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A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY: BARRIERS AND EXPECTATIONS OF ELEMENTARY

EDUCATORS WHO TEACH STUDENTS WITH AUTISM

A Dissertation

by

ABBIE M. MUÑOZ

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A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY: BARRIERS AND EXPECTATIONS OF ELEMENTARY

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December 2021

ABSTRACT

Muñoz, Abbie M., <u>A Grounded Theory Study: Barriers and Expectations of Educators who Teach Students with Autism.</u> Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), December, 2021, 120 pp., 1 table, 3 figures, 119 references.

The purpose of this qualitative research study's is to garner a better understanding of the barriers and expectations of general and special education elementary teachers when teaching students with autism. Previous research indicates that school-aged children are increasingly identified with Autism Spectrum Disorder (Evans, 2016). According to federal law (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 2004; No Child Left Behind, 2001) teachers are required to educate all students in their classroom including students with special needs. While several studies have been conducted on how to education and support students with autism in the classroom, few qualitative studies have been conducted from the educator's perspective. This grounded theory approach about the barriers and expectations of teachers allowed the participants to provide their own perspectives and resulted in a better understanding of factors that influence teachers' views of students with autism. Additionally, these factors provide an introductory model of how to support teachers who instruct students with autism.

DEDICATION

I could not have accomplished my doctoral degree without the unwavering support of my husband, Ray. You have been my rock and biggest cheerleader. Thank you for your love, patience, and understanding. Love you always. I also dedicate my work to my parents, Abel and Minerva Muñoz. You both have instilled in me the love for learning and the value of hard work. Above all, I would like to thank God with blessing me with a loving and supportive family.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The number of children being identified with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is increasing in the United States at a high rate from 1 in 150 in 2002 to 1 in 68 in 2015 (Politte et al., 2015). In 2020, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2020) stated that 1 in 54 children were diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Disorder. There is not a known cause for autism or an understanding of why the numbers have increased throughout the years. Autism Speaks, an organization designed to be a resource for parents and clinicians alike, believe the number of individuals with autism has risen so dramatically due to of the revision of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorders (DSM) as well as an increased awareness of autism that has helped the identification of the disorder. In 2013, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders was revised, becoming the DSM-5. The DSM-5 updated the definition of Autism Disorder and Asperger's Disorder was removed from the manual. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (5th edition; *DSM-5*) (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) states "individuals with ASD often experience impairment in social functioning such as: social-communication impairments and restricted, repetitive, patterns of behavior interests, or activities" (p.50-51).

Uniqueness of Autism Spectrum Disorder

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is commonly thought to be a lifelong condition that negatively impacts communication, relationships, adaptive skills, academic and vocational attainment (Fein et al., 2013). The increase of awareness and screening process for ASD has resulted in a heterogeneous population of individuals with ASD (Roane et al., 2016). As ASD is heterogeneous, some individuals with ASD have a wide range of impairments and varying, if any, co-morbidities; and how these impairments manifest may change over time (Sahin & Sur, 2015). ASD manifests itself and affects a varying degree of functioning domains such as cognition, speech and social interaction (Tiura et al., 2017). Parents of children diagnosed with autism have been faced with a variety of treatment options that all promise to improve their child's cognitive and language abilities (Dawson, 2017). Also affected are expressing and interpreting nonverbal communication, eye contact, difficulties in maintaining relationships, restricted and repetitive patterns of behaviors, and repetitive motor movements such as hand flapping (Roane et al., 2016).

Evans (2016) reported the prevalence of children in public school identified with ASD has significantly increased. According to federal law (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2001; No Child Left Behind of 2004) teachers are required to educate all students including students with special needs. Hart and Malian (2013) noted that due to the steady increase of children being diagnosed with ASD teacher's experiences are affected due to stress. Barnhart (2017) reported children with an autism diagnosis will continue to appear and be included in school classroom, regardless of the challenges they may encounter.

Statement of the Problem

According to Cardinal et al. (2021) in the past 15-17 years the rate of autism has increased significantly. As the number of children identified with ASD increases, so has the number of students in public schools being identified with ASD (Hart & Malian, 2013; Goldman & Gilmour, 2021). Students with autism being identified has increased by 684% over 17 years and 43% on average per year (Cardinal et al., 2021). Due to the rise of students identified with ASD, there is an increase in awareness of what teachers need to effectively support and educate students with ASD (Bertuccio et al., 2019; Hart & Malian, 2013). Current research on how to effectively instruct students with ASD in the classroom is emerging and developing (Hart & Malian, 2013). Cardinal et al. (2021) noted funding should be allocated to address interventions and information on how to implement educational programming. Evans (2016) reported educators receive little in the way of formal training or instruction in evidence-based practices for children with Autism. Cardinal et al. (2021) concluded teachers need support with identifying evidence -based practices, structuring intervention programs, and developing customized individuals supports across multiple setting. However, little is known form the teacher perspective about the barriers an expectations of teachers who educate student with autism. The study sought to explore common barriers and expectations among general and special education teachers who instruct students with ASD.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to explore the following: (1) barriers teachers encounter when educating students with ASD, and (2) the expectations of public school teachers have when instructing students with ASD. School districts could utilize the findings

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from this research to better assist educators teaching students with ASD. General education teachers could receive vital support in the classroom. Students with ASD could increase or accelerate their progression in achieving academic and social goals.

Research Questions

The first overarching question is:

RQ 1: What barriers do public school teachers identify when instructing students with Autism?

- What do teachers identify as barriers related to training?

- Are there attitudinal barriers toward teaching students with Autism?

- What type of barriers do teachers identify relevant to school administration and teaching students with Autism?

- What barriers do teachers identify relevant to parents and teaching students with Autism?

The second overarching question for this study is:

RQ 2: What are the expectations of public school teachers when instructing students with Autism?

- What are teacher's personal expectations as an educator?

- What expectations do teachers have for administration support when teaching students with Autism?

- What expectations do teachers have for parents of children with Autism?

- What are teacher's academic expectations of their students with Autism?

- What are teacher's behavioral expectations of their students with Autism?

- What are teacher's social expectations of their students with Autism?

Conceptual Framework

The Pygmalion Effect by Rosenthal Jacobsen (1968), stated that positive teacher expectations positively influences student outcomes and negative expectations influence performance negatively. Stenger (2019) noted when certain behaviors are expected then we are more than likely to behave in accordance to the set expectations effecting the outcome. Cameron and Cook (2013) found there is a relationship between teacher expectations and student outcomes. The following conceptual framework was designed to assist the researcher in the study. Figure 1 demonstrates the conceptual framework for this study with the common barriers teacher's encounter when teaching students with ASD. Figure 2 demonstrates the conceptual framework for this study for the common expectations teachers have when educating students with ASD.
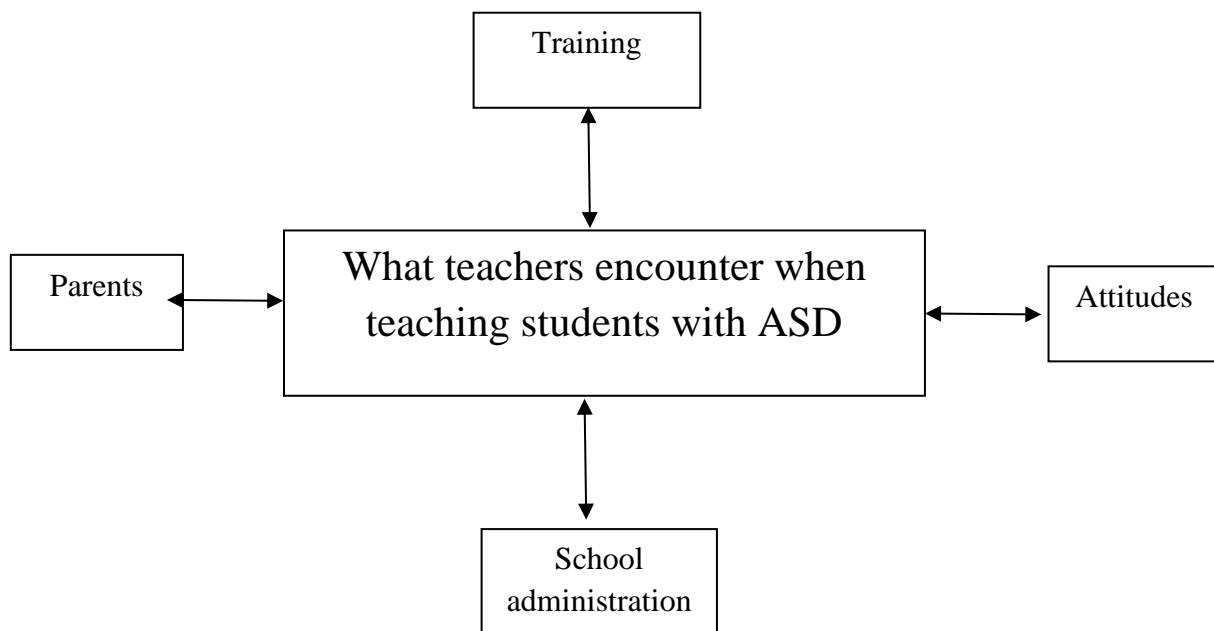
Figure 1. Conceptual Framework for barriers teacher's encounter when teaching students with autism
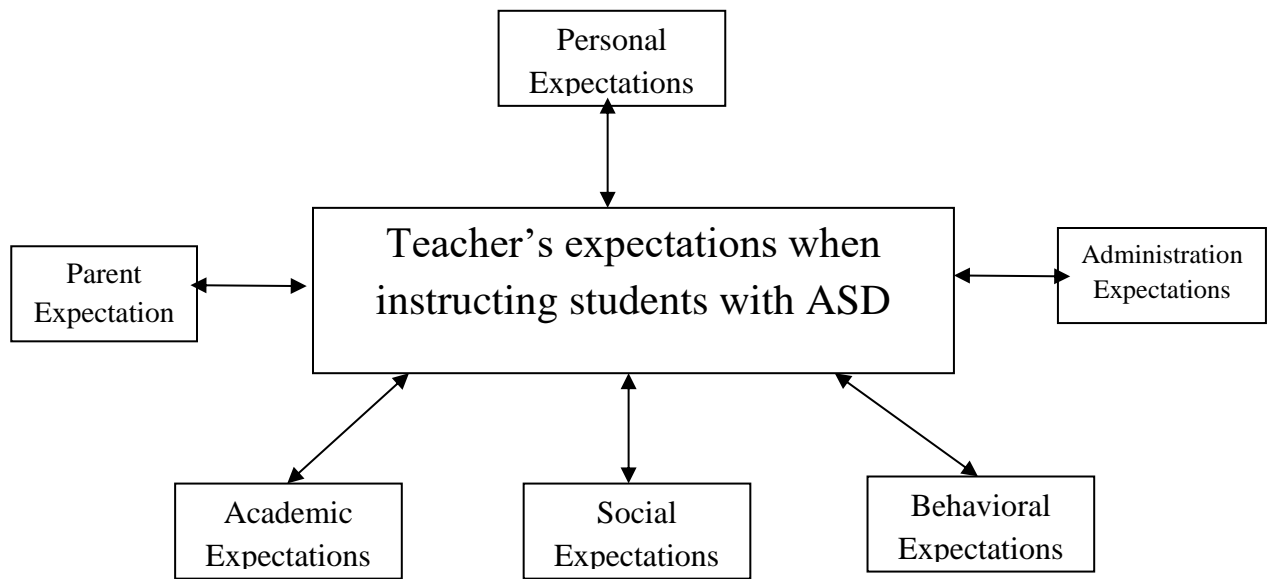
Figure 2. Conceptual Framework for Teacher's expectations when instructing students with autism

Operational Definition of Terms

Autism Spectrum disorder: Autism Spectrum Disorder, according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th edition (5th ed.; DSM–5; American Psychiatric Association, 2013) describes ASD as a persistent deficit in social communication, social interaction across context, restricted patterns of interests and behaviors. Symptoms must be present in early childhood and symptoms limit or impair everyday functioning. ASD can affect individuals mildly, moderately, and severely.

General Education Teacher: whose primary focus is to teach children without disabilities in 1st – 5th grade (Anderson, 2010).

Special Education Teacher: Teachers who teach specifically designed instruction, at no cost to parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability (Wright & Wright, 2012).

Assumptions and Limitations

The researcher assumed many teachers encounter a variety of barriers when educating students with ASD. The researcher further assumed teachers did not receive enough formal training when attending higher education classes. The researcher assumed most teachers feel they do not receive adequate support from school administration or from parents/guardians. The researcher also believed teachers had a predisposed negative attitude towards teaching students with ASD because of the additional stress it may cause. The researcher believed all participants in the study will be forthcoming and answer the questions truthfully to the best of their ability. The study is limited to general and special education teachers who taught elementary school classes. The participants were from a medium-sized south Texas school district. The results may not be generalizable to teachers outside of the state of Texas or different size districts. This qualitative study is limited to 12 elementary public school teachers. The purpose of this study is to understand barriers and expectations teachers encounter when educating students with ASD.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an overview of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) as a disorder that can impair social, communication, and behavioral development. This chapter stated the research questions, sub questions, conceptual frame work, term definitions, and assumptions and limitations. The primary focus of this study is to identify: What are the barriers and expectations teachers have when teaching students with ASD? This chapter highlighted that the number of children diagnosed with ASD is continuing to grow and the need to adequately support their needs is also on the rise. The conceptual framework illustrated demonstrates the process in which the researcher categorized the study. In Chapter 2 the literature provides further information on ASD and how it affects educators.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

In this section the comprehensive literature review was conducted by searching the following key words: autism, barriers in teaching, teacher self-efficacy, teacher burnout, students with autism disorder, special education, general education teacher, special education teacher, autism characteristics, and expectations. The purpose of this literature review was to present a summary of research related to ASD, barriers in teaching students with ASD, teacher and parent expectations for children with ASD, and possible identification of interventions. The questions for this study are: What barriers do public school teachers identify related to instructing students with Autism? What are the expectations of public school teachers when instructing students with Autism?

Understanding Autism Spectrum Disorder

Currently, the cause of autism or why the numbers have increased throughout the years has yet to be discovered. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2012) reported autism is the fastest growing developmental disability in the United States and is present in all racial, socio-economic and ethnic groups. Due to the increase in numbers, autism is thought to be the most common disability in the school system.

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Bertuccio et al. (2019) reported 10% of the 6.7 million students in the special education program were classified with autism during the 2015-2016 school year in the United States. Wilder et al. (2004) stated autism is a disorder present at birth and/or early childhood. Currently, the numbers of children being identified with autism is growing rapidly (Love et al., 2019). Emmons and Zager (2018) reported autism is a multifaceted disorder that manifests itself through an assortment of features and behaviors. Individuals identified with Autism Spectrum Disorder may have a variety of limitations in the areas of functional and effective communication, may display repetitive or obsessive behaviors, and have impairments in creating and maintaining social interactions (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

In 2013, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder was revised, and became the DSM-5. The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th edition; *DSM-5*; American Psychiatric Association, 2013) states "individuals with autism spectrum disorder often experience impairment in social functioning such as: social-communication impairments and restricted, repetitive, patterns of behavior interests, or activities" (p.50-51). The DSM-5 explained that individuals with ASD often experience impairment in social functioning such as: social-communication impairments and restricted, repetitive, patterns of behavior interests, or activities (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Some children may have symptoms present at birth, progress normally until the age of 18 to 24 months of age when there is a delay in development, or children may regress and lose skills they acquired (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012).

