T-PESS and Special Education Teacher Attrition and Retention: A Qualitative Phenomenological Study of Teacher Perceptions of Administrator Effectiveness

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate my dissertation to three very important people in my life. First, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my mom who passed away in December, 2020. Not a single day goes by that I don't think about you and desperately wish you could be here to see me complete my Ph.D. As a follower of Christ, you instilled in me a biblical foundation and a love for our Savior. Your example as a nurse midwife taught me from an early age that life is about service to others. I was able to witness firsthand your gentle soul as you comforted and coached women during their pregnancies and homebirth deliveries. You spent countless hours mentoring, encouraging, and supporting both new and experienced mothers as they walked through their own journey of motherhood. I am grateful for your many life lessons, and miss your wisdom, humor, sense of adventure and how you made our family feel whole.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenology study was to explore special education teacher retention in a large school district in Texas and the perception of campus principal's support as defined through the domains from the Texas Principal Evaluation and Support System (T-PESS). Participants in the study came from 550 special education teachers in Desert ISD, a school district in North Texas. I completed semi-structured interviews with a total of 12 special education teachers from elementary, middle school, and high school levels.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

School districts across the United States have had difficulty finding qualified teachers to fill vacant positions (Cowan et al., 2016; Sutcher et al., 2019). Teacher shortages have been considered an on-going crisis due to school districts having a hard time filling position such as mathematics, special education, and science (Sutcher, et al., 2016; Sutcher et al., 2019). The U.S. Department of Education (2017) reported that 8% of teachers in public school leave the teaching profession and about 10% of teachers move to a different school each year. In addition, the National Association of Secondary School Principals (2021) reported by 2021 the teaching shortage will become critical in all areas of education. This is due to the increase in the enrollment of students in the K-12 setting. The shortage among teachers is significantly higher than for many other occupations such as business, lawyers, and technology fields (Dee, & Goldhaber, 2017; Garcia, & Weiss, 2019).

The *No Child Left Behind* Act (NCLB) (2001) was established as a national effort to recruit qualified teacher for every classroom in the United States. The NCLB Act has done little to increase the number of teachers in the teaching profession. Although NCLB provided funding for financial incentives such as student loan forgiveness, housing assistance, tuition reimbursement, and signing bonuses as a way to relieve the teaching shortage, the NCLB has made it harder for qualified teachers to remain in the teaching profession due to the highly qualified teaching expectation (Dee & Goldhaber, 2017). Consequently, administrators in school districts have a difficult time finding

teachers who meet the highly qualified expectation of NCLB to fill vacant positions (Dee, & Goldhaber, 2017; Garcia, & Weiss, 2019).

One of the harder to fill teaching areas is special education. Schools require special education (SPED) teachers who can meet the needs of students requiring special education services. However, shortages of certified SPED teachers in the U.S. are persistent. During the 1990s, more than 30,000 special education positions were left unfilled by certified teachers (Mcleskey et al., 2004). In the early 2000s, 98% of school districts across the country were reporting a shortage of qualified special education teachers (Bergert & Burnette, 2001; Boyer & Gillespie, 2000) while teachers filled 47,000 special education positions not certified to teach special education (Mcleskey et al., 2004, p. 14). The shortage of qualified special education teachers was acknowledged when the U.S. Department of Education and Office of Post-Secondary Education (2017) announced that 46 states were drastically short of special education teachers. In fact, special education teachers are 2.5 times more likely to leave the classroom after their first year of teaching than other beginning teachers (Mason-Williams et al., 2020b). Mason-Williams et al. (2020b) suggested two primary factors that drive special education teacher shortages: (a) teacher preparedness and (b) teacher retention. The decision to leave the profession altogether or transfer to general education is due to difficult working conditions that includes a lack of administrative support, lack of collaboration, and excessive paperwork (Mason-Williams et al., 2020a).

Teacher Attrition in Special Education

In the past 10 years, there have been an alarming number of teachers who leave the teaching profession after teaching for only a few years. Researchers have noted

that the teacher turnover is a significant problem in the United States, and many school districts have a difficult time recruiting new teachers to teach in school districts (den Brok et al., 2017; Espinoza et al., 2018; Ingersoll et al., 2019). The attrition rate of special education teachers is a serious problem in the United States. Ingersoll and Strong (2011) found that although 40% of new general education teachers leave within the first five years of entering the field, and 20% of special education teachers exit during or immediately after their first year. Emery and Vandenberg (2011) found that overall, special education teacher attrition results in 75% turnover every 10 years. Robinson et al. (2019) reported that there are high attrition rates for special education teachers in 49 out of 50 states in the United States. Kamrath and Bradford (2020) noted that this is due to low pay and on the job stress with having to motivate students in the classroom who often misbehave. The attrition of special education teachers impedes special needs students from reaching their full academic potential and can hinder an entire school district's ability to prepare all students for careers after high school and to live full productive lives (Robinson et al., 2019). The lack of adequate amounts of special education teachers in a school district is a direct result of high turnover and recruitment challenges (Hanushek, 2019; Robinson et al., 2019).

The cost associated with teacher attrition is also on the rise (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Schools across the U.S. lose up to 2 billion dollars every year (Schaffhauser, 2014) hiring, training, and replacing teachers. The financial costs for individual school districts due to teacher attrition can exceed $20,000 per teacher (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Because of the high price of teacher attrition, school leaders should identify factors within their control to retain special

education teachers who are instrumental in the growth and progress of special needs students (Hopkins et al., 2019).

Teacher attrition also affects student achievement. When teachers leave the classroom for any reason, student achievement is affected (Goldhaber et al., 2017). While some studies suggest teacher turnover increased student achievement by hiring higher quality teachers as a replacement, on average there was a negative result to the entire campus with high levels of teacher turnover (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Goldhaber et al., 2017; Hopkins et al., 2019). Teacher turnover creates organizational disruptions that impact staff cohesion and trust, student engagement, and the implementation of instructional programs on the campus (Hopkins et al., 2019), and this disruption often leads to some students falling behind in their academic progress in their classes (Goldhaber et al., 2017; Robinson et al., 2019).

Shortages of Special Education Teachers

Federal law was passed in 1975 to ensure 8.3% of public-school children with disabilities, ages 3 to 21, receive special education services (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). The number of students receiving special education services has increased since the passage of federal law, and 14% of all public-school students, ages 3-21, received special education services during the 2017-2018 school year (NCES, 2017). On the other hand, the number of teachers entering the teaching profession in the area of special education has decreased over the past decade (NCES, 2017). Finding highly qualified special education teachers is becoming increasingly difficult in many school districts across the U.S. (Brownell et al., 2018; Hopkins et al. 2019).

Finding highly qualified teachers impact the rating of schools and the success of students. Studies have historically shown a strong correlation between highly qualified teachers and student achievement (Brownell et al., 2018). A highly qualified special education teacher knows their students and provides each student with research-based strategies that can increase their academic achievement. Also, a highly qualified special education teacher can identify areas of concern with specific students and work with each student independently in determining the best practice methods to ensure understanding of the students and their classroom (Brownell et al., 2018) Therefore, the retention of quality special education teachers in the classroom becomes a priority to districts as they seek to provide positive outcomes for the special needs students they serve (Brownell et al., 2018).

Special Education Teacher Shortage in Texas

During the 2018-2019 school year, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) reported that there were 32,000 special education teachers serving nearly 500,000 special education students across the state. The ratio of special education teachers to students was approximately one teacher to 15 students. However, the TEA (2019a) reported that every year about 2% of special education teachers leave to teaching profession after three years of teaching special education students. With an increase of students becoming or remaining eligible for special education services and a decrease of qualified special education teachers, TEA (2019a) noted the need to hire and retain some 10,000 special education teachers by the year 2021. However, utilizing annual teacher attrition reports gives a limited representation of turnover and the negative impact on schools over time. A recent study by the Texas Education Research Center,

found 42.9% of all Texas schools experience high cumulative turnover of original teaching staff in a three-year period (Holme et al., 2017).

Recruiting and hiring special education teachers is financially challenging to school districts in Texas. A study by the Texas Center for Educational Research (2020) report stated that the costs of hiring special education and other critical area teachers is costing the state of Texas about $329 million a year or at least $8,000 per recruit who leaves teaching in the first few years of teaching. Therefore, considering educational policies and strategies to retain and support the development of effective special education teachers in public schools is imperative to school administrators and school boards (Bland, et al., 2014; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). The goal of improving recruitment of teachers in Texas is to reduce the number special education teachers leaving the profession after just three years of teaching, which will increase access and equity for all students in Texas (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; TEA, 2019a).

Principal Leadership and Teacher Retention

Principal leadership has been shown to have a significant influence on a teacher's choice to stay or leave the profession (Boyd et al., 2011). Ingersoll (2001) found the lack of administrative support was a key motivation for why teachers moved to other schools or left the profession all together. Johnson et al. (2020) asserted that teachers are more attracted to schools when effective principals lead the campus. Fuller et al. (2018) found multiple school leadership behaviors which directly influence teachers and their working conditions. The principal behaviors found to have a direct influence on teacher turnover include: (a) creating a strong school mission and vision;

(b) consistent and transparent communication; (c) implementation of routines and procedures to establish a predictable and stable environment; (d) supporting and encouraging teachers; (e) communicating clear expectations; (f) prioritizing trust and respect; (g) buffering teachers from outside influences that interfere with teaching; (h) involving teachers in decision making; and (i) providing consistent and useful feedback (Fuller et al., p. 4).

In 2011, the Texas Legislature organized and established a consortium of nationally recognized experts on educational leadership and policy to develop a principal appraisal system and make recommendations regarding training and professional development of principals (TEA, 2012). In 2012, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) assembled a principal advisory committee who were tasked with constructing a set of competencies that principals must acquire to be effective leaders and improve student performance. This principal taskforce developed school leadership standards and adopted them into Chapter 149 of the Texas Administrative Code (TAC) on June 8, 2014, now known as the *Texas Principal Standards* (TEA, 2017). The *Texas Principal Standards* include five key categories of effective principal leadership: instructional leadership, human capital, executive leadership, school culture, and strategic operations. The standards also provide a foundation and support to the development and appraisal of effective principals through the Texas Principal Evaluation and Support System (T-PESS) (Texas Education Agency, 2019). There is limited research on the special education teachers' perceptions on the Texas Principal Standards and how it relates to whether special education teachers leave or stay in the teaching profession.

Statement of the Problem

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) (2019) reported that the state of Texas provides special education services to some 500,000 students with a special education workforce of about 32,000 teachers. From 2016 to 2019, TEA (2019a) reported an increase of approximately 54,000 students receiving special education services while reporting special education teacher employment at approximately 9% for those three consecutive years. With an increase of students receiving special education services, there is a need for more special education teachers to provide services to this population of students. However, in the 2017-18 school year, Texas reported an attrition rate of 10.44 % or 37,433 teachers who left the profession. Many of these teachers were special education teachers (Ramsay, 2019). A study by the Texas Education Research Center found 42.9 % of all Texas schools experience high cumulative turnover of original teaching staff in a three-year period (Holme et al., 2017). The longitudinal effects of turnover create instability and organizational damage to schools where staff frequently changes over time. The turnover of teachers could affect students learning and achievement over time (Holme et al., 2017).

The reasons special education teachers leave the profession vary. However, one of the main causes of these unexpected voids is special education teachers leaving the profession due to lack of job satisfaction or lack of administrative support (Dicke et al., 2020; Shaukat et al., 2019). Some significant factors found in research regarding teacher job satisfaction were directly related to school climate and work environment (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016; Dicke et al., 2020). School climate encompasses individual attitudes, behaviors, and group norms that contribute to a safe environment where high-

quality relationships are a priority (Baptiste, 2019; Polatcan & Cansoy, 2019). Teachers often choose to stay in positive working environments with principals who provide opportunities for teachers to grow professionally, are mindful of teacher workloads, provide balanced autonomy, and have supportive leadership behaviors (Polatcan & Cansoy, 2019; Robinson et al., 2019).

Overall school climate and work environment are directly related to a principal's leadership behaviors, styles, processes, and the systems they establish. With the absence of these attributes, highly effective teachers could be confronted with challenges that create job dissatisfaction and eventually attrition (Baptiste, 2019; Polatcan & Cansoy, 2019; Robinson et al., 2019). Therefore, principal leadership and support could directly be connected to job satisfaction of special education teachers, and school leaders are responsible for creating a culture to promote teacher retention (Dicke et al., 2020; Dou et al., 2017).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenology study was to explore special education teacher retention in a large school district in Texas and the perception of campus principals' support as defined through the domains from the Texas Principal Evaluation and Support System (T-PESS). The five principal support practice domains studied include Strong School Leadership and Planning; Effective, Well-Supported Teachers; Positive School Culture; High Quality Curriculum; and Effective Instruction. However, this study focused on Domain 2, Effective, Well-Supported Teachers, and Domain 3, Positive School Culture, of the T-PESS instrument, as these two domains most closely align with the research on the impact of culture and support in teacher

retention (Baptiste, 2019; Dicke et al., 2020; Dou et al., 2017; Polatcan & Cansoy, 2019; Robinson et al., 2019).

Research Questions

The following research questions and sub-questions guided my study:

1. How did special education teachers in an urban district in Texas perceive the support they received from their principals as defined through the TPESS evaluation?
    a. How did special education teachers perceive their principals' Effective and Well-Supported Teachers support practices?
    b. How did special education teachers perceive their principal's role in Positive School Culture?
2. How did the special education teachers describe the principal's role in special education teacher retention?
    a. What perceived Effective, Well-Supported Teacher support practices did principals engage in to support the retention of teachers?
    b. What perceived role did Positive School Culture play in the retention of teachers?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was Learning Organizational Theory. The framework derived from the need to understand teacher turnover in the United States. Senge (1994) defined learning organization as" the ability of an organization to expand capacity to create desired results because they learned as a whole together" (Senge, 1994, p. 1). Senge's theory on learning organizations focused on developing

learning organizations through culture and leadership capacity. I will explain and elaborate on this theory in relation to my supporting literature in Chapter 2.

Significance of the Study

A number of researchers (Aragon, 2016; Carothers et al., 2019; Mason-Williams et al., 2020a; Whipp & Geronime, 2017) have conducted qualitative studies on general education teacher retention, but there are few qualitative studies that explore the impact of principal support practices on special education teacher retention as perceived by K-12 special education teachers. The qualitative studies that do exist focus on the impact of principal's support on general education teachers. Some states have invested in statewide surveys to analyze data on teachers' perceptions of their working conditions and retention; however, Texas is currently not one of those states (New Teacher Center, 2016, p.4) Therefore, the present study will contribute to the growing body of literature by examining special education teachers' perceptions and identifying behaviors and practices principals must develop to support special education teachers and their desire to remain in the profession.

Definition of Terms

The definition of terms in this section will provide the reader with some context, clarification, and a frame of reference for the purposes of this study.

Administrative Support. Administrative support refers to the extent to which principals and other school leaders make teachers' work easier and help them improve their teaching. Administrative support can assume a variety of forms ranging from providing teachers with professional development opportunities to protecting them from district office mandates (Boyd et al., 2011).

Effective, Well-Supported Teachers (Domain 2-T-PESS). Domain 2 focused on how the principal retained effective, well-supported teachers by strategically recruiting, selecting, assigning, supporting, and building their capacity (Texas Education Agency, 2020b)**.**

Executive Leadership. Executive Leadership is Standard 3 of the five Texas Principal Standards and signifies the principals' overall responsibility to model a consistent focus and personal responsibility to improve student outcomes (Texas Education Agency, 2020b).

High Quality Instruction (Domain 4-T-PESS). Domain 4 focuses on how the principal worked with both district and campus staff to ensure that all students have access to a TEKS aligned, guaranteed and viable curriculum, assessments, and resources to engage in learning at appropriate levels of rigor (Texas Education Agency, 2020b).

Human Capital. Human Capital is Standard 2 of the five Texas Principal Standards and signifies the principals' overall responsibility to ensure high-quality teachers and staff in every classroom (Texas Education Agency, 2020b).

Instructional Leadership. Instructional Leadership is Standard 1 of the five Texas Principal Standards and signifies the principals' overall responsibility to ensure every student receives high-quality instruction (Texas Education Agency, 2020b).

Job Satisfaction. Job satisfaction refers to a positive or pleasant emotional state resulting from a person's appreciation of his/her own job experience (Demirtas, 2010).

Leavers. Leavers is a term commonly used to describe teachers who leave the education profession completely (Perryman & Calvert, 2020).

