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Factors That Affect the Learning Needs and Outcomes of Students with Special Needs in an Inclusive Setting at One Elementary School in the Eastern Region of the United States

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ABSTRACT

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

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FACTORS THAT AFFECT THE LEARNING NEEDS AND OUTCOMES OF

STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN AN INCLUSIVE SETTING AT

ONE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LOCATED IN THE EASTERN

REGION OF THE UNITED STATES

Committee Chair: Barbara Hill, Ed.D.

Dissertation dated May 2016

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate the factors that affect

the learning needs and outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting,

such as: leadership style, student discipline, parental involvement, professional

development, teacher collaboration, administrative support, influence of peers, student

ability grouping, class size and attendance. A principal, assistant principal, special

education coordinator, teachers and other individuals that have leadership roles within the

school community were interviewed, documents were analyzed and observations were

made in order to acquire information concerning the learning needs and outcomes of the

special needs students within their school. This type of research involves emerging

questions and procedures, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general

themes, and the researcher interpreting the data (Creswell, 2008). The results of this

study will hopefully influence and assist school leaders and teachers' efforts to promote students' academic success within inclusive classrooms. This research focuses on an elementary school that has inclusion in every classroom. The findings from this research will provide teachers, students and educational leaders with an opportunity for understanding how students placed in special education can achieve.

One elementary school in the eastern region of the United States was used in this study. This school is a pre-kindergarten through fifth grade school that has been implementing inclusion for many years. Every classroom has a regular education teacher, special education teacher and a paraprofessional. There are 22 regular education teachers, 24 special education teachers, and 15 paraprofessionals. The school is located in an urban area. The students come from diverse backgrounds. This school has a large percentage of students with special needs. The school was restructured 10 years earlier and currently has a partnership with a special education center so that students with special needs can be educated in an inclusive setting. The time frame for this research project was two months.

The findings of this study add supporting evidence to the influence of the independent variables. The results of this study show that the researcher identified four dominant themes that appeared during the interviews, the data review and the observations. Professional development, teacher collaboration, influence of peers, and parental involvement were the common themes that support the importance of the independent variables on factors that have an impact on the learning needs and outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting.

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BY

STEVEN-KYLE JEFFERSON

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

According to the United States Department of Education (2004), over five million children are enrolled in special education programs. There are laws specifically designed to safeguard the education of students with special needs. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) enacted in 1975, mandates that disabled children and youth, ages 3 to 21, are to be provided a free and appropriate public school education. With the knowledge and clear understanding of what it takes to create a school environment that is open and supportive, students with special needs are able to achieve academically. Special education can no longer be considered a separate, isolated branch of education. Teaching and preparing students with disabilities to enter the adult world is the responsibility of everyone, not just special educators. While this might appear to be a simple and obvious distinction, it has significant implications for the way special education operates in public schools (Withworth, 1993). School leaders should be familiar with key factors that are necessary for the success of academically challenging student populations to assist or support students to be successfully engaged in learning.

Numerous schools across the United States have been moving more towards an inclusion model that allows students with special needs to actively participate within regular education classrooms. There are different types of inclusion classroom settings. Some of these classrooms have two teachers assigned, a regular education teacher and a

special education teacher as well. Other inclusion classrooms have a regular education teacher and a special education assistant or a paraprofessional. In these classrooms, the students are placed into small groups based upon the individual students' academic needs and abilities. Ideally, the students within the classroom are not aware of which students receive special education services. Students that have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) receive accommodations, modifications, and supports as they work to make progress towards their individual academic goals while assigned to the same classroom setting as their regular education peers. A major goal for all school leaders should be to focus upon factors related to the academic growth and development of students within an inclusive setting.

Instruction that is implemented within the classroom should be geared towards helping the students succeed. The learning environment should be structured in a way that addresses various learning styles, interests and abilities. Individuals may argue that special needs students can achieve within a setting that is not inclusive. Students with special needs and regular education students that struggle academically should learn at their own individual level but they also should be provided with opportunities to receive extra support while in an inclusive setting. The regular education teacher and the special education teacher must work together as a team within an inclusive setting. "The relationship between them must be one of cooperation and collaboration. They must not become independent or mutually exclusive educational tracks, nor can we deny that general and special educators have somewhat different roles to play" (Kauffman & Hallahan, 2005, p. 19).

Public schools now utilize common core academic standards to determine what students should know and be able to do academically at each grade level. These are high quality academic standards in mathematics, English language arts/literacy (ELA). These standards were created to ensure that all students are adequately prepared to graduate from high school with the needed skills and knowledge to be college and career ready and to be able to be successful in life. In the past each state was able to decide what standards they were going to implement and how they were going to be used. With common core standards schools can promote high expectations for all students with special needs. School leaders must be able to provide additional supports and services so that students with special needs can participate in the general curriculum and achieve academically while still having rigorous grade level expectations that are aligned with the Common Core standards.

Special Education is growing and the demands for schools to effectively implement individualized supports are getting stronger. This study provides support for developing interventions and strategies to address some of the current challenges that exist in public schools. The growing number of students being placed into special education needs to have effective support and services that accommodate their diverse learning differences.

School leaders spend precious time creating the foundations of inclusive programs for students with disabilities. Careful thought goes into scheduling co-taught classes, creating balanced classroom rosters, training co-teaching partners, developing collaborative relationships, and providing appropriate supports for students with disabilities (Walther-Thomas, 2000). An inclusion class can be a wonderful place for

many students. Students can learn to accept and value individual differences. Studies

investigating the effects of placement in general education classrooms reveal positive

outcomes in the areas of IEP quality, time of engagement, and individualized supports.

Significant increases in IEP quality on measures of age-appropriateness, functionality,

and generalization were found when students moved into general education classes from

special education settings even though the special educator remained the same (Hunt &

Farron-Davis, 1992). The administrative support from school leaders is an important

aspect. Schools leaders should willingly encourage the development of effective learning

environments of all students. Effective educational leadership is a critical component for

successful improvements in the educational outcomes for students with special needs.

Statement of the Problem

Research on inclusion of students with disabilities in general education

classrooms has shown that students have a positive outcome and achieve academically.

Strong leadership, effective teaching strategies and student support help influence the role

that teachers play in the success of an inclusion class and the learning needs of special

needs students. Studies investigating the effects of placement in general education

classrooms reveal positive outcomes in the areas of IEP quality, time of engagement, and

individualized supports. Significant increases in IEP quality on measures of age

appropriateness, functionality, and generalization were found when students moved into

general education classes from special education settings even though the special

educator remained the same (Hunt & Farron-Davis, 1992). Within the general education

classroom, there was an increase in the amount of instruction on functional activities as

well as basic academic skills such as literacy for students with severe disabilities (Hunt, Farron-Davis, Beckstead, Curtis, & Goetz, 1994).

Positive educational outcomes are not in the area of academics alone. The National Longitudinal Transition Study examined the outcomes of 11,000 students with a range of disabilities and found that more time spent in a general education classroom was positively correlated with (a) fewer absences from school, (b) fewer referrals for disruptive behavior, and (c) better outcomes after high school in the areas of employment and independent living (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Levine, & Garza, 2006).

Similar student engagement outcomes were reported in a study involving nine elementary students with severe disabilities who were observed in both special and general education settings. General education classrooms delivered more instruction, provided a comparable amount of 1:1 instruction time, addressed content more, and used nondisabled peers more and adults less (Helmstetter, Curry, Brennan, & Sampson-Saul, 1998).

Purpose of the Study

The researcher proposes to investigate the factors that affect the learning needs and outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting such as: leadership style, student discipline, parental involvement, professional development, teacher collaboration, administrative support, influence of peers, student ability grouping, class size, and attendance. Learning Outcomes are generally defined as the extent to what is needed for students with special needs to achieve academically. A principal, assistant principal, special education coordinator, teachers and other individuals that have leadership roles within the school community were interviewed, documents were

analyzed, and observations took place in order to acquire information concerning the learning outcomes of the special needs students within their school. The results of this study will hopefully influence and assist school leaders and teachers' efforts to promote students' academic success within inclusive classrooms.

Significance of the Study

This case study is significant to the field of educational leadership because it builds upon the current available body of knowledge relating to school leaders and other educators and their affect on the learning outcomes of students with special needs. The special education population is growing and the demands for leaders to effectively implement individualized support are getting stronger. This study supports the implementation of effective strategies that can increase the achievement of students with special needs. The study can assist with creating new interventions and strategies, and address some of the current challenges that exist in today's public schools. The growing number of students being placed into special education needs to have effective support and services that accommodate their differences.

This research focuses on an elementary school that has inclusion in every classroom. The special education students receive support from regular education and special education teachers with the assistance of a paraprofessional. The findings from this research will provide teachers, students, and educational leaders with an opportunity for understanding how students placed in special education can achieve.

Research Questions

RQ1:   What affect does parental involvement have on the learning outcomes of

    students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

RQ2:   What impact does leadership style have on the learning outcomes of

    students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

RQ3:   What impact does student discipline have on the learning outcomes of

    students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

RQ4:   What aspects of administrative support and leadership style have on the

    learning outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

RQ5:   What impact does professional development have on the learning

    outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

RQ6:   What impact does teacher collaboration have of the learning outcomes

    of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

RQ7:   What impact does ability grouping have of the learning outcomes of

    students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

RQ8:   What impact does class size have of the learning outcomes of students

    with special needs in an inclusive setting?

RQ 9:   What impact does influence of peers have of the learning outcomes of

    students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

RQ10:   What impact does attendance have on the learning outcomes of students

    with special needs in an inclusive setting?

Definition of Terms

Assessment: For the purpose of this study, assessment is defined as the process of using measures of student performance and behavior, including tests, to make educational decisions.

Co-Teaching: For the purpose of this study, co-teaching is defined as a model that emphasizes collaboration and communication among all members of a team to meet the needs of all students in the general education classroom.

General Education: For the purpose of this study, general education is defined as the educational learning experiences of typically developing children in grades pre-K to 12.

Inclusion: For the purpose of this study, inclusion is defined as services that place students with disabilities in general education classrooms with appropriate support services. Students may receive instruction from both a general education teacher and a special education teacher.

Qualitative Research: For the purpose of this study, qualitative research is defined as research using methods such as participant observation or case studies which result in a narrative, descriptive account of a setting or practice (Parkinson & Drislane, 2011).

Special Education: For the purpose of this study, special education is defined as instruction that is specially designed to meet the unique needs of a child with an identified disability.

Summary

The researcher of this study examined the learning needs and outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting based on the following variables: leadership style, student discipline, parental involvement, professional development, teacher collaboration, administrative support, influence of peers, student ability grouping, class size and attendance. This study is significant to the body of educational research because it will help influence school leaders' effectiveness in regards to improving the academic progress of students with special needs.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE RESEARCH LITERATURE

Introduction

The intent of the literature review is to support the topic of study through the use of relative research. It provides a perspective of the study, historical overview, provides research results, and examines prior studies. The primary focus of the research and non-research information in this chapter is cited to address the study: Factors that Affect the Learning Needs and Outcomes of Students with Special Needs in an Inclusive Setting.