Bertuccio et al. (2019) reported autism is a neurodevelopmental disorder that disturbs the communication and behaviors during early childhood. Ryan et al. (2014) reported the symptoms range from mild cognitively, behaviorally or developmentally delayed to moderate and severe

symptoms; therefore, autism is considered a spectrum disorder because of its wide range severity of symptoms. These impairments in social functioning can affect how individuals with ASD form and maintain friendships that are developed throughout their lives. Friedlander (2009) reported students with ASD may have difficulty processing and become over stimulated with bright lights, cafeteria noises, student noises, and other common school sounds. According to Bishop-Fitzpatrick et al. (2017), individuals who are identified with ASD do not have a positive prognosis of quality of life due to the challenges associated with Autism.

ASD is commonly thought to be lifelong condition that negatively impacts communication, relationships, adaptive skills, academic and vocational attainment (Fein et al., 2013). The increase of awareness and screening process for ASD has resulted in a heterogeneous population of individuals with ASD (Roane et al., 2016). As ASD is heterogeneous, some individuals with ASD have a wide variation of impairment and varying co-morbidities (Sahin & Sur, 2015). Also, how these impairments manifest may change over time. ASD manifests itself and affects a varying degree of functioning domains such as cognition, speech and social interaction (Tiura et al., 2017).

Autism Spectrum Disorder in Public Schools

Love et al. (2019) reported children with autism are one of the most challenging populations to instruct. The United States Department of Education (2011) reported students receiving special education services under the coding of autism is growing at a rate five times greater than children diagnosed in previous decades. Hill et al. (2015) explained the increase of children identified with ASD is due, in large part, to the revisions of diagnostic criteria, an increase of awareness among professionals and parents, and better identification.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004), mandates that all children from birth through 21, who are identified with a disability are entitled to a free appropriate education with special services to meet their needs. Bertuccio et al. (2019) summarized IDEA as requiring all students with a disability to be educated in the least restricted environment that fits their needs. No Child Left Behind (2002) and IDEA safeguard the educational rights of students with disabilities, however most individual states do have mandates requiring teachers to have specialized training or certifications to teach students with ASD.

The United States Department of Education (2021) reported 60% of children ages 6-21 who were identified as having ASD, were placed in mainstream classrooms and being instructed by general education teachers. More and more students with ASD are being placed in full inclusion setting; having a student with disabilities in general education classrooms is inevitable (Morrier et al., 2011; Silveira-Zaldivar & Curtis, 2019). Bertuccio et al. (2019) noted 40% of students with autism are in the general education setting over 80% of their school day. Due to federal and state mandates, teachers are required to be knowledgeable and ready to have students with different learning styles, difficulties, and profiles in their classroom (Bertuccio et al., 2019; Burton & Pace, 2009). However, Goldman and Gilmour (2020) found that most teachers are not familiar with specialized types of instruction that can be utilized to successfully teach students with ASD. Bertuccio et al. (2019) noted general education teachers are still hesitant when it comes to students with ASD being instructed in their classroom.

According to Evans (2016), students with ASD require individualized instructional methods that are designed to meet the student's educational needs. Goldman and Gilmour (2020) reported students with autism have unique needs and require specific instruction for the attainment of academic progress and reaching long term goals. Evans (2016) stated, due to the

specific needs and/or challenges of the student with ASD, instruction requires planning and communication between special and general education teachers to meet those academic needs. Unfortunately, not many school districts or campuses provide teachers with the opportunity of educational planning or working together. Cappe et al. (2017) reported students with ASD need modification of their environment, accommodations, special services such as speech and occupational therapy and other behavioral interventions. Teachers who instruct students with ASD report higher levels of stress and burnout, which is why teaching is considered to be more challenging with students with ASD (Zarafshan et al., 2013). In addition to needing academic support, students with ASD may also need support and direct teaching of social skills in the classroom (Barnhart, 2017).

Gersten et al. (2001) reported general and special education teachers experience high levels of stress when students with ASD are a part of their classroom. Silveira-Zaldivar and Curtis (2019) noted teachers who instruct students with ASD are also more likely to experience burnout due to the lack of training and the need to make students with ASD feel included. Goldman and Gilmour (2020) reported since there is a wide range of variability with ASD, some students may only need minimal support which may cause complications for designing evidence based programs for students across the spectrum. Due to ASD variability, students with ASD require specific interventions and strategies that address the difficulties they face individually and not just in academic areas (Barnhart, 2017).

Teacher Barriers

In order for teachers to adequately instruct students with ASD, they must have knowledge and training as well as be able to identify strategies or programs beneficial for student success (Betuccio et al., 2019; Yang & Rusli, 2012). Evans (2016) reported it is imperative teachers

understand and are knowledgeable of state and district regulations as well as best educational

systems in place for students with ASD. Swanson (2012) reported students with ASD have

unique learning patterns and teachers need to understand these patterns and posses special skills

to adequately support their student's needs. Evans (2016) highlighted teachers with students

with ASD may need to receive an above average amount of professional development to

guarantee appropriate and current implementation of teaching strategies.

In order for students with ASD to be successful in the classroom teachers must have

access to empirically supported strategies (Bertuccio et al., 2019; Camargo et al., 2014).

However, Morrier et al. (2011) reported even though the number of children being identified

with ASD and the likelihood of the teachers having a student with ASD is growing, most

teachers report receiving little to no evidence-based practice training pertaining to students with

ASD. Silveira-Zaldiva and Curtis (2019) reported school districts have a lack of funding,

knowledge, training, support, and time to appropriately implement evidence-based practices

(EBPs). Other studies concluded that general education teachers believed they lacked the

experience and knowledge of special education practices in the classroom setting (Avramidis &

Kalyva, 2007; Grant 2018). Teachers feel unprepared to successfully support students with ASD

academically, socially and behavioral (Zaldivar & Curtis, 2019). Goldman and Gilmour (2020)

found having a teaching license does not signify teachers have the qualifications needed to

instruct students with ASD. A teaching license or certificate does not mean they have completed

coursework specifically focused on teaching students with ASD; many education programs fail

to provide preparation in identifying and using EBPs for students on the spectrum (Goldman &

Gilmour, 2020; Hart & More, 2013).

Many teachers feel they do not have the time to adequately prepare for what students with disabilities need for them to be successful in the general education classroom (Bertuccio et al., 2019; Cheuk & Hatch, 2007). In order for teachers to have time to instruct in their classrooms, they rely on paraprofessional support when dealing with special education students (Bertuccio et al., 2019; Soukoup et al., 2007). Silveira-Zaldivar and Curtis (2019) noted teachers reported not having enough support staff to adequately facilitate evidence -based practices for students with Autism. Giangreco (2003) stated that when teachers use paraprofessional support, they are usually not used effectively or efficiently. Bertuccio et al. (2019) added most paraprofessionals do not have the job training or supervision needed to effectively provide inclusion support. Soukoup et al. (2007) found paraprofessional support usually entails working one-to-one with special education students in the same classroom but separated from other students and focusing on different academic material. Unfortunately, it was found that the least qualified paraprofessionals were tasked with providing the bulk of support to students with the most challenging needs (Bertuccio et al., 2019).

Olson et al. (2015) concluded when unqualified paraprofessionals provide most of the support in the classroom, special education students are not meaningfully accessing the curriculum or being a part of the classroom environment. Stahmer et al. (2015) found when EBPs are implement in the classroom by teachers or paraprofessionals it was done without fidelity or consistency. They would revert to non-established interventions because they felt comfortable with them. Silveira-Zaldivar and Curtis (2019) found students with ASD integrated in the classroom spend an estimated 5% of their time in meaningful interactions with other general education students. Jackson et al. (2009) noted special education students need to be fully included in the classroom in order for them to be a part of the classroom community.

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Even though some students with ASD have average or higher intellectual abilities, they may have deficiencies in social and communication skills that requires attention (Sansoti & Sansosti, 2012). Berry et al. (2011) noted barriers in providing adequate special education services are the lack of resources, professional development opportunities, trained special education professionals, and technology. Jenkins and Yoshimura (2010) also concluded professional development is imperative in order to expand teacher's expertise in instruction.

Professional Knowledge

Knowledge requirements and courses/training for education programs vary from state to state for teachers in the area of Autism; this places educators at a disadvantage (Lauderdale-Littin & Brennan; 2017; Teffs & Whitbread, 2009). Lauderdale-Littin and Brennan (2017) reported most education graduates had received minimal training in evidence-based practices for students with ASD. Also, special education training programs do not teach educators how to effectively address students with ASD. Barnhill et al. (2011) found that 41% of the 34 states in the U.S. they surveyed, did not have programs or specialized coursework in ASD in institutions of higher learning. Additionally, 51% of the institutions of higher learning surveyed reported they do not have competencies to educate their future teachers about ASD. Barnhill et al. (2011) found the number of institutions of higher learning offering specialized courses in ASD had slightly increased since a previous study conducted by Teffs and Whitbread in 2009. Lauderdale-Littin and Brennan (2017) found most training programs focused on practices that could be used on a broader population of students and not just ASD. Hsiao and Sorensen Petersen (2019) noted what makes teaching students with ASD more difficult is that there is not one single most effective strategy that will work with all students with ASD and teachers need to be knowledgeable about various strategies in order to be successful.

According to the State Board of Educator Certification (SBEC) of Texas, traditional routes to certification consist of university-based non-education programs, university post-baccalaureate programs, and out-of-state certification (Uriegas et al., 2014). Typically, traditional routes to teacher certification include completing some form or combination of field-based experience, coursework, and passing the state approved content area exams (Uriegas et al, 2014). However, teachers who receive their teaching certificate via the alternative certification route are currently the most rapidly growing manner for which districts use to find their teachers (Rubiera, 2018). As of 2018, SBEC has been dispensing more alternative certificates than traditional degreed educator certificates (Rubiera, 2018). Of all current Texas teachers, 38 percent did not complete a traditional certification but were certified through an alternative program. There are several methods of how teachers can receive their alternative certification such as some programs are self-taught, self-paced, and are comprised solely of online modules that must be completed within a specific time frame (Uriegas et al., 2014). Rubiera (2018) reported alternatively certified teachers do not receive the same standard of training, preparation, and student teaching that traditional teachers receive; therefore, the districts who employ them must do more to support these new teachers.

Goldman and Gilmour (2020) noted more education on specialized instructional strategies for all teachers with student ASD needs to occur. Teffs and Whitbread (2009) reported teachers who had been surveyed had taught students with ASD in their classrooms but did not receive formal training in the areas of behavioral supports, social skills, or on autism itself. Goldman and Gilmour (2020) noted there is a lack of specific autism training for teachers in higher education programs. Hsiao and Sorensen Petersen (2019) reported very few teacher programs offer six hour or more training in evidence practices for students with ASD. Due to the

lack of training teachers receive, teachers tend to use their professional judgment when needing

to make instructional decisions when it comes to students with ASD (Knight et al., 2019).

Goldman and Gilmour (2020) found teachers not sufficiently trained in EBPs may resort to using

unsupported practices that can be harmful to students and/or waste instructional time. Teffs and

Whitbread (2009) found of the teachers surveyed, the majority of them felt unprepared or

somewhat prepared to teach students with ASD in their classroom. Unfortunately, Hsiao and

Petersen (2019) reported special education teachers who frequently instruct students with ASD

reported limited knowledge of ASD and Autism-specific EBPs.

Professional Development

Professional development is considered a method to address educator's lack of

preparation for teaching students with autism (Bertuccio et al., 2019). Professional development

is also seen as an activity that provides teachers with resources or knowledge on specific ways to

enhance teaching (Rotermund et al., 2017; Schartz & Bryan, 1998). Unfortunately, general

education teachers do not feel equipped to meet the academic and behavioral needs of special

education students (Bertuccio et al., 2019; Ornelles et al., 2007). A onetime professional

development or workshop on needs of special education students is not sufficient to address all

the issues (Jenkins & Yoshmiura, 2010). Goldman and Gilmour (2020) reported in order to have

effective specialized interventions and supports for students with ASD, more in-depth in-service

training needs to be offered to teachers. Garet et al. (2001) found traditional professional

development does not afford the appropriate knowledge teachers need to implement strategies in

their classrooms. Unfortunately, Rotermund et al. (2017) found most educators spent eight hours

or less in professional development related to teaching students with disabilities. Barned et al.

(2011) reported with the increase of students being identified with ASD in classroom, it is

important teachers understand how to facilitate learning to this population of students. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) determined the average amount of time teachers were engaging in professional development was insufficient. Bertuccio et al. (2019) reported the most common practice for staff development are presentations and lectures which are not enough for educators to gain knowledge on how to work with children with ASD.

Evans (2016) reported it is important for teachers to attend in-service trainings so what they learn can be directly applied to their students. According to Dymond et al. (2007), teachers are not receiving adequate preparation and training needed to adequately meet the needs of students with ASD. Bertuccio et al. (2019) found most professional trainings are geared towards behavior strategies to address problem behaviors and not evidence based practices for students with ASD. Evans (2016) found once teachers notice the positive effect of what they learned in staff development, it causes them to be more open in attending workshops or professional developments. It may also motivate teachers to incorporate what they learned in their training into their classroom. Gordon (2017) also concluded that teachers who receive specific professional development are more likely to be successful in their classrooms.

Teacher Attitudes

There are many factors contributing to student's success; an educator's attitudes about students with special needs in their classrooms is a critical one (Li et al., 2020). Jury et al. (2021) noted that the less positive attitude teachers had towards students with ASD in their classrooms, the more difficult of a relationship they would have. Bertuccio et al. (2019) found educators feel overwhelmed and stressed when it comes to students with autism in their classroom. Walters (2012) found even though some teacher may have positive attitudes, it is

usually paired with negative emotions such as anxiety regarding the amount of time, training, and resources they will need when instructing special education students.

General education teachers are inclined to have a negative attitude towards special education students in their classroom (Coutsocostas & Alborz, 2010; Jury et al., 2021). A study conducted by Leonard and Smyth (2020) found that over half of primary school teachers possess a negative attitudes towards the inclusion of students with ASD into their classrooms. Avramidis and Kalyva (2007) concluded educators felt they could instruct students with more mild to moderate learning difficulties versus students with sensory impairments, Autism, or neurological disorders. Krischler and Pit-ten Cate (2019) also found teachers have a more negative attitude towards students with challenging behaviors that may be present in students with ASD versus learning difficulties. Jury et al., (2021) noted that teacher's negative attitudes towards students with ASD could be linked to stereotypical beliefs of challenging behaviors related to Autism.

Cheuk and Hatch (2007) explained that one reason for the negative attitudes of some teachers is due to the added stress and work they believe they will have in order to effectively instruct a special education student. Lohrmann and Bambara (2006) found that teacher's negative attitudes may be influenced by what they hear from other teachers and their experiences. Jury et al. (2021) found that teachers had negative stereotyped beliefs of behavioral difficulties with students with ASD which lead to negative attitudes. Rodriguez et al. (2012) found even seasoned educators do not have the confidence to teach students with ASD.

Part of teacher attitudes can be seen as self-efficacy, which is the person's belief about their ability to successfully or unsuccessfully complete a task (Bandura, 1977). Bandura (1997) determined even if the individual had the appropriate skill set to complete a task, success would depend on their belief on whether they could successfully complete the task. Some teachers may

question themselves and believe they are unable to meet the diverse needs of a special education student in their classroom (Damore & Murray, 2009). Bertuccio et al. (2019) noted teachers lack confidence in their abilities to educate students with Autism. Barnhart (2017) suggested teachers with positive views on their abilities to instruct students with ASD would positively affect their ability to teach students with ASD. Margolis and Mcabe (2003) found teachers who had positive self-efficacy were more likely to have students reach their goals and be motivated about their school work.