Movers. Movers is a term commonly used to describe teachers who move from one school to another school (Perryman & Calvert, 2020).

Positive School Culture (Domain 3-T-PESS). Domain 3 focused on how the principal establishes and implements a shared vision and culture of high expectations that drive improved outcomes for adults and students (Texas Education Agency, 2020b).

Principal. A principal is the highest-ranking educator in a school and primarily responsible for providing strategic direction and support to the school system. The principals' role on a campus includes responsibilities such as the development and implementation of standardized curriculum, evaluation and assessment of teaching methods, monitoring student achievement, encouraging parent involvement, continuous revision of policies and procedures, administration over the school budget, overseeing facilities and maintenance, and hiring and evaluating staff (Dowd, 2018).

School Climate. School climate signifies the quality, attributes, and character of school life. School climate is based on patterns of students,' parents,' and school personnel's experience of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices and organizational structures (Brown, 2019).

School Culture. School Culture is Standard 4 of the five Texas Principal Standards and signifies the principals' overall responsibility to establish and implement a shared vision and culture of high expectations for all staff and students (Texas Education Agency, 2019). Also, school culture is a set of norms, values and beliefs,

rituals and ceremonies, symbols and stories that make up the ‘persona’ of the school (Brown, 2019).

Stayers. Stayers is a term commonly used to describe teachers who remain at the same school (Perryman & Calvert, 2020).

Shared Decision-Making. Shared decision-making is a process through which individuals participate on a team to produce a collective wisdom to resolve certain issues by working together (Seher et al., 2018).

Strategic Operations. Strategic Operations is Standard 5 of the five Texas Principal Standards and signifies the principals’ overall responsibility to outline and track clear goals, targets, and strategies aligned to a school vision that continuously improves teacher effectiveness and student outcomes (Texas Education Agency, 2020b).

Teacher Attrition. Teacher attrition refers to the rate at which teachers leave the teaching profession. Several explanations for leaving the profession include alternate career choice, retirement, or other reasons for leaving the field (Raue & Gray, 2015).

Teacher Retention. Teacher retention refers to the rate to which teachers continue employment in the teaching workforce (Ramsay, 2019).

Work Conditions. Work conditions are defined as the degree to which the school creates a safe, pleasant, supportive work environment and includes factors such as salary, professional development, resources and materials, and effective school leadership (Seher et al., 2018).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

I assumed that the respondents understood the interview questions and answered all questions truthfully and objectively. The interview questions focused on special education teachers' perceptions of principal support practices. Therefore, the researcher assumed that the respondents' answers questions directly related to the special education teacher's perception of their current supervisor.

Limitations

The following are the limitation for this study:

1. Special education teacher respondents may have been concerned about answering the interview questions honestly because the questions were about their current supervisor; consequently, participants may have withdrawn from the current study at any time.
2. Perceptions of the teachers may not have reflected all information from given situations; therefore, responses had inherent bias due to the use of reflexive questioning.
3. Participants may have chosen not to answer all of the interview questions during data collection.
4. The research was limited to teacher perceptions related to the leadership criteria from the TPESS instrument.

Delimitations

The following were the delimitation for this research study:

1. Only special education teachers in a district in North Texas participated in the study.
2. I used the TPESS instrument to create questions focused on support and retention.
3. Participants in this study were currently employed as special education teachers; special education teachers that have left teaching were not participants of the study.

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

The current study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the statement of the problem, purpose, and rationale regarding the current study of principal support practices and its effect on special education teacher retention within a large North Texas school district. Chapter 2 consists of a review of related literature encompassing various studies regarding factors that affect teacher retention and attrition. Chapter 2 also includes an overview of research concerning principal support practices that contribute to teacher retention or attrition as well as recommendations from studies on how to support and retain teachers in the profession. Chapter 3 will detail the methodology and qualitative phenomenological design and will include the selection of the participants, instrumentation, data collection, and procedures for data analysis. Chapter 4 presents the findings and discussion of the current study, and Chapter 5 is a summary of the current study, including implications for further research and recommendations for principal support practices and special education teacher retention.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Special Education Teachers are highly sought after and in high demand. The challenge of teaching special education far exceeds the typical expectations of general education teachers. Special education teachers have the remarkable responsibility of accommodating students in their classrooms, providing instruction that meets accountability or benchmark standards, and ensuring the inclusion of students with special needs into general education classrooms (Cowan et al., 2016; Sutcher et al., 2019). These tasks have expanded the roles of special education teachers resulting in a change in the rates of teacher retention, job satisfaction, dedicated administrative supports, and longevity in the teaching profession (Sutcher et al., 2019; Garcia, & Weiss, 2019). High turnover rates coupled with special education teachers leaving the profession is costly to many school districts, in some cases costing as much at $20,000 per teacher (Collins & Schaaf, 2020). Ramos and Hughes (2020) state that the cost of teacher attrition is between $1 and $2 billion per year in the United States. They also find that administrators play an important role in reducing teacher attrition.

Researchers have noted that school districts with larger numbers of highly qualified teachers positively affect economic outcomes and students' academic successes (Podolsky et al., 2016). There were significant differences in the quality of public-school teachers and growing evidence that less effective teachers often congregate in schools that perform at lower levels and serve a larger number of disadvantaged students (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Research has further shown that school administrators can either decrease or enhance a teacher's

willingness to remain in the profession (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Podolsky et al., 2016). Additionally, teacher retention remained a crisis in many areas across the country, and the number of qualified teachers looking for jobs became fewer and fewer (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Podolsky et al., 2016).

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenology study was to explore special education teacher retention in a large school district in Texas and the perception of campus principal's support as defined through domains two and three from the Texas Principal Evaluation and Support System (T-PESS). Dicke, et al, (2020) and Shaukat, et al, (2019) found that special education teachers left the profession due to a lack of job satisfaction and lack of administrative support. For this literature review, I focused on factors that influence job satisfaction and the types of administrative support that most influence retention and attrition.

The Search Process

In this literature review, I (a) discussed retention and attrition of teachers; (b) discussed the role of job satisfaction in a teacher's decision to leave the profession; (c) discussed the role of administrators in the retention and attrition of teachers; and (d) discussed the alignment between the two T-PESS domains being studied and the literature on teacher retention and attrition. The literature review will close with an explanation of how the learning organization theory applies to my study. To begin my literature review, I examined the current literature on factors that affect special education teacher's retention, attrition, and job satisfaction. Additionally, I reviewed the research on the Texas Principal Evaluation and Support System (T-PESS) instruction with a specific focus on Domain 2, Effective and Well-Supported Teachers, and Domain

3, Positive School Culture. A variety of data sources were researched. Literature was accessed by searching for studies using Google Scholar and accessing the online library at the University of Tennessee. I used ProQuest and EBSCO host, with both used to identify, access, and obtain relevant literature, primarily peer-reviewed scholarly articles with an emphasis on those published within the past five years. Search terms included *teacher retention, teacher attrition, job satisfaction, administrative support, administrative influence on retention, learning organization theory,* and *special education teacher*. During the search process, I first searched for literature on all teachers and then focused on special education teachers specifically. There was minimal research specific to special education teachers, with the preponderance of literature addressing all teachers as a whole.

Once the initial search yielded approximately 100 articles, I reviewed abstracts of the studies to determine best fit to my literature review topics. Initially, I focused on studies that only discussed special education teachers specifically; however, I quickly found that the literature focusing on special education teachers was insufficient and I included research that discussed teachers as a group. Once an initial group of articles was culled from the search sources, I was able to review the references from each article to determine if additional articles related to my topic were referenced and could be access for review. The goal of the literature review was to determine if the principal practices measured in Domains 2 and 3 of the T-PESS relate to the behaviors identified in the literature as influencing teacher retention. This review also led to my selection of the *Learning Organizational Theory* as the theoretical framework of the study.

Why Special Education Teachers Leave the Profession

Special Education Teacher Shortage

The U. S. Department of Education highlighted a shortage of special education teachers in all 50 states as noted in the Teacher Shortage Areas Nationwide listing back in the year of 2012 (2018). A report entitled “Mobility in the Teacher Workforce” described the teacher shortages as a major contributing factor to moving the education system forward for most school districts in the United States (Aragon, 2016; Malatras, et al., 2017). The Texas Education Agency (2020a) designated special education as a teacher shortage area for the 2020-2021 school year. Texas joined eight states with critical area teaching shortages according to *The Learning Generation* (2016). Andrene (2020) said “teacher shortages are labor market disruptions that threaten school organizational stability and trigger uncertainty in recruitment and hiring (p5). Sutcher et al. (2019) reported that many school districts in the United States have a hard time filling special education positions, noting that special education teacher shortages were at 95% of the school districts in the United States in 2018 school year (Brownell, et al., 2018). To reduce the difficulties faced by principals in recruitment and hiring and to reduce the impact of teacher shortages, teachers must be retained.

Espinoza et al. (2018) reported that the first year of teaching is a time for teachers to progressively improve teaching skills and efficacy. Kim (2019) reported that a principal leadership skill plays an important element of whether a new teacher stay or leave the teaching profession. However, many special education teachers left the teaching profession after three years of teaching and before they can become proficient educators. The turnover of teachers imposes training, interviewing and productivity

costs on the school district (Espinoza et al., 2018). Also, in many rural and small school districts, special education teachers were the most difficult to attract and recruit (Espinoza et al., 2018).

Factors that Influence Teacher Turnover

There have been many instructors leaving the teaching profession since the mid-1990s (Ingersoll et al., 2016). The rates at which teachers leave has climbed to nearly 4.5 million in public schools over the past decade (Vilson, 2015). Teachers who opt to leave or transfer within the profession between schools and districts were at a 55% high (Gray & Taie, 2015; Ingersoll et al., 2016). The remaining 35% were instructors who decided to pursue different career paths altogether (Gray & Taie, 2015).

Nonetheless, regardless of why teachers leave the profession, shortages persist, and schools must deal with the departure of these teachers (Gray & Taie, 2015). A 2015 federal data poll on public school teachers discovered that 17% of public-school teachers who were new to the profession vacated their jobs after four years (Ingersoll et al., 2016; Vilson, 2015). In some rural and urban school districts in the United States, the number of teacher vacancies is much higher in some areas. Despite many rural and urban school districts having difficulty attracting and retaining highly qualified teachers, the numbers remained high for turnovers (Ingersoll et al., 2016; Vilson, 2015).

Hammonds (2017) identified unique structure barriers to the teacher labor markets. They included seniority influenced teacher assignments, tenure restrictions, and rigid salary schedules. The barriers were identified as the catalyst to turnover in many school districts. Podolsky et al. (2016) noted that several factors leading to turnover in many schools were: (a) compensation and salaries, (b) costs for entry into

the profession and preparation, (c) personnel management and hiring, (d) lack of support for new teachers, and (e) working conditions that include the effects of school leadership. Professional collaboration and shared decision-making were also cited as factors that influence teacher turnover (Podolsky et al., 2016). Resources and accountability for teaching were also some of the factors that determined whether a teacher left or remained in the teaching profession (Podolsky et al., 2016). Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond, 2017, discovered that higher teacher turnover rates are due to lower salaries, poor instructor quality, schools with lower budgets, absence of school programs, decreased teacher collaborations, and professional development for teachers. Supply and demand for teachers were also identified as factors that contributed to teacher shortages.

Teacher Job Satisfaction

Because of state-mandated testing programs coupled with the push to increase students' achievement in the school additional pressure was placed on teachers (Thibodeaux et al., 2015). Many teachers felt insurmountable pressure to raise test scores in their school districts (Thibodeaux et al., 2015). Although this was an issue faced by teachers, many reported that they planned to continue in the teaching profession for the next few school years (Thibodeaux et al., 2015). When considering teacher job satisfaction, many teachers responded that high stake testing led to some teachers leaving the profession (Thibodeaux et al., 2015).

A study on teacher job satisfaction stated that there was no difference between state-mandated testing in subject areas when exploring teacher job satisfaction (Torres, 2019). State-mandated and non-state mandated measures for subject area teachers

reported comparable perceptions of job satisfaction (Torres, 2019). Additionally, there was a relationship between teacher mentoring programs, morale, the desire to remain in the teaching profession, and job satisfaction (Torres, 2019). Many teachers expressed that they continued in the teaching profession due to student success, satisfaction with their subject area of teaching, and the need to make sure their students increased their achievement level (Torres, 2019).

Administration's support of teachers was another important area of job satisfaction for many teachers (Ford et al., 2018). A lack of administrative support in areas such as student discipline and high teacher to student ratio were two reasons some teachers left the teaching profession (Ford et al., 2018). Many teachers depended on school administration to support them in their decision-making and provide an environment where they can experience a high level of job satisfaction (Ford et al., 2018). Many teachers left the teaching profession due to personal reasons and job dissatisfaction; therefore, the administration needed to find ways to support each teacher at the school to increase overall student achievement (Torres, 2019). Some teachers felt overwhelmed by completing their daily teaching assignments, and administration should have been aware of this issue to communicate regularly with teachers to find strategies to overcome issues faced by teachers (Ford et al., 2018).

Ford et al. (2018) reported that many teachers are consumed daily with student discipline issues, paperwork, and state-mandated testing. Teachers felt as if student discipline issues in the classroom limited the effectiveness of teaching students each day due to the increasing number of behavioral issues faced (Ford et al., 2018). Some teachers felt that they should focus more on teaching students and less on the state-

mandated paperwork to be more effective teachers. Further, some teachers felt that policymakers made education decisions that affected them, and teachers were concerned about the increased amount of pressure placed on them daily to increase student achievement (Torres, 2019).

Principals' leadership behaviors and styles had a significant effect on teachers' intent to remain in the teaching profession (Baptisle, 2019). Researchers (Baptisle, 2019; Torres, 2019) noted a positive correlation between teacher mentoring, with respect to whether teachers continued in the teaching profession, and teacher job satisfaction. Principal's leadership style had the biggest impact on teacher retention in the classroom. (Baptisle, 2019; Torres, 2019). Torres (2019) found that mentorship with seasoned teachers and job satisfaction had the least influence on a teacher's desire to remain in the teaching profession.

Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2015) reported stress, job satisfaction, and coping strategies in the teaching profession. Coping strategies, consequences of stress, job satisfaction, and work-related stress among Norwegian teachers were examined. Groups of working and retired teachers, totaling 30, were interviewed and reported high job satisfaction, but also complained of heightened levels of stress and exhaustion as factors that determined job satisfaction. Consequences and coping techniques differed with the age of the respondents and there was a growing need for school districts to retain teachers due to the high demands of replacing them.

Rumschlag (2017) conducted a study on teacher burnout due to personal accomplishment, depersonalization, and emotional exhaustion. There was a correlation between teacher burnout and educational outcomes. Teachers experienced

counterproductive instruction, suboptimal student interaction, and increased absenteeism, which led to teacher attrition when they are burned out (Rumschlag, 2017). Interestingly, teacher turnover was higher than any other profession and many authorities attribute burnout to the phenomena. Teachers who earned their degree through traditional comprehensive pedagogy experienced lower burnout and attrition, thus there is an interrelationship between teachers' ability to make decisions on staying or leaving the profession and traditional pedagogy (Rumschlag, 2017).

Pay and Benefits

Teachers' pay and benefits have come to the forefront of much concern and discussion in recent years due to the higher demands placed on teachers to increase the academic achievement of students in the classrooms (Miller, 2014; Ritchie & Smith, 2017). Miller (2014) reported that some 65% of employees rated teacher pay as very important to them, and 37% rated it as important to them. Many teachers made pay and benefits the number one determinant of teacher's job satisfaction at work. In addition, 55% of the teachers rated the base rate of pay as very important, however, 65% of the respondents were satisfied with their base rate of pay (Miller, 2014). Further, some 43% of the teachers noted salary was significant to them, while 45% were satisfied with their compensation (Miller, 2014).

Mertler (2016) surveyed teachers on their career choice of teaching and found that some 25% of the teachers noted that if they had to choose a career again, they would not select a career in education. In the same survey, some 45% indicated that they were not sure if they would choose to teach as a career. Mertler's (2016) survey on teaching as a career also found that the number one reason teachers left the profession

was for a better paying job. Data from this study lastly indicated that if 55% of the teachers surveyed had to decide on teaching again, they would have chosen education as a career choice (Mertler, 2016).