Dependent Variable

This study's dependent variable is Learning Needs and Outcomes of Students with Special Needs in an Inclusive Setting.

Historical Overview

Although all school-age individuals in the United States are currently entitled to an education, the right of those with disabilities to receive a free and appropriate education is a relatively recent development. It was not until 1918 that all states had compulsory education laws; prior to this time, children in many places, including those with disabilities, were not required to attend school (Bursztyn, 2007). Until the mid 1900s, many children with disabilities were secretly concealed by parents and families as much as possible (Allen & Schwartz, 2001). Parents of children with easily identified

disabilities such as Down Syndrome were often counseled to commit their children to asylums. In instances when parents did not follow such counsel, many would hide their disabled children in attics and in back rooms where they would not be noticed by others (Allen & Schwartz, 2001).

Several important court cases were instrumental in laying the groundwork for legislation to address the civil rights issues of equal protection and due process of the law for children with disabilities. In *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), the Supreme Court upheld the Fourteenth Amendment guarantee of equal protection under the law; this amendment also stipulates that people cannot be deprived of life, liberty, or property without due process. Simply put, a state that provides education (which is legally considered ''property'') to its children must provide an education for every child living in that state (Bursztyn, 2007). Since 1977, every child who has a disability and needs special education has been entitled to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) under a federal law that is now called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (Bateman, & Linden, 2006).

Although each reauthorization has changed the specifics of the law, its basic tenets regarding civil rights remain the same:

1. All children, regardless of type or severity of disability, are eligible to receive a free and appropriate public education.

2. Nondiscriminatory evaluation and placement procedures must be followed.

3. Students should be educated in the least restrictive environment possible.

4. Due process procedures must be followed. (Bursztyn, 2007)

The IDEA Amendments of 2004 reaffirmed the intentions of IDEA 1997 but made few changes, some good and some worrisome. On the positive side, it reflected increased emphasis on scientifically based interventions, improved academic and functional performance checks for students with disabilities, early intervening services, positive behavioral interventions, efforts to better serve minority students and providing more effective transition services (Bateman & Linden, 2006).

Defining Inclusive Education

Venn (2007) focused on assessing students with special needs. In his work, inclusion was defined as

> The education of students who have disabilities with students who are nondisabled. IDEA 2004 further stated that special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of students with disabilities from the regular educational environment should only happen if the nature of severity of the disability precludes education in regular classes with appropriate supplementary aides and support services. (p. 42)

At the turn of the 21st century, the idea of inclusion attracted intense and conflicting interests by educators and the public. Inclusion has risen above the idea of including children with disabilities with their nondisabled peers in the general education classroom (Osgood, 2005).

According to the 28th Report to Congress by the U.S. Department of Education (2004), there is variability in placement patterns among states, and a lack of positive

demonstrating the strategies for and outcomes of inclusive education (TASH, Congressional Briefing on Inclusive Education, 2009). In the 2007-2008 school year, students with developmental disabilities such as autism, intellectual disabilities (mental retardation), and multiple disabilities were the least likely to be educated in general education classes for most of the school day. Examples of the percentage of students "included" in general education classes at least 80% of the day were:

- 12.8% of students with multiple disabilities;
- 15.8% of students with mental retardation; and
- 34.5% of students with autism.

At least 56.5% of students with mental retardation received all of their instruction in a special education classroom or separate school (TASH Congressional Briefing on Inclusive Education, 2009). The TASH research shows that as a result of inclusive classrooms there has been some improvement. From 2004 to 2008, elementary reading for special education students improved by 31.7% and elementary math improved by 23.9%.

Academic Achievement

With the increased accountability on school principals to close the achievement gap, school principals' perceptions of their leadership qualities need to be analyzed with a view toward improving instruction in schools (Kaplan, Owings, & Nunnery, 2005). School principals are being held responsible for educational outcomes and, therefore, a need to evaluate practices to improve student achievement is essential (Catano & Stronge, 2007). Croninger and Vail (2009) found that the art of teaching reading to

students is a very complex and difficult process. Their study examined fourth and fifth

grade students in Maryland. They recorded the actions of students and teachers during a

reading lesson. They argued that it is not necessarily the reading program that is a key

factor in student success, but rather the quality of time and the complexity of the

instruction (Ruscoe, 2010).

      Weaver (2011) conducted a study that measured reading scores of students in

kindergarten through grade 3 that experienced the Response to Instruction Intervention

process for two academic years compared to students in kindergarten through grade 3 that

did not experience the Response to Instruction Intervention process. All of the

classrooms involved were inclusion classrooms that served the needs of students with

disabilities and had a special education teacher. The methods for teaching reading that

each teacher used for this study was guided reading, phonics activity centers, phonemic

awareness activities, and vocabulary development. The findings of this study show that

the reading scores of students that experienced the response to Instruction Intervention

process scored higher on standardized test.

Independent Variables

Leadership Style

      During the 1970s and 1980s, research established that all children can learn, in

spite of their background and that some schools were more effective than others (Davis,

2010). The actions of school leaders impact school capacity and may either enhance or

diminish student achievement. School capacity is defined as the collective power of a

school staff to raise student achievement (King & Youngs, 2002). School administrators

who build school capacity through an effective leadership style may influence student achievement through teachers (Christie, Thompson, & Whiteley, 2009).

Crain (2010) conducted a study that examined different types of leadership styles of public school administrators to determine how the leadership styles affected student achievement. The study included 60 principals and 301 teachers from 28 school districts in Louisiana. The findings from this research showed that the perceived leadership styles, flexibility and effectiveness, did not affect school performance scores. Principals should be aware of how teachers view their flexibility and effectiveness in order to try and improve student academic achievement in their schools (Crain, 2010).

Student Discipline

The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), reauthorized in 1990 partially because of concerns of the disabled students' rights as they related to discipline, has helped to protect students with special needs in addition to requiring schools to understand the motivation behind their behavior (Butera, Klein, McMullen & Wilson, 1998). Research has indicated that the classroom teacher is the most important determinant of student learning (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Recent data from the U.S. Department of Education (2004) suggests that students with disabilities served by IDEA are more than twice as likely to receive one or more out-of-school suspension as students without disabilities. Across the nation, 72% of students subjected to physical restraint were classified as students with disabilities served by IDEA. Thirty two states had higher percentages than the national average.

In Nevada, Florida, and New York, students with disabilities served by IDEA represent less than 15% of students enrolled in the state, but more than 90% of the students who were physically restrained in the state. Nevada (96%), Florida (95%), and New York (93%) reported the highest percentages of physically retrained students with disabilities by IDEA. Four states had fewer than 50% of students subjected to physical restraint classified as students with disabilities served by IDEA: Hawaii (0%), Mississippi (40%), Arkansas (41%), and Louisiana (43%). The research study concluded that students with special needs received discipline consequences at a statistically higher rate than their peers without disabilities. In addition this study shows that students with disabilities (IDEA) represent 12% of the student population, but 58% of those placed in seclusion or involuntary confinement, and 75% of those physically restrained at school to immobilize them or reduce their ability to move freely (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

Parental Involvement

School leaders have a strong impact on the priority placed on parent involvement within their schools and in the overall community (Protheroe, Shellard, & Turner, 2003). Schools must consistently encourage parents to become involved in their children's learning at all grade levels. Respectful relationships and supportive links between schools, families, and communities are imperative to successful partnerships (Christenson, Godber, & Anderson, 2005). School administrators and teachers need to appreciate the customs and beliefs of culturally and linguistically diverse parents if they truly want them to be involved in their children's schooling (Wandersman et al., 2002).

Recent literature has given even more power to parents by stating that parents play a major role in assisting their children with matriculation (Vadem-Kiernan & McManus, & Chapman, 2005). "Schools are not the only institutions in society in which teaching and learning occur. The family is a critical institution in this regard, and parents are teachers of their children" (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991, p. 280).

Studies show that parental involvement at home and school is related to increased academic outcomes. Jeynes (2011) conducted a study to investigate the impact that parental involvement has on academic achievement. His research shows that parents should become involved early so that they can be engaged in their child's education. In 2012, the National Center for Educational Statistics showed that 76% of students nationwide had parents who reported attending a regularly scheduled parent-teacher conference; 74% had parents who attended a school or class event; 42% had parents who volunteered or served on a school committee; 58% had parents who participated in school fundraising; and 33% had parents who met with a guidance counselor. There was more participation of parents of students in grade kindergarten through eighth grade. Robles (2011) conducted a qualitative study to investigate the participation of parents in an urban school district. The results of the study indicated that school leadership was a significant factor in parents' participation in programs. Parents wanted to feel that the staff was willing to help them understand concepts that they might not be familiar with.

Student Attendance

Attendance not only affects individual students but also can affect the learning environment of an entire school (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Students who are not in

class have fewer opportunities to learn the material that enables them to succeed later in school. Research on truancy and absenteeism suggests that students with better attendance score higher on achievement tests than their more frequently absent peers (Lamdin, 1996). Roby (2011) conducted a research study that focused on the relationship between school district attendance and academic achievement. The findings from his research say that there is a strong positive relationship between student achievement and annual building attendance averages. The research was conducted at urban public school districts (Cleveland, Cincinatti, Columbus, Dayton, Akron, and Toledo) in six different cities throughout the state of Ohio. Students that fell within the top ten percent averaged 96.46% on the Ohio proficiency test, compared with the bottom ten percent averaging 92.75%. It is self-evident that good attendance improves a student's ability to learn and that bad attendance impedes it; this is a primary reason why daily school attendance is compulsory (Cowans, 2008).

Jones (2011) conducted a correlational study that was initiated to assess the relationship between student achievement and student attendance within Georgia public schools. The study was based on archival data from 445 schools in Georgia. There was a significant positive correlation between student attendance and student achievement on the CRCT in mathematics and reading. Students with special needs that missed more than 15 days of school test scores were statistically significant compared to those who did attend school. Better attendance was associated with better mathematics and reading performance as measured by the CRCT (Jones, 2011).

Professional Development

Teachers are expected to keep abreast of new knowledge, to individualize instruction for a diverse population of students, to help all students achieve high standards, to introduce new technologies into the classroom, to become experts in student growth and development, to help manage the school, and to reach out to parents and the community (Castleberry, 2010). The process of growth and development in the teaching profession represents a common value among education professionals. Continual learning in the field of education may include subscribing to professional journals, attending conferences, participating in research projects, and collaborating with other teachers (Moore, 2009). Educational policies purposefully connect professional development and school improvement (Elmore, 2002). Research on the impact of professional development on student achievement is limited because it is difficult and expensive to study, and the link between professional development and student achievement is complex (Huffman, Thomas, & Lawrenz, 2003). There is no definitive definition of professional development because it is a broad concept with a range of complexities. The simple definition of professional development is an activity to provide opportunities for staff members to grow professionally or personally (Schwartz & Bryan, 1998).