Barnhart (2017) noted staff development/training, experience, and available resources all affect teacher's attitudes; with enhanced educational preparation leads to increased levels of confidence and positive attitudes (Avramidis & Kalyva, 2007; Bertuccio et al., 2019). Eldar et al. (2010) found when teachers are prepared to instruct students with ASD and are supported, teachers usually have a more positive attitude towards students with ASD. Consequently, a positive attitude towards teaching special education students is due, in large part, to receiving adequate training, support from staff, and appropriate resources (Jerlinder et al., 2010). Li et al., (2020) also noted teacher's attitudes could be altered through better disability awareness and educational training.

Parental Involvement

Parental involvement is an important part in the education of their children and is supported by laws such NCLB and IDEA (Azad & Mandell, 2016). The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2010) stated in order to have an effective educational program for special education students, parents and school personnel must work together. Azard and Mandell (2015) pointed out many studies conducted emphasized the importance of parents and teachers working together when it comes to their child's education. Simpson et al. (2003)

reported home-school collaboration and meaningful participation is an integral piece of positive outcomes with students with ASD in schools. Simpson et al. (2003) also concluded that in order to have a meaningful home-school collaboration, teachers must be willing to learn from the parent, work together, and share information about resources and available programs. Azad et al. (2016) noted family and school partnership is essential to address issues at home and school; the partnership is just as important as direct interventions the student may receive.

Fogle et al. (2020) found there are several obstacles that impeded positive parental involvement such as what educational services are needed, staff qualifications, and limited understanding of special education. Azad et al. (2020) reported many parents of a child with autism are unhappy and dissatisfied with their child's education. Distrust and the inability of parents and educators to value each other's perspective can also lead to negative interactions between them (Fogle et al., 2020). Due to this dissatisfaction, there has been a rise in litigation between parents of children with ASD and school districts (Stoner & Angell, 2006; Azad et al., 2020).

Starr et al. (2001) found that when parents of children with ASD were asked about how school could improve, parents reported teachers need to be provided with adequate training, allocate more time for their child to be with a paraprofessional, and develop better individual education plan goals. Whitaker (2007) noted parents appreciated when school personnel would keep them up to date about their child's progress and when teachers took the time to listen to their concerns. However, some studies have reported parental input on goal setting and decision making process are overlooked (Azad et at., 2016).

Turnbull and Turnbull (2001) found schools do not always do an adequate job in building trusting relationships with parents and including them in making educational decision regarding

their child with ASD. Azad et al. (2016) found parents with a child with autism reported being

frustrated and unheard during special education meetings and parent – teacher conferences.

Fogle et al. (2020) found parents of children with autism experienced more stress when meeting

with school personnel than parents of typically developing students. Lake and Billingsley (2000)

reported communication between school personnel and parents is described as tense with a lack

of information and support when dealing with students with ASD. Azad et al. (2020) noted

parent's lack of trust in the school system as well as uneven balance of power can cause poor

communication between parents and school personnel.

Stoner and Angell (2006) noted schools view parents with children with ASD as

demanding, pessimistic, oppositional, and challenging. Parents with a child with ASD may not

have the same goals or beliefs that their child's teacher or therapist may have. Parents may feel

what is best for their child is different than what teachers are recommending (Parsons et al.,

2009). However, family involvement has proven to show a positive growth in the area a of

school-home skill generalization, better trust between school and parents, and parent

understanding of school programs (Dunlap et al., 2008). Bush et al. (2017) reported regular

parent involvement with their child's education would allow for a better understanding of their

child's capabilities, strengths, and weakness.

Teacher Expectations

McWherter (2017) found data on teacher expectations geared towards students with

autism is deficient it is still important to consider. Missett et al. (2016) reported teacher

expectancy is based on perceptions and expectations which the teacher uses to make predictions

about student ability. If a teacher believes a student will progress as other students in the class,

that student will likely meet the expectation (Wilder et al., 2004).   Further, if teachers have high

expectations for their class, then the students have a tendency to meet those expectations. According to Witmer and Ferreri (2014), students with ASD are not expected to meet grade level standards in academics. Witmer and Ferreri (2014) hypothesized low expectations may stem from communication and behavioral challenges students with ASD demonstrate as well as the staff's inability to appropriately meet those needs. Missett et al. (2016) found wrong predictions on a student's abilities can cause low expectations and inaccurate evaluation of the student's behavior and overlook information or data that reports otherwise. Witmer and Ferreri (2014) further explained that when examining students with ASD individualized education plans most goals were addressing behavior and communication skills.

According to Cameron and Cook (2013) inclusive teachers of special education students have to determine which aspects of the general education curriculum are appropriate for the special education student. Teachers need to know when and how to teach the general education curriculum as well as the best method to approach functional, behavioral and social goals for special education students. Cameron and Cook (2013) believe inclusive teacher's method of accomplishing these tasks are directly related to their expectations they have for their students. McWherter (2017) reported teacher expectations likely influence the learning environment and student-teacher relationship. There is a clear relationship between expectation and goal setting for teaching their special education students as well as their behavior towards them. Personal positive expectations for themselves are important; if teachers are setting goals and have expectations for their students, it can reflect their own expectations of their ability to meet the special needs of their students (Cameron & Cook, 2013).

Cameron and Cook (2013) found teacher's expectations and behavior towards their special education students was influenced by the visibility of the disability. For example, if the

student had a mild disability that was not easily determined by the student's appearance, then the expectations usually were no different than for the general education student. However, the expectations would differ from the special education student when the disability is visibly apparent; expectations would be adjusted based on the student's perceived abilities (Cameron & Cook, 2013). Cook (2001) determined inclusive teachers are less likely to believe their severely affected students are not choosing to under-perform but are more likely to believe they are unable too; this may cause inclusive teachers to set very low expectations and goals for students with severe disabilities, which may be lower than what the student can achieve. For students with mild disabilities, expectations are at the same level as general education students with the belief that if they tried harder they could meet the same goals as the general education students (Cameron & Cook, 2013).

Parental Expectations

Parental expectations also shape their parenting behavior towards their children (Bush et al., 2017). Parental expectations impact their child's educational outcomes, self-concept, and school adjustment (Bush et al., 2017). De Boer and Van der Werf (2015) found when parents have higher academic expectations, their children perform better than their perceived intellectual ability or past academic performance. Bush et al. (2017) noted that even as young as three years old, when parents had high academic expectations, their children, demonstrated advanced intellectual, physical and behavioral abilities.

Parents take into consideration the school environment and teacher factors when formulating expectations for their child. Parents of children with ASD have specific concerns about their child's education such as teacher qualifications, classroom placement, and social interaction with peers (Tobin et al., 2012). Once the parent's understand their child's

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educational placement and feel their child's needs are being adequately met, they will form a more positive expectation about how well their child will perform (Bush et al., 2017). Parents of children with ASD expectations were a good indicator of how well their child would perform in school.

Parents and teachers may have different expectations due to what they believe the child is capable of achieving (Bush et al., 2017). Parent's expectations may be related to varying aspects of their child's life such as social skills and emotional development. These areas may be more important to parents than the academic expectations teachers may have. When parent's expectations do not match with the teacher's expectations or the school does not meet parent expectations because of available services, tensions may arise between the two parties (Russell, 2005). Nickels (2010) found it was important for school personnel to inquire about parent's expectations and experiences with school services as well as to regularly ask parents about their expectations. Additionally, teachers should inquire how parents feel the teacher is doing and what they value most about their child's education. Bush et al. (2017) noted with continual communication between school and parents, and a better understanding of the child's capabilities, realistic expectations can occur.

Summary

In the literature review, autism in the school setting, teacher barriers, parent expectations, and teacher expectations were discussed. A brief background was provided about special education law such as NCLB and IDEA. In the past decade, more research was conducted on how to educate students with ASD including which methods would be more effective to facilitate their learning. More research needs to be conducted in the areas of teacher perceived barriers and expectations in educating students with ASD. The overarching questions that guides this

research are: What barriers do public school teachers identify when instructing students with Autism? What are the expectations of public school teachers when instructing students with Autism? Research in this area will shed light on teacher perceived barriers and hopefully how to address them to better meet the educational needs of students with ASD. Exploring the expectations of teachers may bring about understanding of how to better serve teachers which would have a positive impact on their student's educational performance.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the research methodology for this qualitative

grounded theory study. Research indicates the number of children identified with autism is

growing rapidly and there is copious amounts of research on "best practices" when educating

students with autism. However, the amount of research on the educator's perspective pertaining

to teaching students with autism is sparse. For this reason, the researcher chose to examine the

educator's perspective to gain a better understanding of their teaching experience. This method

also facilitates a richer understanding of teacher's experiences educating students with ASD.

Grounded theory also supplies a method to develop theory from the collection of data in order to

comprehend what teachers encounter when instructing students with ASD. The research plan,

including the methodology, study participants, procedures, and analysis method, as well as

ethical concerns are primary components of this chapter.

Research Questions

This study sought to construct a theory to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What barriers do public school teachers identify when instructing students with autism?

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Sub-questions

- What do teachers identify as barriers related to autism training?

- What do teachers identify as attitudinal barriers toward teaching students with autism?

- What types of barriers do teachers identify relevant to school administration and teaching students with autism?

- What barriers do teachers identify relevant to parents and teaching students with autism?

RQ2: What are the expectations of public school teachers when instructing students with autism?

Sub questions:

a) What are teacher's personal expectations as an educators?

b) What expectations do teachers have for administration support when teaching students with autism?

c) What expectations do teachers have for parents of children with autism?

d) What are teacher's academic expectations of their students with autism?

e) What are teacher's behavioral expectations of their students with autism?

f) What are teacher's social expectations of their students with autism?

Methodology Selected

As the focus of this study is on teacher's perspectives and understanding their experience when educating students with autism and the lack of research in this area, a qualitative approach is the most effective method. Qualitative research methodologies are used when an issue needs to be studied. By analyzing problems utilizing qualitative methods, the researcher is able to identify variables that are difficult to measure quantitatively and shed light to silenced voices (Creswell,

2013). This allows for an in-depth, multifaceted, detailed understanding of the problem because it requires researchers to directly interact with their participants by entering their homes or places of work. This approach allows participants to tell their story in their words (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative approaches allow participants to share their thoughts and feelings in their own words and not through a questionnaire. Utilizing the qualitative research approach, permits participants to feel empowered by sharing their stories and decreases the authority of the researcher over the participant (Creswell, 2013). This is accomplished by the researcher collaborating with the participant during the data analysis and interpretation phase of the research; by doing so, participants contribute to how what they said is being interpreted and reported, (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research is conducted when the researcher wishes to write in a manner that tells stories. By writing in a narrative style the reader can understand the context in which the participants highlight an issue. While quantitative methods can show relationships and trends, they do not assist in the understanding of participant's experiences, profound emotions, and behaviors (Creswell, 2013).

Creswell (2013) noted when investigating an area that has not been saturated with research, qualitative methods would be advantageous. It is advantageous for researchers to choose qualitative methods to develop theories when insufficient or inadequate theories are in place (Creswell, 2013). When studying individual differences, and relationships, it is difficult to examine the relevant complexities through statistical analysis alone (Creswell, 2013). By utilizing a qualitative method the researcher was able to develop a better understanding of teacher's perspective when educating students with autism. The researcher was committed to capturing the experience of teaching students with autism through the educators' perspective. By doing so it was hoped a better understanding would be gained as to how to help teachers to

successfully educate their students with autism. Creswell (2013) instructs qualitative researchers

to use a qualitative approach by collecting data in a natural setting of the participants and

conducting research in comfortable and/or familiar environments for the participants. By using

the qualitative approach to data collection, the researcher was able to accumulate vivid,

insightful, and honest data from the participants. Since participants were able to share their

experiences through their own words it added to the complexity, genuineness, and authenticity of

the data. For this study a qualitative grounded theory approach was selected as the purpose of

this research was to examine a phenomenon and develop a theory by relying on the insight of a

person's experience to the situation in question.

Grounded Theory Methodology

This qualitative study was be conducted using grounded theory methodology. Willis

(2008) described grounded theory as a method to assist researchers to understand complex social

process. Glaser and Strauss (1967) reported grounded theory is data collection and analysis are

used to interact with a phenomenon as closely as possible. Creswell (2013) described grounded

theory as a method to move further than describing in order to generate or discover a theory.

Grounded theory is when the researcher produces a broad explanation or theory of a process

shaped by the data collected by the study's participants (Creswell, 2013). Engward (2013)

summarized grounded theory as a research method that through data and analysis creates theory.

A grounded theory is being used to reveal patterns in society that individuals may not be

conscious of (Engward. 2013). Engward (2013) reported grounded theory is empirical

investigation, that is used to investigate social phenomena by examining what individuals

experience or what issues they face and how they handle these problems.

According to Creswell (2013) data collection is conducted in a natural setting with sensitivity to the participants and examine data "inductively and deductively" to construct themes. Grounded theory was presented by Creswell (2013) has having five major components. These are: 1) an action that the researcher is trying to explain, 2) to develop a theory of this action, 3) memoing, 4) data collection, and 5) data analysis. In this study, the researcher is trying to explain or understand the experience of educators when teaching students with autism. The researcher's purpose, by the end of the study, is to develop a theory of this process. A theory is an understanding that the researcher develops stemming from the research conducted, (Creswell, 2013). Memoing occurs when the researcher writes down ideas as data is being collected and analyzed (Creswell, 201). Creswell (2013) described memoing is used to help articulate the process that is unfolding and to visualize the flow of the process. During the data collection phase, the researcher is interviewing participants and comparing data to determine if an emerging theory is developing (Creswell, 2013). According to Creswell (2013) in grounded theory, data analysis can be structured where it follows the pattern of developing categories and codes to form a theoretical model or less structured by putting together meanings about a category. Grounded theory is research conducted by the experiences of individuals in the investigation or study to find a pattern related to these experiences (Creswell, 2013). Grounded theory study was used because the research sought to find a pattern or develop a theory related to identified barriers and expectations of teachers who educate students with ASD and to help support them.

The Researcher

Creswell (2013) identified bracketing as a method the researcher could utilize to separate his or her own experiences from what is being studied. Bracketing was used to help remove the researcher from the data due to her own assumptions and beliefs about individuals with ASD and

experiences of education students with ASD. The researcher worked as a general education middle school teacher for 2 years as well as a Licensed Specialist in School Psychology for 12 years. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and a Master of Arts in Educational Psychology. The researcher has also been a Board Certified Behavior Analyst for 5 years. Currently, the researcher is a Rehabilitation Counseling Doctoral student in her third year. No participants had a personal relationship with the researcher or a conflict of interest.

The researcher has extensive experience interviewing, consulting with and training educators who teach students with Autism. Since 2009, the researcher has been responsible for training parents to assist with school and home collaboration and explaining the autism diagnosis. The researcher also facilitates periodic staff development for teachers and paraprofessionals who wish to learn more about ASD and how to implement positive behavioral interventions and supports.

Sampling

The researcher used purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2013) to recruit participants as well as criterion sampling by approaching educators who are known to the researcher to teach students with autism and have been teaching for a minimum of one year. The sample was drawn from a population of general and special education elementary school teachers who have experienced instructing students with ASD. Therefore, theoretical sampling was also utilized since the researcher chose participants that would help form a theory (Creswell, 2013). Male and female teachers were recruited; however, for this study only female teachers participated. In all, 12 female teachers participated in the study. All participants were elementary school teachers.

All participants have a bachelor's degree and have at least one year of teaching experience. All participants have taught students with ASD. Table 1 depict participant demographics.