Researchers reported several factors that contributed to teaching being an enjoyable and meaningful profession. Some of these factors include competitive salary, adequate benefits, and a positive work environment (Mertler, 2016; Ritchie & Smith, 2017). Competitive salaries were a strong determinant of teacher's job satisfaction (Ritchie & Smith, 2017). The Society for Human Resources Management (2016) conducted a study on employee's benefits and job satisfaction indicating that overall benefits were more important to employee's job satisfaction than the compensation. The results of this study also suggested that job satisfaction was more important than salary.

Liang and Akiba (2015) reported a strong relationship between employee's payment and job satisfaction, with some 65% of the respondents noting that they were pleased with the pay they received in their position. For some employees,' compensation did not play an important role in employment, although the employees enjoyed increases in their salaries. Studies in other occupations noted that the correlation between job and pay satisfaction for the employees was modest, yet positive (Liang & Akiba, 2015). Researchers also cited that there is a small correlation between the average level of an employee's pay and the average level of their job satisfaction (Mertler, 2016; Sojourner et al., 2014).

Sojourner et al. (2014) conducted a study on teacher pay, reform, and productivity. Their study explored the impact of pay incentives (teacher pay for performance, P4P) for teachers who adopted complementary human resource

management (HRM) practices for student achievement and workflow. The results indicated that teachers in districts who participated in the P4P reform, there were higher levels of student achievement. Additionally, the traditional manner of paying teachers based upon their experiences and education was a practice that needed to be revamped (Sojourner et al., 2014). The most significant effect, regarding increased student achievement, occurred in grades third through eighth.

The overall salaries and benefits teachers received affect the quality of those who chose this career path. This affected students' academic outcomes due to the time and effort teachers put into their assigned teaching duties (Baker et al., 2014). Low compensation was directly linked to teachers leaving the profession and wages were viewed unsatisfactory when compared to the time and hours required for educating students in a classroom setting (Baker et al., 2014; Newberry & Allsop, 2017). In the United States, the average teacher was paid less than other professionals who obtained college degrees (National Education Association, 2017). There was also a reduction of teachers' pay over the past decade due to budget problems and the lack of push by teachers' unions across the United States. The stagnation of compensation for teachers does not exist in other professions (National Education Association, 2017). Research indicated that in more than 30 states, average teacher salaries were at such low levels that some teachers with families have been eligible to receive assistance from statewide programs in addition to their incomes (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Despite many schools offering various systems of compensation, government aide primarily included food assistance and health benefits for families that consist of four or more (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Attrition existed because there were fewer opportunities for teachers to receive a higher salary and due to financial hardships, many decided to seek other employment with higher-paying employers (Hendricks, 2014). The Center for Education Compensation Reform indicated that increased compensation among effective teachers is the best practice to keep highly qualified teachers (Hendricks, 2014). The research, however, also showed that recognizing effective teachers alone will not eliminate the concerns of turnover and recruitment (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Recognizing effective teachers for educations populations who are more challenging to teach without targeting competitive compensation and salaries did not always prove successful (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Special Education Attrition

Williams and Dikes (2015) asserted that the shortage of special education teachers was caused in part by teacher stress and burnout, which led to many of them leaving the teaching profession. Billingsley and Bettini (2019) found that special education teachers who enter the teaching profession without the proper certification and training experience were more likely to leave the teaching profession than special education teachers who received the proper certification and training. Principals oversee teacher induction and socialization processes through formal and informal duties related to supervision and leadership (Kutsyuruba & Walker, 2020). Kutsyuruba and Walker (2020) found that the principal is responsible for identifying effective mentors, creating a positive culture, providing orientation and resource training, and providing formative and summative evaluation with appropriate goal setting. While formal structures are often designed by district level programing, the informal structures

of an induction program are heavily influenced by the principal on a campus, resulting in an increased influence of culture and effective evaluation on teacher success (Marz & Kelchtermans, 2020). Research showed that the school administrator is vital in creating a meaningful, effective induction and mentoring program (Kutsyuruba, 2020).

The primary reasons why many special education teachers left the field of teaching included personal issues, students discipline issues, paperwork, better salary, and benefits (Williams & Dikes, 2015). Hagaman and Casey (2018) reported that some special education teachers left the teaching profession due to stress, burnout, and the lack of administrative support. Several researchers classified the concern of new special education teacher in three categories. These included (a) inclusion, collaboration, and interactions with adults, (b) pedagogical concerns, and (c) managing roles in the classroom.

Personal Issues/Adult Interactions

The special education teachers who voiced their concerns with inclusion, collaboration, and interactions with adults cited their concern with unsupportive building principals and school climate, which led them to burnout and increased attrition rates (Hagaman & Casey, 2018; Williams & Dikes, 2015). Negative working conditions included the lack of adequate resources, facilities in the school district, not being able to participate in their school discussion making, the lack of administrative support, and unmanageable workload (Feng & Sass 2018). Special education teachers also cited that they left the teaching profession due to the lack of support from the local school principal and the school district as a whole (Langher et al., 2017).

Student Discipline and Diverse Learning Needs

The special education teacher who is concerned with pedagogical issues struggles to meet the diverse needs of their students both behaviorally and academically (Hagaman & Casey, 2018). Feng and Sass (2018) reported that many teachers who work in challenging schools frequently reported concerns with negative student's behavior issues and overall undesirable working conditions, which, in turn caused them to leave their teaching positions. Many special education teachers who lacked the feelings of success with their students chose to leave their position in these types of schools and secured a position at another school or school district outside of special education (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019). Some special education teachers indicated that they had a hard time with managing challenging students in the context of the demanding working environment with the inclusion of some students with disabilities in general education classrooms, which caused burnout (Langher et al., 2017; Yu et al., 2015). Supporting the diverse needs of students, behaviorally and academically, caused strain on special education teachers (Mathews, 2020).

Managing Roles of Special Education Teacher

In relation to managing roles in the classroom, novice special education teachers struggled to balance the numerous expectations placed on them by the principal, colleagues, and the school district supervisor (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019). Langher et al, (2017) noted that many special teachers leave the teaching profession due to teacher workload, excessive paperwork requirements, and negative school climate. Among the top job stressors for special education teachers were excessive workload and required paperwork, which were compounded by a lack of administrative support and a lack of

trust within the school environment (Mathews, 2020). The amount of non-teaching tasks required of special education teachers created chronic stress, resulting in special education teachers leaving the field (Ansley et al., 2016; Conderman & Katsiyannis, 2002)

Salary and Benefits

As previously mentioned in the literature review, all teachers struggled with the salary and benefits provided in the profession. With the addition of the above-mentioned responsibilities, special education teachers cited salary and benefits as a significant area of concern (Mathews, 2020). Langher et al. (2017) suggested that special education teachers made their decision to leave the field of special education due to being dissatisfied with their salary and decrease in funding that should be available to purchase education resources for their students and the classroom.

Special education teachers left the teaching profession due to burnout (Yu et al., 2015). Causes of burnout included excessive workload, low job satisfaction, behavior problems in the classroom, and the lack of student success (Yu et al., 2015). Langher et al. (2017) asserted that special education teachers who experienced support from family and colleagues and have a sense of personal accomplishment were more likely to fight the burnout and remain in the teaching profession. Mathews (2020) found that administrators played an active role in reducing the negative effects of job-related stressors, such as workload and student management, through the creation of a positive culture and supportive leadership.

School Principal Leadership

Recent research investigated the role of administrators in special education teacher attrition. Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) found that “[t]eacher turnover is reduced in settings that enable greater collaboration, professional learning, and engagement in decision-making – and where principals have longer tenures” (p. 56). The role of the principal in Texas is to enable all of these things to happen (Texas Education Agency, 2013) and the T-PESS instrument is designed to guide principals into providing that type of support.

School administrators must prepare themselves to address the administrative needs of their teachers and other staff in school districts (Cansoy, 2019; Wylie & Hodgen, 2020). The campus principal is second to the teacher when it comes to student achievement, and they are most effective when they support teachers (Leithwood et al, 2004). Teachers and other school staff depend on and look upon administration for guidance in the workplace, and the administration should make provisions to accommodate employees under their supervision. Administrators in schools should provide leadership that encompasses the nature and environment of the workplace (Cansoy, 2019; Wylie & Hodgen, 2020). They should also measure the progress of the teachers and the staff, and to provide strategies to assure success for all stakeholders involved (Özgenel, & Karsantik, 2020).

Sterrett and Richardson (2020) reported that professional development is one of the most effective tools available to develop and enhance teachers’ knowledge, as it allows the teachers to contribute to the learning of the students. Professional development could make the teacher feel that he or she is an important part of the

school and decision-making processes for student learning. Strategies for promoting effective learning programs in the school should be an ongoing element with the teachers and there should be collaboration among them and a sense of highly connected feelings to what teachers are doing in their classroom to increase the academic achievement of their students (Sterrett & Richardson, 2020). The school administration should provide professional development activities that embraced these characteristics not only for effective learning or to develop teaching strategies, but also increased teacher job satisfaction in the school (Sterrett & Richardson, 2020).

Classroom teachers are interested in developing and improving their pedagogical skills and classroom management strategies (Hopkins, 2014). Pedagogical skill enhancement can be done effectively if school administrators provide professional development activities around these areas to improve the teachers and staff member's skill set. There was a positive relationship between increases in student academic achievement and professional development (Hopkins, 2014). The positive correlation between professional development and increased academic performance was associated with teachers' feeling empowerment that they are part of the school decision-making process (Hopkins, 2014).

Administrators can also provide support in other ways to teachers and staff members such as assisting with health and wellness programs at the schools (Center for Disease and Control, 2018). This type of support is suitable for teachers and support staff as it can promote job satisfaction and can be a smart move on the part of the administration to help teachers improve their health and wellbeing because it can be hard to replace good teachers in many rural areas in the United States (Sterrett &

Richardson, 2020). Promoting good health and wellbeing of employees in a school district decreased medical care costs and employee absenteeism (Leo, 2015). Healthy teachers and staff members brought benefits to the school and the community at large (Bruselius-Jensen et al., 2017).

In Mathews' (2020) study on administrative support for special education teachers, the teachers needed accessibility and social emotional support to have job satisfaction. The findings also included a need for respect and appreciation, high quality professional development and provision, such as materials, planning time, mentors, and trust in decision-making. While teachers recognized that administrators did not always have control over job stressors, the teachers felt that administrators could provide more time to address non-teaching related tasks. Mathews (2020) also found that teacher perceived support from administrators played an active role in reducing stress and increasing teacher retention.

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceived relationship between principal practices, as measured by domains 2 and 3 of the T-PESS, and special education retention. Based on Mathews' (2020) study, the perceived support from administrators increases retention; however, little research has been done on perceptions of principal behaviors identified within T-PESS and perceived teacher support. The next part of the literature review will provide context around the T-PESS instrument.

Texas Principal Evaluation and Support System (T-PESS)

The Texas Principal Evaluation and Support System is a five-part rubric that aligns with Texas principal standards (for educator certification) and includes a self-

assessment and a supervisor assessment (TEA, 2020b). The supervisor uses a rubric, containing five domains of principal competency, and a goal setting form is used by the administrator as a self-reflection tool. The domains included in the T-PESS system are designed around the five standards defining the role of the principal (Goodwin et al., 2015; Marzano et al., 2005; TEA, 2020; Waters & Cameron, 2007). The five standards are:

1) Instructional leadership—ensuring every student receives high quality instruction.
2) Human capital—ensuring high quality teachers and staff in every classroom.
3) Executive leadership—modeling personal responsibility and a relentless focus on improving student outcomes.
4) School culture—establishing and implementing a shared vision and culture of high expectations for all staff and students.
5) Strategic operations—implementing systems that align with the school's vision and mission and improve the quality of instruction. (TEA, 2020b)

The domains of the T-PESS instrument incorporate these five standards into five domains:

1) Domain 1: Strong School Leadership and Planning: ensures that campus principals demonstrate clear leadership roles and responsibilities, and well-defined planning processes are incorporated to reach school improvement goals, identify, and implement effective instructional programs and services, and improve student outcomes.

2) Domain 2—Effective, Well-Supported Teachers: focuses on how the principal retains effective, well-supported teachers by strategically recruiting, selecting, assigning, supporting, and building their capacity.
3) Domain 3 – Positive School Culture: focuses on how the principal establishes and implements a shared vision and culture of high expectations that drive improved outcomes for adults and students.
4) Domain 4 – High Quality Curriculum: focuses on how the principal works with both district and campus staff to ensure that all students have access to a TEKS aligned, guaranteed and viable curriculum, assessments, and resources to engage in learning at appropriate levels of rigor.
5) Domain 5 – Effective Instruction: focuses on how the principal is responsible for ensuring that every student receives high-quality instruction that leads to student growth and achievement. (TEA, 2020b).

For the purposes of this study, I focused on Domain 2, Effective, Well-Supported Teachers, and Domain 3, Positive School Culture.

Domain 2, Effective, Well-Supported Teachers, represented skills identified in the literature as increasing retention for special education teachers. Domain 2 required the principal to demonstrate four specific essential actions (TEA, 2020b). First, the principal must demonstrate essential actions for human capital. These actions focus on recruitment of teachers through a comprehensive interview process, as well as using targeted and personalized strategies for the retention of high-performing staff. The principal must also identify teacher strengths and needs to determine appropriate staffing and team creation. Second, the principal must demonstrate essential actions for

talent management. Talent management includes supporting teacher leaders, monitoring team dynamics, implementing an effective mentor teacher program, and creating a culture of systemic support and progress. The third essential action for a principal focuses on observation feedback and coaching, while the fourth focuses on professional development. These essential actions are inter-related and require constant monitoring, feedback, oversight. Oliveras-Ortiz (2017) states that instructional coaching measured in T-PESS provides professional development, collaboration, and support and teachers that find their principals to be highly skilled in coaching have a higher level of trust and job satisfaction. This same study found that administrator presence correlates to perceived administrative support, which also increased teacher job satisfaction. Research on the T-PESS instrument and domain 2, in specific, is limited to one study; however, one of the purposes of this study was to add to that body of research.

Domain 3, Positive School Culture, evaluated the principal's role in establishing and implementing a shared vision and culture of high expectations (TEA, 2020b). Domain 3 of the T-PESS instrument also identified specific principal essential actions. The first essential action is creating an environment of high expectations and shared ownership for student success. This action connects the school vision to all decisions and daily practices. The second essential action requires the principal to include the entire school community in applying and reinforcing behavioral expectations systematically while executing the student code of conduct as a regular practice. The principal's third essential action provides for proactive and responsive student support services for academic and social emotional needs and the fourth essential action

involves families and the community in student learning. While there is no research literature that discusses domain 3 specifically as it relates to T-PESS, Mathews (2020) found a direct relationship with the creation of a positive, supportive culture and teacher retention. Therefore, this domain has the potential to influence special education teacher retention.

Theoretical Framework

Senge's theory of learning organizations requires a fundamental shift for school leadership to move from the traditional view of leadership to a model of shared leadership, where the administrator is responsible for building the organization through building professional capacity, building a shared vision, and working collaboratively to understand the complexity of the organization (Senge, 1994). The T-PESS instrument directly assesses the administrator's role in creating and implementing the shared vision and in building professional capacity (TEA, 2020b). This theory provides the lens through which administrative support increases teacher retention. The leader as teacher concept provides the framework through which administrators provide the professional development, support, and collaboration required of Domain 2 in the T-PESS instrument (Senge, 1994; TEA, 2020b). The leader as steward concept also explains the responsibility of the administrator to create and sustain a positive school culture, Domain 3, referenced in the T-PESS instrument (Senge, 1994; TEA, 2020b). Team learning, "a process of aligning and developing the capacity of a team to create the results its members truly desire," is required of an effective school leader and practicing team learning is directly assessed as part of the T-PESS instrument (Senge, 2006, p. 218). The perceptions of support and collaborative decision-making engages teachers

and staff in shared responsibility and shared goal attainment, which removes the focus of bureaucracy and focuses on a shared commitment to learning (Hsu & Lamb, 2020).