Professional development affects student achievement through three steps. First, professional development enhances teacher knowledge and skills. Second, better knowledge and skills improve classroom teaching. Third, improved teaching raises student achievement (Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, & Shapley, 2007). Crockrell (2011) conducted a study that analyzed the impact of professional development on student

achievement in eastern North Carolina high schools. Student achievement data was analyzed over a three year period. The student achievement was based on the North Carolina Testing and Accountability model and Annual Yearly Progress (AYP). Surveys were administered to gauge teacher perceptions of the impact of professional development on student achievement. The AYP data shows that there was not an increase in reading or mathematics scores. The surveys indicated that teachers exposed to more professional development offerings had more time to engage in the active learning process; however, there was no substantial impact on student achievement.

Castillo (2011) conducted a mixed method study to determine if teacher implementation of mastery learning strategies learned through professional development increased student achievement. This study examined 11th graders across five high schools in a high performing, rural fringe school district in California's Central Valley. Professional development training was provided for all of the 11th grade English teachers. The findings from this research indicate that professional development training combined with coaching did not increase the level of teacher knowledge, teacher efficacy, and teacher implementation strategies. The teachers who received the professional development did not show increased knowledge of mastery learning strategies.

Teacher Collaboration

The relationships among all educators within a school community may determine how effective the school's instructional program will be. Teaching and learning are bound to be much more meaningful when positive relationships exist between everyone

involved (Jackson & Davis, 2000). Teachers need encouragement when the pressures of teaching lead to dismay and an inability to complete necessary tasks (Chadbourne, 2004). Collaborative teams of teachers work together, sharing knowledge pertaining to essential curriculum. The problem of too much content with too little time is solved when teachers share opinions and collaborate together (Kendall & Marzano, 2000).

Today's teachers must transform their individual personal knowledge into collective, widely shared and cohesive professional knowledge (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2005). Teacher collaboration must be in place because no teacher is an expert on all elements of the curriculum (Chenoweth, 2009). In school settings where collaboration occurs, students recognize that consistent expectations are present, resulting in a better learning environment. Successful teacher collaboration examples include planning together to develop a cohesive, unified program such as those in career academies and theme schools. Teacher collaboration also improves student achievement, behavior and attitudes (Inger, 1993).

McHenry (2009) examined relationship between elementary principals' leadership behaviors, teacher collaboration, and student achievement. A survey was used that measured the teachers' perception of their elementary principals' leadership behaviors and the level of collaboration in their schools. Quantitative data were collected from 161 Mississippi elementary teachers in 15 schools. The findings from this study indicate that certain leadership traits of elementary principals are related to higher levels of teacher collaboration. This study found that the leadership behaviors of the principal are related to the levels of teacher collaboration in a statistically significant way. McHenry's finding show that teachers' perceived leadership behaviors explain 8% of the

variance in reading achievement and 9% of the variance in mathematics achievement in the selected schools.

Wimberley (2011) conducted a study to explore the relationship between teacher collaboration and student achievement. The study examined the level of collaboration within a school district based on a list of variables rating a school as collaborative (using contracted time embedded during the school day) or non-collaborative (collaboration occurring in book study groups, during workshops, or professional development). Scores from the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) were analyzed to determine the relationship between collaborative school and non-collaborative schools. The findings from Wimberley's research indicate that student achievement was higher among collaborative schools. The collaborative schools achieved higher on both math and communication on the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) test at the eighth grade level. The length of time for implementing collaboration between teachers was a factor that was reported by the respondents that participated in this study. The sharing of common, formative and summative assessments, length of time for collaboration, sharing of strategies and the effectiveness in which administrators clarified objectives all lead to measurable academic benefits.

Ervin (2011) examined the relationship between teacher collaboration and student achievement among elementary and middle school teachers in one suburban school district in Georgia. The researcher analyzed data from surveys gathered that studied teachers' perceptions regarding collaborative practices that assist them in better preparing students for greater academic performances. The collaboration survey was mailed to 73 elementary and middle school principals in Cobb County Georgia. Both Title 1 and non-

Title 1 schools were included in this study. The survey was given to 1,724 teachers in the

Cobb County School District; 91% of the participants strongly agreed or agreed with the

statement, "My work with other teachers is professionally beneficial for me;" 92% of the

participants strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, "My work with other teachers

is beneficial to my students;" and 86% of the teachers agreed or strongly agreed that,

"The school principal supports meetings with other teachers." This study found that

teachers who work together increase student achievement.

Administrative Support

Reshaping school culture and the organizational climate requires a different set of

skills that were not necessarily required from school principals who were historically

trained primarily in the areas of managerial supervision (Brown, 2006). The job

description for that of school principal is complex to say the least. On one hand, the

leader must possess a comprehensive understanding of instructional pedagogy, while, on

the other hand, possess the interpersonal relationship skills to work within diverse

populations, resolve conflicts, and motivate both children and adults (McInnis, 2009).

Effective principals must create environments where trust is felt and taking a risk can

occur with high levels of comfort (Rude, 2005). When teachers are supported by their

superiors they are likely to experiment and take risk to improve the quality of instruction

(Hoy, 1997). With the increasing demands of accountability placed on the shoulders of

principals, success as a principal requires a considerable depth of knowledge beyond

managing the day to day activities of a school (McInnis, 2009).

Nason (2011) conducted a quantitative study that examined the impact of principal instructional leadership practices on student achievement. The study did not prove significantly however, the following notable observations and interpretations can be drawn from the results of the study:

1. Principals may feel more comfortable in maintaining the responsibilities that are often associated with traditional models of principalship than they are with the varied responsibilities placed upon principals in the 21st century.

2. Principals may only feel pressure to increase their instructional leadership practices as their years in improvement status increases.

3. The school size does not directly affect the amount of time a principal spends engaged in instructional leadership activities.

Williams (2008) examined the principal influence on student achievement in high minority, poverty, and performance K-8 schools. The research was conducted at an urban public school that has a high population of minority and special needs students. The majority of the students is eligible for free or reduced lunch, and achieving at a proficiency level in reading and mathematics on the fourth grade Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Exam. Quantitative and qualitative methods were used to analyze the data. The findings from this research suggested that the perception of principal influence and support in effective schools have a safe and orderly environment, effective instructional leadership, high expectations from school leaders, and a clear and focused mission.

The teachers that participated in this study say that they felt the most supported by administrators who:

- Do not tolerate any type of inappropriate behavior.

- Encourage and provides time for professional collaboration.

- Encourage and support all staff to become effective instructors.

- Investigate research based practices and encourages and supports trials.

- Sets an example and has high expectations for themselves and this filters down.

Influence of Peers

Scholarly research on adolescent peer groups and peer relationships has been going on since the 1960s. It is well documented that peer relationships can provide positive support, as well as inhibit adolescents from doing well (Coyl, Jones, & Dick, 2004). Some students form relationships with peers that promote academic engagement. Others join peer groups that promote disengagement from the school and academic practices. Members of these two types of groups will have different experiences in school leading to different academic futures (Salee & Tierney, 2007). Students' attitudes, intentions and behaviors towards their peers with disabilities are important to their mutual co-existence and development (Bebetsos, Zafeiriadis, Derri, Kyrgiridis, 2013).

Bebetsos et al. (2013) conducted a study that attempted to investigate whether there are any relations between the variables of attitudes, intention, perceived behavioral control, moral satisfaction, information, and general attitudes amongst regular education students and students with special needs. The quantitative study consisted of 172 primary grade school children—78 boys and 94 girls between 10 to 12 years of age. The findings from this study suggest that nondisabled students attitudes were proved powerful in

predicting their behavior towards their disabled peers. This study also suggests that

teacher knowledge and skills on the subject of inclusion will help the academic

achievement and peer relationships of students with special needs in an inclusive setting.

Student Ability Grouping

The public schools in the United States are under increasing pressure to graduate

more capable, qualified students. One way to effect needed change is through the

implementation of a grouping strategy that provides all students with access to the

highest quality curriculum and instruction available (Rimmer, 2010). Ability grouping is

an instructional method that has recently gained attention for its flexibility and

opportunities to target instruction to specific groups of learners (Barksdale-Ladd &

Thomas, 2000). Ability grouping has been defined as a practice that places students into

classes or small groups based on an initial assessment based on their level of readiness or

ability (Kulik, 1992). Tracking has been ingrained as a mechanism for sorting and

placing students in the United States for many years (Rubin, 2006). Tracking often

negatively impacts the long-term educational success of students by reducing academic

rigor based on perceived ability levels (LeTendre, Hofer, & Shimizu, 2003).

Although the achievement effects of ability grouping in secondary school has

been studied extensively, limited research is available on the effects of ability grouping of

achievement in elementary schools (Robinson, 2008). At the elementary school level, the

use of flexible grouping gives diverse groups of students the opportunity to learn grade

level curriculum at the appropriate level of difficulty (Haghighat, 2009). Placement

decisions are particularly significant because of their potential to widen achievement gaps

and restrict access to learning opportunities (Robinson, 2008). Most states hold educators and schools accountable only for student performance on standardized state tests, it seems that the general education curriculum becomes only the core academic curriculum and, accordingly, fails to provide the scope and content needed to ensure positive outcomes for all students, including students with severe cognitive or multiple disabilities (Turnbull, Turnbull, Wehmeyer, & Park, 2003). If the teacher does not differentiate instruction, they may choose to work one-on-one with a student needing extra attention while leaving other students to complete worksheets; or work with the whole group while attempting to address student's individual needs (Stringfield, 1997).

Allayne (2011) examined the influence of ability grouping on the achievement of special needs students, as measured by their performance on high-stakes assessments. She examined the effectiveness of ability grouping with special needs students as they are compared with students who are not grouped by ability. The findings from this study suggest that if special needs students are to be grouped by ability, it must be done accurately. The ability groups in an inclusive setting provided the special needs students with various learning activities that helped develop their skills. When the students were grouped with their peers based on their needs and ability level, the teachers were able to focus on higher level thinking skills. Differentiating the instruction in the classroom was essential for academic success.

Gates (2011) investigated the effects of total school cluster grouping on the achievement and identification of elementary school students. The study was also conducted to learn about the perception classroom teachers had of the ability level of students that were grouped based on academic achievement. The findings from this study

suggested that students initially identified a low-achieving made greater gains than their high achieving peers. The gains may have been greater because teachers received professional development on strategies used for low achieving students. The qualitative findings from this study suggested that teachers believed that students that were identified as high achieving students were not truly high achieving. Many of the teachers believed that student achievement increased over time for most students and that cluster grouping may improve how teachers view their students with respect to achievement and ability.

Class Size

The concept of class size continues to be a social issue in the beginning of the 21st century when educational reform is the focal point for all stakeholders (Finn, 2002). Most researchers and educators support reducing the number of students in each classroom, but this initiative inevitably costs more money for more teachers, classrooms, and materials (Maples, 2009). Teachers believe that smaller class size leads to better and more creative classroom environments that allow individualization and result in increased student achievement and better self-concept (Kennedy, 2003).