The researcher recruited participants from one local school district. Once the researcher received approval from The University of Texas at Rio Grande Valley, Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct the study in the school district, the researcher sent out a recruitment letter (Appendix) via email to elementary teachers. The participants were selected based on the researcher's knowledge that the teacher has a history of teaching students with autism. Once the recruitment letter was sent out to participants and once agreed to; a follow up email was sent to set a date and time for the interview. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed to determine the need for more participants and based on the richness of data retrieved from the 12 participants. According to Creswell (2013) theoretical saturation is achieved when new categories or information is no longer being retrieved from the data. In this study, theoretical saturation was achieved with 12 participants as no new categories emerged after the tenth participant.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Participants	Gender	Years of Experience
Teacher 1	F	23
Teacher 2	F	6
Teacher 3	F	6
Teacher 4	F	16
Teacher 5	F	16
Teacher 6	F	12
Teacher 7	F	16

Table 1, continued.

Teacher 8	F	9
Teacher 9	F	11
Teacher 10	F	32
Teacher 11	F	14
Teacher 12	F	7

Data Collection

Interview questions were developed and then critique by three individuals who have

worked with individuals with ASD or had previously conducted qualitative research. One

individual was a former teacher and now licensed professional counselor. The second individual

is a former special education teacher and now a special education counselor. Both individuals

conduct social skills groups for students with ASD and consult with teachers. Additionally, a

professor at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) who has conducted/published

qualitative research reviewed the interview questions. Interview questions were refined to reflect

the revisions recommended by the expert reviewers. Questions are available for review in

Appendix. Approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) was sought and attained from

the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. Upon approval, the researcher emailed a recruitment

letter to participants individually. The recruitment letter is provided in Appendix for review.

Before the first interview, informed consent was explained to each participant.

Participants verbally stated that they gave consent. To further safeguard the confidentiality of

the participants were not asked to sign the consent form. The informed consent form, made

participants aware that their interview was being audiotaped and will be destroyed once the study is finalized. The researcher conducted the study by using a semi-structured interview. A semi structured interview is a strategy in which the researcher asks participants a series of predetermined but open-ended questions (Creswell, 2013).

Via Zoom, data collection occurred through the use of audio tapes and field notes. A semi structured, open-ended questions format interview techniques was used. Before each interview, participants were asked to provide verbal consent of their participation in the study. The purpose of the study was explained and participants had the option to discontinue participation in the study at any time. According to Creswell (2013) the researcher usually conducts 20-30 interviews in order to saturate categories or until new data is no longer produced. All participants were interviewed twice for a total of 24 interviews. Interviews were conducted one to one and via Zoom. Each interview did not last more than 40 minutes. According to Creswell (2013) qualitative methods allows for data collection to be conducted in the field and in a comfortable environment for the participants. Following Creswell's (2013) recommendations the researcher gave the participants the option to choose when and where the interviews were conducted.   The interviews were conducted via Zoom and participants were either at home or in their classroom. All interviews were *audiotaped* using a digital recording system.

According to Straus and Corbin (1990) a category in qualitative research is groups of information of what has occurred or happened based on what the participant has shared. This study's data collection followed Creswell's (2013) explanation of a "zigzag" method of the researcher conducting an interview, then analyzing the data, then returning to the field to retrieve additional data, and then back again into the field until saturation of data is achieved. Interviews were audio recorded using a digital recorder. This allowed the researcher to re-play the

interview to optimize transcription. During data collection constant comparative method of analysis was used, as the researcher would conduct an interview, transcribe, code then conduct an interview with another participant and comparing emerging categories (Creswell, 2013).

The process of grounded theory is to gather information and return to the source to gather more information; as this process continues; a theory starts to take shape from the data being collected (Creswell, 2013). Due to this occurring, a few follow up questions were added to the current questions asked of all participants. As themes began to materialize from the data, the researcher asked clarifying questions to provide further explanation on the topic. Such as, "Can you give me an example or what was your experience with that?"

The point of saturation is achieved when new or emerging themes were not being observed Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013) described memoing as the act of the researcher writes down ideas of the emerging theory whether the research is using open, axial, or selective coding. Memoing was utilized in this study to recognize potential patterns in and between codes, to help organize thinking, how the data worked together, and to assist with the creation of patterns and emerging links between codes (Engward, 2013). Memoing helped the researcher sort the emerging ideas and assisted in writing theories and stay organized. Interviewing continued until theoretical saturation was achieved.

Data Analysis

During the interview process, data collection began with interviews conducted by the researcher which allowed the researcher to observe and take field notes on the participant's demeanor and body language. Memoing was also utilized, which is the act of the researcher writing down information based on the evolution of the interview to assist with coding

(Creswell, 2013). Data analysis occurred in stages. Grounded theory uses three phases of coding open, axial, and selective (Creswell, 2013). Coding of the transcripts were completed in the sequential order of when the interview took place. The researcher coded three interviews at a time, to determine if theories began to surface from the data.   Coding is used to help the researcher in comprehending the views of the participants and in investigating their shared experiences (Creswell, 2013). Codes are generated based on the data collected during the research process.   The researcher coded, as the interviews took place and if needed, the researcher revisited participants for clarification or follow up with questions based on the emerging information.

According to Creswell (2013) member checking is a step needed in qualitative analysis. In this study, member checking was conducted. Once transcriptions were completed and themes were constructed, each participant was emailed a copy of their data to confirm the information accurately conveyed the message they expressed. Out of the 12 participants emailed, 1 responded to the email. The one participant reported they were in agreement with the data and did not recommend adding or changing information. Participants were not included in the process of writing or editing the analysis and results of the study.

The researcher categorized participants' information under categories, sub-categories, themes and sub-themes by open and axial coding. Coding used in grounded theory is used to analyze the experiences of the participants in an organized method (Creswell, 2013). The researcher then used the findings to provide analysis of the data, categories and themes.

Open and Axial Coding

Engward (2013) described coding as an important link between the collected data and creating a theory to explain the information gathered. Creswell (2013) stated open coding is where the researcher begins coding the information collected into major categories and is the first step in the data analysis. Engward (2013) reported coding takes place in three stages. Stage 1: open coding is where as many possible ideas are generated. Stage two: codes become definitive as data is being analyzed. The last stage is when the researcher improves on the final theoretical concepts (Engward, 2010). During the open coding phase the researcher scrutinized the data consisting of the transcriptions and memos to develop categories of information that emerged from the interviews. Open coding consisted of the researcher reviewing the transcription line by line to uncover the meaning of the participant's words (Creswell, 2013). The researcher continued interviewing and examining the data until saturation was reached. After the first set of categories derived from the open coding were developed, the researcher began to axial code.

Axial coding is the interconnecting of codes (Creswell, 2013). The researcher focused on one core phenomenon and then went back to the data to create categories around the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). By axial coding the researcher returned to the data looked at a specific category to determine if understanding into specific coding categories existed. This method of coding allows the researcher to provide detailed attention to each interview. During axial coding the researcher trying to determine what caused the phenomenon, what happened in response to them, what influenced the strategies and what consequences occurred caused by the strategies (Creswell, 2013). Selective coding is the final phase in coding data. Selective coding "builds a story" that connects the categories (Creswell, 2013). Once the information was

gathered it was organized into a figure that represents the theoretical model. From this model statements can be made that interconnect the categories creating a model for a theory. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990) selective coding occurs when the researcher takes the central phenomenon and connects it to other categories and validating the relationships of categories. See Figure B.

Credibility

Validation, trustworthiness, and authenticity were addressed in this study by the following: Triangulation was conducted by interviewing participants until data was saturated, by finding the same themes in different participants and presence of similar information in the literature review. Due to this method of triangulating data, credibility was achieved. Peer review was utilized for an external check of the data gathered. The peer reviewer, an expert in qualitative analysis, reviewed themes, assisted in categorizing themes, and re-categorizing data. The researcher kept peer debriefing session notes to refer back to when needed. From the beginning the researcher underwent a "clarifying researcher bias" process by questioning her biases or assumptions that might affect the analyses of the data. The researcher acknowledged having a sympathetic nature towards teachers and although did not enter the study with a negative bias, a bias may exist. To establish credibility member checking was utilized in this study. Validation was addressed through member checks and expert review. The researcher returned the findings to the participants and requested feedback and evaluation of the accuracy of the data, although only one participant responded. Authenticity was addressed through rich data, triangulation, and peer review. The amount of rich data collected from participants as well as the relationship built with the participants all add to the accuracy of the study (Creswell, 2013). To

ensure credibility the researcher does not have a negative bias towards the study and its participants. Authenticity is achieved through the use of participant quotes.

To remain consistent, the interviews were conducted in the same manner with all participants. The researcher ensured that all interviews were audiotaped to capture the entire interview and prevented the researcher from adding or excluding any information gathered from the participants. By using grounded theory methodology assisted the researcher in keeping the interpretation of data objective and decreased bias.

Ethical Concerns

Before the interview is to begin, the researcher read a copy of the consent form to the participant and allowed time for the participant to ask questions. If the participant had questions regarding the study the researcher answered to the best of her knowledge. The researcher reviewed in detail the process of the interview. For convenience, the researcher allowed the participants to choose the location, date, and time of the interview. The researcher also emailed the interview questions before the interview so the participants could feel prepared and unpressured. The researcher was also mindful of not shaping findings in any particular direction by meeting with a peer-reviewer and discussing the emerging themes and categories. To protect the participant's identity, the researcher did not record participant's names and were assigned a participant number such as Teacher 1, Teacher 2 and so on. The risks to human subjects participating in this study are minimal to none. All participants are over the age of 18. All participants hold a bachelor's degree from a university and a teaching certificate. None of the participants demonstrated an impaired mental capacity. All audiotaped recordings will be deleted after five years.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to outline the research method utilized to explore the research questions. In this chapter, the procedure, interview questions, informed consent, data collection, and ethical considerations were discussed. This chapter also identified the criteria for the participants and how bias was minimized. A grounded theory methodology was used to create theory on what barriers and expectations do teachers have when educating students with ASD. All participants in this study contributed to the theory by sharing their experiences as a teacher in a public school setting. The goal of Chapter IV is to give the study results and show the methodology described I Chapter III was adhered to.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

This dissertation investigated the barriers and expectations elementary educators who teach students with Autism. The results provide a starting placing for the understanding of the variety of factors that impact instruction how teachers instruct students with Autism and as to why educators feel overwhelmed. Furthermore, the findings identify ways in which to promote a positive learning environment for students and teachers.

The researcher conducted 24 interviews with 12 participants and utilized Grounded Theory (GT) to collect and analyze data which led to overarching themes and theory grounded in data. Themes centered on reported expectations held by teachers for Personal, School Administration, Parents, Academic, Behavioral, and Social. Themes also centered on perceived barriers by teachers in the form of School Administration, Parents, Autism Training, and Attitude. These overarching and sub themes are evident from the data gathered.

In the area of expectations there are two main categories: stakeholders and students with autism. Each main category had 3 subcategories. Under the main category of stakeholder's expectations the three subcategories are: Teacher, Parent and Administration. In the second main category of students with autism the three main subcategories are: social, behavior, and academic. Under the subcategory of teacher expectations five themes emerged: give students what they need, be positive and encouraging, create a good environment, do their best, and grow as an educator.

Give students what they need to succeed.

Six out of twelve participants reported their personal expectations as an educator is to provide students what they need to succeed and grow. Teacher 8 stated she expected, "to see the growth… able to help them out in their education." Teacher 4 elaborated:

> I expect myself to provide the best education for the students. Provide them with the tools that they need. Try to get them ready by the time they leave me, so that, you know, they can grow from what was learned in my classroom.

Teacher 1 has a similar expectation of wanting to give her students what they need to grow. Teacher 1 shared:

> For myself, my personal expectation would be that I would be able to build a rapport with the student and provide that student with whatever it is they need in order to be successful

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as an individual. Whatever that may be. It's my duty to make that connection with the kid

and give him or her or whatever it is that they need to be successful in my class.

Be positive, encouraging, and supportive

Five out of twelve participants reported their personal expectations was too positive with

their students. Teacher 3 stated, **"**Always be that support for my student…never giving up on my

students." Teacher 5 shared:

I want my students to leave the classroom knowing that they are smart. And they can do

anything that they put their mind to. I want them to… I want them to know that they can

do it.

Teacher 2 felt it was important to encourage her students and expressed:

Some may say, "I don't know it" but yes you do. You can do it. You know you may have

come in not knowing how to read but you're going to leave knowing how to read and you

may not be able to sit in their seats for a certain amount of time but we'll get there.

Create a good environment

Four out of twelve participants felt they expected to provide their students with a safe and

fun learning environment. Teacher 10 simply stated, "not only that make learning fun and make

it a safe place." Teacher 8 also felt, "we need to have that welcoming environment." Teacher 12

elaborated:

As an educator, I always like to make my environment during the classroom safe, fun, a

safe, fun learning environment for my kiddos. That's primary for me. I tell my kids,

"This is your room. This is your classroom. It's like your home, your home away from home."

To do their best

Three out of twelve participants reported they expect for themselves to do their best and have high expectations. Teacher 7 stated, "To do the best that I can do for my students with what I have." Teacher 6 expressed, "I think my personal expectations as an educator would be to give my all, to give my all. You know, give them my all, a hundred percent." Teacher 5 also shared, "do the best you can do."

Continue to grow as an educator

Two out of twelve participants reported they expected themselves to continue to learn and grow as an educator. Teacher 8 shared, "remaining open and always continuing to learn and grow as an educator." Teacher 2 expressed, "never stop learning, never stop, yeah. So my expectations for myself is to continue doing that. Don't stop learning and teaching keep on going and going."

<div align="center">

Parent Expectations

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Under the last subcategory of expectations was parent expectation, six themes emerged: work together as a team, good communication, be supportive, follow through at home, be actively involved, be realistic about what they can do.

Work together as a team

Five out of twelve participants shared they expect that parents work together with teachers as a team. Teacher 2 noted, "We have to work with each other." When parents work with teachers it makes things go smoothly, Teacher 12 stated, "if the parent is willing to help me, I - you know, hand-in-hand, it just - it makes things easier and better." Teacher 1 elaborated on why her expectation of working together with parents is important:

> As a teacher you would want your parents to be on the same team you are on. The same page as far as working together to get the kiddos what they need so they can be successful. So just being on the same page on the same team wanting the same thing for the kids. It should be where we're on the same team and it's like what can we do together to make your son or daughter succeed. With them comfortable in their classroom and get them what they need. If we work together we can figure something out that will help the kid out and also the kid seeing that we are working together, you know?

Good communication

Five out of twelve participant reported feeling having open communication with parents is an important expectation. Teacher 12 simply stated her expectation was, "just for them to communicate with me." Teacher 11 believed being honest and communicating was an expectation of hers and shared, "If they have any worries, just to you know be honest with us. So we can help them in the long run. I mean to be honest. Tell us. We can help or we can try to find a way to help." Teacher 8 shared her experience of how beneficial it was when parents communicate with teachers:

I go back to that parent, even though, he was 4 years old… she was very knowledgeable

about autism. And we were always sharing information and I would let her know his

behavior. And she would be "ok maybe it was because of this…" so we would always

have that communication. So it is very important so that maybe you know we can help

the child.

Teacher 1 felt similar about communicating with parents and shared, "an open line of

communication, like, "hey I tried this and this isn't really working as it should."

Be supportive

Five out of twelve participants noted that they expected parents to be supportive of them

as teachers. Teacher 11 stated she expected parents to be, "pretty much just understanding…just

being a little bit more supportive." Teacher 10 shared her expectations for parents, "to be

supportive… to feel they're supportive and not always thinking it's your fault that the day didn't

go well. I guess to offer support." Teacher 9 simply stated, "For them to be supportive of the

teacher and the child is important."

