Retention of Special Education Theories

Student Name

Course Name

Date

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the impact of teacher retention rates in special education. Currently, a huge demand exists for special education teachers, due to their specific knowledge base. This topic is relevant because special education teachers serve as positive and meaningful role models in supporting the unique needs of their students. They also play a huge impact in supporting a framework that captures the spirit of success and achievement for children with special needs. Special education remains a challenging area of research and requires a high level of understanding and acceptance of the issues that are most relevant to this population, and how to meet these needs effectively.

Teacher retention rates are critical factors in addressing quality within schools. Those who remain in their positions and provide quality educational experiences are likely to have more positive impacts on their students, as they can develop strategies to improve outcomes for these students as they grow and mature.

The primary hypothesis of the study supports the belief that in environments with mentoring programs, retention rates will be higher and will provide a greater level of support in meeting the needs of special education needs students. It is believed that mentoring programs keep teachers engaged and enable them to take steps required to achieve success in their roles. Furthermore, mentoring programs support them in determining how to best approach the student–teacher dynamics to achieve the best learning outcomes. The leadership dynamic within the school environment must also be supportive of the mentoring relationship so that teachers will benefit from these relationships at a high level. This process, in turn, will support their growth and desire to remain in their roles for a longer time.

Review of the Literature

Retention in the special education field must be examined using a variety of sources that provide data and information regarding the needs of special education teachers.

The relationship between retention rates and the learning outcomes of the students who are taught also needs to be examined. This process requires an examination of the research data and principles that are likely to impact students in different ways; demonstrating the importance of understanding how to evaluate data and information effectively with the intent of achieving a specific purpose. Retention in special education offers a unique set of circumstances that impact on the needs of teachers. The ability to understand the dynamics of this specialty area and what makes them stay in the field or leave for other opportunities is crucial for the current research. The research literature available in this area represents a means of understanding and acknowledging the specific areas that require further focus and consideration. Still, significant factors related to this area must be further examined. For this study, keywords and phrases, such as teacher retention, attrition, special education, and retention were used to search the existing academic literature. Sources were derived from several databases, such as Google Scholar, and no publication date filter was applied. The literature review will evaluate the main themes and demonstrate the importance of understanding the teaching field and focus on what is required to meet student expectation long term.

Billingsley (2004) addresses the importance of understanding preparation for the special education field and how it affects professional development and growth. This author determined that there is a shortage of special education teachers in many areas, given the challenges of the subject. The author further studied how shortages affect those who currently work with students with special needs (Billingsley, 2004). This study reflects on the importance of understanding the dynamic of special education, to better grasp how teachers can manage the challenges and difficulties of the field. Areas of focus include personal factors, characteristics, qualifications, the work environment, and responses to the workplace environment (Billingsley, 2004). The study utilized a thematic review of existing literature, to determine the results and primary findings. The results indicate that the major themes related to attrition and retention include the surrounding work environment, qualifications, personal characteristics, and affective reactions to the work environment. The study determines that teacher retention and attrition must be critical priorities for the education system for the foreseeable future (Billingsley, 2004).

A study by Olivarez and Arnold (2006) notes that teachers who remain in the field are likely to possess several common characteristics that impact their overall development and growth, given that many leave within the first five years of service. This study evaluates the demographics of Education Service Center – Region II in South Texas, to determine how teacher-based characteristics impact outcomes in different ways (Olivarez & Arnold, 2006). In this capacity, it is likely that teachers in different communities face specific challenges that impact their overall desire to remain in the field, thereby affecting shortages (Olivarez & Arnold, 2006). Teacher shortages in special education are common, and it appears to be correlated with specific demographic factors, such as race (Caucasian), age (over thirty), and education (bachelor's degree) (Olivarez & Arnold, 2006). Therefore, it is likely that these conditions reflect the importance of demographics as a potential cause of the special education teacher shortage in Texas, as some characteristics or personal conditions might increase some of the challenges faced within this geographic area (Olivarez & Arnold, 2006). This study is essential because it conveys how a particular area has been impacted by its current teacher population, as it is necessary for identifying the specific factors that impact pm retention and overall focus within the field (Olivarez & Arnold, 2006).

Brownell, Hirsch, and Seo (2004) provide a summary of teacher shortages in special education, stating that there is a critical need to evaluate existing policies and regulations determine whether they contribute to the root causes of this phenomenon. This summary article references literature in the field of special education. The authors Brownell, Hirsch, and Seo (2004) state that attrition must be better understood. It is necessary to comprehend what drives teachers to make accurate decisions, particularly those who are younger, who are less experienced in the field, and who may become frustrated with the field early on and decide to move to different areas (Brownell et al., 2004). There must be an improved recognition of the policies and requirements that special education teachers must meet to teach in this field. Other factors, including qualifications and evaluation techniques that may deter some from remaining in the field (Brownell et.al, 2004) should also be considered. This study identifies specific interventions, such as quality alternative routes, comprehensive personnel databases,

and systemic reforms as the critical factors in determining how to improve retention rates and address factors that directly impact attrition and recruitment within schools (Brownell et al., 2004). This study is relevant because it further emphasizes some of the factors that influence teacher-based decisions and methods of employment selection at the special education level, to emphasize the need for reform within this area (Brownell et.al, 2004).

Perry (2011) addresses the significance of new teacher orientation, and whether or not this has any real impact on retention rates within the field. This study utilized a two-group comparative survey that was extended in time, using teachers from the MiNHT group that were randomly selected for participation. The study population comprised primarily of females (Perry, 2011). This study indicates that there must be a greater focus on the development of new strategies to recruit qualified minority teachers, and to provide them with training and education that will have a lasting impact on their ability to work effectively to meet the needs of their students and remaining committed to the field for many years (Perry, 2011). This study is relevant because it conveys the importance of evaluating teacher induction and how it potentially affects retention rates. In the study, a program, entitled "Building an Excellent Start to Teaching," was evaluated to determine its ability to motivate teachers to remain within the field and retain their enthusiasm for long periods of time (Perry, 2011).