Wilson (2011) conducted a quantitative, correlational study to examine the relationship between class size and student achievement in language arts and mathematics as measured by citywide test scores. The citywide test scores of 481 third and fifth graders from four elementary schools in Brooklyn, New York, were included in the final analysis. The class sizes ranged from 4 to 34 students. There was no statistically significant relationship between language arts scores as measured by citywide test scores and class size and there was no statistically significant relationship between

mathematics scores as measured by citywide test scores and class size. In the special education classroom, there was no statistically significant relationship between language arts scores as measured by citywide test scores and class size when controlling for teacher experience, classroom type (special education, inclusion/CTT, gifted, or general), amount of money spent per student, and number of teachers or teacher aides in the classroom.

Arico (2011) used a mixed method approach to determine if reduced inclusion class sizes affect student's scores on the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge. This study was also used to solicit teachers' opinions of smaller class sizes. The findings from this study suggest that special needs students that were placed in smaller inclusion classrooms did score better on the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge Test than the students that were placed in larger inclusion classes. Arico's research shows that class size does effect the academic achievement of students with special needs in an inclusive setting. The results also show that teachers believed that smaller inclusion classes would influence the academic achievement of students with special needs.

St. German and Quinn (2006) conducted a mixed methods study to provide insight into how class size affects student learning. The study explored the perceptions of experienced teachers in Title I schools concerning class size and how it influences student achievement; 292 surveys were sent to eight participating schools; 116 surveys were completed and returned. Of the 116 surveys completed, 87 of the respondents worked in elementary schools; 49.4% chose that 12-15 students was a optimal class size to increase student achievement. However, the most frequently reported class size was 20 students.

CHAPTER III

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

The primary focus of this chapter is to explain the theoretical framework utilized to guide the study. The dependent and independent variables are defined, the relationship among the variables is established and the limitations of the study are explained.

Theory of Variables

The theoretical framework focused on the independent variables: leadership style, student discipline, parental involvement, professional development, teacher collaboration, administrative support, influence of peers, ability grouping, class size, and student attendance. This research focused on how the independent variables relate to the dependent variable factors that affect the learning needs and outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting at one elementary school located in the metropolitan eastern region of the United States.

Theoretical Framework

The primary framework that guided this study was Maslow's (1970) Hierarchy of Needs Theory and Albert Bandura's (1977) Self-Efficacy Theory. Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a content theory that is driven by the fundamental question, what motives

human behavior (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2008). Albert Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory

is the belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to

manage prospective situations (Bandura, 1977).

Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory

Maslow's five stage model is divided into basic needs and growth needs. One

must satisfy lower level basic needs before progressing on to meet higher level growth

needs (see Figure 1). Once these needs have been reasonably satisfied, one may be able

to reach the highest level called self-actualization (McLeod, 2007). Every person is

capable and has the desire to move up the hierarchy toward a level of self-actualization.

Unfortunately, progress is often disrupted by failure to meet lower level needs.
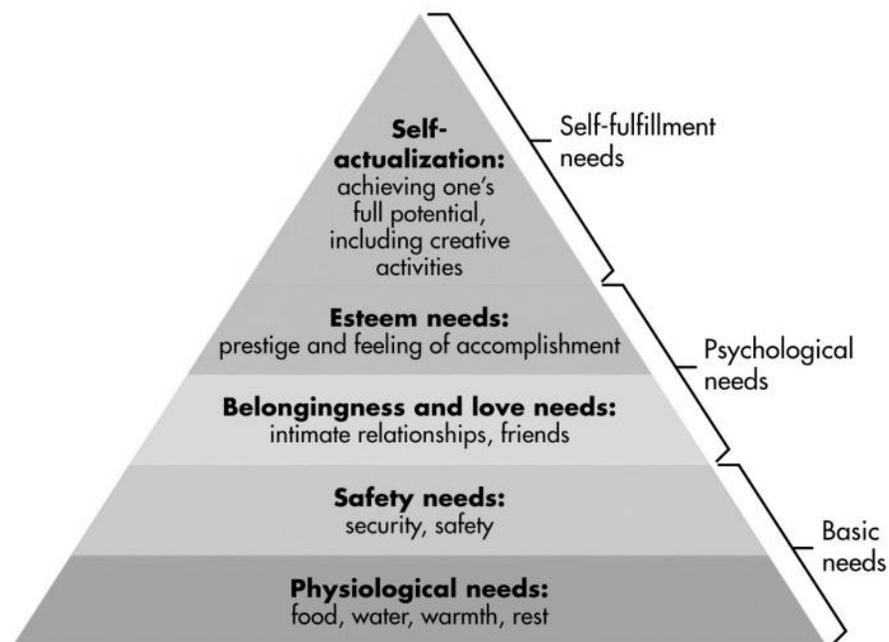
Figure 1. Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

Albert Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory

Virtually all people can identify goals they want to accomplish, things they would like to change, and things they would like to achieve. However, most people also realize that putting these plans into action is not quite so simple. Bandura (1977) and others have found that an individual's self-efficacy plays a major role in how goals, tasks, and challenges are approached (Cherry, 2015).

People with a strong sense of self-efficacy:

- view challenging problems as tasks to be mastered;

- develop deeper interest in the activities in which they participate;

- form a stronger sense of commitment to their interests and activities; and

- recover quickly from setbacks and disappointments.

People with a weak sense of self-efficacy:

- avoid challenging tasks;

- believe that difficult tasks and situations are beyond their capabilities;

- focus on personal failings and negative outcomes;

- quickly lose confidence in personal abilities. (Cherry, 2015)

The theoretical framework and independent variable relationship is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1

Theoretical Framework and Independent Variables Relationship

Factors Affect the Learning Needs and Outcomes of Students with Special Needs in an Inclusive Setting	
Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs	**Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory**
Leadership Style	Teacher Collaboration
Influence of Peers	Ability Grouping
Student Discipline	
Parental Involvement	
Professional Development	
Administrative Support	
Class Size	
Student Attendance	

Definition of the Variables

Dependent Variable

Learning Needs and Outcomes of Students with Special Needs in an Inclusive Setting: Instructional strategy, psychological, administrative, and educational support needed by special needs students to enhance their academic achievement.

Independent Variables

Ability Grouping: For the purpose of this research, ability grouping is defined as the practice of dividing classes into small instructional groups based on student needs.

Administrative Support: For the purpose of this research, administrative support is defined as **level** school leadership support involving a variety of tasks and work methods.

Class Size: For the purpose of this research, class size is defined as the number of students in a given course or classroom.

Influence of Peers: For the purpose of this research, influence of peers is defined as the social influence a peer group exerts on its individual members, as each member attempts to conform to the expectations of the group.

Leadership Style: For the purpose of this research, leadership style is defined as a leader's style of providing direction, implementing plans, and motivating people.

Parental Involvement: For the purpose of this research, parental involvement is defined as the level in which a student's parent is actively involved in the school community and promotes the mission and goals of the school.

Professional Development: For the purpose of this research, professional development is defined as "those processes and activities designed to enhance the professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes of educators so that they might in turn improve the learning of students" (Guskey, 2000, p. 16).

Student Attendance: For the purpose of this research, student attendance is defined as the number of students present in an inclusion classroom.

Student Discipline: For the purpose of this research, student discipline is defined as the system of rules, punishments, and behavioral strategies appropriate to the regulation of children.

Teacher Collaboration: For the purpose of this research, teacher collaboration is defined as the collaboration between special education and general education teachers.

Figure 2 shows the relationship among the variables.

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

Leadership Style

Student Discipline

Parental Involvement

Professional Development

Teacher Collaboration

Administrative Support

Influence of Peers

Ability Grouping

Class Size

Student Attendance

DEPENDENT VARIABLE

Factors that Affect the Learning Needs and Outcomes of Students with Special Needs in an Inclusive Setting
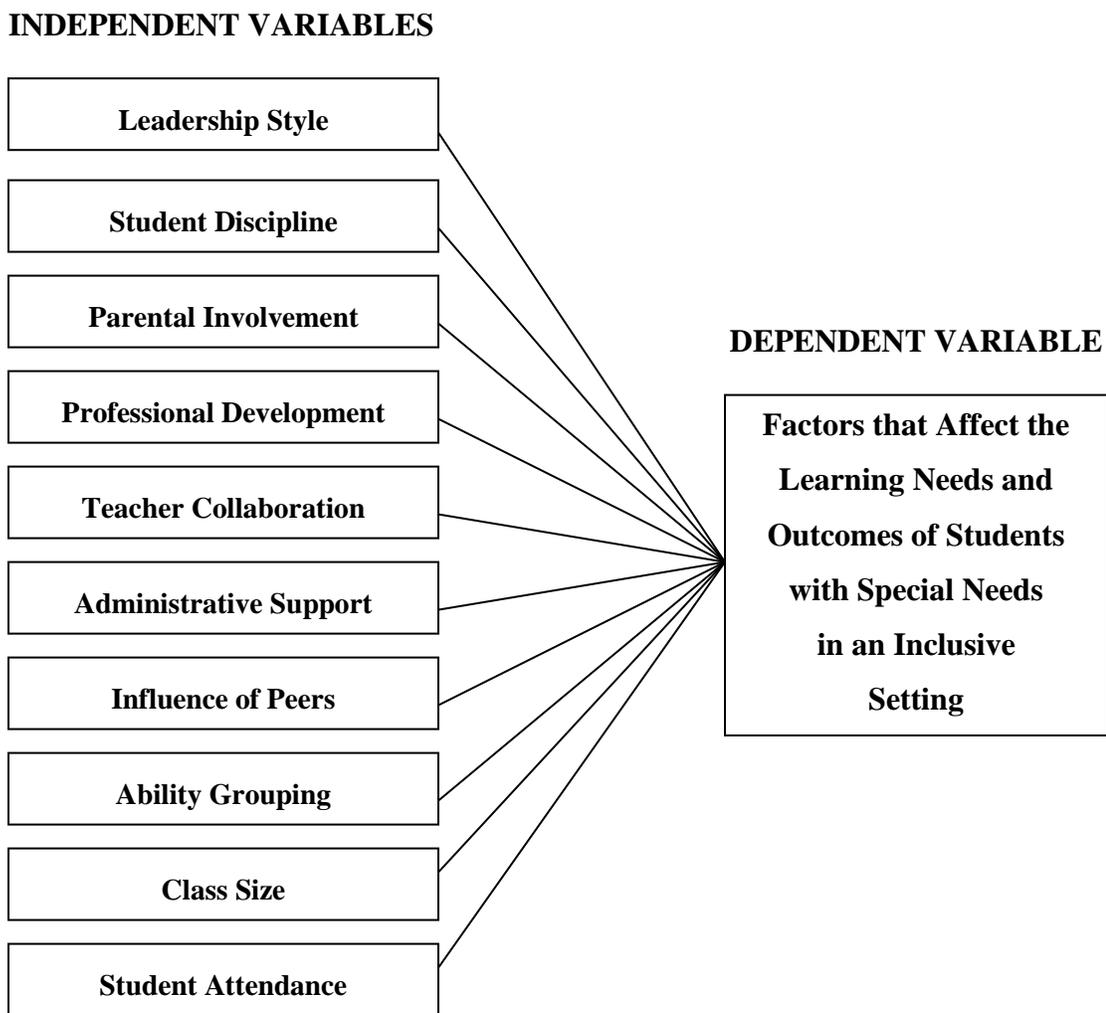
Figure 2. Relationship among the variables.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study include the following:

1. Analysis was limited to a single elementary public school located in one
    metropolitan area.

2. The study was limited to a single inclusion school in the eastern region of
    the United States and the results from this research may only be
    representative of schools that have full inclusion.