Follow through at home

Five out of twelve participants shared they expected parents to follow through at home

with what was being taught at school. Teacher 7 reported what she expected from parents, "for

them to transfer what we're doing in school, to transfer it at home." Teacher 1 also expects

parents to follow through at home and stated:

I'm expecting for them (parents) the child to follow through at home…Keep that fluidity

going. So the kid can kind of sees "okay, whatever I'm doing at home. I should also do at

school" and vice-versa.

Teacher 6 shared similar reasons why she expects parents to follow through at home and

expressed:

My parents, I want them to carry over and do the things that we're doing here because

they're never going to do that at home if you're not expected to or ask to. My expectations

and I hope and most of the time parents do follow through.

Be actively involved

Five out of twelve participants reported they expect parents to be actively involved with

their child. Teacher 9 stated, "The expectation I have is to be involved. To be concerned about

their child." Teacher 1 simply stated, "Parents need to do their part." Teacher 5 explained how

she expects parents to be involved with their child:

I expect my parents to do those kind of things. Like you know, if they need to go to the

doctor then take them to the doctor. If they need more therapy and they are able to get it

then you know it is beneficial to the child.

Be realistic about what their child can do

Two out of twelve participants reported they expected their parents to have realistic

expectations concerning their child. Teacher 9 stated:

Have realistic expectation especially, I know the spectrum is wide, but depending on their

child knowing what the child is capable of and not have unrealistic expectations…

Patience and time you know it takes time.

<div align="center">**Expectations for Administrators**</div>

Under the subcategory of expectations for administrators four themes emerged: be

supportive, allow teachers to attend trainings, trust us, understand students with autism may need

more support, try and help, know the students.

Be supportive

Six out of twelve participants reported they expected school administration to be a source

of support for the teachers. Teacher 4 put it simply, "I expect them to support me in whatever it

is that I need." Teacher 8 also was clear on her expectations for administration, "to be helpful

and supportive." Teacher 3 elaborated:

The expectation that we have for our administration, for support, is to be able to… be

comprehensive and compassionate of our students. To support us in any ideas that we

might come across that is going to benefit, be beneficial for them (students with autism).

Allow teachers to attend trainings

Five out of twelve participants reported they expect their school administration to allow

or provide trainings pertaining to autism. Teacher 4 stated, "If there are training I want to go, that

they allow me to go. Those are my expectations." Teacher 7 noted:

When there's trainings, to just be understanding that we have to go. It's not that we want to be out. It is that we have to go. Be acceptable of staff developments that we need to do that. We need to attend.

Teacher 8 was also very clear on her expectations of school administration:

It's just you know… I was never given a chance to go to a training or "here there is something you can use." But from the very beginning, if they would have said you could go to a training even half day, anything so I could be better prepared, you know. That is something that I expect the administration to help us in.

Trust us

Four out of twelve participants reported they expect school administration to trust them and their ideas. Teacher 12 simply expected, "trust us because we're here with the kids all day." Teacher 5 shared:

Allow me to do whatever… I feel that they… whatever I feel that I need to do. Like you got this. They put their full trust in us. Know that the kids are learning and that we are trying our best.

Teacher 1 felt administrators should trust them because they have more experience then school administration, she elaborated:

The administrator is going to have your back. And if trying something that's kind of out of the box, like they kind of look at you like what? That they support you because you have more training than them.

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Understand Students with Autism may need more support

Four out of twelve participants reported they expected school administrators to understand that students with autism may need more support and do things differently. Teacher 11 shared her expectations for school administration, "For them to be understanding. So I guess for them to understand that there is a reason why these things are being done." Teacher 7 noted, "I expect just understanding. Just be understanding because our situation is different from any other classroom outside of mine."

Try and help out

Two out of twelve participants reported they expected school administration to try and help them with students with autism. Teacher 3 put it simply, "Even if they may not know what to do, even if they try, it helps anyways. To help however they can." When asked how they can help, Teacher 3 elaborated:

> I would like to see that an administrator to help us special education teachers use the strategy. "Try this." The same way they have strategies or tools for reading, math, science, and social studies.

Teacher 1 stated:

> You've got an administrator that has a SPED (special education) background then you would expect them that they would be right there with you. Giving you suggesting on how to cope and deal with teaching students with autism.

Know who the students are

Two out of twelve participants reported they expected school administration to know who the students with autism are. Teacher 6 stated, "My expectation for them to get to know the students as individuals not as a special needs kid to know their names. Still take the time to know them."

Expectations for Students with Autism

There are three subcategories under the second main category of expectations for students with autism: Social, Behavior, and Academic. Under the subcategory of social expectations three themes emerged: interact with others, learn to communicate feel accepted and accept others.

Social Expectations

Interacting /socializing with others. Six out of twelve participants reported their social expectations for their students with autism was to be able to be around and interact with others. Teacher 8 shared she expects her students with autism to, "share and socialize with the students." Teacher 4 expects:

To able to do group activities together. Try to encourage that, you know? That play with one another which is a super-important skill to have and a lot of them don't have it. They don't know how. I'm just interacting with them, or interacting having them interact with one another in their own way because they don't do it like a typical child would.

Teacher 5 shared: "I expect them to socialize with others. If we go to the playground I expect them to go and play with the other students. Like I expect them to do to socialize with others." Teacher 6 shared a similar expectation:

> My social expectations is, I expect for them to be socializing with others not just amongst here but others outside. An example would be …walking to the classroom in the morning or when were transition through electrics and someone says, "hey guys!" you know I have my students say, "hello" say "good morning" say "good afternoon, how are you?" I want them to socialize with us and everybody with us.

To communicate

Five out of twelve participants reported they expect their student with autism to communicate with others. Teacher 4 shared she expected her students to learn to communicate by either, "use sign language or… you know a picture exchange or some form of communication to help them." Teacher 5 explained her expectation:

> I expect them to talk to other than and that's one thing…in my classroom they are talking to each other that they get together and you know they're having like little conversations and it may be…like I feel jibber-jabber, like I can see it, like they're having a conversation with themselves.

Learn to be accepting of others and feel accepted

Five out of twelve participants reported they expect their students with autism to learn to accept others and feel accept as well. Teacher 11 stated she felt it was important to, "Make them

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just feel part of everything." Teacher 10 shared, "they are able to make friends and able to feel good about playing with other children." Teacher 7 expect her students with autism to accept others and explained:

> You, we are all different. We are not all the same. I'm dark your light. I have long hair. She's tall she's short. But we're all different and it's okay to be different, and it's okay to be different, and little by little they learn to accept the student.

Behavior Expectations

Under the subcategory of behavior expectations three themes emerged: follow the rules and have appropriate behavior, same expectations, and do not hurt themselves or others.

Follow the rules and have appropriate behavior

Nine out of twelve participants reported they expected their students with autism to follow their classroom rules. Teacher 11 simply stated she expects her students to, "Keep your hands and feet to yourself." Teacher 7 stated:

> The only thing I expect for safety reasons for them …to walk not run…They are able to sit learn they are able to learn. The expected classroom behavior that you know that we need in order to be able to have a flow of teaching.

Teacher 1 expressed her behavioral expectation, "It would be to have that respect with other people around them and just to be able to cooperate with people around them whether it's an adult or students. Teacher 10 shared, "Oh to follow the rules. They are able to follow the rules and realize there's consequences." Teacher 12 had similar behavioral expectations and said, "I

do expect my students to follow rules, follow procedures. Staying in your chair. Not running

around."

Same expectations

Six out of twelves participants reported they have the same behavioral expectation for

their students with autism that they do for students who are not on the spectrum. Teacher 11

simply stated, "The same as everybody else" Teacher 2 share, "just as any other student that

doesn't have autism. I think we should treat students with autism the same as anyone else."

Teacher 1 felt similar about behavioral expectations and said, "we want to treat them as much the

same as that, you know, any other kid."

Not to hurt others or themselves

Five out of twelve participants shared their behavioral expectation for students with

autism was to not harm themselves or others. Teacher 11 state she expected, "(students) don't

hit especially teachers or anybody. Teacher 7 reported:

Not try to hit themselves injure themselves. That's an expectation but that's one of the

behaviors that I want to target so they're not hurting each other or hurting themselves.

Teacher 6 shared the same expectation of, "…not harming themselves or others." When asked to

give an example on how she would work with the student so they could meet that expectation,

Teacher 6 shared:

To teach them to stop hitting or stop being aggressive. I have had as student that is like

that. I had him from kinder to 5th grade and he just went to 6th grade and he was very

aggressive. Very *very* aggressive. But with us being patient and showing him, he went to harming, you know, everybody, to like, not really harming. He would just kind of start harming himself. So then we got different things, like a helmet to protect his head…so he started to learn I don't want to wear the helmet, so I need to stop hitting my head. So we were very consistent, like, "we're going to put your helmet on if you hit your head." So anytime he would hit his head we would put the helmet on and he didn't want to wear it. So he stopped that behavior all together.

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Academic Expectations

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Under the subcategory of academic expectations four themes emerged: show growth or progress, to achieve their potential, high expectations, and to feel their success.

Show growth or progress

Nine out of twelve participants reported they expected students with autism to show some growth or progress in academics. Teacher 9 felt her academic expectation for her students with autism is, "To see growth. To see the student make growth whether it's minimally and or you know drastically." Teacher 5 shared her academic expectations for her students with autism:

> I expect them to you know read and write and to know their alphabet and to be able to count. They are picking up something, like they have to be getting something from what we're teaching them. They may not pick everything up and then by the time they're in fifth grade, like their reading and they're adding and subtracting.

Teacher 2 shared:

An expectation is to always have that progress. It's always moving forward, progressing, even the littlest progress is still a lot of progress. A student may come in not knowing their alphabet but we're going to get that. All the letters and sounds. And then they will know how to blend and read a word that they didn't even know before for even one letter in that word.

Teacher 8 expects her student with autism to, "just learn and grow, you know? Even though it might be different for them as long as they take something each day, anything." Teacher 10 also expects students with autism to learn and expressed, "I just don't expect them to sit there and color or "let's just keep you busy." They will pick up what we are trying to teach them."

To achieve their potential

Five out twelve participants reported they expect their students with autism to achieve their personal academic potential. Teacher 4 stated, "I expected that they achieve what they are capable of… doing." Teacher 1 explained:

If you have a high function student and obviously you would to expect a lot more from a high functioning autistic kid then someone who is not as high functioning. I push each kid to their limits based on what they can and cannot do.

Teacher 12 shared:

I need to have work done. I do expect them to at least sit and try. I tell all my students, "As long as you're trying, try your best. If you don't try, we're never going to get anywhere." So I do expect them to try at their level. At their level, of course.

Everyone's at a different level, so even if a child is autistic, I do expect them to do work

here in the classroom because ultimately that's what we should be doing there.

High Expectations

Five out of twelve participants reported they hold students with autism to high academic

expectations. Teacher 6 shared, "each individual I want high expectations." Teacher 11 had

similar expectations and said, "I have high expectations for my student." Teacher 3 noted:

My academic expectations, they are high. My expectations with them is to just give it 100%.

My expectations academically is always giving it a hundred percent. Always doing their best.

To feel their success

Four out of twelve participants reported they expected their students with autism to feel

good about their academic achievements. Teacher 9 shared, "Academic expectations for him was

to feel success, like everybody else does. For them to see their successes." Teacher 11 also

expressed, "Have him feel proud because he accomplished something in his own way."

Teacher Barriers

Participants were asked about the barriers they encounter as educators who teach students

with autism. There are two main categories under teacher barriers: training, and stakeholders.

There are three subcategories under the main category of stakeholders there are: teacher

attitudes, parent, and school administration.

<center>**Attitude Barriers**</center>

Participants were asked if they identified attitude barriers such as negative feelings towards teaching children with autism. The five themes that emerged from teacher attitudes are: very difficult and stressful, don't know what to do, students with autism cause more work, don't want the student with autism, and only see their disability.

Very Difficulty and Stressful

Seven out of twelve participants shared they felt having a student with autism in their classroom was very difficult and would cause them significant stress. Having a student with autism in their classroom along with other students who also need their attention caused some teachers to feel pressure on how to best teach their students. Teacher 10 expressed her opinion on having a student with autism in her classroom, "Yes, it is more difficult you come with the attitude that is gonna be very hard. I think it stresses me out. I was very stressed out. I was very stressed out." Teacher 1 notes, "It was stressful. Like you want to make sure that you're doing the student justice." Teacher 8 also shared the same attitude by saying:

> With my experience again, very hard, very challenging… At times it was just like why is this student in here, you know? When I was very frustrated, not only did I have him, I had three other students that were behavior problems. I was very stressed. I was. I would get there and I was like, "here we go again another day"… I feel like I'm not… I won't be successful for them. I will not be a successful teacher. I feel I probably fail them. Like I'm not ready to have them in my classroom. I'm not competent…. It was very hard.

Teacher 12 elaborated on how the stress was affecting her:

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It's stressful. Honestly, I'm not going to lie, I was under a lot of stress the first four

weeks, coming back from COVID. I mean I'm an adult…I'm okay. I'm ready to go.

I'm ready to work. But these kiddos, all of them, I'm trying to provide a safe learning

environment for them. I assured - reassured my parents during Meet the Teacher, "I'm

going to take care of your child," you know, "I'm here." I'm a mother myself. I

understand. I have two kids. But it was stressful because I could not control the situation

with that particular autistic student because she was severe. And it just - I lost sleep. I

would wake up thinking about her…. You know what I mean? My appetite, it's not like

me. I love to eat, but that was affected and it was a lot of stress.

They have autism, I don't know what to do

Six out of twelve participants reported they felt they did not know how to deal with a

student with autism in their classroom. Teacher 6 noted she has encountered the attitude of, "I

don't know. I've never been trained. Are you going to help me? Is someone gonna come in with

him? How is he going to sit down?" Teacher 2 felt general education teacher's negative attitude

stemmed from not knowing how to handle a student with autism. Teacher 2 shared:

I've had it happen so many times where they say, "I don't know what to do. I've never

taught to students with autism"….But in the beginning they have that fear because they

don't know. They don't know what to do. They don't know what not to do. What they

can and cannot do.

Teacher 12 expressed she did not know how to help her student:

I wasn't able to help that child to follow the rules or procedures because I didn't have the

techniques. The methods needed to help her because we're not certified and trained for

that.

Teacher 8 explained she did not know what to do either:

I didn't know how to explain it to the kids as well…Basically he is different. I was like,

"What do I say? What do I do to let the kids know his behavior is not ok but that is how

he is but we don't do that in my classroom." I think that was what I was always trying to

figure out. What do I do? I didn't know. I didn't want to say the wrong thing. I didn't

want to label him. I didn't want the kids to go home and say something.

View students with autism has causing more work

Six out of twelve participants felt that having a student with autism in their classroom

cause them additional work. Teacher 8 shared having a student with autism in the classroom as,

"just feels like it's another load,… we have to all these other students." Teacher 11 felt "Not only

do I have my regular students but I have the student with special needs or challenges…."

Teacher 5 reported her experience with general education teachers on her campus when one of

her students with autism is placed in the general education setting:

They're (general education teachers) mad at me like they're mad at me because they're

selected and they have to do all this extra work. They end up not talking to me. Like

you're not my friend anymore because they feel like I did this to them. I mean I

understand that it's cuz there's a there's a lot of work that that everyone has to do. All the

teachers have to do. It's a lot. It's not only just with the students, it is the paperwork.

Everything, the paperwork and all these emails. It is… it's overwhelming, and then add…

something extra….that I think it's so much…. They have a lot on their plate also in

regards to having a large classroom, and now they have a student where they have to do

extra work for.