Summary

The literature review highlighted how the profession of teaching is a demanding job, especially for special education teachers. Special education teachers have the remarkable responsibility of accommodating students in their classrooms, providing instruction that meets accountability or benchmark standards, and support the inclusion of students with special needs into their general education classrooms (Cowan et al., 2016; Sutcher et al., 2019). Research conducted over the past decade pointed towards that retention of special education teachers were influenced by several factors within and outside the school district and the classroom. In many areas of the United States, special education teachers were in short supply, and it continues to be difficult for many school districts to hire and retain special education teachers. The literature also highlighted that if special education teachers were well trained, fully certified, and adequately prepared for their teaching position, they were more likely to stay in their respective positions. Also, teacher preparation, professional development, teacher quality, working conditions, salary and benefits were all contributing factors for greater numbers of special education teachers staying in the field. I also highlighted the importance of leadership and responsibilities school principals have to support and promote retention of special education teachers. The Texas Principal Standards clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of principals (Texas Education Agency, 2017, p. 17). The literature presented in this chapter supports connections between these

standards and administrative support practices needed to retain special education teachers.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenology study was to explore special education teacher retention in a large school district in Texas and the perception of campus principal's support as defined through the domains from the Texas Principal Evaluation and Support System (T-PESS). The five principal support practice domains studied include instructional leadership support, human capital, executive leadership, school culture, and strategic operations; however, this study will focus on Domain 2, Effective, Well-Supported Teachers, and Domain 3, Positive School Culture, of the T-PESS instrument, as these two domains most closely align with the research on the impact of culture and support in teacher retention (Baptiste, 2019; Dicke et al., 2020; Dou et al., 2017; Polatcan & Cansoy, 2019; Robinson et al., 2019). The present study contributed to the growing body of literature by examining special education teachers' perceptions of support and identifying behaviors and practices principals must develop to support special education teachers and support their desire to remain in the profession. Chapter 3 explains the research methods, including the research design, the research setting, population and sampling, instrumentation, data collection and data analysis, validity and reliability, ethical considerations, researcher's perspective, and the summary.

Research Design

I used a transcendental phenomenological research design for this study. Through this phenomenological study, I explored how special education teachers in a large school district in Texas perceive their campus principal's support as defined

through Domains 2 and 3 from the Texas Principal Evaluation and Support System (T-Pess) (TEA, 2020b) on their job satisfaction and retention. These perspectives involved special education teachers' perceptions on the five principal support practice domains studied that included: instructional leadership support, human capital, executive leadership, school culture, and strategic operations.

The transcendental phenomenological approach was founded on the philosophy of Edmund Husserl (Hammond et al., 1991; Husserl, 2012). Transcendental phenomenology is a qualitative research strategy in which one identifies the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants, both in terms of what was experienced and how it was experienced (Creswell, 2017; Husserl, 1970; Husserl, 2012; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). This research design became prominent in the late 19th century as a reaction against the dominant scientific positivist view of philosophy and psychology (Hammond et al., 1991; Husserl, 2012). Edmund Husserl, a German philosopher, is recognized as the founding father of transcendental phenomenology. He developed a philosophy and psychology that does not separate mind from matter but points to conscious experience as a central feature of life (Hammond et al., 1991; Husserl, 1970; Husserl, 2012). Further, Moustakes (1994) "described phenomenological research as involving a return to experience to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for a reflective structural analysis, which portrays the essence of the experience" (p. 25). Moustakes also noted that phenomenological research seeks to disclose and expound on the phenomena of behavior as they manifest themselves in everyday life.

A conscious experience is a certain awareness one has of given experiences while living through or performing them. According to the Global Workspace Theory (Baars, 2017), the cognitive processes of the brain allow for unconscious knowledge structures and consciousness of an experience to co-exist. This means that while Special Education teachers may not always note the sensory input and unconscious perceptions influencing a reaction in a specific situation, the brain can analyze the subconscious events to create a conscious experience within minutes. This theory supports the use of the transcendental phenomenological approach for this research because I probed the conscious experiences of Special Education teachers related to times when they made a conscious choice to stay or leave education based on administrator interaction. While some teachers may not have recognized the choice to stay or leave teaching in the moment of the interaction with the principal, the conscious experience solidifies shortly after the interaction ends (Panagiotaropoulos et al., 2020).

A phenomenological research approach provided the appropriate structure of which to explore this research study qualitatively. In addition, some researchers noted that phenomenology assumes that researchers who go through the exploration and interpretation of personal experiences and lived experiences can articulate patterns, trends, and tendencies that explain and heighten understanding (Creswell, 2017; Kayuouglu & Yetiser, 2015; Moustakes, 1994; Suddick et al., 2020). Phenomenological studies rely on interviews as the primary source of data collection in order to accurately record the lived experience as well as the perceptions of the participants during the lived experience. Studies that use interviews tend to explore how individuals make

sense out of their personal experiences (Kayuouglu & Yetiser, 2015; Moustakes, 1994; Sundler et al., 2019).

Participants in this study were viewed as self-interpreters who possessed the skill set to interpret their lives as well as the situations, artifacts, and others around them. In addition, “phenomenological studies refer to the study of personal experiences and requires a description or interpretation of the meaning of phenomena experienced by participants in an investigation” (Moustakes, 1994, p. 103). Special education teachers provided their perceptions and lived experiences of their principals’ support practice domains such as instructional leadership support, human capital, executive leadership, school culture, and strategic operations.

Context of the District

The population for this study came from participants associated with a school district in the northern part of Texas using the pseudonym Desert ISD. The school district had over 550 special education teachers providing services for some 6500 students in special education in grades K-12. The district, at the time of the study, served over 100 square miles and 10 cities. Demographically, the district was less than 1% American Indian, 24% Asian, 13% African American, 26% Hispanic, less than 1% Native Hawaiian, 33% White, and less than 1% two or more races. The district was identified as a district of innovation, which allowed for flexibility in some programming and the calendar, and the district was considered a Chapter 41 school, which allowed the state to recapture more than $1.5 billion to redistribute to other districts in Texas.

Population and Sample

This qualitative phenomenological research study used a purposive criterion-inclusion sampling method to select the population and the data sources to obtain the perceptions of special education teachers' in-depth views. Purposive sampling means to select participants who meet the criteria or standards that the researcher set for the study (Creswell, 2017; Etikan & Bala, 2017). Using a purposive, criterion-inclusion sampling method allowed for "for the identification and selection of information-rich cases" that were knowledgeable of the phenomenon being studied and that were available and willing to participate (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Using a purposive criterion inclusive sampling technique allowed for the selection of participants that had experienced the phenomenon being studied. (Guetterman, 2015; Palinkas et al., 2015.) The inclusion criteria for this study included special education certification and employment with the same administrator for at least three years, with an equal number of teachers being selected from elementary, middle school, and high school levels. These criteria were selected to ensure that the teachers participating in the study had experienced the leadership of the same administrator prior to and during the pandemic. The researcher verified that each participant met the study criteria. The exclusion criteria included special education teachers who were not certified and/or who had less than two years of experience working as a teacher of the district. Once a list of teachers identified as meeting criteria was generated, a request for participation was sent out to all teachers.

The population for this study came from 550 certified special education teachers that worked in Desert ISD and met the criterion for inclusion in the study. Participant selection began by sending an invitation for participation to the entire population to participate in a sample survey used to determine if the teacher met the criteria to be included in the study. The last question was will you be willing to be a participant in the study that may include one or more interviews. From the survey, I divided those that indicate willingness to participate in the study into grade level groupings: elementary, middle school, and high school. Teachers selected from each grouping for participation met additional criteria based on the longevity of working with the same campus administrator. Additional criteria for narrowing the group of participants included (in order of application) certification pathway (alternative certification vs. traditional certification), and employment experience outside of education.

The sample included 11 certified special education teachers in grades K-12. Creswell (2017) reported a sample size of 5 to 20 participants is sufficient for a qualitative research study while Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that the number of participants should be determined by saturation of data. Saturation of data is further defined as the point at which replication of data, or information, occurs and no new data is found (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nelson, 2017). Data collection continued until saturation was met.

Instrumentation

The instrument for this research study was a researcher-created open-ended interview protocol. The interview questions derived from research sources reported in the literature review of this study (see Appendix A) and the Texas Principal Evaluation

Support System (T-PESS), which is central to the purpose of the study. The semi-structured interviews consisted of items that asked the participants open-ended questions in the interview process (Creswell & Poth, 2012). The individual interview instrument focused on the perceptions of how special education teachers in a large school district in north Texas perceived their campus principal's support as defined through the domains from the Texas Principal Evaluation and Support System (T-Pess) on their job retention. This study was intended to fill gaps in the available research on the perceptions of special education teachers and how they perceive the principal at their local school in providing support in the areas of instructional leadership support, human capital, executive leadership, school culture, and strategic operations. The present study contributed to the growing body of literature by examining special education teachers' perceptions and identifying behaviors and practices principals must develop to support special education teachers and their desire to remain in the profession.

Field Test of Instruments

To increase the credibility to this qualitative study, I conducted a field test with the interview questions to ensure the validity of the interview protocol (Creswell, 2017; Ebmeier, & Ng, 2005). The researcher selected three people that mirrored the characteristics of the participants to participate in a pilot interview. Feedback from the field test improved the interview questions before using them in the research study. In addition, field testing aided in determining whether the interview questions had flaws, limitations, and fell within the design of the study (Creswell, 2017; Ebmeier, & Ng,

2005). This information provided the researcher a chance to revise the interview questions prior to conducting the research study.

The experts also reviewed the interview questions to determine the credibility of the questions. The participants who took part in the field testing with the interview questions provided feedback to the researcher on the interview protocol. The feedback on the interview protocol helped in determining what questions need to be changed, to combine, to eliminate or to reword (Creswell, 2017; Ebmeier, & Ng, 2005). I made changes to the questions based on the feedback from the experts.

Data Collection

Data was collected using open-ended interviews with each of the participants. The goal of the interview was to encourage the participants to express themselves freely with their responses to the interview questions. The interview protocol consisted of open-ended questions that were aligned with the research questions and the T-PESS evaluation system. All of the participants in this study were asked the same interview questions, with probing or follow-up questions used as necessary (McGrath et al., 2019). The interviews took place via a secured virtual meeting room with each interview being recorded for later transcription. Cross et. al (2020) state that unstructured, in-depth, one-on-one interviews should be the primary method of data collection in phenomenological research. This allows for the researcher to participate in dialogue and make observations that are noted by the researcher during the interview as well as providing a later transcript for analysis (Sloan & Bowe, 2014); however, I chose a semi-structured interview process to ensure alignment between the T-PESS and teacher perceptions. Only a few questions in the interview were predetermined to focus initial

discussion on perceptions of the different areas evaluated by the T-PESS instrument. My process combined basic elements of the structured interview, using some previously prepared questions, and allowing for objective comparison of participants, with the benefits of the unstructured interview, allowed for free-flowing conversation and depth of reflection for participants.

The interview protocol I followed is the four-phase process to Interview Protocol Refinement framework (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). This four-phase process started with ensuring the alignment between interview questions and research questions. Because participant responses are layered and complex, the use of aligned research questions served to keep the interview aligned with the purpose of the study. Neumann (2008) recommends the use of an interview matrix to identify which questions potentially produce information applicable to a specific research question. The goal of phase one was to “elicit relevant answers that were meaningful and useful in understanding the interviewee’s perspective. That is basically what interviewing is all about” (Patton, 2015, p. 471).

The second phase of IPR is to create an inquiry-based conversation (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Castillo-Montoya (2016) says researchers need “to develop a protocol that promotes a conversation, compose interview questions different from how you would write research questions (p. 813).” The research questions should include my knowledge of the every-day practices of special education teachers developed specifically to be understandable to participants and designed to create conversation. The interview should follow conversations protocols, such as not interrupting and building rapport. To this end, there were four types of questions: introductory, transition,

key questions, and closing questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I also considered follow-up questions to seek clarity and prompts to elicit responses. An important step in this phase of IPR is bracketing or identifying any preconceived ideas and thoughts I have when creating the protocols for inquiry-based conversations. I identified any biases and ideas that I had about my research questions when writing interview questions (Chan et al., 2013).

The third phase of IPR included the review of the interview questions and protocol. Feedback on the clarity of questions and the clear alignment of interview questions to the research questions increased trustworthiness and ensured that the questions show reduced bias. Getting reviews from subjects that fit the sampling criteria from a district other than Desert ISD allowed for participant feedback of the protocol and used experts and my research committee allow for the iterative process of review (Castillo-Montoya, 2016).

The fourth, and final, phase of the IPR is piloting the interview protocol. The interview protocol used conversational, inquiry-driven questions with each question analyzed for clarity and answerability using feedback, and then it was time to pilot the protocol with people that mirror the characteristics of the sample population (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Interview simulation should take place in the same method as the research interviews will take place and the focus will be on me gaining experience following conducting the interviews. I took note of any improvements or revisions that needed to take place and make those changes prior to conducting the research.

Data Analysis

Data analysis included the coding, sorting, and the identification of relationships

and themes within data (Tomaszewski et.al., 2020). Data analysis is needed for the researcher to provide outcomes of a research study and to share it with other stakeholders who may be interested in the results of the study (Shinebourne, 2011). There are several types of data analysis used in phenomenological research, such as word count analysis, keywords-in-context analysis, classical content analysis, constant comparison analysis and discourse analysis. According to Sechelski and Onwuegbuzie (2019) multiple methods should be used to provide a thorough analysis of data.

In this research study, I analyzed the data by using an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which was more appropriate to the phenomenological research approach (Alase, 2017; Smith et al., 2009). IPA is a data analysis process used to develop certain patterns, trends and thematic content that was central to the research questions (Alase, 2017; Shinebourne, 2011). I used this process and strategy to analyze the interviews data based on a five-stage process for analyzing phenomenological interviews. This five-stage process included (a) comprehensive reading, (b) tertiary note taking, (c) identifying themes, (d) categorizing the text into integral units, (e) abbreviate understanding across cases, and (f) establishing narratives for each theme to formulate the tenets for emergent definitions and perceptions (Shinebourne, 2011). For the purposes of this study, a direct content analysis using keywords-in-context was used (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) based on the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) procedures.

According to Alase (2017), researchers should not begin data analysis until they have reflected on their own experiences related to the phenomenon in order to avoid interjecting personal bias into the data analysis process. Researchers also call this

bracketing, or systematically posing questions to increase self-awareness and reflection throughout the data collection and analysis process (Chan et al., 2013). By describing prior experiences overtly, the research can avoid reading into the data during analysis. This is a determination of positionality. According to researchers, positionality describes a researcher's position on the research topic and the researcher's worldview (Foote & Bartell, 2011; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013; Rowe, 2014.) This positionality identifies researcher bias, and the identification of the bias will allow me to identify assumptions about the experiences of participants based on my own biases (Holmes, 2020). While analyzing data and reporting findings my positionality also identified where I have, or may have, influenced my research. My positionality statement included a statement of my worldview of the research process, influencing factors on my research, such as age, gender and career, and my pre-determined position about the research. My positionality statement also included a discussion of how these factors might have influenced the research process and how my positionality may have changed over the course of the research (Holmes, 2020; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

Once I identified positionality through bracketing, the first step of the IPA procedure was to complete a comprehensive reading by reviewing and reading the transcripts to gain a thorough understanding of the information from the transcribed data (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Shinebourne, 2011; Sundler et al., 2019). This was repeated several times to get the proper sense of the data. Sundler et al (2019) states that open-minded reading should include an interpretation of data into keywords and concepts that are easily understood, and the goal is to identify new information rather than focusing on information that is already known in the literature.

The second step of tertiary note taking completed was examining the words used by the participants from the data (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Shinebourne, 2011; Sundler et. al., 2019). This step allowed me the opportunity to further look at the transcribed data in a way that laid out the groundwork for the emergence patterns and themes. In addition, this aided me in obtaining the perceptions of participants in the study and added meaning to their responses from the data. During this step, I took notes in the margins and note shared vocabulary and experiences. There was also a search for meaning in each experience (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Shinebourne, 2011; Sundler et al., 2019). The goal for this step was to give meanings preliminary names. The use of directed content analysis allowed me to identify themes from previous research in addition to identifying themes based on the relevant research findings in the interview data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

The third step of identifying themes was completed by a thorough examination of the data to determine the themes that emerged from the transcribed data. This was accomplished by coding the transcripts based on themes. The goal for this step was to give meanings preliminary names (Sundler et al., 2019). I completed this by moving between the holistic description of the participants' experience and the part of the experience that use specific vocabulary and shared meaning. At this step, emerging themes and overarching ideas became evident. Suddick et al. (2020) recommend that creation of a visual map to create an analysis across all of the transcripts. This visual map can provide a cyclical analysis of themes or a web of themes as they emerge from analysis. The use of a visual map allowed for the identification of emergent themes as a precursor to identifying similarities and differences among themes.