Summary

This chapter provided the conceptual and theoretical framework on which this study centers. The theories align to the implications for educational leaders and teachers to influence and promote the learning needs and outcomes of special needs students in an inclusive setting. The relationships among the variables, definition of variables, and limitations of the study were explored.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this case study was to examine the factors that affect the learning

needs and outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting through the

following independent variables: leadership style, student discipline, parental

involvement, professional development, teacher collaboration, administrative support,

influence of peers, ability grouping, class size, and student attendance.

This chapter presents background information on the school and discusses the

research design, description of the setting, instrumentation, participants and location of

the research, and data collection procedures.

Research Design

This qualitative case study was used to investigate the relationship between the

independent variables leadership style, student discipline, parental involvement,

professional development, teacher collaboration, administrative support, influence of

peers, ability grouping, class size, student attendance, and the learning needs and

outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting. Qualitative research is a

paradigm in which the researcher examines a problem in which the variables that

contribute to the problem are unknown (Creswell, 2008). This type of research involves

emerging questions and procedures, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data (Creswell, 2008). The study addressed the implications this research has for teachers and educational leaders. In this research interviews, document review and observations were used. These approaches were used because it enabled the researcher to study multiple individuals that manage and teach and in an inclusive setting. The data from these interviews, document reviews, and observations were used to compare similarities and differences among the participants to answer the research questions. Interviews were recorded on an ipad and later transcribed by hand. In the field of Special Education there have been many changes that have transformed schools. This research provides an in-depth study of factors that affect learning needs and outcomes in inclusive classrooms.

Research Questions

RQ1: What affect does parental involvement have on the learning outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

RQ2: What impact does leadership style have on the learning outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

RQ3: What impact does student discipline have on the learning outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

RQ4: What aspects of administrative support and leadership style have on the learning outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

RQ5: What impact does professional development have on the learning outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

RQ6:   What impact does teacher collaboration have of the learning outcomes
        of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

RQ7:   What impact does ability grouping have of the learning outcomes of
        students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

RQ8:   What impact does class size have of the learning outcomes of students
        with special needs in an inclusive setting?

RQ 9:   What impact does influence of peers have of the learning outcomes of
        students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

RQ10:   What impact does attendance have on the learning outcomes of students
        with special needs in an inclusive setting?

Table 2 shows the data collection alignment for research questions.

Table 2

Data Collection Alignment of Research Questions

Research Questions and Variables	Interview Questions (Teachers)
RQ1. What affect does parental involvement have on the learning outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?	In what ways do you think parental involvement impacts the learning needs of students with special needs in an inclusive setting? (teachers, administrators, and parents)
RQ2. What impact does leadership style have on the learning outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?	What impact does leadership style and administrative support have on the learning needs of students with special needs in an inclusive setting? (teachers and administrators)

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)

Research Questions and Variables	Interview Questions (Teachers)
RQ3. What impact does student discipline have on the learning outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?	In what ways do you think student discipline impacts the learning needs of students with special needs in an inclusive setting? (teachers, administrators and teachers)
RQ4. What aspects of administrative support and leadership style have on the learning outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?	What impact does leadership style and administrative support have on the learning needs of students with special needs in an inclusive setting? (teachers and administrators)
RQ5. What impact does professional development have on the learning outcomes of student with special needs in an inclusive setting?	To what extent to you believe professional development has on the learning needs of students with special needs? (teachers and administrators)
RQ6. What impact does teacher collaboration have of the learning outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?	In what ways do you think teacher collaboration impacts the learning needs of students with special needs in an inclusive setting? (teachers and administrators)
RQ7. What impact does ability grouping have of the learning outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?	In what ways do you think ability grouping impacts the learning needs of students with special needs in an inclusive setting? (teachers and administrators)
RQ8. What impact does class size have of the learning outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?	In your experience how does student-teacher ratio affect the learning needs of students with special needs in an inclusive setting? (teachers and administrators)

Table 2 (continued)

Research Questions and Variables	Interview Questions (Teachers)
RQ9. What impact does influence of peers have of the learning outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?	To what extent to you believe influence of peers has on the learning needs of students with special needs? (teachers, administrators and parents)
RQ10. What impact does student attendance have of the learning outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?	What extent does student attendance have on the learning outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting? (teachers)
	What challenges do parents face in getting special needs students to school regularly and on time? (parents)

Description of the Setting

One elementary school in the eastern region of the United States was used in this study. This school is a pre-kindergarten through fifth grade school that has been implementing inclusion for many years. Every classroom has a regular education teacher, special education teacher, and a paraprofessional. There are 22 regular education teachers, 24 special education teachers, and 15 paraprofessionals. The support staff rotates between classrooms based on the needs of the children. For each grade level there is one grade level chairperson. The school has one special education coordinator, one assistant principal and one principal. The school is located in an urban area. The students come from diverse backgrounds. This school has a large percentage of students with special needs. The school was restructured ten years earlier and currently has a partnership with a special education center so that students with special needs can be

educated in an inclusive setting. The time frame for this research project was two months.

Data Collection Procedures

1. Obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board at Clark Atlanta University.

2. Obtained approval from the local school/school district to complete research.

3. Reviewed school discipline records, student achievement, and attendance records.

4. Interviewed participants.

5. Transcribed the interviews and identified common themes.

Sampling Procedures

Purposive sampling was used was used for this study. The researcher was purposeful in the selection of the participants. This sampling technique provided the researcher with basic data that is relative to the study of factors that affect the learning needs and outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting.

Working with Human Subjects

Participation in this study was completely voluntary and followed the guidelines set forth by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Clark Atlanta University. The purpose of this study was explained as the researchers interest in obtaining information about factors that affect the learning needs of students with special needs in an inclusive setting. The researcher protected the identity of the participants. No identifying information was asked.
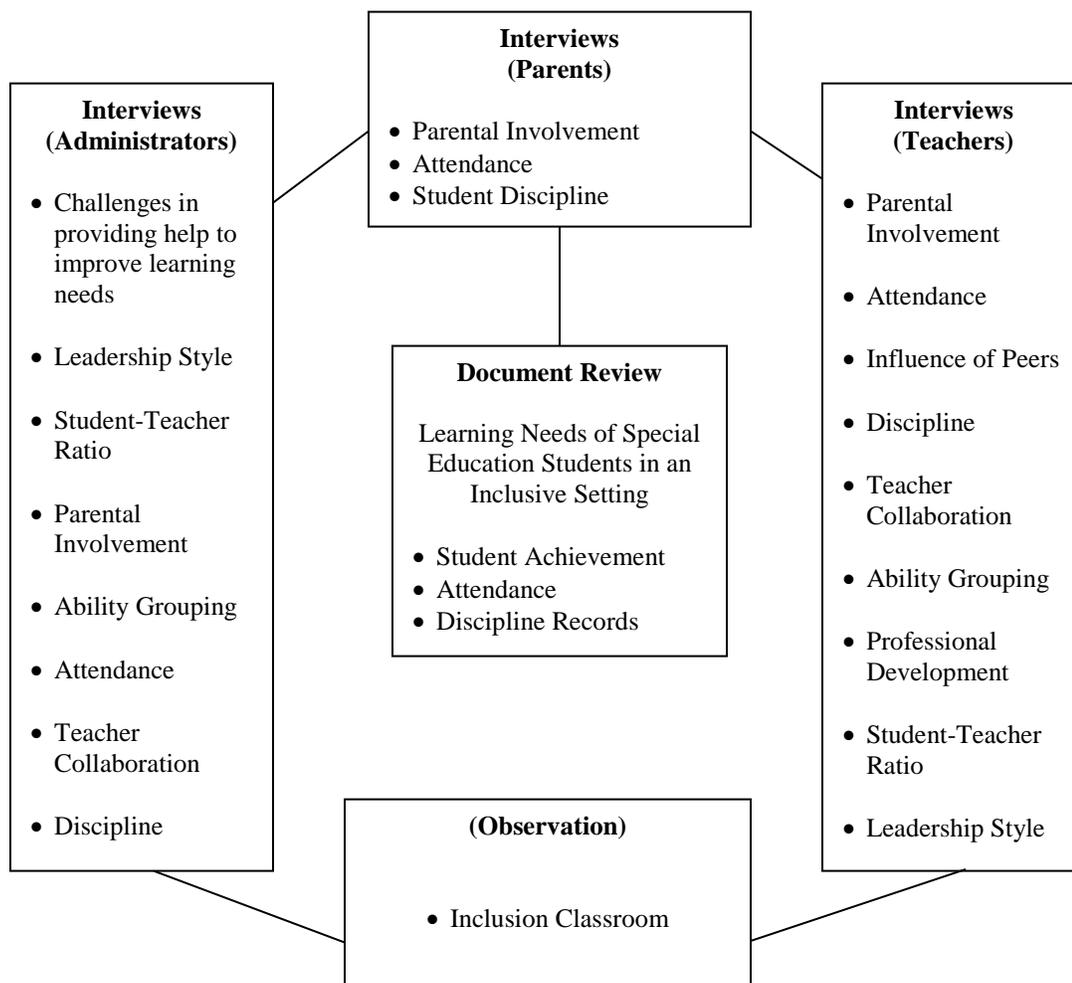
Instrumentation

The researcher developed interview questions, observed classrooms and reviewed documents specifically for this study. The interview questions were developed by the researcher in consultation with the dissertation committee. The interview questions, document review and observations are used to gain insight on the factors that affect the learning needs and outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting. The interview questions consisted of open ended questions that corresponded to the research questions. The interviews were conducted individually. The observations took place in inclusive classrooms. Figure 3 lists the instruments used to document the case study.

Description of Data Analysis Methods

The qualitative data collected was through interviews and document reviews and classroom observations. The researcher used statements from interviews and observation notes to interpret the data into themes. The researcher analyzed and compared the themes, patterns, or differences of the responses to the interview questions.

Teacher Interview

1. In what ways do you think parental involvement impacts the learning needs of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?
2. What impact does supervision of special needs children at home have on the learning needs of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?
3. To what extent to you believe influence of peers has on the learning needs of students with special needs?