Don't want the student with autism

Three out of twelve participants reported feeling that the student with autism should not

be in their classroom or have encountered that attitude by another teacher. Teacher 6 shared she

has encountered the attitude of not wanting the student with autism in the classroom by other

teachers, "…teachers say well why me? Like why? Why do I have to have that student here... I

have gotten a lot of teachers not wanting to deal with special needs in general and especially

autistic kids." Teacher 5 also stated, "I've had students where they've had to go to Gen. Ed. and

the teachers don't want them. They have like a bad attitude towards…They don't want it"

Teacher 8 expressed her reasoning for not wanting a student with autism in her classroom:

I don't have time for this, to fit their needs. It all goes back to training because if we were

trained maybe these teachers would be more accepting to have an autistic child in their

classroom. You know with different backgrounds, as well as different education all in

different levels, then to have another student who we are not trained to really educate

them…Just like, "ok here we go again." I've seen it and I've heard it. Like this child

should not be in my classroom because I don't have time.

Only see their disability

Three out of twelve participants reported teachers have an attitude of simply seeing the student with autism as being bad or cannot see past their disability. Teacher 6 expressed teachers only see the child's disability and believe them to be bad. She explained, "…they don't give the kids the opportunity or they automatically label the kids special needs. So they won't learn or they are bad. Won't learn. They are aggressive." Teacher 2 shared:

> I think a lot of teachers are afraid in the beginning because they… hear the word autism. They don't know what to expect. I see right away, sometimes, when a teacher sees a student who has autism, right away, it's that fear. They question whether the student should be in the unit or not. Because they don't see the potential that a lot of these kids have….because they see the disability before they see the student. He has the exact same potential as every other student in the classroom but right away they just see the word autism.

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Parental Barriers

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Participants where asked about their perceived barriers or challenges they encounter with parents of students with autism. The themes that emerged from this subcategory are: in denial, don't understand autism, too busy to be involved or apathetic, no follow through at home, overprotective, and no communication.

Parent denial

Five out of twelve participants reported how difficult it is to teach a child with autism when the parent is in denial about the diagnosis. Teacher 4 shared, "This is new to them. Their baby has just been identified as having a disability. They're going to be in a special program. A lot of parents when they start with me, they are very defensive upset." Teacher 10 shared, "I think one is having them come to terms that their child has special needs and challenges." Teacher 4 elaborated:

> They're just mad. But by the end of the year we have a good relationship because they see that we are trying to work with their child. I think that's the hardest. I think once they leave our unit, the parents are more accepting. It's just difficult for them in the very beginning when at first their child is identified.

Teacher 12 disclosed what happen when her student's parents was in denial:

> I have one, a severe case of an autistic student and where the parents seemed kind of, like, not ready. They're not ready to accept the fact that their child is autistic. I get it. I have kids of my own. It's hard to hear things like that. And you're - How do I say it? You envision your child a certain way. To you its totally normal, their behaviors. So when you hear that or…, as a parents, it's just hard to hear that. So there was a huge delay or a huge issue because… It didn't allow the process to go as smoothly with getting the student the help that that child needed initially.

Teacher 5 has experienced parental denial in the manner in what parents believe their child can accomplish such as:

The parent told me that he's potty trained, he can write his name, and all these things. I'm like "Awesome! That's great." So now we're on the second week of school and taking the child to the restroom on schedule and accidents … accidents. We haven't seen even tracing. He can't even hold a utensil or a pen or a marker. I don't know if it's an illusion. I feel like they (parents) think their child can do all these things at home but we don't see it in the classroom, so I don't know if it's a denial thing.

Teacher 11 also shared her frustration of trying to get the student in her classroom assistance but because of the parent's refusal to see the child's behavior as atypical it caused a delay in services. Teacher 11 shared:

My experience with some of the children that I've had, it does take a long time for them to get tested, fill out the paperwork, and then the paperwork doesn't match… I have had a couple where my paperwork didn't match to the paperwork of the parent and the child did not get in (special education) and then the child got lost within a bubble. Because there was a, "Oh my child can speak. They can do that." But they can't…and they just need that help.

Do not understand autism and do not know what to do

Five out of twelve participants reported a barrier they encounter when dealing with parents of students with autism in they do not understand autism or know how to handle their child. Teacher 2 stated, "Sometimes parents just have no idea what to do…. They are helpless." When asked to further explain why not understanding or knowing what to do is a barrier Teacher 2 explained:

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I think a lot of the time… parents just don't know what to do and they don't know the

questions to ask either. They say, "My son or daughter has autism and that's it." They

don't really say, "Well this just works for him or her." We're the first ones to say "Why

don't you try this at home? To use the visual use a picture schedule." They may not even

know what to do.

Teacher 7 shared it is difficult to make decisions when parents are not aware or don't understand

autism. Teacher 7 stated, "Other parents say, "No Miss… I don't know anything whatever you

decide you decide." Teacher11 reported parents may not understand what school professionals

are discussing:

I sat in an ARD and I was like, "I have a degree and I don't understand some of the

terminology people are using." (People) were just talking and I don't understand all those

words you are using and you want the parent to understand all the abbreviated words?...

You want them to sign something… No, you need to explain a little more, no like a little

bit more, explain. Because they're not aware. We are just thinking because we are used to

the terminology but if I didn't understand in the beginning how do you expect the parent

too?

Too busy to be involved or apathetic

Five out of twelve participants reported parents may say they are too busy or do not have

the time to help out or be actively engaged in what is going on at school or getting the help the

child needs. Teacher 10 shared her frustration when she encountered a parent with a child with

autism who was too busy to be involved:

I felt his mom would walk out of here and be like, "I'm free!" I'm not saying that's what

it was but some days it felt like it. She would say like, "he doesn't do this at home." But

she would spank him in the hallway and the nurse would call her to change him and she

would be like, "I can't I'm busy."

Teacher 5 also expressed her frustration when she sees parents who are not involved:

They (parents) also need to take them to…outside therapy. I think it can really help a

child. I feel like …a lot of times the kids have the resources to go to different therapies

and the parents are just like lazy to drive them. I know you don't do anything all day…

you could at least take them after school… This is like horrible to say but they don't care

how do they expect me to, you know? I …we get in a bad attitude and it gives me a bad

attitude. How come …I don't know how to say bust my bottom and then they're like at

home... They set high expectations for me to help their child but when it comes to them,

no. I don't know, I don't. It's frustrating.

Teacher 8 also felt this was a barrier and stated, "There are parents like well here he is and I

gotta go! They are not into their education at all."

No follow through at home

Four out of twelve participants reported a parental barrier was the lack of support parents

provide to teachers. Some teachers provided examples of the supportive parents they sometimes

have and how they differ from the unsupportive parents. One of the most common characteristic

of an unsupportive parent was not following through at home with what was being taught at

school. Teacher 3 believes parent follow through is needed from the parent and explained, "If we

are doing our part here in the classroom, we would like that to be followed through at home."

When asked why it is important for parents to continue the routine at home Teacher 3 stated:

> So they (students) come back to us and we do the reinforcing. Then you know within a couple weeks they go on Spring or Christmas break and come back and they're kind of out of the routine. So having the parents buy in and follow through what we do in school to follow though home …. The following through with our schedules our routines that we do in our classroom for them. To follow through at home is a big important part of seeing our students succeed and meet their goals.

Teacher 7 also shared her frustrations with her experience of parents that do not follow through at home:

> They're not going to transition what we're doing in the classroom at home. It's just whatever gets done working with a child on the Spectrum in the classroom that's all that's going to happen. Because when the child goes home there's not going to be… schedules …structure in a routine… first then. No consequence if we broke a rule or we didn't do our work. We have that barrier where everything stops at 3:45.

When Teacher 7 was asked to explain further her belief of why parental follow through is important and why it is a barrier when it does not happen, this was said:

> If we don't work together… if you don't have structure routine in your house because, "oh well there's family over. Oh my God and I just don't want him to have a fit." You don't want him to have a tantrum and you let them do whatever the child wants whether it is play …on his phone or watching movies. I go then everything I'm working for,

everything I'm doing from 7:45 to 3:45 it's going to go down the drain because we're not …aligned on the same page.

Overprotective

Three out of twelve participants reported that when parents shelter their child too much it is a barrier to the child's growth and independence. Teacher 1 felt that the overprotection may stem from wanting them to be successful. Teacher 1 shared:

> From my perspective what I've seen is that most parents seem to be very worried about their kids being successful in the in the school setting. Sometimes they can be overprotective... I feel like parents…come in this frame of mind that they over shelter these kids and really they be surprised with how much the kids can thrive when given the opportunity.

Teacher 6 felt when parents are overprotective it can make it more difficult to teach skills. Teacher 6 stated:

> The ones that are over supportive that's a barrier because we want these kids to be independent and learn these skills. Because mom and dad will not be always around. Some of these parents try to do so much and when they come to us, we want them to be …independent in the classroom. We're trying to teach them to be independent and it kind of like …Mom is doing everything, Dad's doing everything. So then they come here and they're like, "I can't open my water bottle because mom is always doing it for me." So now we have to deal with those behaviors. Then the parent finds out… they are like, "can you please help him open his water bottle? Please help him because he has a hard time

doing it." … He's never going to learn how to open a water bottle and that's a skill he should learn.

Lack of Communication

Two out of twelve participants reported a lack of communication between parents and teachers is a barrier they encounter. Teacher 2 explained why communication is important between teacher and parent:

…Communication with the teacher and the parents having communication….Kind of seeing where the students are at school and then… communication from …parents at home and see how we can work it out. I'm following through and having that communication from school and home. Communication and follow through with the procedures, interventions, information…. sometimes they're …some communication barriers.

Teacher 9 reported how the lack of communication affected the how she implemented assignments. Teacher 9 explained:

 As the parent, she had a problem communicating with me. She only communicated through the special education teacher. So I felt like (that was) the hardest part……I would have appreciated direct communication…. There were times like I said where communication was not brought forth to me and it went to special education teacher. … We could have discussed like, "oh this is too much for homework." The homework was being modified to his level but she could have… the communication could have been

there. Like, "Can you scale it back? Then increase it?" Instead of like going around. I felt

… a little bit uncomfortable because there wasn't a clear communication.

<h3 style="text-align:center;">**School Administration Barriers**</h3>

Each elementary school has their own team of school administrators that vary in experience and personality. Typically, school administration team consists of a Principal and several Assistant Principals or Campus Facilitators who assist in the daily business of the school. Under this subcategory, participants reported five administration barriers that impede their instruction to students with Autism: no support, do not understand students with autism, they are not much help, they don't know the students with autism, and more focused on test scores.

No Support

Seven out of twelve teachers indicated they do not feel supported by their school administration team. Support presented itself in general terms such as school administration do not understand the process of teaching students with autism, not involved and are not familiar with students with autism, more concerned about academic and state tests, and do not provide much assistants or are unable to help due to other commitments or duties. Teacher 8 stated:

> There isn't any support and I think because they also have their, you know, all these other situations going on in the school environment with other teachers and students, and they have this attitude either you sink or swim.

In the area of support, Teacher 12 felt, "Sometimes they're not always there for certain cases like that. I think they should support teachers more with students who are coming in with autism."

Likewise, Teacher 3 reported the lack of support demonstrated by her school administration when needing guidance was something she was accustomed to and stated, "I'm so used to it, to be honest. It's just, I just do it. I wish there was more support in that area." Teacher 8 expressed the extreme effect of lack of support was having on her:

> I want to retire. I'm ready to leave. I ready to leave the special education area as soon as I get a certification in general ed that I am ready to leave. This is causing teachers…in our field not to want to do special ed because we're being overworked and overwhelmed. We don't have support in that in that area.

Do not understand students with autism

Seven out of twelve teachers expressed their dissatisfaction with the level of knowledge and support school administrators provide. Teacher 1 stated, "They may not have the support you feel you need because they are not familiar with the topic." When asked to elaborate Teacher 1 responded:

> Sometimes not all the administration is, for a lack of a better word, an expert in special education. It is rare to find an administrator that has special education background. Therefore, they may not understand all that entails working with kids with disabilities and more specifically students with autism.

Teacher 2 described her reaction when needing guidance on an issue with a student with autism:

I would have, of course go to them (administration) but my first person to go to is

someone in the special education office in a different building and I have to call them. So

I always felt I had to go that route instead of going straight to the office.

Teacher 6 shared her frustration on how she felt she was being unfairly evaluated because the

administrator did not understand the challenges of instructing students with autism. Teacher 6

stated:

I have had some barriers when I had my T-Test for my evaluation last year. It was virtual

and it was hard you know to get the kids, to be engaged. I tried calling their name, getting

their attention and my administrator was typing in the chat as I'm trying to conduct a

lesson. "How are you engaging this student?" So I kind of felt like, "they don't

understand these kids, you know?" On the computer they can look but it's kind of hard to

engage them on a computer. If it was in my classroom, I explained to her after, if it was

in my classroom I would have gotten the little girl up and interacted with her but you

know it was a little different. So I kind of feel sometimes the barriers are they look at

working with these kids as regular education kids but they need to understand that they

are not.

Teacher 12 reported, "At the same time, admin cannot expect them (students with autism) to

perform at the same level as a regular student here that doesn't have autism. So they also need to

understand that not every autistic student is the same." Another participant, Teacher 9 expressed

her concern on how the school administrator did not know how to approach her student with

autism. If she had not been happen to come across the situation it could have ended in a meltdown for the student. Teacher 9 shared:

> They need to be aware of how to communicate with them (students with autism). That's also like very *very* important. They don't respond well to the raising of voices like you do with the general population. For him sound was very *very* like important. If you're raising your voice at all, it freaks him out. You can't use that approach. They (administration) need to be aware also. It's not the aggressive approach. He needed calming. Just me explaining, he needed to be explained what was happening. He saw the nurse, he got scared, and he saw the admin, and they were yelling at him. It was too much. You could just tell it was fear in his in his eyes. It was too much he need baby steps.

They are not much help or can't do much to help

Six out of twelve participants reported even when school administrators tried to help they were not much they could do or accomplished. Teacher 10 shared, "What can you (administrator) really do? Except he (administrator) told me you know keep a notebook and write down every detail that happens. But that's exhausting when you have a classroom full of kids." Teacher 11 reported having the same experience, even though school administrators tried to help their suggestions were not useful. Teacher 11 shared, "They (administration) told me take her to the calming room. But that had nothing to do with it. Her target was me. It wasn't the environment, it was me."   Teacher 10 felt even though the administrator tried to help with ideas, the ideas themselves were not useful. Teacher 10 also reported she felt that the administration

knew how serious the situation in her classroom was with her student with autism, however they still could not do much to help her. Teacher 10 stated:

> They felt bad. We understand how difficult it is. But at the same time their hands were tied, also by the rules and laws they have to follow. I mean, don't get me the wrong way, they would come and say, "how challenging it is for you but we have to follow the rules and regulations."

Teacher 4 reported even though her school administration tried to purchase the items she needs to help her meet the needs of her students with autism, school administrators could not and would have to move up the chain of command. Teacher 4 explained:

> It's more funding here. Where I'm at, I do have support. The admin is good. It's just there's not… there's no funding for that those things (equipment) are very expensive. I know, I understand that. I just wish our director will get us something.

They are not involved with or know students with autism

Three out of the twelve participants reported they identified one of the barriers pertaining to school administrators is their lack of involvement with their students with autism. Teacher 6 stated:

> I have had some principles or administrators that don't know my students. So I think that's a barrier for me. I feel like, they kind of look at those students as *your* students. "Okay, she takes care of them. They're good." But they don't really get to know them as a school student, you know? I go back to the, "you know they look at their special needs

and not as the child's school student." They don't get to know them. I don't know maybe they're busy. I don't get very many walkthroughs and I always invite my admin to come in at any time. Please come see what we're doing, like get to know these kids.