The fourth step of categorizing the text into integral units, was accomplished by sorting themes by categories on the perceptions through classifying the interpretation of their experiences of the participants. This step included identifying similarities and differences between meanings as well as identification of the similarities and differences in lived experiences of the participants (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Sundler et al., 2019). Once the codes from the initial analysis were grouped, and central organizing concept was created to provide domain summary, which were developed into themes in the next step (Love et al., 2020).

The fifth step of abbreviate understanding of the data from the participants allowed the development of patterns and themes in the analysis of the data collected to guide in the understanding of the phenomenon within the transcribed text. Patterns and themes were identified, and particular care was taken so that I let meaning emerge rather than incorporated biases and personal experiences into the data (Love et al., 2020; Sundler et al., 2019). Tentative themes were identified through the language of the participants and any subthemes were identified in this step.

During the fifth step, the data was analyzed based on the framework of the Learning Organizational Theory (Senge, 2006). This framework states that the whole school will grow in capacity by learning together and that the desired result within the context of teacher retention can be gained by the process of group learning. In the same regard, organizational influences, such as leadership performance, negatively impact teacher attrition, and the ability to evaluate responses to leadership performance in the context of the decision to continue teaching or leave can create opportunities for organizational growth (Senge, et. al., 2000). Data were analyzed using directed content

analysis by identifying key concepts from the theory to create operational definitions to each category with the purpose of processing the interactions of the stakeholders to characterize the overall conscious experiences of Special Education teachers (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Analyzing organizational experience that influence the Special Education teachers' retention with a focus on leadership skills gave me the insight to make recommendations on organizational learning and responses that Senge et. al. (2000) theorize is necessary to produce long-term organizational growth and change.

The sixth step established narratives for each theme to formulate the information for emergent patterns and themes. A narrative that forms the basis of the research findings was explicitly developed into written text. Creating a narrative involved taking the themes identified in the final table and writing them up one by one with an analysis of the participants' discussions and the researchers' commentary (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). To conclude the analysis of data, a discussion of and reflection on the themes as they related to the research questions was formulated to outline meanings of the described experiences (Sundler et al., 2019).

A holistic approach to analyzing the open-ended interview was used in order to write a "thick description" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) description of how special education teachers in a large school district in north Texas perceive their campus principal's support as defined through the domains from the Texas Principal Evaluation and Support System (T-Pess) on their job retention. The IPA process and qualitative software, ATLAS.ti, were used to organize and code the data for accuracy. Additionally, I coded the data by hand to compare to the software analysis. Once this coding was

completed, themes were explicitly named and discussed (Shinebourne, 2011; Sundler et al., 2019).

Trustworthiness and Credibility

Credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability are the components of the criteria that provide evidence of trustworthiness in qualitative research studies (Cope, 2014; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). In order to ensure validity and reliability in the study, credibility, transferability, consistency, and verifiability strategies were utilized. Lincoln and Guba (1985) reported that qualitative researchers speak of trustworthiness, which simply asks if the research can be trusted. In this regard, based on qualitative design, I used semi-structured open-ended interviews to assess the validity and reliability of the study using the criteria of credibility, transferability, reliability, and confirmation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

The data collection, data management, and analysis were followed in a systematic and ethical way and is a significant part of trustworthiness. During the research process, the data collection both audio and written were saved on my password protected computer located in my home office to safeguard the confidentiality of the participants. Journal notes, paper copies of the participant's transcripts, and the data manuscripts, coding, and any other handwritten notes used to analyze the data were locked in a file cabinet in my home office. I was the only person with the key. Participants printed data was identified by a letter and number such as P1, P2, P3 etc. during the data collection process and colors with participant's initials were used for identification by me during the data analysis, which also maintained each person's identity to remain confidential. In addition, the integrity of the study was maintained by

adherence to all procedures and policies as outlined by University of Tennessee Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Credibility

Triangulation of data is critical to the credibility of qualitative findings (Alase, 2016; Johnson et al., 2020). Suddick et. al (2020) believe the interview, dialogue, and interpretation of data leads to an extension of meaning that creates a new understanding of the phenomenon being studied. For this study, the following triangulation forms was used to corroborate the topic under investigation and determine if there are inconsistencies in the data: triangulation of data sources by using individuals from different levels of K-12 education, triangulation of data analysis by analyzing data with and without the use of technology, and triangulation of investigators by having the participants of the research review member check the final data analysis. The first pillar of triangulation for this study was the inclusion of Special Education teachers with varied backgrounds that work in different levels of primary and secondary education (Denzin, 1978; Lemon & Hayes, 2020; Patton, 1999). The second step of triangulation was triangulating data analysis through the use of the data-mining software ATLAS.ti in addition to the analysis of the data without technology support (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007; Lemon & Hayes, 2020). According to Leech and Onwuegbuzie, at least two types of data analysis tools (technology-base and researcher analysis) will increase representation of the themes from the study in addition to helping the research extract satisfactory meaning from the data. The final step of triangulating the data was member checking of the synthesized data analysis (Birt et al., 2016; Harvey, 2015; Walter et al., 2014). Once data was analyzed and thematic analysis is complete, I provided all

participants with a summary of the thematic analysis that did not include any participant identifying information and asked to review the information. Birt, et al. (2016) call this process synthesized member checking and members are encouraged to add notes and reflections to the concise summarized themes provided from the researcher. These three triangulation approaches increase the trustworthiness of the findings.

I also used member checking to add credibility to the collected data. Member checking was conducted by sending the transcribed interviews back to the participants to check for accuracy (Birt et al., 2016; Creswell, 2017; Iivari, 2018; Madill & Sullivan, 2018; McGrath et al., 2019). I sent the transcribed interview back to each of the participants to check the transcribed data for accuracy, and the participants had one week to return the transcribed interview data. The first member-checking process was completed prior to beginning data analysis. When each participant reviewed the transcript of the interview, only one participant requested a minor edit, which did not change the meaning of the answer.

Ethical Considerations

I followed all ethnical guidelines due to the use of human subjects involved in this study. Multiple steps were taken to ensure the privacy rights of research participants involved with this study. Approval was obtained to conduct the study from the University of Tennessee Institutional Review Board (IRB) to contact participants and to conduct data for this study. Permission was also be obtained from the local school district to which the study took place. Each research participant was provided with a detailed description of the purpose of the study, the nature of the study, and the procedures for the interviews and the surveys. The participants' informed consent was provided at the

beginning of the study so that the participants could have the option of withdrawing from the study at any time. A signed informed consent was obtained from each participant before the researcher conducted the interview and the survey. All questions from participants related to the study were answered to ensure that each participant understood the study process.

The only anticipated risks to participants of this study related to the researcher's relationship to the potential participant. The participants worked in a large school district in North Texas and the researcher held a leadership position within district administration. At the time of the study, no potential participants directly reported to the researcher; however, the potential for coercion could be intimated based on the role of the researcher in the district (Resnik, 2016). To avoid any semblance of coercion, the informed consent document clearly provided the research regulations and guidelines as well as a statement assuring participants that employment would not be impacted by participation in the study (Resnik, 2016).

To minimize the potential for any other ethical risks, the participants would be interviewed via a secured virtual meeting platform only accessible by the participant. The researcher followed the interview protocol for this study to aid in reducing researcher bias (Resnik, 2016). The privacy of the participants was protected by not putting participant names, or the name of the local school or administrator, or the school district on the participants' materials relating to this study. The researcher also kept all information pertaining to the participants and the school district confidential in the final data analysis. In addition, the individual interviews and the survey were scheduled at a convenient time and place with the help of each participant. The interviews were

conducted individually to ensure confidentiality and to avoid contact between the participants. No details from the interviews and the survey were disclosed with anyone else in the school district.

Statement on Positionality and Research Bias

As a previous special education teacher, campus administrator, and current district special education administrator, I recognized that I do have my own bias and perspective to the study. These biases included my own perceptions and opinions of how the five domains within the Texas Principal Standards impact special education teachers' decisions to leave or remain in the classroom. These past experiences influenced my research. However, I counteracted my bias by accurately capturing and reporting factual finding of participant's responses throughout each phase of the research. This was done through a researcher's self-reflection statement prior to and following data analysis, which is presented in Chapter 4 (Alase, 2017).

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore how special education teachers in a large school district in Texas perceived their campus principal's support as defined through the domains from the Texas Principal Evaluation and Support System (T-Pess) on their job retention. The five principal support practice domains studied include: instructional leadership support, human capital, executive leadership, school culture, and strategic operations; however, this study will focus on Domain 2, Effective, Well-Supported Teachers, and Domain 3, Positive School Culture, of the T-PESS instrument, as these two domains most closely align with the research on the impact of culture and support in teacher retention (Baptiste, 2019; Dicke et al.,

2020; Dou et al., 2017; Polatcan & Cansoy, 2019; Robinson et al., 2019).. The sample for this study consisted of 11 special education teachers in a school district in the northern part of Texas. The data was collected using open-ended interviews and a survey. Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used to analyze the data. IPA was a data analysis process used in data analyses to develop certain patterns, trends, and thematic content central to the research questions.

Chapter 4

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenology study was to explore special education teacher retention in a large school district in Texas and the perceptions of teachers of their campus principals' support as defined through the domains from the Texas Principal Evaluation and Support System (T-PESS). My research focused on participant perceived support of campus principals for special education teachers. Two research questions were crafted to guide my study:

1. How do special education teachers in an urban district in Texas perceive the support they receive from their principals as defined through the TPESS evaluation?
2. How do the special education teachers describe the principal's role in special education teacher retention?

Each question was supported by two sub-questions designed to investigate teachers' perceptions of the support practices of principals and how those perceptions impacted special education teachers' decisions to stay in the field or leave education.

Participants

The participants in this study included teachers from a large school district in Texas with both elementary and secondary teachers represented. Table B1 lists basic demographic data of the participants and is followed by a brief description of each participant. The table and descriptions are provided for the purpose of giving context to the primary themes. The data included in the table include the level of experience, years

of teaching in Desert ISD, and total years of teaching experience. The participants were given a pseudonym to protect their identity (see Table B1).

Participant 1: Missy. Missy is an elementary resource special education teacher with three years of teaching in Desert ISD, where she has worked with one principal. Missy has a total of six years of teaching experience. At the time of the participant interview, Missy was teaching a self-contained classroom where she instructed multi-grade level students. Though she has contemplated certification as a diagnostician, Missy related her desire to maintain in special education as relationship building with her kids and seeing their progress over time.

Participant 2: Terry. Terry is an elementary self-contained special education teacher with twelve years of experience, all of which have been in Desert ISD. He has worked with his current principal for six years. Terry's experience has all been in special education, with a shift in grade levels from middle school for seven years to elementary. Terry likes to say his "classroom is the Cadillac of classrooms."

Participant 3: Stacy. Stacy is an elementary self-contained special education teacher with a total of fourteen years of teaching experience. She has worked in Desert ISD for five years with one principal who shared with her in her first year as a teacher at the campus, that there are three people that you need that are strong to run a school properly - an office manager, a secretary, and a special education leader "because if special education is in the dumps, then the whole school will be in the dumps."

Participant 4: Elise. Elise is a middle school inclusion special education teacher with six years of teaching experience, all within Desert ISD. Prior to teacher, Elise worked in the corporate world and was self-employed. Although she shares the

difficulties of the position and the pay, she stays in education for the relationship with her students and “just seeing them grow or change every day.”

Participant 5: Heather. Heather is a middle school self-contained special education teacher. She has eleven years of experience, all of which have been within Desert ISD. Her current principal has a background in special education which Heather shared assists in her support as an educator. Heather serves on the campus leadership team and works directly with her campus administrator of five years to develop campus and team goals. Heather shared that internal motivation is needed to be a special education teacher, but external support along the way is important to staying in the job.

Participant 6: Annie. Annie is a high school resource special education teacher with eighteen years of experience in the classroom. Annie has taught all eighteen years in special education in Desert ISD. She has worked with 3 different principals. Annie shared that intrinsic motivation is a must for special education teachers.

Participant 7: Charlotte. Charlotte is a high school self-contained special education teacher with a total of twenty-six years of teaching experience. She has worked in Desert ISD for six of those years and shares with her current principal, she has “never had so much support than this is my 27 years of teaching.” Charlotte is a curriculum writer for Desert ISD and shares her expertise with her peers.

Participant 8: Londa. Londa is a middle school inclusion special education teacher with thirteen years in Desert ISD. She has a total of twenty years of teaching experience in the classroom. Londa shared that in the interview for her current position, she left with a hug from the interview panel and “was like, yeah I got this you know, but I knew I had it.”

Participant 9: Rhonda. Rhonda is an elementary resource special education teacher with fourteen years of teaching experience. She has taught in Desert ISD for three years. Rhonda was a special education teacher in a self-contained classroom prior to her current position with her campus administrator and left Desert ISD to pursue other career options. She recently rejoined Desert ISD with the same principal. Rhonda shared, “She's been my principal in different areas of my life.” Rhonda explained that being a special education teacher is what she was created to do.

Participant 10: Jamie. Jamie is a high inclusion school special education teacher with ten years in Desert ISD. He has a total of fourteen years of special education teaching experience both at the elementary and secondary levels. Jamie teaches in a self-contained classroom with multi-age and grade level students. His current principal has nineteen years of experience within public school, providing comfort to Jamie’s support level in the classroom. Jamie shared his son has autism and this has helped him understand how to get into the brains of his students. He stated, “I'm just really good at that.”

Participant 11: Sara. Sara is a twenty-seven-year veteran special education inclusion teacher. All her years of experience have been within Desert ISD. Sara relates her positive experience as a teacher to relationships with her peers, “the people you work with every day, side by side, I mean, I think that makes a difference.”

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore special education teacher retention in a large school district in Texas and the perception of campus principals’ support as defined through the domains from the Texas Principal

Evaluation and Support System (T-PESS), with a focus on Domain 2, Effective, Well-Supported Teachers, and Domain 3, Positive School Culture, of the T-PESS instrument, as these two domains most closely align with the research on the impact of culture and support in teacher retention (Baptiste, 2019; Dicke et al., 2020; Dou et al., 2017; Polatcan & Cansoy, 2019; Robinson et al., 2019). The goal of my research was to determine if the behaviors and attributes measured by the T-PESS instrument reflected teacher perceptions of principal effectiveness as it impacts their willingness to stay in the field of education.

Themes for Research Question 1: Principal Support

Research Question 1 focuses on principal support as measured by the T-PESS. The five principal support practice domains studied include Strong School Leadership and Planning; Effective, Well-Supported Teachers; Positive School Culture; High Quality Curriculum; and Effective Instruction. However, this study will focus on Domain 2, Effective, Well-Supported Teachers, and Domain 3, Positive School Culture, of the T-PESS instrument, as these two domains most closely align with the research on the impact of culture and support in teacher retention (Baptiste, 2019; Dicke et al., 2020; Dou et al., 2017; Polatcan & Cansoy, 2019; Robinson et al., 2019). Domain Two focuses on principal behaviors, such as: recruiting, selecting, assigning, and inducting highly effective educators; establishing systemic support strategies that are consistently applied and supportive, implementing a process of observation and evaluation that promotes professional growth, and personalizing and aligning professional development. Domain Three includes principal behaviors, such as aligning the vision, mission, and goals of the school, establishing clear expectations for all, and providing

support and community collaboration (Texas Education Agency, 2019b). These domains and practices were the foundation of the interview instrument used for data collection.

Following the process established in Chapter 3, the analysis of the data yielded four primary themes the teachers felt relevant: interconnected relationships (the way in which all campus members are connected), respect, admiration, and appreciation between all campus members, global communication (global conversations between administrators and all educational stakeholders), and consistency through equitable and timely interactions between administrators and all campus stakeholders. These themes remained consistent in teacher comments across all grade levels. The discussions also generated several substantive sub-themes that are discussed in each section below.

Interconnected Relationships

Relationships between an administrator and the campus community were a major theme throughout the participants' responses. As Charlotte shared, having "good relationships with your faculty are going to trickle down to the students, and I think that's absolutely critical." Smaller sub-themes that were a part of this theme included relationships with teachers in general and relationships with special education specifically.

The data established that principals should have a deep and rich relationship with all teachers. This relationship should be professional in nature but should acknowledge that each teacher has an existence outside of the school building that requires a work/life balance. Londa explained that "a principal needs to have some idea how his teachers are feeling, have some idea of how the teachers are collaborating, you

know…He has to know how his teachers are feeling." Elise commented that "principals need to actually walk in the shoes of teachers. A lot of principals have gotten to that level, and they have almost forgotten what it was like to be a teacher and to actually be in a classroom." Stacy stated that:

> Principals can retain highly effective educators by supporting them…I feel that it is all about the culture of a school. That is what matters the most. If the culture of the school feels inviting and loving and supported and they will retain teachers easier and more effectively. [My principal] is very supporting and very, very kinds. The general feeling when I walk into the school is very inviting. That is really, really important. She is very, very good at that.