Interviews (Parents)

- Parental Involvement
- Attendance
- Student Discipline

Interviews (Administrators)

- Challenges in providing help to improve learning needs
- Leadership Style
- Student-Teacher Ratio
- Parental Involvement
- Ability Grouping
- Attendance
- Teacher Collaboration
- Discipline

Document Review

Learning Needs of Special Education Students in an Inclusive Setting

- Student Achievement
- Attendance
- Discipline Records

Interviews (Teachers)

- Parental Involvement
- Attendance
- Influence of Peers
- Discipline
- Teacher Collaboration
- Ability Grouping
- Professional Development
- Student-Teacher Ratio
- Leadership Style

(Observation)

- Inclusion Classroom

Figure 3. Instruments used to document the case study.

4. In what ways do you think student discipline impacts the learning needs of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

5. In what ways do you think teacher collaboration impacts the learning needs of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

6. In what ways do you think ability grouping impacts the learning needs of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

7. To what extent to you believe professional development has on the learning needs of students with special needs?

8. In your experience how does student-teacher ratio affect the learning needs of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

9. What impact does leadership style and administrative support have on the learning needs of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

10. What challenges do teachers face in getting special needs children to school regularly and on time and how does attendance affect your students learning outcome?

Parent Interview

1. In what ways do you think parental involvement impacts the learning outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

2. What challenges do parents face in getting special needs children to school regularly and on time?

3. To what extent to you believe influence of peers has on the learning outcomes of students with special needs?

4. In what ways do you think student discipline impacts the learning outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

Administrator Interview

1. What impact does leadership style and administrative support have on the learning outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

2. In your experience how does student-teacher ratio affect the learning outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

3. In what ways do you think parental involvement impacts the learning outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

4. To what extent to you believe professional development has on the learning needs of students with special needs?

5. To what extent to you believe influence of peers has on the learning needs of students with special needs?

6. In what ways do you think ability grouping impacts the learning needs of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

7. In what ways do you think teacher collaboration impacts the learning needs of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

8. In what ways do you think student discipline impacts the learning needs of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

Summary

This qualitative research examined the factors that affect the learning needs and outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting. The researcher selected a qualitative approach that uses interviews, document reviews and observations. The chapter explained the research design, description of the setting, sampling procedures, working with human subjects, instrumentation, participants of the research, data collection procedures and statistical applications.

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the factors that affect the learning needs and outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting through the following independent variables: leadership style, student discipline, parental involvement, professional development, teacher collaboration, administrative support, influence of peers, ability grouping, class size, and student attendance. There were four themes that were extracted from teacher interviews, administrator interviews, parent interviews, observations, and a document review of discipline and attendance/classroom records. The data sources that were collected were used to provide answers to the research questions and establish a relationship between the variables. After analyzing the data, the researcher found the common themes. This chapter presents the results of the data analysis.

Background

The researcher conducted a total of twelve interviews at one elementary school in the eastern region of the United States: Six interviews with teachers, three interviews with parents, and three interviews with school administrators (principal, assistant principal, and special education coordinator). The participants of this study ranged in age

from 25 to 53 years old. Two were male and 10 were female. The participants had between 5 and 24 years of experience. All had experience working in an inclusion classroom with students with special needs.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The participants were asked open ended questions. During the individual interview sessions there were a total of 10 questions for teachers, 8 questions for administrators, and 4 questions for parents. There were three observations of inclusion classrooms and a document review of attendance and discipline records. Once all of the data sources were collected, the researcher identified four dominant themes that appeared during the interviews, the data review, and the observations (see Table 3). The questions asked during the interview were specifically about factors that may have an affect on the learning needs and outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting. The interviews were transcribed and the observation notes were typed.

The researcher conducted classroom observations that took place over a 4-week period in a total of three inclusion classrooms. The researcher reviewed classroom lesson plans, attendance records, and discipline records. Once all of the interviews, observations, and data collection were compiled, four themes appeared. The themes were effective professional development, effective teacher collaboration/co-teaching, influence of peer impact on student behavior, and parental involvement.

Table 3

Analysis Matrix

Theme	Data Source	Number of Times Each Theme Emerged
Effective professional development	Interview	9
Effective teacher collaboration/co-teaching	Interview / Observation	9
Influence of peer impact on student behavior	Interview / Observation	12
Parental Involvement	Interview	12

Analysis of Interviews

The responses from the interview questions provided the answers to the research questions. The administrator interview participants included the principal, assistant principal, and special education coordinator. The teacher interviews included two third grade teachers, two fourth grade teachers, and two fifth grade teachers. For the parent interviews, parents of a third, fourth, and fifth-grade student were interviewed. The interview responses that show a common theme are stated after each corresponding research question is listed. Table 4 shows the dates and titles of interviews.

    RQ1: What affect does parental involvement have on the learning outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

The statements in the responses from the interviews indicate that student achievement related to academics and behavior is better when the parents are involved.

Table 4

Date of Interviews and Participants' Titles

Participant	Interview Dates	Title	Primary Role
P-1	November 23,2015	Principal	Principal of Administration and Supervision
P-2	November 23,2015	Assistant Principal	Assistant Principal of Instruction and Attendance
P-3	November 25,2015	Special Education Coordinator	Director of Special Education Program
P-4	November 24, 2015	Teacher 1	Special Education Teacher
P-5	December 3, 2015	Teacher 2	Regular Education Teacher
P-6	December 4, 2015	Teacher 3	Special Education Teacher
P-7	December 10, 2015	Teacher 4	Regular Education Teacher
P-8	December 10, 2015	Teacher 5	Special Education Teacher
P-9	December 10, 2015	Teacher 6	Regular Education Teacher
P-10	December 11, 2015	Parent 1	Parent of Special Needs Student
P-11	December 11, 2015	Parent 2	Parent of Special Needs Student
P-12	December 11, 2015	Parent 3	Parent of Special Needs Student

Related Interview Responses

Principal:

Okay, what I have noticed since I've been here is that the parents that are involved are usually the ones of special needs students. Here we get pretty good participation from parents but when the special needs students have parents that come up to the school, work with them here and at home they usually perform better. It may not be academically but usually the behavior of that student is okay.

Assistant Principal:

In my opinion the parents need to be here. Usually if they not here the student isn't performing as well as they can. The parents that work with their child at home and have something to do with what goes on here, things run a lot smoother.

Special Education Coordinator:

All of the teachers here and myself notice that special needs students here that have involved parents perform better. Sometimes academically and sometimes with their behavior.

Teacher 1:

With the setting I'm working in this year I have definitely seen a difference in the progress of students that have involved parents.

Teacher 2:

Yes, it's not always the case but parents that are involved usually make sure their child has it together.

Teacher 3:

Parental involvement usually is what makes the difference at this grade level.

Teacher 4:

Almost every time a student has a parent that is involved the student does better.

Teacher 5:

I feel that parents that are active in their child's education do better. Especially in this setting it's beneficial for the parent to know what going on and that everything goes well for the student.

Teacher 6:

Parental Involvement is a big one. When the parents engaged the students are usually making progress.

Parent 1:

Most of the other parents here that I see are parents of kids with IEP's. Usually I see them behaving around the school.

Parent 2:

The other moms I talk to that have a kid in an inclusion class acts appropriate when they need too. My son may have other difficulties but I know he is better off because I'm here every once in a while. I'm sure it's the same with the other parents.

Parent 3:

When they are in a special type of class they do better with knowing I'm here and that I'm always around.

RQ2: What impact does leadership style have on the learning outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

The statements in the responses from the interviews indicate that the influence of peers can influence the learning outcomes of students with special needs negatively and positively.

Related Interview Responses

Principal 1:

The regular education students in an inclusive setting can be good or bad for the students with special needs. Depending on the student they can either follow someone who is doing the right thing or follow someone who isn't doing the right thing.

Assistant Principal:

I've seen the special needs students learn from the students sometimes quicker than the teacher, but I've also seen both regular and special ed. learn things they aren't supposed to learn from each other.

Special Education Coordinator:

Here at this school in this setting the students that are learning in an inclusive environment can learn benefit and maybe not benefit from being around their peers.

Teacher 1:

In my class we usually see it both ways. Positively and negatively.

Teacher 2:

I think it's great that regular ed and special ed are exposed to each other, but I don't know if it affects them only positively.

Teacher 3:

I've seen it positively affect them and also the opposite. The students at this age learn from each other. It's not always the best things but sometimes it can be a good thing.

Teacher 4:

The students in my class play off of each other. One day they are doing the right thing because of their peers and later that day or the next day it might be something they know they aren't supposed to be doing. I think it has a lot to do with this age group. Elementary school, especially third graders can be huge followers.

Teacher 5:

I would like to say it positively affects my students, but it also negatively affects them. It's always a problem when you have various groups in your class and a student realized that certain kids aren't doing or aren't required to do as much work.

Teacher 6:

It really depends on the group of kids. It can be good or bad.

Parent 1:

My son enjoys being around the student with special needs and the regular ed children. I'm sure he gets good and bad things from the behaviors of both students.

Parent 2:

I'm not sure if they affect them positively or negatively. I'm really not sure how. My daughter learns from the student too. It's not always a good thing and not always a bad thing.

Parent 3:

The student in her class helps her out when she needs help. They even give her some assistance on the playground during recess and after school, but I do know that she hears things from them that I don't expose her to.

RQ5: What impact does professional development have on the learning outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

The statements in the responses from the interviews indicate that professional development has a big impact on the learning needs of students with special needs in an inclusive setting.

Related Interview Responses

Principal:

What I've noticed is that it is extremely important for teachers in this school working with this population of students to have professional development and training that is geared towards our students. Too many times we have had meetings that are focused on special education but not on autism or emotional behavior disorder. Those are the two largest that we work with here. There have been many times when the county or various people or specialist will offer something and it doesn't really apply to what we need here. When we are having meaningful, useful meetings that are actually effective I have noticed changes in the inclusion classes.

Assistant Principal:

I feel that when we have the type of professional development that is geared

towards everyone and their students it makes a huge impact. The workshops we

have that we try to use for professional development now are sectioned off and we

separate the teachers and assistants into groups that focus on what they really

need.

Special Education Coordinator:

For our exceptional education teachers we try to put them or end them to

professional development that is all about what they are doing. I see a difference

in the classroom when the teachers attend trainings that help them implement

thing in the class that help with the type of students on their caseload.

Teacher 1:

For years I've always wanted to go to meetings that help with special needs

students, but with our new administration we have had the opportunity to attend

workshops that help us and we get to do a lot of different things in the classroom

that benefit our kids. It makes a huge difference with the kids that are pushed into

this setting.

Teacher 2:

I love going to meetings that actually help is with our kids. It does help but only

when it's actually about what we do here.

