my ability to do a good job.					
13	I feel that there is more work to do than I practically have the ability to do.					
14	I feel that I do not have time to do many of the things that are important to doing a good quality job					
15	I find that I do not have time to plan as much as I want to					
	Total					

Score interpretations (No matter your score, pay attention to areas you ranked a 5.

15-18: No sign of burnout.

19-32: Little sign of burnout.

33-49: At risk of burnout.

50-59: Severe risk of burnout.

60-75: Very severe risk of burnout.

Appendix C: Consent Form

Research Study Title: Special education teachers' perception of burnout.

Principal Investigator: Maria Elena Ayala

Research Institution: Concordia University, Portland

Faculty Advisor: Leslie Loughmiller

Purpose and what you will be doing:

The purpose of this case study is to investigate special education teachers' perception of burnout when it relates to special education. I expect approximately 15 volunteers. No one will be paid to be in the study. I will begin enrollment on 08/1/2019 and end enrollment on 08/31/2019.

Once I get the participants, I will send the consent forms through email and give them instruction for the survey and a due date. Before the interviews, I will be reviewing your rights as participants and seek your consent. Interviews will be recorded and I will ask for your permission to start the recording. In addition to the recordings, I will be taking notes that will further support me with this case study. I will ask you open ended questions to give you an opportunity to express yourself as you need too. Furthermore, I will be willing to answer any questions you might have about the study. The process should take between 60-90 minutes of your time.

To be in the study, you will be interviewed twice. One interview will be an initial interview and questions asked will be open ended questions as I have stated above. Along with the open ended questions, I will be asking some questions that relate to your experience background. The second will be a follow up to share findings from first interview and ask further questions base on the analysis of the first interview. Both interviews will recorded and transcribed.

Risks:

There are limited risks in participating in this study based on shared information. However, I will protect your information. Any personal information you provide will be coded so it cannot be linked to you. Any name or identifying information you give will be kept securely via electronic encryption or locked inside the file cabinet. When I review the collected the data, none of the data will have your name or identifying information. I will refer to your data with a code that only I as

the principal investigator knows links to you. This way, your identifiable information will not be stored with the data. I will not identify you in any publication or report. The recording of the interviews will be deleted after they have been transcribed. The survey responses will also be destroyed after they have been transcribed. Your information will be kept private at all times and then all study documents will be destroyed 3 years after we conclude this study.

Benefits:

Information you provide will help in providing special education teachers and administrators support to help reduce special education teacher burnout. You could benefit from this study because it serves as a tool to make you aware of areas identified that need some adjustments and growth.

Confidentiality:

This information will not be distributed to any other agency and will be kept private and confidential. The only exception to this is if you tell us abuse or neglect that makes us seriously concerned for your immediate health and safety.

Right to Withdraw:

Your participation is greatly appreciated, but we acknowledge that the questions we are asking are personal in nature. You are free at any point to choose not to engage with or stop the study. You may refuse to respond to any of the interview questions you do not wish to answer. This study is not required and there is no penalty for not participating. If at any time you experience a negative emotion from answering the questions, we will stop asking you questions.

Contact Information:

You will receive a copy of this consent form. If you have questions you can talk to or write the principal investigator, Maria Elena Ayala at email mayala@mail2.cu-portland.edu. If you want to talk with a participant advocate other than the investigator, you can write or call the director of our institutional review board, Dr. OraLee Branch (email obranh@cu-portland.edu or call 503-493-6390).

Your Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I asked questions if I had them, and my questions were answered. I volunteer my consent for this study.

Participant Name

Date

Participant Signature

Date

Investigator Name

Date

Maria Elena Ayala

7/23/2019



Appendix D: Recruitment E-mail

Hello,

My name is Maria Elena Ayala. I am a Concordia University-Portland student enrolled in graduate school pursuing my doctorate degree. A part of my requirement is to conduct a study and collect data. I would like to invite you to participate in this study. The study will consist of a completion of a survey and two interviews. I am reaching out to you because I am looking for elementary special education teachers who are willing to participate in my research study. Participation is completely voluntary, and your answers will be anonymous. All data collected will be kept confidential and secure for your protection. If you are interested in participating and have any questions, please email me at mayala@mail2.cu-portland.edu or call me at (831) 261-2732.

Thank you for your time.

Maria Elena Ayala
Student Researcher
Concordia University- Portland

Appendix E: Permission to Use Burnout Survey E-mail

Permission to use your burnout self-test elena ayala Fri 8/9/2019 1:15 PM To:
mtegeneral@mindtools.com <mtegeneral@mindtools.com> Cc: Maria Ayala
<mayala@mail2.cu-portland.edu>

Hello, My name is Maria Elena Ayala and I am a Concordia University-Portland student working on my dissertation. The area of focus for my study is special education teacher burnout. I am seeking your permission to use your Burnout Self-Test for my study. I plan to send your burnout survey via email to up to 15 participants. I will be including your permission email to my IRB application. I have included my Concordia email in the CC box above. Looking forward to your response.

Thank you for your time!

Maria Elena Ayala

Rosie Robinson <rosie.robinson@mindtools.com>
Wed 9/25/2019 9:10 AM

Hi Elena,

I apologize for the delay in getting back to you. We have been very busy here recently and I'm afraid that I have only just got around to looking at your response.

You are more than welcome to direct your participants to the Mind Tools site in order to complete the quiz. However, for permission to distribute the quiz along with the answer key, we would need to charge a fee of \$150 USD.

Please do let me know which option you would prefer, and I will process your request accordingly.

Kind regards,
Rosie

Appendix F: Statement of Original Work

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously- researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

Statement of academic integrity.

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

Explanations:

What does “fraudulent” mean?

“Fraudulent” work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one’s own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate’s final work without full and complete documentation.

What is “unauthorized” assistance?

“Unauthorized assistance” refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another’s work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work

Statement of Original Work (continued)

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University—Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.

2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly references and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association*.

Digital Signature

Maria Elena Ayala
Name (Typed)

3/31/2020
Date