The culture of a school is impacted by the level of support Stacy feels from administration. Londa and Stacy both found that the principal creates the culture of the school.

Other participants also explained the importance of principal and teacher relationships. Rhonda had this to say about principals having relationships with teachers:

> [Principals] can invest in teachers. That means knowing their names, knowing about them, knowing that we are more than just a body that comes to school. Knowing that we do what we do, whether it be general education or special education, we do it because that is our heart. That is our passion and understanding that helps us be efficient. It helps us to be what each child needs…I think understanding that we are more than just a teacher. That we are

> also parents. That we are spouses. That we are caregivers to our parents. That we are more than just a teacher…Value our time.

Participants also suggested that supportive principals see teachers as real people, not just as campus employees. Heather asserted, “I think it is important that the administrator know the person that they’re observing. Know their background, know their history, and know what their experience level is before you are going to judge different teachers on different things.” The data supported that relationships mean knowing the teacher professionally.

The principal’s relationship with teachers should also include meeting with teachers regularly, including pre- and post- observation meetings. Terry explained:

> I need to feel that my principal values what I do… A principal truly takes the time to get to know me as a teacher, my classroom, and my students, and is willing to listen to me is effective. So much of it is building the relationship of trust, of support. My principal I’ve had…I explained the five-page indicator checklist, what my classroom is supposed to look like, so she knew the pieces. I think a principal can think they are supportive if they just come in, but they need to take the time to truly understand how my classroom is supposed to run by understanding the criteria that the district has set out.

Missy agreed that meeting with teachers is important, and she goes further to say:

> I think a big part of that is the same thing I do as a teacher, which is the relationship piece. One thing my principal does really well with this is she makes sure to not, like, sit across from me. She is always sitting next to me and using a conversational tone. It helps build that relationship on a professional level. But I

> think it's the idea of 'I'm here to support you. We are here in this together' rather than these are the expectations…It's that idea of building relationships and the support piece.

Missy also reflected on her principal's strengths in this area:

> I feel like there's a lot of positive—not positive reinforcement but positivity in general. I feel she assumes best intent with all of us and that really gives us space to achieve those goals and be professionals. She is very outright, and she doesn't micromanage. She gives suggestions but ultimately the teachers have a lot of autonomy because of the relationship piece…I came from another district that had an administrator that had just a different approach that I wasn't thriving in and I stayed in that position for as long as I did for my students…but it was not a good work-life balance when I came to my current position. My principal's positivity and relationship-based coaching make me feel more supported.

Other participants also agreed with the need for meetings with principals. Londa had this to say about her principal meeting with her:

> During the week before the walk-through. He meets with us first and he says, like, you know I'm here just to see how the students are performing. Just go ahead and teach. So, he gives you some encouragement before that and after that he'll, may a week or two goes by sometimes, he'll tell you that he saw this student, did you notice this student in the background was doing this, or he'll say I like the way that you address the student when the student wasn't on task. We meet if time permits.

As indicated by the data, a principal should be available to meet and give encouragement to teachers, which is important in building relationships with all teachers.

Participants also responded principals should ensure a positive relationship specifically with special education teachers and recognize that special education teachers have unique differences in their roles than general education teachers. As a part of this relationship, principals should be present and visible in special education classrooms as much as they are in general education classrooms, and the principal should be present in ARD meetings, although the district policy states that department heads can be designated as ARD administrators. Rhonda held that "[principals] can support us differently than they can, maybe, a general education teacher, because our needs are different." Heather declared that:

> A principal who dismissed a lot of what [special education] teachers do on a daily basis would be a problem. Principals need to understand the level of effort that goes into being a special education teacher, not only from the student care perspective, but from the paperwork perspective. They don't understand the hours and hours and hours of work that go behind [ARD] meetings…If you don't have an administrator that understands that [being a special education teacher] is different than being a general education teacher, if the administrator dismissed your concerns, which would ruin the relationship.

Rhonda alleged that, "sometimes principals ask questions about why something is done a certain way and, oftentimes, walking around to see how things are different, because sometimes you don't understand unless you are right there."

Building relationships with special education teachers and teams required positive interactions and the ability to be present according to the data. Stacy reflected that her principal builds relationships this way:

> She told me once that there are three people that you need that are very, very strong to run a school properly. Number one, a strong office manager. Number two, a really friendly secretary. Number three, a strong special education leader. Because if special education is in the dumps, then the whole school will be in the dumps. And as soon as she said that she had e sold because she is absolutely right. She is involved in all of our meetings, she comes to a lot of them, not all of them. She is encouraging. She is in all of our ARD meetings. I love the fact that she is so involved. She knows all of our kids. She knows them by name. She knows their needs. She knows a lot.

Londa felt that her principal was not as visible in her classroom this year and it impacted their relationship negatively:

> It was really hard. We had to reschedule a lot. I would have a date for my evaluation, but I wouldn't get it that week. I would be, like, two weeks or so. It would have you on pins and needles. It was really hectic, and he was really apologetic but still, you know he has to know when it was scheduled. He also has to know what you have on your evaluation so he could give you the feedback if he has to reschedule your post observation conference. Sometimes it is out of his control, but I'd still like to know how I did.

The data showed that sometimes special education teachers are even surprised when an administrator shows up in their classrooms. Elise said that:

> The principal is in charge of the math department, so I have never experienced a walk through with this principal ever. One time this principal, at the beginning, when he first started, said hi and popped into the classroom. I was shocked because that hadn't happened before. But that was four years ago.

Jamie alleged, "Principals don't know [what happens in special education] because they have so many other fires, so many other areas that need a lot more support, so I don't have as many walk-throughs." The visibility of the principal is important to special education teachers.

The participants all agreed that principals should create positive relationships with special education teachers. Heather summarized this theme well when she said:

> Special education teachers are a very different make-up…My principal understands the emotional toll of working in special education…If your administrator doesn't really, really understand that that would create a situation where it is very, very difficult.

All of the participants felt that positive relationships were important to the culture and climate of the school.

Respect, Admiration, and Appreciation

The second theme to emerge from the data is the need for special educators to feel respected. The first way to show special education teachers respect is by knowing what happens, or is supposed to happen, in a special education classroom. Annie shared that:

> My principal does a great job of listening and also being a good supporter, with the district, providing those resources that we need to do our job better whether

> that's curriculum or dealing with classroom management, and being a mentor also.

Londa included this discussion of her principal's support:

> My principal is very supportive of me and my crazy method of teaching. He's very supportive and if he needs to know something he'll come to me and ask me, my thoughts, and I really do appreciate that. It's very important that I believe a principal needs to know about special education. It's very beneficial not only for teachers, the students, but it's also beneficial for him. He needs to know what he can do to resolve a situation, or you know to work to not go against what the teacher is trying to do.

Participants indicated that respect is shown by trusting the professional judgement of special education teachers and keeping demands reasonable. Heather pointed out that her principal "trusts me enough to make all the decisions and that's what he tells me. I run everything by him if it's something major."

A perceived lack of respect can stem from the lack of understanding of the role of special education teachers and the difference between that role and general education. Heather specified a lack of understanding of the workload for a special education teacher, which does not align with the respect shown for decision-making:

> A lot of what we deal with on a day-to-day basis as looked as being an over exaggeration, or not totally understood the level of effort that goes into being a special education teacher. Not only from the student care perspective, but as well as the paperwork perspective. It's easy for them to sit at an organization meeting

and go through it, but they don't understand the hours and hours of work that go behind it.

Rhonda shared this concern when she discussed the disconnect between the treatment of general education teachers and special education teachers:

> I feel like my principal has been very supportive of general education teachers. She understands it because she did it and she always has their best interests at heart, and I do not feel like Special Education teachers are cared for in the same way. I think we're expected to clean up a mess and fix any problems and do it with less staff and less support.

Finally, principals' show respect through the planning and implementation of the professional development program that includes special education topics. First, teachers want a professional development program that aligns professional development and goal setting. Stacy summarized this theme when she shares:

> Our teacher evaluation process is specific to general education, and we can take it and say, hey, this is what I want to learn about, and we get to run with it. That personalized alignment would really help where it's personalized to what I need versus what everyone else needs.

Terry agreed with Stacy, stating professional development "is going to be relevant to me and my classroom circumstances and align to either the goals of the district and [my] professional development." Missy concurred when she said,

> You would need to create some investment, like what I have to do with my students. I have to make sure they have some kind of interest in what I'm talking about, otherwise, it's not going to be relevant for a lot of them. Make us invested

> in the goals and the mission. And it would be great to see [professional development] aligned with our goals.

Rhonda enjoys personalized professional development when “you can go online and get extra if there’s something that you’re passionate about or there’s something that you, you know, you need help with or you want to grow in.”

As deduced from the data, another way to show special education teachers respect is through developing professional development that creates a culture of respect between general education and special education teachers by emphasizing topics that are applicable to supporting special education students in all environments. Heather shared that her principal would “approach me a lot of time and [ask], is there something particular you’d like the staff to know and do better? Especially with the paperwork or with their understanding of modification and the different between modifications and accommodations.” Jamie stated that:

> there is a lot of [general education] training I sit through that does not pertain to me...but on the other hand if I ever want to move to a different room or a different representation of students …I need to be at least of aware of what the training is so I can reflect on it and use it. Sometimes there is a bit of frustration with the entire special education department that we go to all general education trainings and our special education trainings, but the general education teachers don’t come to special education trainings, yet they have all of our students.

Londa also believed that a principal should “provide professional development that is going to be able to support the whole school holistically…not just the general education, also special education…finding professional development to reach every student.”

Global Communication

The third theme found in the data focuses on global communication. Special education teachers expect communication to be professional, timely and clear, personalized, and constructive. They also expect communication to take place between the principal and outside constituents, not just with the teachers.

Professional communication takes many forms, including communication with staff and students, thoroughness of written communication, and communication of district information. Heather shared:

> My principal is a people person. He's a great communicator, he has wonderful communication skills. With the staff, as well as the children, he has open communication with them, he is their main person. He has exposure to the kids on a daily basis. He's out in the hallway, he also does lunch duty and he's always telling the kids anything he needs for them to know and he's communicating things through that, especially when it comes to expectations.

Communication should be professional and provided in a variety of ways. Missy reflected on her principal's communication after a classroom observation, "I get a lot from written feedback and she's available anytime I need to have a verbal conversation with her afterwards." Jamie shared the communication process of his campus administrator and how he feels that information is communicated:

> She sends out a lot of emails and I can usually read between the lines on emails and what is said. Sometimes what is not said speaks as loudly as what is said. So sometimes I know she is trying to address a concern and she's trying to do it

> in a positive way by sending it to all staff and giving us information, so that we can make adjustments to what we are doing.

What is said and what is implied is equally important to Jamie. Written communication must be clear and positive.

Sara reinforced the importance of effective communication from her principal when communicating district-level information:

> [Communication] is two ways. A lot of times they get information from our directors, and it never filters down. To include us in what the school is doing, sometimes they just think, well it doesn't really pertain to them. Sometimes we just don't get included. We don't get usually as much feedback. They don't write as many comments, it's basically a check proficient or whatever they feel, but there's really not any comments or anything to help.

Communication, written and oral, is critical for the special education teacher.

Communication should also be timely and set clear expectations. Charlotte reflected on her campus administrator's communication of expectations:

> He reiterated he would only tell us in a faculty meeting what the expectations are [and then would] sends it out in writing to us in our Monday memos to make sure that the students know. He has a student Congress that does videos for the announcements, for all the students to see so he makes sure that things that have to be known, everyone knows. He sends out information to parents so that parents are informed, and he does that very well. He strives to have our campus be a family community. He creates very high expectations. I would say, a huge

> portion of our department has very high expectations really. Keep the rigor high for our special education population.

Personalized and constructive communication should also include constructive feedback and not just empty cheerleading or pat phrases. Stacy shared about her principal's communication and constructive feedback:

> We automatically get an email as soon as they press submit of what they observed and what was going on. That immediate feedback is really important, and we are encouraged as teachers. She asks questions, she doesn't jump to conclusions just based on her observations. She asks questions whether that's in the class while I'm teaching or afterwards. She has great ideas, and we can sit and have conversations about the ideas that I have and [the ideas] she has, and we can discuss it.

Terry reflected on his campus administrator's ability to provide effective constructive feedback:

> I do believe you need to be positive, there is nothing wrong with being you. You don't want to be negative all over the place, but at times, I think there can be a toxic positivity in the sense that you, really can't make a change with it. If the system is broken, you have to be able to be critical and look at the broken pieces of the system. So, sometimes, she should maybe lean a little bit towards that. Too much positivity and not necessarily willing to say if I'm coming to you, we want to be solution seeking and let's identify and talk about what's wrong in the system before we can really seek solutions.

Professional communication, in all of its forms, is important to special education teachers in this study.

Finally, communication with parents and community is also important to teachers. Heather shared thoughts on communication to parents and the community:

> I think if we could find better ways to reach out to especially our economically disadvantaged and our Hispanic and African American [families], because those are where the gaps are from the academic standpoint. And that's where we really need to be focusing our attention.

Missy also shares that her principal "has breakfast with the administrator…the parents were invited to come into the library…and it was an open forum with the administrators to talk about resources, the initiatives that we have going on and how parents can follow up at home." Parental communication from principals increases positive culture and supports teachers.

Consistency through Equitable and Timely Interactions

The final theme that emerged from data is the need for consistency. The participants want consistency in follow-through, accountability for all, and consistent expectations for all. In reflecting this theme of consistency, Annie professed of her principal:

> I think it would be the principal who needs to be almost kind of fair in the expectations and understand who the staff are. Hold everyone to the same expectations within an understanding of the individual. [My principal] would really hold those expectations. He did a good job with being consistent. He was perceived as he was being fair and holding everyone to the same expectations.

Stacy shared her frustration with a lack of consistency:

> This is important, so the expectations are very clear, they have been given to us, we see it every day, the students see it and it's communicated well. It feels like sometimes they're not consistent enough between teachers, not that she chooses favoritism. It has to do with the ones that aren't following it and [they] aren't getting in trouble.

Classroom observations require a high level of consistency and timeliness. Londa reflected on her concerns with consistency in communication and reliability from her campus administration for classroom observations:

> It was really hard, and we had to reschedule a lot. I never would have a date for my post evaluation, I wouldn't get it that week it will be like maybe two weeks. So, it has you on pins and needs like you know, but I do understand, last school year was really hectic. He was always really apologetic, he would email me or call me, but still, you would like to know how you did.

Data showed that principal timeliness in feedback increased special education teacher satisfaction.

The participants were concerned about accountability for all. Charlotte communicates lack of consistency in accountability for all at the campus:

> I think it goes back to when there's not a teacher that is following through with our missions, our visions, and our slogan and some students are not being successful. [If] the teachers are not being successful, he doesn't have that follow through. It kind of leaves a bitter taste in our mouth. We are working so hard to

> make sure we're meeting this. And then we've got this handful of people over here that are not.

Rhonda shared her frustrations in the lack of consistency of accountability to campus personnel supported by her campus administrator:

> I think we need things like having things posted. We need things like structure and reminders for the adults as much as we do for the children. For example, teachers can show up late to school every day and there's never a consequence. I feel like we need things that are put in place that help kind of keep the order and I don't feel like we have that. I don't think there is a lot of follow through. There not a lot of checks and balance, there is almost too much trust if that makes sense.

Consistency of accountability creates structure and increases positive school culture for special education teachers.

Conclusion

The analysis of Research Question 1 provides brief descriptions and relevant experiences to understand context to the developed themes. These lived experiences, as relayed by the participants, support the development of the interconnected themes, and evolved throughout as the data analysis process emerged. Implementation of the triangulation process supported the following themes that emerged across the analysis of the data of the first research question: interconnected relationships; respect, administration, and appreciation; global communication; and consistency through equitable and timely interactions.

Themes for Research Question 2: Principal's Role in Special Education Teacher Retention

Research question two focused on teacher perceptions of the principal's role in special education teacher retention. The first theme focuses on the principals' knowledge of special education and campus programming, while the second focuses on the role a campus principal plays in the special education teacher's decision to stay in education or leave the field altogether. The data reflected the finding of an additional theme, which is the reason teachers contemplate leaving the field.