Teacher 3:

Here we have a message board that we post stuff on that we think will be good for

us to attend. If our coordinator and the rest of the administrative staff like what we

post we can go to that professional development. When we get to go to meeting

that are about special ed and our students it's really helpful.

Teacher 4:

Me and my co-teacher I work with enjoy going to meetings that actually about

what we do in our classroom. When it is about what we do, we like it and we use

in our class. It usually works and we can see a change.

Teacher 5:

I've learned about different interventions to use with my kids from the behavior

specialist a few months back. It was useful.

Teacher 6:

On Wednesdays we have our meetings. Sometimes they don't apply to us at all.

When we do have meetings that are about us it's helpful and we use some of the

stuff in my class. It's good for our type of students.

RQ6:   What impact does teacher collaboration have of the learning outcomes of

students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

The statements in the responses from the interviews indicate that teacher

collaboration is teacher collaboration is good for the students but some perceive it as the

reason many teachers do not stay on schedule with the district pacing chart. Overall, the

teachers and administrators like co-teaching.

Related Interview Responses

Principal 1:

The co-teaching relation is extremely important at this school. Every educator in this building must know how to collaborate with others. If not things just won't work. If there is collaboration it can be very beneficial for our students.

Assistant Principal:

Most teachers here have had to really adjust to collaborating as much as we do. Most schools don't have this much inclusion. We have seen great changes lately and when the co-teaching relationship is right and there is lots of collaboration the students can really benefit from that. The main complaint that I hear is issues with staying up with the pacing schedule. All of the classes have small groups because there are two teachers, and multiple paras. With all of the groups and many different levels it can be difficult for everyone to be at the same place and to move along at the appropriate time.

Special Education Coordinator:

What I've noticed during observations is that the collaboration goes well but what is a bigger issue is the class as a whole staying on schedule lately and not falling behind with the curriculum.

Teacher 1:

If all small groups are at the same spot we are good. My co-teacher and I collaborate everyday but it's not always easy.

Teacher 2:

Teacher collaboration is wonderful if done the right way. Common planning times

really help.

Teacher 3:

The relationship between both teachers in an inclusion class has to be a good one.

If they have a good relationship and work well together the students have more of

a chance of performing better academically. I've seen a difference in my progress

monitoring when this happens.

Teacher 4:

Both teachers have to be on the same page for teacher collaboration to happen. If

to teachers are in the class they need to work together. That's the only way the

students can make progress. Every time we take benchmark test it's an issue

because students in higher groups have cover more than the below level groups.

Teacher 5:

Teacher collaboration can impact the students because things usually run better in

the classroom. Transitions, small group work is a big one, and pacing all have to

do with both the special education and the regular education teacher collaborating

with each other.

Teacher 6:

The co-teaching relationship is effective when both teachers collaborate and plan

together. Of course it's always difficult to stay together throughout the entire

lesson with some of our students but if the teachers work together the students

really get a lot from it.

Document Analysis

The two document analyses provided information for two of the research questions. Document Analysis 1 is the attendance records for the entire school: K-5 Attendance, Regular Education, and Special Education. Document Analysis 2 is the classroom record (school discipline) records with the class average. The attendance records and school discipline records had dates of in school and out of school suspensions, days absent and late to school, number of students in each class, the number of times and dates students have been sent to administrators, and classroom average aligned to the district pacing schedule.

RQ3: What impact does student discipline have on the learning outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

Document analysis 1 shows the dates of all office referrals. Monthly reports were presented in a table that shows how many times students were sent to the office and the number of hours or days they spent in in-school suspension. Students with special needs did spend multiple days in in-school suspension. They are limited to a maximum number of 10 days of out of school suspensions for each academic school year. This document served as verification that multiple students with special needs missed days in class. In document analysis 2 the classroom average for each academic content area is aligned to the districts pacing schedule and is separated by every month of the schools year. The classroom averages for many of the grades 3 to 5 classrooms are lower when the special needs students are pulled out of class for out of school suspension.

RQ8: What impact does class size have of the learning outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

In Document Analysis 2, the class records did not show lower classroom averages for classes that had a higher absence rate however in the teacher interviews many teacher mentioned that when student are absent it does impact their academic achievement and learning outcome.

Analysis of Observation

Three classroom observations were held in grades 3, 4, and 5. All classes were inclusion classes with students with special needs. The researcher spent 45 minutes in each class for three days. Each classroom had a regular education teacher, special education teacher and two special education par-professionals. The information aligned from the classroom observations are stated after the corresponding research question is listed.

RQ7:   What impact does ability grouping have of the learning outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

Related Information from Classroom Observation 1, 2, and 3

In each class that was observed there were small groups. Many of the classrooms had independent groups. Students that finished early went to computer stations so the teachers would have more time with the other students. The students with special needs seemed to understand concepts faster and move to various activities smoothly when they were grouped with their peers and more than one adult. They received more help when they were in these groups. Every classroom had paraprofessionals to assist the students with special needs. In observation 1 and 2, the small groups would give a "thumbs up" for understanding if they were comfortable with the concept that was being taught. If

they gave a thumbs up the teacher or paraprofessional would write a problem on the students individual white board for them to solve. Most of the students that gave a "thumbs up" answered the problem correctly. Many of the groups in all three classes were working at a different pace. The higher groups worked independently. It seemed as if the students were separated by strengths in weakness on the content being taught in the small group.

Summary

The analysis of the data revealed that the independent variables leadership style, student discipline, parental involvement, professional development, teacher collaboration, administrative support, influence of peers, student ability grouping, and class size were related to the learning outcome of students with disabilities in an inclusive setting. The researcher used Dragon Software to record 12 interviews of 3 administrators, 6 teachers, and 3 parents. Once all of the data sources were collected the researcher identified four dominant themes. Two document reviews were used and three classroom observations were held. The four themes were effective professional development, parental involvement impacts the learning needs and outcome of students with special needs, influence of peer's impacts student discipline, and effective teacher collaboration influences the learning outcome of students with special needs. Interview questions were used to answer all of the research questions. The document analysis was used to help answer research questions 3, 8, and 10 and the classroom observations were used to answer research question 7. This chapter has explained the setting where study was taken place, and analyzed the data in relation to the research questions.

CHAPTER VI

FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the factors that affect the learning needs

and outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting through the following

independent variables: leadership style, student discipline, parental involvement,

professional development, and teacher collaboration, and administrative support,

influence of peers, student ability grouping and class size. This was a qualitative study;

interviews, document analysis, and observations were used to determine what factors

affect the learning outcomes of students with special needs at one elementary school in

the eastern region of United States of America. After analyzing the data the researcher

found that effective professional development, effective teacher collaboration, influence

of peers and parental involvement were all major themes that affect the learning

outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting. This chapter focuses on

the major findings that were found throughout this study. The conclusions in this chapter

are based on the findings that were discovered in this study. The following research

questions pertaining to each of the independent variables of the study are below.

Findings

The researcher collected data through interviews with the principal, assistant

principal, special education coordinator, teachers, and parents (see Chapter V, Table 4 for

a list of participants with titles and interview dates). Common themes were identified to gain an understanding related to the research questions.

> RQ1: What affect does parental involvement have on the learning outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

Each person interviewed indicated that they usually saw a difference in the behavior or academic progress of a student that had a parent that was involved in the school. The Interviews showed that many of the parents of students with special needs were very knowledgeable and willing to volunteer and help in the school. Parents mentioned that when they became more active in the school they noticed more progress related to the students IEP goals. According to P-11 (parent 2),

> For most of grades 1 through 3 I didn't really do much and he wasn't doing that well, but as soon as I started to show my face a little more I noticed a different response from teachers. There would be more correspondence and a little more organization. Now I'm here all the time because of my schedule at work and I help out in the class and I'm able to see what type of things work with him and we work on them together and he usually does better that way. (Personal communication, December 11, 2015)

> RQ3: What impact does student discipline have on the learning outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

According to the principal and assistant interviews, student discipline had an impact on the learning outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting; however, when students' behavior is disciplined in the school, they perform better academically. Instead of being suspended out of school they do better academically if

they are separated from their class and placed in school suspension. When they are with a paraprofessional they get the opportunity to finish school work and learn with the adult that they are placed with. According to the document reviews the classroom averages for many of the grades 3-5 classrooms are lower when the special needs students are pulled out of class for out of school suspension.

RQ4:   What aspects of administrative support and leadership style have on the learning outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

The findings from the interviews show that teachers prefer that administrator are supportive when students are disruptive in class and need to be disciplined. However, many of the teachers feel that the leadership style and support don't have an effect on the learning outcome of students with special needs. Many teachers feel that the administrators are not knowledgeable of the disabilities that many of the students have. They do not have a full understanding on how to manage the behaviors and effectively communicate. According to P5 (teacher 2), "I think that the leadership style and the support has more to do with how the staff feels and not really about how the students perform or learn" (Personal communication, December 3, 2015). Another teacher, P6 (teacher 3), says that

> I think support from the administration doesn't really have to do much with our students' progress but more to do with how the teachers and paraprofessionals manage the classroom. We are supported here but I don't think it makes the kids do better. (Personal communication, December 4, 2015)

RQ5:   What impact does professional development have on the learning

outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

The findings from the interviews show that professional development has a large

impact on the learning outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting.

Every administrator and teacher participant said that professional development is good

for the learning outcomes of students with special needs if it is geared towards the

population of students that teacher and administrator are working with. According to P9

(teacher 6),

> We used to have meeting that had nothing to do with our type of students but as
>
> soon as we requested training on working with Autism and seminars with the
>
> behavior specialist, it helped us use something in the classroom that help our
>
> students perform better academically and with their behavior. (Personal
>
> communication, December 10, 2015)

RQ6:   What impact does teacher collaboration have of the learning outcomes of

students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

The findings from the interviews and observations show that teacher collaboration

has a good impact on the learning outcomes of students with special needs. The first

observation showed that the lesson was well organized and the teacher worked together

to establish moving stations and small groups in the classroom. Many of the interviews

said that collaboration and good co-teaching relationship impacts that learning outcomes

of students with special needs in an inclusive setting. According to P9 (teacher 6),

> The co-teaching relationship is effective when both teachers collaborate and plan
>
> together. Of course it's always difficult to stay together throughout the entire

lesson with some of our students but if the teachers work together the students

really get a lot from it. (Personal communication, December 10, 2015)

RQ7: What impact does ability grouping have of the learning outcomes of

students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

According to the interviews P4, P5, and P6, ability grouping has an important

impact on the learning outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting.

However, in classrooms with students with severe disabilities, small groups based on the

student's ability are not as impactful.

RQ8: What impact does class size have of the learning outcomes of students

with special needs in an inclusive setting?

According to the interviews P4, P5, and P6, class size does not have a large

influence on the learning outcomes of students with special needs. Each teacher

mentioned that the small groups in the classrooms in an inclusive setting make the class

seem much smaller. According to P9 (teacher 6),

With all of the small groups we have in the class and the rotations to the different

stations it's not that noticeable that that we have so many kids in here. It's also a

good thing that we have help. There are times when we have 4 adults in the class

at once. Each adult has their own group. Teachers and paras said a teacher-lead

group and the class size are real issues. The observation of the classrooms

showed that all students worked in small groups of three to five students.