Teacher 9 explained what happened because the administrator was involved with her student with autism and did not know her student's triggers. Teacher 9 shared:

I know just from an experience that year, he was not having a good day. I think he was leaving from electives. I think the nurse had called him because he was going to do a physical and so he didn't want to do it. So they were kind of like wanting to restrain him. I was like that's not a good approach for him. They need to be aware of do's and don'ts also because all autism children are different. But like for him touch was either he wanted to feel touched or he didn't. If he didn't know you, don't touch him.

Teacher 4 expressed throughout her career at her current school she has experienced very little involvement when it comes to school administrators and her students. Teacher 4 stated, "I think it's pretty much not much involvement because they have a lot on their plate too. It's you know… we pretty much on our own."

More focused on state testing than on students

Two out of twelve participants shared they felt their school administration was more worried and focused on the academic performance on state tests then on their students with autism. Teacher 2 reported, "It's a lot of academics. (Academics) are kind of put first because of the STAAR testing." Teacher 5 also shared, "I know that is the worry. Having to produce scores, and scores, and scores but sometimes it is not all about the scores."

Autism Training Barriers

The second main category under barriers is autism training. Teachers are given training for different areas in education such as reading, writing and other subject matters. Trainings can be provided by the district or by outside entities such as services centers. Due to the variety of trainings, participants were asked what their perceived barriers were when it pertains to autism training. Six themes emerged from the subcategory of autism training, which are: training does not translate into the classroom or it is unrealistic, not enough time, not enough training, administration not allowing teachers to attend trainings, more work, not knowing what training is available, and more hands on.

Training does not translate to the classroom or is unrealistic

Six out of twelve participants reported the training they do receive pertaining to autism is difficult to put into practice in the classroom or seems unrealistic to try. Teacher 5 expressed:

> I feel like sometimes when we go to the trainings, I think things are sometimes easier said than done. I mean it's really easy to come up with things…you do this…. But maybe when we come back and implemented with some of the students, then really those aggressive behaviors come out and that becomes very exhausting. There's only so much a person can take and sometimes it's easier to just, I guess just …leave it alone. Instead of having to deal with the behavior… Just it's very hard… because they're like, "oh well do it like this, this, this," (But) when you're in a classroom with so many kids, you know it's not just like a two-on-one. It's just sometimes it's just easier said than done. We can get

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the activities together. We can …print out stuff and but I guess sometimes putting it in place is just… it's hard to do.

Teacher 10 also had a similar take on the trainings received. Teacher 10 reported the training they received was sufficient however was unrealistic with a classroom full of students.

I mean the trainings I've been to are very good and but this… The training I had… this is an extreme case, the training didn't apply to him. I don't know if that makes sense. You learned techniques to work with children with autism but then you had an extreme case or severe case and I couldn't use any of the techniques… I had 22… plus students so the trainings didn't seem relevant….but you get all these trainings but we are not trained. No, not really, I mean, yes we are trained but the training goes out the window when I have 22 kids…

When Teacher 10 was asked how did it made her feel to attend trainings that was not useful to the circumstance, Teacher 10 responded, "A waste of time. Sometimes they're good but not being able to apply what you learn seems like a waste of time." Teacher 6 also shared the feeling of the training not being realistic as it translated back to an actual classroom:

It's kind of, I don't want to say ideal classroom (but) they (presenters) will give us a scenario to get training but you really don't know how to work these kids until you work with the individual kid….. Like maybe some things may work in the training (but) some things might not work. Every student's different.

Teacher 11 echoed her frustration of attending training but not being useful in the current situation:

…"Well we'll get to that later" or when they tell you, "well try this." … (I) know, no not when you have a child that is all over the place. They're smaller, the bones are smaller, and their hands are smaller. They would just tell me that, "We will get back to you on that, we will get back to you on that."

Not enough time

Six out of twelve participants reported they simply do not have time to attend trainings pertaining to autism in addition to mandatory trainings or trainings not provided during the regular school day. Teacher 8 does not have the time to attend autism training and simply reported, "If there is (autism) training we have all these other trainings we have to attend." Teacher 12 elaborated:

Finding the time to - for us to be able to attend a training that will be able to help us with students who are autistic, or any other student, you know, with different ranges of autism. I know that it's a range from mild to severe. Finding the time to send us. I know that trainings cost money too - I don't know how much it would cost the district, but the primary one is the time. Because we already have …- I mean somehow they still find trainings to send us to in the summer. So I mean, my summer, I did reading academy. I didn't finish until June, July. That's something required by TEA. Blended learning, I had training for June, August, before school started. And this year, like, we are running with our schedule on trainings, trainings, trainings. So I think finding the right time to pull us out of the class.

Teacher 10 echoed Teacher 12's feelings pertaining to not having the time to attend autism training due to all other training that are mandatory to attend:

> It just seems like one more training. I don't know how to explain it. Like I have my bilingual hours and I have GT hours and then you have all sorts of training that is mandatory…Then you want to add autism? Which is good. I think it is important to have it but it just seems like one more thing to do with our already busy schedules.

Teacher 7 felt they are incredibly busy that they do not have the time to check to see what trainings are available, **"**Learning about the training that last minute….we're always are rush rush rush rush rush that we do have the mental time." Teacher 2 expressed the availability of autism training is not the problem it is the ability to attend, "I feel like working with students with autism there are a lot of trainings that will help but and we're not always available to go."

Not enough training

Six out of twelve participants reported they do not receive adequate training when it comes to autism. Teacher 11 simply stated, "This is my 14th year not once I have ever gotten autism training." Teacher 6 expressed, "I think that we don't get enough of it (training) to be honest with you." Teacher 9 shared not receiving the appropriate training was difficult, "So I guess not knowing complete strategies… it's a different learning experience and teaching experience for that student." Teacher 8 expressed:

> But I just think that we should be trained … to offer solutions. Like how to successfully have this child in our classroom…that's something we never, as a regular education (teacher), I never took any classes like that in my education. I was never offered any of

those classes. So that's something new to us or me…..Overall, I think it goes back to the training there is not enough. We feel that we are not meeting the child's needs.

Administration not allowing teachers to attend training

Five out of twelve participants reported a barrier they encountered was that their administration did not allow them to attend training pertaining to autism. Teacher 8 shared, "They don't offer us trainings." Teacher 2 shared administration determine whether teachers are able to attend and stated, "A lot of the time I was not able too." Teacher 7 expressed school administration did not understand the significance of sending their teachers to training:

> I think more than anything it's very difficult… for our bosses to see the importance of sending either teachers or paraprofessionals to trainings. (Because) that means we're going to be out of the classroom that's more than anything a barrier for them (administrators).

More Work

Four participants out of twelve reportedly felt trainings they attended translated into more work for them that they have to do when returning to the classroom. Teacher 5 shared:

> It's a bunch of students running around and yes there's assistance but you know everyone has to be on the same page. It's hard. It's very hard. If they (paraprofessionals) don't get the same training…it's hard to for them too. Also, if they don't get the training (then) you have to teach them also…Then it's kind of exhausting. Something like that you don't want to do it because it's like, "Okay, well you know what like it's just more work."

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Teacher 4 felt attending trainings simply meant they would still have to do research on their own, "I think as a teacher the training you get, you have to do more on your own. Still to learn more about you know the topic…Whatever it is you're trying to achieve."

Not knowing what training is available

Three out of twelve participants reported a barrier to autism training is simply not knowing what trainings are available or where to find them. Teacher 3 felt, "Some teachers aren't aware of the available resources." Teacher 12 simply stated, "So I don't even know how I would be able to access them."

More hands on training

Two out of twelve participants reported a barrier related to autism training is to have the training more hands on to help them better understand retain the concepts. Teacher 4 reported:

It's better if we had an actual student that we could maybe…follow. They could do a training on a student and show the techniques that they used as opposed to this is what you're supposed to do… I think something like that would be beneficial.

Teacher 6 also felt hands on training would be helpful when learning new strategies:

We want something fun. That will help us remember and take away and stuff. So sometimes when we have training it's kind of just like the PowerPoints…I guess it'll be a challenge…more training and something you know that catches our attention…I'm more of a Hands-On, so I like…to go to workshop so I can remember. We did one or two maybe my first or second year of teaching. We did the one about the daily schedules and

I remember us all, as Educators, we were together. We have a little cut outs and we're putting the velcro and you know we were doing it. That was a really good …a good training because we were able to make it and practice it.

Summary

Participants were asked to share their personal expectations as an educator. Some participants reported they expect to create a fun and safe environment for students to learn and to provide students with the tools they need to be successful. Some teachers also shared they expected themselves to always be positive and encouraging to their students.

Teachers' expectations for parents were explored. Almost half of teachers expected parents to work together as team with the teacher to help their child reach their goals. Teachers expected parents to be follow through at home with skills and interventions they are working on at school. Some participants reported they expected parents to be a source of support for teachers and have an open line of communication with them.

Participants were asked to share the expectations they have for school administrators. Many teachers reported they expected school administrators to be supportive of them and the ideas they have and trust that they know who to best teach their students with autism. Teachers also expected school administrators to be understanding and allow teacher to attend training pertaining to autism. A few participants shared they expected school administrator to try and help them when they are having difficulty with a student.

Social expectations for students with autism were also explored. Teacher's reported they expected for students to be able to socialize and interact with others in and out of the classroom.

Students with autism are expected to communicate and learn to give eye contact when they interact. Some teachers reported they expect students to feel accepted by others and to accept others as well.

Teacher's behavioral expectations for students with autism were clear. Teachers expected students to follow the classrooms rules and have appropriate behavior in the classroom similar to all students. Teachers also expected students to not hurt others or themselves.

Academic expectations were also shared by participants. More than half of teachers reported they expected to see growth or progress no matter how big or small in their students. Teachers held their students with autism to a high academic expectations and expected them to achieve their potential. A few participants also expected students to feel success and be proud of what they have accomplished.

The first barrier explored was attidunal barriers. Half of the participants expressed having a student with autism in their classroom as extremely difficult and stressful. Several teachers also felt having a student with autism in their classroom caused them to have additional work that they do not have the time to complete. More than half of the participants felt they had deficient skills and knowledge to educate students with autism and therefore caused them to feel they are not providing the education the students need. A few participants shared they have encountered the attitude of not wanting the student with autism in their classroom and only see the disability and not the child.

Participants were also asked about their perceived barriers pertaining to parents of students with autism. Teachers reported it was difficult to teach and get the help the student

needed when parents are in denial. Another barrier identified was parents not knowing what to do to help their child with autism. A few teachers reported they believed a barrier was that parents did not follow through at home with what was implemented in the classroom as well as not being involved in their child's education.

The study's findings revealed that teaching students with autism pose barriers for educators. School administration barriers were explored with participants; more than half reported they felt school administrators did not provide the support they needed. Teachers shared that school administrators do not seem to understand that teachings students with autism is different from teaching students who are not on the spectrum and do not seem to take the time to get to know the students. A few teachers felt school administrators were more concerned with state testing scores then they are with the student's with autism education.

In the area of training, participants felt they did not receive adequate training, realistic training or hands on training that would allow them to better serve their student with autism. This barrier appeared to be a common theme throughout the participants. Half of the participants voiced their dissatisfaction with the amount of training they receive.   Participants reported they do not receive enough training and or they do not have sufficient time to attend training pertaining to autism. Another barrier in accessing autism training is a few participants are not aware of what and when trainings are offered. Half of the teachers reported they view autism training as unrealistic and does not translate to the classroom and more work for them.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This study explored the barriers and expectations of general and special education elementary teachers who educate students with autism. Participants identified barriers in the area of school administration, parents, attitude, and autism training. Participants also shared their expectations for themselves, school administrators, and parents. Participants expressed academic, behavioral, and social expectations they hold for their students with autism. A review of the literature explored the view of educators' perceived barriers encountered when teaching students with autism. In the past five years, researchers have started to pay closer attention to these perceived barriers. However, little research has been conducted specifically dealing with public education teachers' expectations of themselves, students with autism, parents, and administration.

Teacher Barriers

Professional Knowledge

Students with autism can be found in the general education setting as well as the special education setting. Bertuccio et al. (2019) reported that many students with autism are in the general education setting 80% of their school day.

In this study, Teachers 8 and 11 touched on the amount of time students with autism were their classroom. Teacher 8 noted, "He (student with autism) was in my classroom all day." One of the reasons educators who have students with autism in their classroom over an extended time felt their presence is due to the lack of training they have received in their education program. Similar to the results of this study, Goldman and Gilmour (2020) found that most teachers are not familiar with specialized types of instruction that can be utilized to successfully teach students with ASD. Additionally, Lauderdale-Littin and Brennan (2017) found most training programs focused on practices that could be used on a broader population of students. Teachers 9 and 1 supported these findings. Teacher 9 reported she, "did not know complete strategies," to teach her student with autism. Teacher 1 also shared, "…most trainings are kinda broad based…that are math, reading based but not specific…with special education students." Information shared from Teacher 1 and Teacher 9 is comparable to what Lauderdale-Littin and Brennan (2017) reported that most education graduates had received minimal training in evidence-based practices for students with ASD. Teacher 8 shared, "that's something we never… as a regular ed, I never took any classes like that in my education. I was never offered any of those classes so that's something new to us or me."

Autism Training

Participant's experience with autism training was specifically explored. Jenkins and Yoshmiura (2010) reported a onetime professional development or workshop on needs of special education students is not sufficient to address all the issues. Half of the particiants reported not receiving enough autism training. Teacher 1 stated, "It just requires more training… understand the background of what autism is and how different kids demonstrate the quality of autism."

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Morrier et al. (2011) found most teachers report receiving little to no evidence-based practice training pertaining to students with ASD. Teacher 6 echoed what Morrier et al. (2011) found and shared, "I kind of feel like training wise we don't get enough training." Teacher 11 shared, "this is my 14th year not once I have ever gotten autism training." Goldman and Gilmour (2020) also reported more in-depth in-service training needs to be offered to teachers. Similar to what Goldman and Gilmour (2020) found, Teacher 4 shared, "I know I can try this with this student but I still need more help with it." Bertuccio et al. (2019) reported the most common practice for staff development are presentations and lectures which are not enough for educators to retain knowledge on how to work with children with ASD. Comparable to what was found by Bertuccio et al. (2019), Teacher 6 supported this finding and stated, "training that would benefit us… we want something fun that will help us remember and take away stuff. So sometimes when we have training it's kind of just like PowerPoint so …something you know that catches our attention."

Teacher Preparedness

According to the literature, teachers do not feel equipped to meet the academic and behavioral needs of special education students (Bertuccio et al., 2019; Ornelles et al., 2007). Teacher 8 supported these findings when she stated, "you know … with (an) autistic child, with their social and behavior impairments, we face obstacles to manage their needs. So I do feel unprepared to support these students socially and academically." Teffs and Whitbread (2009) found of the teachers surveyed, the majority of them felt unprepared or somewhat prepared to teach students with ASD in their classroom. Teacher 2 shared, "They (teachers) don't know what to do. They don't know what not to do." Bertuccio et al. (2019) noted teachers lack confidence in

their abilities to educate students with autism. Teacher 8 supported these findings when she shared, "I will not be a successful teacher. I feel I probably fail them, like I'm not ready to have them in my classroom. I'm not competent

Teacher Attitudes

According to Bertuccio et al. (2019) educators feel overwhelmed and stressed when it comes to students with autism in their classroom. Similar to these finding, teacher 10 stated "Yes it is more difficult. You come with the attitude that is gonna be very hard. I think it stresses me out I was very stressed out. I was very stressed out." These findings mirror this study's as seven out of the twelve participants reported feelings of stress and difficulty when working with students with autism. Teacher 12 noted, "It's stressful…I was under a lot of stress…" Zarafshan et al., (2013) found teachers who instruct students with ASD report higher levels of stress and burnout. Teacher 7 supported these findings by reported, "this is causing teachers in my in our field, for paraprofessionals in our field not to want to do special ed because we're being overworked and overwhelmed." According to Jury et al. (2021) teachers had negative beliefs of behavioral difficulties with students with ASD. Comparable to these findings Teacher 3 shared, "they (teachers) don't give the kids the opportunity or they automatically label the kids special needs, so they won't learn or they are bad won't learn they are aggressive."