Special Education Knowledge and Campus Programming

Participants differed in their experiences with principals' that have knowledge of special education; however, the perceptions of the importance of the principal's knowledge of special education and campus programming have been consistent. The principal's knowledge of special education does not impact the participants' decision to leave special education. Some participants, such as Stacy, did not find the principal's level of expertise to impact their roles as special education teachers, even though the principal is very knowledgeable. Stacy shared that her administrator has a high level of Special Education knowledge:

> [Her knowledge] is very sound. In a previous school before she came to the school that I'm at, she had to revamp the entire Special Education team. The whole staffing everything and she had to be involved in every single step and with that. She worked with district people, and they were at her school all the time. I feel like because of that situation she went through she learned and gained so much knowledge and that she is very knowledgeable and if we have or

> if I have a question, she can get a certain person on the phone in like two seconds. I appreciate that because I'm in need of an answer I appreciate that control and that power when I need it.

Stacy found her principal to be knowledgeable, but she did not link this knowledge with her reasons for staying in the field of special education.

Not all principals have an understanding of special education. Alternately, Charlotte reflected on her principal's knowledge of Special Education, which was quite different from Stacy's experience:

> I would say he has a good understanding of it but it's not his forte. And because of that he allows his Department Chair to really take a good leadership role. [The Department Chair] is an advisor to him, he allows other assistant principals who are stronger in the Special Education realm to work over our department.

Heather's experience was similar to that of Charlotte, as she articulated her campus administrator's knowledge of Special Education*:*

> He doesn't have a [high knowledge]. He's not the eyes and ears on our campus on a day-to-day basis of seeing the issues going down in the classrooms. So, he lets me kind of make a lot of decisions about programming and who goes where.

The experiences of Charlotte and Heather were that of autonomy in the special education department due to the principal's lack of knowledge.

Elise had a different thought as she reflected on her principal's knowledge of Special Education and the effect it has on making recommendations that impact her decision to stay at the campus. Elise believes that "if [the principal] had more knowledge

of [Special Education], you know what really entails for these particular decisions or whatever we come up with, I think he would be more supportive for it."

Knowledge of special education is not the only influence on the job satisfaction of special education teachers. Rhonda's experience centered more on the principal's attitude toward special education rather than her principal's knowledge of special education:

> I think she had the heart for it. I don't think she had the head understanding, like the law understanding…An understanding that the law is fluid, and it changes and so just because you did it that way eight years ago doesn't mean that that's still the way that we're supposed to do it today. Or the way that is even best practices. Definitely I don't expect them to have, like, the most current research but I feel like we've got to do more to prepare them for the everyday stuff…I feel like there's got to be a better way to prepare [principals].

Rhonda believed that having a heart for special education is important, even if the knowledge of special education isn't there.

Principal's Impact on Decision to Stay

None of the participants indicated that the lack of principal support would have made them consider leaving the field of education. However, while the role of the principal did not have an impact of them staying or leaving, it did impact mobility of teachers. Annie shared her thoughts on the impact of her principal's support and her decision to stay in Special Education:

> Overall, there is some impact I think, from administration. Specifically, we did really feel supported from our administration, and I think that is so much more

> impactful on whether we stay or go. I think in Special Education, there has to be a lot of intrinsic motivation. Teacher morale [is important] and they need to feel supported. I think that's a big impact. I think teacher morale is the biggest thing in keeping me deciding if I'm going to stay or go.

Elise agreed when she said, "What makes me stay is the relationship with the kids. It has nothing to do with the principal or anything like that, except for what I mentioned earlier, we need as Special Education teachers to be trusted with things." Terry echoed Elise when he said that he "works at schools that I feel supported by the principal. I wouldn't necessarily stop special education because my way of doing things is not related to my principal. I would just find a new place to be." Leaving education completely is not the only option.

The teachers did indicate reasons why they have considered leaving the field. One of the biggest reasons that the participants have considered leaving the field is the expanding role of paperwork in special education. Terry asserted that the "constantly expanding paperwork takes astronomical amounts of my time…To be really, really honest, this last year I would wake up at 3:30 in the morning and work for an hour and a half before going to school to teach." He also said, "he worked until six sometimes to do paperwork [after school] and I would try to take one day a weekend off, but I worked six of the nine days of my Thanksgiving break."

Another participant, Charlotte, reiterated Terry's thoughts, when she alleged that "the paperwork is the big thing and that's why I know a lot of my peers around the district are ready to leave. Some have left because we have more paperwork than any other district and it's redundant." Charlotte believed in teaching bell-to-bell and her

conference time was taken up with planning. So, Charlotte held that she is “having to spend pretty much my entire weekend working on paperwork that’s very redundant…when it was said that all this paperwork is not going away [after the pandemic] and it’s just going to get work people started jumping ship.”

Another area of concern is the constant turnover of special education personnel at the district level, which results in constant changes. Heather asserted that

> when there’s constant change and turnover and a shifting philosophy it throws everyone for a loop…That’s where I have heard about wanting to quit it’s over stuff like that…the stressors of the past year combined with a lot of changes at a district level in terms of how you’re trying to manage and run a special education department is a little bit much. When you’re dealing with all of these changes that is where I find that teachers are ready to just chunk it all.”

Annie said that “the support from district’s special education [personnel], you know, I think that’s more impactful than [campus] admin.” Jamie agreed when she says that “mostly I think it is a system issue [more] than a principal issue because I think everybody’s working really hard.”

Even with all of these reasons that teachers would leave the field, the overall response of participants was that teaching is a vocation that transcends principal behaviors. Rhonda said it best when she said, “I think that’s a God thing…My heart’s here. I want to be a part of this…I feel like [teaching] is what I was created to do.” Data showed that teachers felt teaching was a vocation.

Limiting Researcher Bias

Prior to beginning the data analysis process, I reflected on my experiences with the phenomenon being studied to identify potential biases to avoid interjecting them into the data analysis. When I started the data collection process, I was unsure if teachers would be willing to provide transparency in answering the questions that were posed to them. My initial thoughts were (a) special education teachers would be uncomfortable during the interview as the process was completed via Zoom and virtual experiences could lend to a feeling of disconnect between interviewer and interviewee that a face to face encounter offers, (b) special education teachers would be guarded in their answers, or perhaps even refuse to answer which would prevent the opportunity to gather information I was seeking, and (c) special education teachers were considering leaving the profession due to their administrator's unsupportive behavior and practices.

I began my educational career as a special education teacher and had the opportunity to experience the supervision of both supportive and unsupportive principals. As a practicing campus administrator, I became a staunch advocate for special education teachers on my campus. For the last six years, my role as a district administrator has provided experiences where I've had the opportunity to witness the supervision of both supportive and unsupportive principals to special education teachers in a large district setting.

Data indicates (Holme et al., 2017) Texas continues to struggle with the retention of special education teachers and experiencing this firsthand as a teacher, principal, and district administrator confirmed the reality of the current shortage. As I began the interview process, I initially thought I would receive confirmation of the current shortage

trends from teachers who would provide examples of how unsupportive their principals were. As the interviews progressed, I became keenly aware that my perceptions about the lack of support principals provide to their special education teachers was untrue. As I began probing and spending time with teachers, the reality of their situation unfolded. Through these conversations, it was discovered that most teachers felt highly supportive in their campus roles. They felt valued. What I did uncover was the overwhelming amount of paperwork that made special education teachers question their desire to remain in the profession. As this data surfaced in the interviews, I found myself questioning current practice trends from when I was a beginning teacher and prompted me to reflect on those changes of how data collection and Individual Education Plan development has shifted within the school environment over the past decade. While data collection is readily available through informal and formal measures, it is time consuming and can be overwhelming for new and experienced teachers alike.

Summary

In Chapter Four, I presented my analysis and results of the investigation of special education teachers' perceptions of administrator support as measured by the TPESS instrument and how those perceptions impacted special education teacher retention. I presented brief descriptions of each participant to provide context for responses. I presented the emergence of initial findings into preliminary themes. I also shared my positionality statement to show my shared experiences, my experiences immersed in the data, and how my positionality changed over time.

The lived experiences of the participants supported the development of four independent yet interconnected themes that align with TPESS principal practices found

in Domains 2 and 3. These data will be further discussed on Chapter Five and implications for principal practice will be shared. Finally, recommendations for future research will be suggested.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore special education teacher retention in a large school district in Texas and the perception of campus principals' support as defined through the domains from the Texas Principal Evaluation and Support System (T-PESS), with a focus on Domain 2, Effective, Well-Supported Teachers, and Domain 3, Positive School Culture, of the T-PESS instrument, as these two domains most closely align with the research on the impact of culture and support in teacher retention (Baptiste, 2019; Dicke et al., 2020; Dou et al., 2017; Polatcan & Cansoy, 2019; Robinson et al., 2019). The goal of my research was to determine if the behaviors and attributes measured by the T-PESS instrument reflected teacher perceptions of principal effectiveness as it impacts their willingness to stay in the field of education. Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the findings, implications of the findings, limitations, recommendations for practice, recommendations for future research, and conclusions.

Summary of the Study

The research design for this study was a qualitative phenomenological research design. This qualitative phenomenological study was used to explore how special education teachers in a large school district in Texas perceive their campus principal's support as defined through the domains from the Texas Principal Evaluation and Support System (T-Pess) (Texas, 2020) on their job satisfaction and retention. The phenomenon being studied in my research was principal's roles in teacher retention in the field of education.

The following research questions and sub-questions guided my study:

1. How did special education teachers in an urban district in Texas perceive the support they received from their principals as defined through the TPESS evaluation?
    a. How did special education teachers perceive their principals' Effective and Well-Supported Teachers support practices?
    b. How did special education teachers perceive their principal's role in Positive School Culture?
2. How did the special education teachers describe the principal's role in special education teacher retention?
    a. What perceived Effective, Well-Supported Teachers support practices did principals engage in to support the retention of teachers?
    b. What perceived role did Positive School Culture play in the retention of teachers?

This study was intended to fill gaps in the available research on the perceptions of special education teachers and how they perceive the principal at their local school in providing support. The present study contributed to the growing body of literature by examining special education teachers' perceptions and identifying behaviors and practices principals must develop to support special education teachers and their desire to remain in the profession.

This qualitative phenomenological research used a purposive criterion-inclusion sampling method to select the population and the data sources to obtain the perceptions of special education teachers' in-depth views. Purposive sampling means to

select participants who meet the criteria or standards that the researcher set for the study (Creswell, 2017; Etikan & Bala, 2017). Using a purposive, criterion-inclusion sampling method allowed for “for the identification and selection of information-rich cases” that are knowledgeable of the phenomenon being studied and that are available and willing to participate (Palinkas et al., 2015).

The sample included 11 certified special education teachers in grades K-12. Creswell (2017) reported a sample size of 5 to 20 participants is sufficient for a qualitative research study while Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that the number of participants should be determined by saturation of data. Saturation of data is further defined as the point at which replication of data, or information, occurs and no new data is found (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nelson, 2017). Data collection continues until saturation was met and saturation was met in my study.

Participants in this study were viewed as self-interpreters who possess the skill set to interpret their lives as well as the situations, artifacts, and others around them. In addition, “phenomenological studies refer to the study of personal experiences and requires a description or interpretation of the meaning of phenomena experienced by participants in an investigation” (Moustakes, 1994, p. 103). Special education teachers provided their perceptions and lived experiences of their principals’ support practice in Domains 2 (Effective, Well-Supported Teachers) and 3 (Positive School Culture).

The instrument for this research study was a researcher-created open-ended interview protocol. The interview questions were derived from research sources reported in the literature review of this study (see Appendix A) and the Texas Principal Evaluation Support System (T-PESS), which is central to the purpose of the study. The

semi-structured interviews consisted of items that asked the participants open-ended questions in the interview process (Creswell & Poth, 2012).

The goal of the interview was to encourage the participants to express themselves freely with their responses to the interview questions. The interview protocol consisted of open-ended questions that were aligned with the research questions and the T-PESS evaluation system. All of the participants in this study were asked the same interview questions, with probing or follow-up questions used as necessary (McGrath et al., 2019). The interviews took place via a secured virtual meeting room with each interview being recorded for later transcription. Suddick et. al (2020) state that unstructured, in-depth, one-on-one interviews should be the primary method of data collection in phenomenological research.

In this research study, I analyzed the data by using an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which was more appropriate to the phenomenological research approach (Alase, 2017; Smith et al., 2009). IPA is a data analysis process used to develop certain patterns, trends and thematic content that is central to the research questions (Alase, 2017; Shinebourne, 2011). Using this method of analysis allowed me to include participants in the evaluation of data collection and ensure that data collected reflected the lived experiences of the participants.

ATLAS.ti, was used to identify themes and extract meaning from the data. I analyzed the data following the process outlined in Chapter 3 and followed the analysis with a comparison of my thematic evaluation with the information identified by the ATLAS.ti program. The comparison of data yielded consistent results and allowed for identification of the themes represented above. The final step in triangulating the data

provided member-checking of the transcribed interviews and synthesized data. All participants of the study were provided a summary of their transcribed interview along with the thematic analysis. Participants reviewed transcribed information and were encouraged to provide notes and reflections to the summarized themes provided by the researcher.

Implementation of the triangulation process supported the following themes that emerged across the analysis of the data of the first research question: relationships, respect, communication, and consistency. The data interpretation involved the findings, answering why and how questions, attaching significance to the results, and putting patterns into an analytic framework for reporting in order to identify experiences specific to the participants. The coded themes were collected to determine significance to the problem and purpose of the study and are reported below.

Discussion of Research Question 1

How do special education teachers in an urban district in Texas perceive the support they receive from their principals as defined through the TPESS evaluation? A number of researchers (Aragon, 2016; Carothers et al., 2019; Mason-Williams et al., 2020b; Whipp & Geronime, 2017) have conducted qualitative studies on general education teacher retention, but there are few qualitative studies that explore the impact of principal support practices on special education teacher retention as perceived by K-12 special education teachers. Additionally, there is a lack of research examining special education teachers' perceptions of behaviors and practices principals must develop to support special education teacher retention.

Research shows that traditional indicators of special education teacher attrition include low pay and on the job stress with having to motivate students in the classroom who often misbehave (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Kamrath & Bradford, 2020). Additionally, a lack of professional collaboration and shared decision-making, a lack of resources, and increased accountability for teaching were also some of the factors that determined whether a teacher left or remained in the teaching profession (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Podolsky et al., 2016). With the exception of salary, these indicators are measured as part of the T-PESS instrument and the teachers recognized the importance of administrator performance on these areas. The participant data shows that these key areas related to attrition were positively impacted by principal performance and that the participants were less likely to leave a campus or district if the school administrator was open to learning about and supporting special education needs.

Overall, participant data showed that the indicators measured by the TPESS evaluation tool in Domains 2 and 3 aligned with teacher expectations of administrative support. The special education teachers identified several attributes measured by T-PESS as important to their job satisfaction: tailored development, feedback, and coaching; staff collaboration and leadership; systemic evaluation and supervision, communication, and interpersonal skills; and ethical behavior (TEA, 2019b). This alignment supports the use of the T-PESS as an effective tool in measuring the behaviors and attributes of principals that impact special education teacher job satisfaction. The TPESS Principal website states “by focusing on key issues related to human capital, [principals] treat faculty/staff members as the most valuable resource

and invest in their development, support, and supervision" (TEA, 2020b, para. 3). Participants believe that the key attributes of interpersonal relationships, (the way in which all campus members are connected), respect, admiration, and appreciation between all campus members, global communication (global conversations between administrators and all educational stakeholders), and consistency through equitable and timely interactions between administrators and all campus create a culture of value and increase the human capital of special education teachers.

Key data that differed from general research on teacher retention and principal evaluation focused on the role of principal in creating an equitable environment in which special education teachers were offered specific support, professional development, and inclusion in the campus with a focus on the needs of special education students. The focus on creating a sense of collaboration between general education and special education teachers, in addition to requiring general education teachers to recognize the different needs of various students on campus, aligns with Mason-William's, et al. (2020b) research that discusses that the demands of paperwork, caseload size, and complexity of teaching responsibility puts special education teachers at greater risk for attrition.

Discussion of Research Question 2

While current research indicates that principals play a pivotal role in teacher retention (Baptisle, 2019; Torres, 2019), the data from my study showed that special education teachers see the principal as a determiner in the decision to stay on a particular campus but not as a key influencer on staying in education. None of the participants indicated that the lack of principal support would have made them consider

leaving the field of education. Rather, the participants explained that the two biggest influences on special education teacher retention in the field of education were the impact of non-instructional duties and the leadership of district level administration.