RQ9: What impact does influence of peers have of the learning outcomes of

students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

Each participant mentioned that influence of peers had a large impact on the learning outcomes of students with special needs; however, the participant that teaches in the class with a large autism population says that her students do not usually pay attention to the other students' behaviors. According to P-4 (teacher 1),

> Many of the students in my class feed off of each other's behaviors. If one person does something than a few other might do it. The difference about my class and some other the other inclusion classes on this side is that we have a few students with autism and they don't really pay attention to other people the way some of the other students do. (Personal communication, November 24, 2015)

Limitations

The researcher collected and analyzed the data. There were limitations that arose.

- This study took place at an elementary school in the Eastern Region of the United States

- If the researcher collected data at multiple schools the study would have created a larger pool of participants.

- After looking at the interview questions and answers that the participants gave the researcher realized that being more specific in the questions may have added to the analysis of the variables.

During the interviews, the participants responded and seemed confident in their answers. The researcher is confident that even with the limitations that were present, they had no effect on the outcome of the findings for this study.

Recommendations

Recommendations for School Leaders, Parents, and Teachers

School Leaders and Teachers

- For professional development to be effective, school leaders need to make sure that trainings are geared towards the population of special needs students that attend the school where teachers instruct.

- School leaders should involve parents of special needs students in school activities as much as possible. Parental involvement seems to promote good behavior and positive academic achievement outcomes.

- Peers of students with special needs play a huge role in the learning outcomes that are displayed in class. Teachers and school leaders should closely monitor what students are learning from each other.

- Teachers and school leaders should closely monitor the pacing of all students in an inclusive setting.

- School leaders and teachers should consistently monitor and modify special needs students' IEPs to ensure that all identified needs are met.

Parents

- Parents should volunteer by spending time with students in the school setting and at home so that there can be a positive impact on the learning outcomes of students with special needs.

- Students learn from their peers. Parents should closely monitor what their child learns from other students in an inclusive setting.

- Parents should monitor their child/ren's IEP to ensure that their needs are being met.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study was done to examine the factors that affect the learning needs and outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting at one elementary school in the eastern region of the United States. The data for this study was collected from educators and parents that were all very familiar special education and students being educated in an inclusive setting. Although many findings in this study found that there were a relationship between the variables and some common themes the study design does create some limitations. This study was done at one elementary school. Expanding this study to include middle school and high school interviews, observations, and document reviews with a wider variety of students with special needs would give the researcher insightful information that could be beneficial for educators that work with students with special needs in an inclusive setting. The following topics are suggested to researchers who may have an interest in contributing to the literature of this study:

- Analyze the strategies that influence the academic achievement of students with special needs in an inclusive setting.
- Examine the effectiveness of co-teaching special needs students in grade K-5
- Analyze the effect of teacher implementation of accommodations and modifications put in place for students with special needs.
- Examine teachers' perceptions of inclusion classrooms.

- Analyze the relationship between special education and regular education students during instruction in an inclusive setting.

- Examine the effectiveness of inclusion at an elementary school.

Conclusions and Implications

This study was designed to answer research questions concerning the factors that affect the learning needs and outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting at one elementary school in the Eastern Region of the United States. The findings of this study add supporting evidence to the influence of the independent variables. The results of this study show that researcher identified four dominant themes that appeared during the interviews, the data review and the observations. Professional development, teacher collaboration, influence of peers, and parental involvement were the common themes that support the importance of the independent variables on factors that have an impact on the learning outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting. The researcher concluded that the interviews with teachers, administrators and parents, document reviews, and observations support the evidence that the independent variables influence the learning needs and outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting.

Through this study, school administrators, teachers, and parents can gain an understanding of what affects the learning needs of students with special needs in an inclusive setting. They will also be able to gain insight on how leadership style, student discipline, parental involvement, professional development, teacher collaboration,

influence of peers, student ability grouping, and class size influence the perception of other educators.

Summary

Teachers, administrators, and parents of special needs students benefit from factors that influence the educational outcomes of students with special needs. This study can influence and assist with developing a better understanding of how leadership style, student discipline, parental involvement, professional development, teacher collaboration, administrative support, influence of peers, ability grouping, class size, and student attendance can promote student success . What emerged from this study is that the four dominant themes—Parental Involvement, effective professional development, teacher collaboration, influence of peers, and parental involvement—are all critical factors that every teacher, administrator, and parent that participated in the study feels strongly influences the educational outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting. As a result of this study, the following conclusions have been developed: at one elementary school in the eastern region of the United States, there is professional development that is offered but teachers benefit from training and professional development that is primarily about the type of disabilities that they work with. Most of the special needs students that have parents that are involved and active in the school achieve academically or behave in the inclusive setting. Teacher collaboration is effective in an inclusive setting. The influence of peers is something that is seen in an inclusive setting. However that influence can be positive and negative.

In this study, administrators, teachers, and parents were interviewed, classroom observations took place, and a review of documents was done to investigate the factors

that affect the learning needs and outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive

setting. Knowledge about what affects special needs students in an inclusive setting is a

major component and would benefit all parents and educators. This study is important to

the field of education. Special education in public schools is a setting that most educators

work with. Students with special needs can achieve if teachers, administrators, and

parents have an understanding of what is needed to promote a positive learning outcome

in inclusion classrooms.

APPENDIX A

Interview Questions

Teacher Interview

1. In what ways do you think parental involvement impacts the learning outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

2. To what extent to you believe influence of peers has on the learning outcomes of students with special needs?

3. In what ways do you think student discipline impacts the learning outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

4. In what ways do you think teacher collaboration impacts the learning outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

5. In what ways do you think ability grouping impacts the learning outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

6. To what extent to you believe professional development has on the learning outcomes of students with special needs?

7. In your experience how does student-teacher ratio and class size affect the learning outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

8. What impact does leadership style and administrative support have on the learning outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

9. What impact does student attendance have on the learning outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

Parent Interview

1. In what ways do you think parental involvement impacts the learning needs of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

2. What challenges do parents face in getting special needs children to school regularly and on time?

3. To what extent to you believe influence of peers has on the learning outcomes of students with special needs?

4. In what ways do you think student discipline impacts the learning outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

Administrator Interview

1. What impact does leadership style and administrative support have on the learning outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

2. In your experience how does student-teacher ratio affect the learning outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

3. In what ways do you think parental involvement impacts the learning outcomes of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

4. To what extent to you believe professional development has on the learning needs of students with special needs?

5. To what extent to you believe influence of peers has on the learning needs of students with special needs?

6. In what ways do you think ability grouping impacts the learning needs of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

7. In what ways do you think teacher collaboration impacts the learning needs of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

8. In what ways do you think student discipline impacts the learning needs of students with special needs in an inclusive setting?

APPENDIX B

Document Review 1 and 2 Notes

- Office referrals of grade 3, 4, and 5
- Number of in-school suspensions
- Number of out of school suspensions
- Special Education students in each class spent twice as many days in in-school suspension
- Students are coded- (Special Education Services, Early Intervention Program, Free and Reduced Lunch, English as a Second Language)
- Benchmark assessment scores are lower in October and November. Same month as multiple out of -school suspensions. All students are special needs students.
- During months of lower attendance classroom benchmark average is the same as previous months

Observation Notes

- Grades 3, 4 and 5
- Each group has 4-6 students
- Para-professional follows groups to various stations
- Students that have difficulty are escorted out of class by Para-professional (happened twice in 4th grade class). Student came back approximately 20 minutes later.
- Thumbs up, thumbs down for understanding
- Worked on small individual white boards, active board and desk work
- All students were working on the same skill but at various levels (differentiated instruction)
- Every group with a Para-professional had a student with special needs
- Smooth transitions from group to group
- Students who finished early went to the individual computer station
- Students separated by ability
- Higher groups worked independently
- Students help each other when having difficulty in math

APPENDIX C

Information Letter and Consent

This letter is an invitation to consider participating in a study I am conducting as part of my Doctoral degree in the Department of Educational Leadership at the Clark Atlanta University under the supervision of Dr. Barbra Hill. I would like to provide you with more information about this project and what your involvement would entail if you decide to take part.

Special Education is growing and the demands for schools to effectively implement individualized supports are getting stronger. This study will provide support for developing interventions and strategies to address some of the current challenges that exist in public schools. The growing number of students being placed into special education needs to have effective support and services that accommodate their diverse learning differences. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to investigate the school leadership factors that promote the academic achievement of students with special needs in an inclusive setting such as: leadership style, student discipline, parental involvement, professional development, teacher collaboration, administrative support, influence of peers, student ability grouping, class size and assessment. Academic achievement will be generally defined as the extent to which a student has accomplished his or her academic goals. A principal, assistant principals, department chairpersons, teachers and other individuals that have leadership roles within the school community will be interviewed and observed in order to acquire information concerning the achievement of the special needs students within their school. The results of this study will hopefully influence and assist school leaders and teachers knowledge of the learning needs of students with special needs within inclusive classrooms.

This study is significant to the field of educational leadership because it builds upon the current available body of knowledge relating to school leaders and their affect on the learning needs of students with special needs. The special education population is growing and the demands for leaders to effectively implement individualized support are getting stronger. This study will the support and implementation of effective strategies that can increase the achievement of students with special needs. It can assist with creating new interventions, strategies, and address some of the current challenges that exist in today's public schools. The growing numbers of students being placed into special education needs to have effective support and services that accommodate their differences. Therefore, I would like to include you to be involved in my study. I believe that because you are actively involved in providing instruction for students with special needs, you are best suited to speak to the various issues.

Participation in this study is voluntary. It will involve an interview of approximately 10- 15 minutes in length to take place in a mutually agreed upon location and a survey. Interviews and Surveys will b e given out between the months of August, 2015 and November, 2015. You may decline to answer any of the interview or survey questions if you so wish. Further, you may

decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences by advising the researcher. With your permission, the interview will be tape-recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. Participants have the right to inspect, upon request, any instrument or materials related to the proposal within a reasonable period of time after the request is received. Access to student records will not be needed for this research. All information you provide is considered completely confidential. Your name will not appear in any dissertation or report resulting from this study, however, with your permission anonymous quotations may be used. The name of the school and school district will not be used. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study.

You can sign and return this letter to Steven-Kyle Jefferson at 3204 Saville Street Atlanta GA 30331 or Skj1906@yahoo.com. If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me (Steven-Kyle Jefferson) at 404-944-4023 or by e-mail at skj1906@yahoo.com You can also contact my dissertation chair person, Dr. Barbra Hill at 404-880-6015 or e-mail BHill@cau.edu

I very much look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project.

Sincerely,

Steven-Kyle Jefferson	**Date**	

Participant's Signature	**Date**	

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