More Work

Cheuk and Hatch (2007) explained some teachers negative attitude is due to the added stress and work they believe they will encounter when instructing a special education student. Similar to Check and Hatch (2007) findings, teacher 5 reported, "There's a lot of work that

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everyone has to do, all the teachers have to do…the paperwork and all these emails it's overwhelming…" Teacher 10 also support these findings by saying, "Not only do I have my regular students but I have the student with special needs or challenges will I be able to meet his needs."

Parental Involvement

Fogle et al. (2020) noted one barrier of parental involvement is limited understanding of special education. Teacher 11 supported this findings when she reported, "One time I sat in an ARD and I was like I have a degree and I don't understand some of the terminology….I don't understand all those words you are using and you want the parent to understand…?" Stoner and Angell (2006) found parents with a child with ASD may not have the same goals or beliefs that their child's teacher or therapist may have. Similar to Angell (2006) findings, teacher 5 shared, "I feel like they can do all these things at home but we don't see it in the classroom." A study conducted by Azard and Mandell (2015) noted studies emphasized the importance of parents and teachers working together when it comes to their child's education. Teacher 3 had similar beliefs and stated, "if we are doing our part here in the classroom we would like that to be followed through at home."

Expectations

Expectations were also explored with all participants. Wilder et al. (2004) reported that if a teacher believes a student with autism will progress as other students in the class, then that student will likely meet the expectation. Similar to Wilder et al (2004), teacher 6 shared, "my expectations were high but you know it was amazing…to see that he exceeded my expectation."

McWherter (2017) reported teacher expectations likely influence the learning environment, student-teacher relationship, and goal setting. Similar to McWherter (2017) findings teacher 12 shared her personal expectations was, "creating a supportive and respectful classroom environment and building relationships." Teacher 1 noted,"…I would build the rapport with the student and provide that student with whatever it is they need…"

Parental Expectations

Azard and Mandell (2015) found that it was imperative that parents and teachers work together when it comes to their child's education. Similar expectation was shared by Teacher 12, "if the parent is willing to help me… hand-in-hand …it makes things easier and better." Teacher 2 also agreed and stated, "We have to work together." A study by Simpson et al. (2003) reported that in order to have a meaningful home-school collaboration, parents and teachers must work together, and share information. Comparable to the Simpson et al. (2003) study Teacher 8 that sharing information was important and stated, "We are both knowledgeable. We are sharing information." Bush et al. (2017) reported when there is communication between school and parents, a better understanding of the child's capabilities, and realistic expectations can occur. Teacher 8 agreed with Bush et al. (2017) and reported when she had open communication with her parent, "…it was very important, so that …we can help the child."

Academic Expectations

According to Witmer and Ferreri (2014), students with ASD are not expected to meet grade level standards in academics. However, according to this study's findings 9 out of 12 participants in this study expected students with autism to progress and meet their goals. Teacher

10 shared, "I just don't expect them to sit there and color or let's just keep you busy. They will pick up what we are trying to teach them." Teacher 4 shared her academic expectation, "I expect them to you know to achieve … capable of what they are doing."

Utilizing the grounded theory method, the researcher was able to uncover a connection between teachers who educate students with autism and their expectations and barriers. Participant's expectations were basic reasonable expectations they possess for all stakeholders involved in the educational process of their student with autism.   It was discovered when teachers' expectations were not met they expressed them as barriers. Teachers shared they expect to receive support, understanding and a general knowledge of their students from their school administration. When asked to disclose what barriers they encounter with school administrators, teachers reported not receiving support, not understanding students with autism, and not knowing who their students are.

The same connection can be discerned from the expectations teachers held for parents of students with autism. Teachers expected parents to follow through at home, be actively involved, and be realistic with what students can achieve. When these parental expectations were not met, it was evident that teachers reported them to be barriers. Teachers reported their barriers as: no follow through at home, parents not involved, and being in denial or overprotective. When parent's expectations do not match with the teacher's expectations, tensions may arise between the two parties (Russel, 2005). It is reasonable to believe parental involvement in their child's education is essential for educators to do their job well.

Retrieving from this study's findings, teachers do not have unrealistic or unreasonable expectations for stakeholders. Teachers reported they expected administrators to support them in what they need to successfully educate students with autism. Teachers also expected parents to work and communicate with them when it pertains to the child. Teachers need their basic expectations to be met from administration and parents to feel component and confident when teaching students with autism. See Figure 3.

Teacher Expectations

Students with Autism

Stakeholders

Admin.

- Be supportive
- Trust us
- Allow teachers to attend trainings
- Understand students with autism
- Try & Help
- Know the students

Parent

- Work Together
- Be supportive
- Communication
- Follow through at home
- Be actively involved
- Be realistic about what they can do

Teacher

- Give students what they need
- Be Positive
- Create a good environment
- Do their best
- Grow as an Educator

Social

- Interact with others
- Learn to communicate
- Feel accepted & accept others

Behavior

- Follow classroom rules
- Same Expectations
- Do not hurt themselves or others

Academic

- Show growth
- Achieve their potential
- High Expectations
- To feel their success

Barriers

Training

- Not enough time
- Not enough training
- More hands-on
- Unrealistic
- More work
- Not knowing what is offered
- Not allowed to attend

Stakeholders

Teacher Attitude

- Very difficult & stressful
- Don't know what to do
- They are more work
- Don't want the student
- Only see their disability

Parent

- In denial
- Don't understand
- Not involved
- No follow through at home
- Overprotective
- No communication

Administration

- No support
- Don't understand
- Not much help
- Don't know students with autism
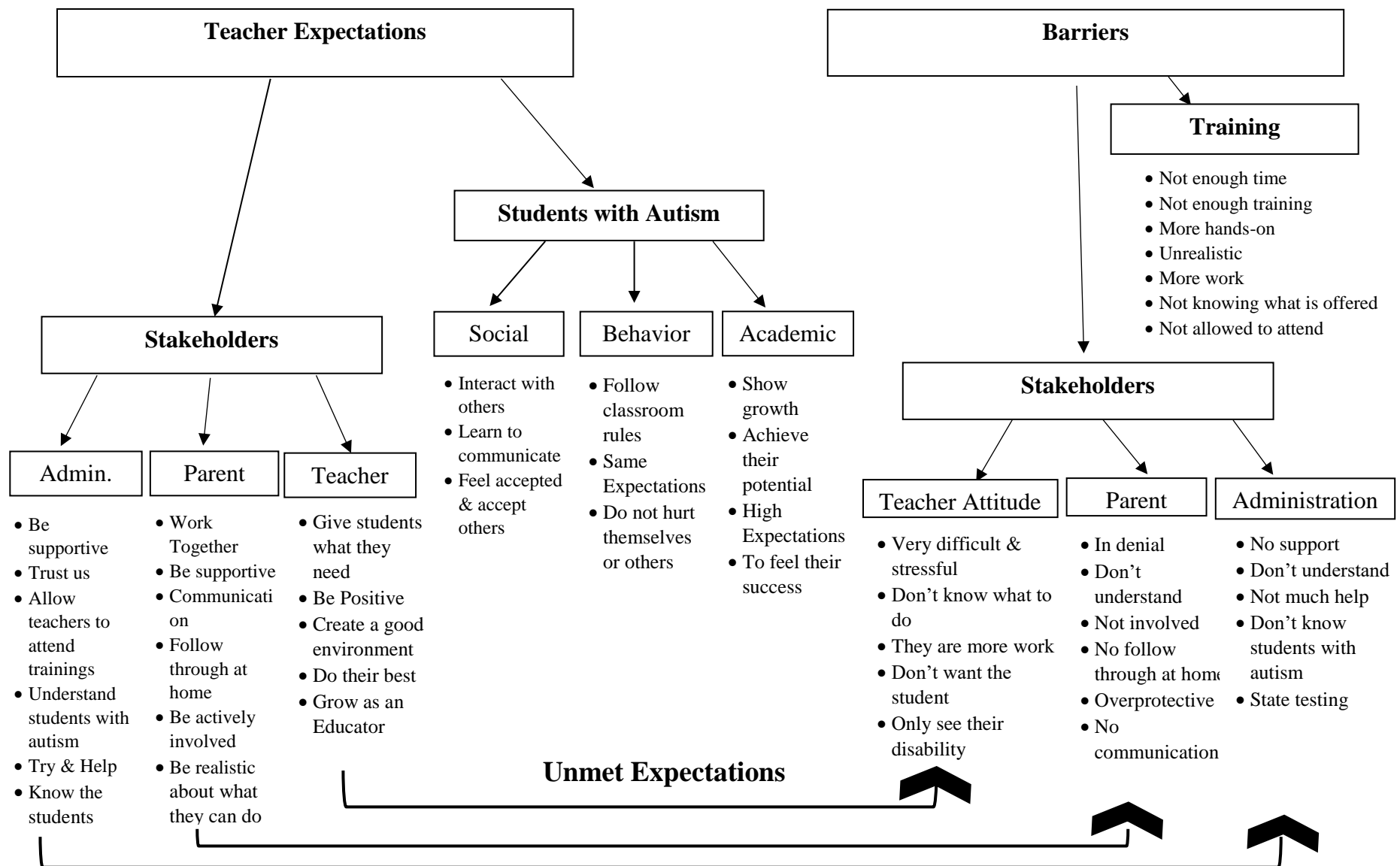- State testing

Unmet Expectations

Fig. 3. Thematic map of themes and subthemes identified

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Although this study was not designed to compare special and general education teachers' responses, it is noteworthy to report the difference in language use between the two. Special education teachers used words such as, "my student" or "our student;" While the general education teacher used "autistic student." It is also noteworthy to report that special and general education teachers reported the same barriers and expectations

Limitations

This dissertation supplements the literature on what causes barriers to form for teachers who educate students with autism. However, a convenience based sample, all female participants, and recently returning from the COVID-19 pandemic may have created limitations for this study. Additionally, the participants were recruited from one school district. A total of 12 participants participated in the study. The demographics (gender and years of experience) of the participants are found in Table 1. Due to the convenience sampling, generalization of results are not appropriate across the entire population of elementary teachers. Returning to in-person learning after a full year out of the classroom may be seen as a limitations as teachers and students are adjusting to the new manner of education.

Creswell (2013) noted that 20-30 interviews should be sufficient to reach saturation in data and Latham (2013) reported typically 11 participants are sufficient to achieve saturation in data. This is the justification for 12 participants and 24 interviews and achieving saturation in data. However, it can be seen as a limitation as the sample size is small, even though data saturation in this study was achieved.

All participants were homogenous as far as having experience teaching student with autism; however, they taught different grade levels. This may be considered a limitation as

different grade level teacher may be concerned with varying aspects of teaching students with autism. For example, early childhood teachers may be more focused on assessment and entrance to special education programs for their students, while higher grade levels may be more concerned with educational performance.

Furthermore, some participants were interviewed post hoc meaning they were interviewed after their experience of teacher a student with autism. Teachers may have been able to internalize or reflect on their experience and how it affected them versus the participants who are currently teaching students with autism. Another limitation may be that some participants may have years of experience educating students with autism while others may be drawing from less experience.

One potential limitation of this study is the possibility of the participants feeling their honesty may impact them negatively due to the researcher being employed by the same employer. The researcher reaffirmed to each participant that the information gathered is confidential and names would not be associated with the data or published in the study. Another potential limitation is the participants not being fully cooperative because of past negative experiences with administration and may view the researcher as an extension of administration.

Recommendations for Future Research

The area of autism and education would benefit from further research of the experiences of special education teachers and general education teachers. By understanding the experiences general and special education teachers while educating students with autism, it can lead to enhanced collaboration between the professionals. This can also lead to a positive learning

experience for the student with autism. Further research is needed to investigate if there is a difference between early childhood education teacher's perceived expectations and barriers compared to higher elementary grade teachers. This can shed light on the difficulties early education teachers encounter when attempting to receive assistance for their students with autism. Another area to investigate is the expectations and barriers alternative certification teachers experience versus traditional educational program graduates. This research may help identify what areas alternative certification program to need supplement in order to better prepare their graduates.

It is recommended for educator's expectations to be further explored by a larger number of participants to discern if there are additional expectations that educators possess. By learning and understanding these expectations, it can help future educational programs and school administrators to better support teachers as they educate students with autism. This improved understanding gleaned from the research could lead to better attitudinal outlook when teaching students with autism and lower rates of frustration and stress.

Another gap in the literature is the perspective of school administrators. This study explored teacher's expectations and barriers, however it would be interesting to learn what expectations and barriers school administration encounter when having students with autism enrolled at their school. The findings from school administration and teacher experiences may unify the two professional groups with better understanding of what the other is enduring.

Conclusion

Overall, the range of expectation and barriers educators reported highlight areas of interest for further investigation. Analysis of participant's interviews indicate teachers possess reasonable and realistic expectations for stakeholders in their student's education. It is assumed that when teacher's expectations are not being meet those expectations evolve into barriers. Conversely, if teacher's expectations are being meet then few barriers exist. Understanding how best to meet teacher's expectations can positively affect students with autism educational experience as well as the educators experience of teaching students with autism.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX

RECRUIMENT LETTER

Hello,

My name is Abbie Munoz, I am a student from the Department of Rehabilitative Services at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV). I would like to invite you to participate in my research study to **Barriers and Expectations of Teachers of Students with Autism** The purpose of this study is to is to explore the following: (1) barriers general and special education teachers encounter when education students with Autism, and (2) the expectations of school general and special education teachers have when instruction students with autism.

This research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB) at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.

In order to participate you must be 18 years or older and have taught student's with Autism in the elementary setting within the past 2 years.
Participation in this research is completely voluntary, you may choose not to participate without penalty.

As a participant, you will be asked to complete an interview with me, which should take about 30 minutes to complete. All data will be treated as confidential. Data gathered from our interview will not have identifiable information of the participant and will be stored in a password encrypted computer. Data gathered from the interview will be destroyed after it has been used.

If you would like to participate in this research study, please email at abbie.muz01@utrgv.edu. From there we will set up a time when we can conducted the interview.

If you have questions related to the research, please contact me by telephone at 210-831-2015 or by email at abbie.muz01@utrgv.edu.

Thank you for your cooperation!

Interview Questions

- What do you identify as barriers (challenges) related to autism training?

- Are there attitudinal (attitude) barriers towards teaching students with autism?

- What type of barriers do you identify relevant to school administration and teaching students with autism?

- What barriers do you identify relevant to parents and teaching students with autism?

- What are your personal expectations as an educator?

- What expectations do you have for administration support when teaching students with autism?

- What expectations do you have for parents of children with autism who are in your classroom?

- What are your academic expectations of students with autism who are in your classroom?

- What are your behavioral expectations of students with autism who are in your classroom?

- What are your social expectations of students with autism who are in your classroom?

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

The author, Abbie M. Muñoz currently lives in Edinburg, Texas and is employed as a Licensed Specialist in School Psychology. She graduated from Our Lady of the Lake University in San Antonio with a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology and a minor in History in 2005. She then earned her Master's Degree in School Psychology at the University of Texas Pan American in 2009. She also received her certification for Board Certified Behavior Analyst from the University of Texas Pan American in 2015. Her doctoral degree in Rehabilitation Counseling from the School of Health Professions, was earned from the University of Texas at Rio Grande Valley in 2021.

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