One unique theme emerging from the data focused on the overwhelming nature of paperwork and non-instructional duties related to special education. Billingsley and Bettini (2019) found that working conditions, such as paperwork, student behavior, caseload size, and complexity of teaching assignment are predictors of special education teacher's attrition. Mason-Williams et al. (2020b) found that the pressure on special education teachers to define their roles, versus the well-defined general education teacher role, and the self-creation of schedule and the level of differentiation for students creates a burden on special education teachers. The response of school administrators at the district and campus level needs to focus specifically on addressing the unique needs of special education and should be different from supports for general education teachers. Special education teachers need to have additional preparation and planning time or a reduction of non-instructional tasks to increase job satisfaction and reduce burn-out and attrition.

Participants also described their perceptions of the influence of district level administrator decision-making as more impactful for retention than campus-based administration. While there is little research specifically on the impact of district administration and teacher attrition, Shuls and Flores (2020) found that school districts that were highly effective in retaining teachers created opportunities for teachers to participate in and lead district level committees and that the committees' voice and opinions play a key role in making district-level decisions. Many of the participants in the

study did not feel their voices were heard at the district level and this created dissatisfaction in their roles as teachers.

Discussion of Literature

My research investigated the phenomenon of the role of the principal in special education teacher retention in the field of education. While Boyd et al. (2011) found that principal leadership has been shown to have a significant influence on a teacher's choice to stay or leave the profession, my study shows that special education teachers find principal leadership impactful for retention at a specific campus; however, other factors, including non-instructional duties and district level administration and policies, impact the special education teacher's decision on whether or not to leave education as a profession. The results of this study do not align with research on the factors influencing special education teachers staying or leaving the profession (Bland, et al., 2014; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

The greatest impact on special education teachers to stay or leave the field of education focused on non-instructional duties versus the role of campus-based administration, which is contrary to much of the published research on teacher attrition (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Mathews, 2020). Ford et al. (2018) reported that many teachers are consumed daily with student discipline issues, paperwork, and state-mandated testing. These teachers felt that they should focus more on teaching students and less on the state-mandated paperwork to be more effective teachers. Data from this study specifically states that non-instructional duties have a correlation to declining job satisfaction. Further, some teachers felt that policymakers made education decisions that affected them, and teachers were concerned about the increased amount of

pressure placed on them daily to increase student achievement (Torres, 2019). Torres' research aligns with the findings of my study. District-level administration and district level policies were specifically mentioned as impacting job satisfaction, especially as the policies related to non-instructional tasks. While there are few studies on how non-instructional tasks impact special education teacher attrition, my study suggests that further research should be done to determine if there is a correlation between this specific stressor and attrition.

While none of the questions or responses led to examination of salaries and benefits, researchers reported several factors that contributed to teaching being an enjoyable and meaningful profession. Some of these factors include competitive salary, adequate benefits, and a positive work environment (Mertler, 2016; Ritchie & Smith, 2017). Mathews (2020) also found that teacher perceived support from administrators played an active role in reducing stress and increasing teacher retention. However, none of the participants of the study discussed salary or benefits as being an active factor in their decision to stay in the field of education.

Addressing special education specific stressors requires principals and district level administrators to recognize how the demands of special education teachers differ from general education teachers. Mason-Williams, et al., (2020b) specifies specific ways to address special education teacher demands clearly defining roles of special education teachers and ensuring general education teachers partner with special education teachers to share in planning and scheduling for special education students. In addition, special education teachers need to be provided additional time to complete the non-instructional tasks specific to special education. Due to increased non-

instructional duties, special education teachers cannot incorporate additional tasks without removing something from their plates.

Theoretical Framework

This research study aligns with the Senge's theory of learning organizations. Senge's theory of learning organizations requires a fundamental shift for school leadership to move from the traditional view of leadership to a model of shared leadership, where the administrator is responsible for building the organization through building professional capacity, building a shared vision, and working collaboratively to understand the complexity of the organization (Senge, 1994). The special education teachers identified several attributes that align with this model of leadership as important to their job satisfaction: tailored development, feedback, and coaching; staff collaboration and leadership; systemic evaluation and supervision, communication, and interpersonal skills; and ethical behavior (TEA, 2019b). Within these practices, the campus-based leaders are able to incorporate shared leadership as Senge's theory advises.

This theory provides the lens through which administrative support increases teacher retention. The leader as teacher concept provides the framework through which administrators provide the professional development, support, and collaboration required of Domain 2 in the T-PESS instrument (Senge, 1994; TEA, 2020b). The leader as steward concept also explains the responsibility of the administrator to create and sustain a positive school culture, Domain 3, referenced in the T-PESS instrument (Senge, 1994; TEA, 2020b). When campus-based leadership follows the practices identified by Senge to a level of proficiency as measured in the T-PESS, the data from

special education teacher perceptions reflects a lack of campus attrition; therefore, reducing attrition from the field of education.

Expanding on Senge's Theory

Senge's theory of learning organizations focuses on the types of leadership necessary in an organization that learns and grows. The conceptual model developed from the data centers around the importance of multiple level of leadership, not just the leadership practices of immediate supervisors. Senge's theory does not specify the level of leadership that should focus on creating a learning organization; however, research in education often focuses on campus-based leadership due to state-mandated, site-based decision-making practices. Based on the findings of my study, district level leadership in special education impacts the retention of special education teachers at a greater level than does campus-based leadership. Therefore, when applying Senge's theory of learning organizations to public schools, which has historically focused on campus-based leadership, my research points to the impact of senior leadership being of greater importance than has been previously theorized through educational research.

Limitations of the Findings

The following limitations of the findings should be considered when reviewing the recommendations for practitioners and recommendations for future research:

1. Special education teacher respondents participated in the interview with a district level administrator (me) and the answers to the open-ended questions went in an unanticipated, novel direction specific to the role of district level leadership in attrition and retention.

2. Perceptions of the teachers may have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting changes in public education, which is beyond the scope of the topic of this study.
3. Data and descriptions cannot be generalized due to the limited population from one school district in Texas, the focus on special education teachers, and the small sample size.
4. The research questions were based on the T-PESS, which is not implemented in all school districts in Texas or in districts outside of Texas.
5. My experiences as a special education teacher and administrator may be viewed as influencing the open-ended questionnaire, the interview protocol, and the analysis of the themes from the data. To offset this limitation, I bracketed through the creation of a statement of limiting researcher bias provided in Chapter 4, by following the IPA analysis method that included participant verification of data, and the use of triangulation.

Recommendations for Practice

My research impacts individual schools and school districts across the United States with similar principal evaluation tools and concerns with special education teacher retention. The participants in my study indicated that they perceived the T-PESS to accurately assess key behaviors and attributes related to special education job satisfaction. This suggests that district level administrators should evaluate the effectiveness of principal behavior using the T-PESS while also evaluating current teacher attrition on each campus. District administrators should work with principals at the local school to implement the strategies to reduce the number of special teachers

leaving the teaching profession by increasing principal effectiveness, as measured by T-PESS through administrative professional development and mentoring support in Domains 2 and 3.

Efforts in increase retention for special education professionals should also focus on reducing the non-instructional duties involved in the teaching assignment or in creating additional planning time for teachers to use to complete non-teaching duties. This could be done by hiring more support staff at each local school in order to give special education teachers more time to plan, have parent conferences, and collaborate with other teachers to design different teaching strategies for their students. Administrators can also provide support in other ways to teachers and staff members such as assisting with health and wellness programs at the schools (Center for Disease and Control, 2018). Promoting good health and wellbeing of employees, through a reduction of stress due to non-instructional tasks, can decrease medical care costs, employee absenteeism, and attrition due to job stressors (Bruselius-Jensen et al., 2017; Leo, 2015). This also can help to reduce teacher burnout and overall stress from their teaching assignments and non-instructional tasks.

In Mathews' (2020) study on administrative support for special education teachers, the author noted that teachers needed accessibility and social emotional support to have job satisfaction. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic teachers have faced unique challenges and tremendous pressure. They had to quickly adopt to remote learning to balance the impacts of the pandemic on their personal lives, the past year has seen teachers overwhelmed with stress, trauma, and burnout. Therefore, school district administrators should show more compassion for special education due to the

amount of stress that they have been under over the past two years. By doing this, they can help to reduce the number of special education teachers leaving the teaching profession due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The findings also indicated the need for district level administrators to show more respect and appreciation for the overall work of special education teachers by providing stipends for special education teachers. School district administrators should also provide high quality professional development on research-based intervention strategies for instruction, discipline, and implement intentional collaboration planning with general education teachers and administrators. In addition, district level administrators should utilize special education teachers' knowledge and expertise when making decisions that impact their roles and responsibilities at the school level (Shuls & Flores, 2020). This directly aligns with the findings of my study, with a specific focus on fostering intentional relationships at both the district and campus levels.

While special education teachers recognized that campus-based administrators did not always have control over job stressors, the special education teachers in my study felt that administrators could provide more time to address non-teaching related tasks, which aligns with current research (Mason-Williams, et al., 2020b; Mathews, 2020). Recommendations for the district include better communication regarding the necessity of non-instructional tasks and possible mandates regarding extra planning time for the completion of non-instructional tasks. Campus administrators should consider the overall paperwork and responsibilities of a special education teacher and lessen additional school duties at the campus level to enhance job satisfaction.

Finally, the findings of my study indicated that district level leadership plays an

important role in perceptions of special education teachers. The participants of my study indicated that the leadership style and practices of district level leadership plays a critical role in retaining special education teachers in the field. This could be due to the perception of district level control over policies and non-instructional duty assignments. There is minimal research on the role district level administrators' play in teacher retention; however, current Desert ISD district leaders should take this perspective into account when addressing district attrition levels for special education teachers.

Recommendations for Future Research

The scope of the study and the limitations were centered on data collected from special education teachers to explore special education teacher retention in a large school district in Texas and the perception of campus principals' support as defined through the domains from the Texas Principal Evaluation and Support System (T-PESS). Future researchers may consider pragmatic research studies that use different interventions and focus on action research to improve professional development training at other school districts to better comprehend the dynamics applicable to this population and to increase participant knowledge of principal leadership skills and knowledge of special education. Additionally, researchers may want to explore how other domains in the T-PESS instrument assess principal behavior and the impact on special education programming and practices.

Future researchers may want to examine a larger sample population within the state of Texas or across multiple states in the northern part of the United States. Examining a larger population of special education teachers' retention on campus principals' support as defined through the domains from the Texas Principal Evaluation

and Support System (T-PESS) could aid future researchers to have a better understanding of the experiences and views of both the special education and the campus administrator's views on the T-PESS. The results of such research may assist school districts, teachers, and administrators with designing professional development and training for both special education teachers and school campus administrators on strategies that results in the improvement of teaching and learning for both groups in performing their duties in the school district.

The findings of my study contribute to the need for more research to be completed on the role of district level administration on the attrition rate of special education teachers. District level support played a role in the job satisfaction of the participants of my study. Current research focuses only on campus-based administration with few researchers considering the impact of attrition; however, Elyashiv (2020) states that "policy makers should be made aware of the implicit dimension of teacher attrition and its negative impact, and design formal policies to enable school leaders to take the necessary steps towards minimizing or even eliminating it" (168). There is increased evidence that fundamental shifts must take place at the district, state, and federal level in order to have a lasting impact on teacher attrition.

Research on Pandemic Impact

Additional research should also be done on the impact of the pandemic on teacher attrition from the field. School districts were given guidance from all levels (state, local, and federal) on how to respond to the needs of special education students during remote learning and COVID restrictions. While IDEA did not change, the

expectations on how teachers were to document their support services while changing modalities of support was overwhelming. Desert ISD created mandatory documentation requirements and required all teachers to use district forms to document all services and curriculum. Teachers had never been required to follow a systematic way of capturing student services in this district and this documentation contributed to the feelings of being overwhelmed and over worked. The state of Texas is researching the increase of teacher attrition; however, academic research should also be increased with a focus on the longevity of the impact.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenology study was to explore special education teacher retention in a large school district in Texas and the perception of campus principals' support as defined through the domains from the Texas Principal Evaluation and Support System (T-PESS). Hester et al. (2020) found that teachers felt their profession had an adverse effect on their overall quality of life, thereby contributing to feelings of burnout. The data in my research study support the impact of burnout and quality of life on special education teacher retention.

Recruiting and hiring special education teachers is financially challenging to school districts in Texas. A study by the Texas Center for Educational Research (2020) report stated that the costs of hiring special education and other critical area teachers is costing the state of Texas about $329 million a year or at least $8,000 per recruit who leaves teaching in the first few years of teaching. Therefore, considering educational policies and strategies to retain and support the development of effective special education teachers in public schools is imperative to school administrators and school

boards (Bland, et al., 2014; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). The results of this study do not agree with previous research on principals' leadership behaviors and teachers leaving the profession (Baptisle, 2019; Torres, 2019); therefore, the focus for the district should be to decrease the impact of non-instructional tasks on teacher job satisfaction. The goal is to reduce attrition of teachers, to increase student learning and achievement and to retain highly qualified special education teachers.

The pendulum of job satisfaction is shifting from a focus on campus-based culture and climate to a greater analysis of special education teaching requirements from a federal and state perspective. Given the national response to teachers and education and the increased need for special education documentation due to increased court cases, special education teacher attrition is at an all-time high. This research should help guide school district administrators and school leaders in response to the needs of special education teacher in order to reduce the number of them leaving the teaching profession each year.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1) What is the process that your administrator follows to recruit, select, assign, and induct effective educators?

    a) What is your perception of the effectiveness of this process?

    b) What are your principal's strengths and weaknesses in this area?

2) In what ways can a principal support and retain highly effective educators?

    a) What is your perception of your principal's performance in this area?

3) What do you believe rigorous, calibrated, and supported observations look like?

    a) How does your principal conduct observations?

    b) What areas of strength and weakness does your principal have when completing observations?

4) What does personalized and aligned professional development look like?

    a) What is your perception of your principal's role in professional development on your campus?

5) How does an effective principal align the vision, mission, and goals to a safe environment and high expectations?

    a) What are your principal's strengths and weaknesses in creating a safe environment and high expectations?

6) What are your principal's strengths and weaknesses in establishing clear expectations and systems for behaviors, including social and emotional supports?

7) In what ways can principals lead strategies to proactively provide and coordinate student support services?

a) What are your principal's strengths and weaknesses in providing and coordinating students support services?

8) What are your perceptions of your principal's ability to productively involve and coordinate family and community involvement?

9) Considering our discussion of your principal's strengths and weaknesses, in what ways does your principal's behavior in these areas impact your decision to teach special education or to leave the field?

a) What could your principal do to increase your likelihood of staying in the field?

10) Do the areas we discussed have the greatest impact on your decision to stay in the field or leave, or are there other areas that are more impactful?

APPENDIX B

Table B1

Participant Data

Name	Level of Experience	Years in Desert ISD	Total Years of Experience
Missy	Elementary	3	6
Terry	Elementary	12	12
Stacy	Elementary	5	14
Rhonda	Elementary	3	14
Elise	Middle School	6	6
Heather	Middle School	11	11
Londa	Middle School	13	20
Annie	High School	18	18
Charlotte	High School	6	26
Jamie	High School	10	14
Sara	High School	27	27

VITA

Janna Crow was born in Bossier City, Louisiana and had the opportunity to live in various places throughout her childhood as her father was in the U.S. Air Force. She currently resides in Plano, Texas. Janna earned her Bachelor of Arts in Special Education in 1998 from Bob Jones University, a Master of Educational Leadership in 2013, and a Master of Special Education in 2014 from New Mexico Highlands University.

In 2003, Janna had the opportunity to begin in her teaching career as a special education teacher for Moriarty Public Schools in Moriarty, New Mexico. She spent the next ten years working in various capacities in Albuquerque Public Schools. Upon completion of her Master of Educational Leadership in 2013, Janna worked as a principal for Mountainair Public Schools in Mountainair, New Mexico. In 2014, Janna had the opportunity to begin her doctoral studies at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, Tennessee. Over the next seven years, Janna served in different teacher and leadership positions for Knox County Schools, Carteret County Schools, Jackson-Madison School District, Goose Creek Consolidated Schools, and Plano Independent School District. In 2022, Janna completed her Doctor of Philosophy in Education with a concentration in Leadership Studies in Education from the University of Tennessee.