A study by Stempien and Loeb (2002) addresses the significance of understanding how teachers feel regarding their experiences with students with emotional and behavioral impairments and how this impacts their desire to remain in the field. The study results demonstrate that younger teachers with less experience are more likely to experience a higher level of dissatisfaction with their roles than those who are older and have more experience (Stempien & Loeb, 2002). This study is relevant because it reflects the importance of understanding the dynamics of the field and what is necessary to improve job satisfaction, while also considering how to best improve conditions to improve retention rates (Stempien & Loeb, 2002). The study determines that job satisfaction is a priority, and when this is not achieved, there is a much greater risk of stress and a greater likelihood of leaving a position or the field altogether.

A research study by Brown and Wynn (2007) used semi-structured interviews with a sample population of 12 principals, along with focus group interviews with a group of 4–6 teachers across 12 schools, using several common concepts and strategies that have been utilized successfully through a professional learning platform (Brown & Wynn, 2007). The study findings are relevant because they indicate that specific characteristics of principals support higher teacher retention rates. The characteristics were found to be related to issues that impact new teachers, specifically, proactivity rather than reactivity in addressing their needs. It was also found that principals are committed to bettering themselves and responding to the teacher and student needs in a timely manner to meet expectations (Brown & Wynn, 2007) and achieve higher retention rates. This study supports the belief that principals must be actively involved in supporting integration and satisfaction to promote retention for those who may have mixed feelings regarding their role in the profession (Brown & Wynn, 2007).

Connelly and Graham (2009) created a study to evaluate the role of pre-service education in improving preparation and training for teachers in the special education field. This research article is necessary for the current investigation because it aims to understand what makes special education teachers more likely to remain in the field longer. Logistic regression analysis was used to evaluate survey responses provided by special education teachers to determine if pre-service teaching played a role in the likelihood of attrition (Connelly & Graham, 2009). Most importantly, the study evaluated the impact of pre-service education on special education teachers and attrition rates (Connelly & Graham, 2009).

A study by Dempsey, Arthur-Kelly, and Carty (2009) provided a literature review regarding the role of mentoring for special education teachers, revealing how information technology impacts this process (Dempsey et al., 2009). Those with a special education degree who are in the early stages of their careers are likely to benefit from mentoring in different ways. Therefore, this study found that mentoring provides opportunities for growth for special education teachers (Dempsey et al., 2009).

The focus of the study, created by Karge and Frieberg (1992), was reviewing evidence for identifying the level of support for special education teachers that is acquired through education and other means, to determine the impact on retention rates. The study utilized a secondary analysis approach and noted that administrative support plays a critical role in supporting their progress and needs in the special education field (Karge & Frieberg, 1992).

The study aims to understand how mentoring and other types of support are useful for special education teachers in preventing or reducing attrition, as they are influenced by their mentors (Karge & Frieberg, 1992).

Lee, Patterson, and Vega (2011) embarked on a research study to identify how teachers exercise self-efficacy and represent a means of invoking the desired response in their students. The study used a survey of multiple choice, open-ended, and Likert-scale questions from a sample of 154 special education teachers, using a correlation analysis. The aim was to determine that they require a high level of support and guidance to frame their experiences and to remain in the field for longer periods of time (Lee et al., 2011). This study was designed to provide a better understanding of how self-efficacy and preparation play a role in retention (Lee et al., 2011). The study by Miller et al. (1995) questioned whether there was a correlation between the impact of specific personal characteristics and teachers' decisions to remain in the field or succumb to attrition. An evaluation of 1,152 responses was conducted to determine what sets those who stay apart from those who leave. The findings indicated that those with lower levels of stress are more likely to remain in the field for longer periods of time (Miller et al., 1995). The current study aims to recognize the factors that typically influence how teachers respond to factors such as stress, age, and climate in whether attrition is more likely or if they will remain in the profession longer (Miller et al., 1995).

Rousseau (2011) evaluated the different issues affecting attrition rates and whether elements to improve staff satisfaction are helpful in enabling teachers to remain in the field longer. The study used an interview method to evaluate teacher-based perceptions and to recognize the importance of understanding stressors that impact on the work

environment in different ways (Rousseau, 2011). The overall purpose of the study was to identify how collaboration aligns with the desire to remain in the field longer rather than to leave and begin new career paths elsewhere (Rousseau, 2011).

Plash (2005) aimed at identifying factors related to attrition, retention, and migration of special education teachers living in Alabama. The study design included two groups, some with high qualifications and others who were not sufficiently qualified, using an interview- based approach (Plash, 2005). Furthermore, an ex-post facto design was used to compare the groups, along with a survey and the interview method. It was determined that a variety of factors are related to attrition, such as relocation, paperwork, failure to meet qualifications, and caseload (Plash, 2005). The primary study objective was to determine what contributes to attrition rates, and how these rates might be reduced through the actions taken by school districts (Plash, 2005).

The purpose of the study by Fore, Martin, and Bender (2002) was to determine why teacher burnout is a common phenomenon in special education and what is required to ensure that they are retained longer. The study notes that areas such as poor working conditions and lack of quality education for these students contribute towards burnout (Fore et al., 2002).

The intent of the study was to examine these variables and to recognize the value of this practice in alleviating attrition rates (Fore et al., 2002).

Whitaker (2000) examined the impact of mentoring on attrition rates for special education teachers. A questionnaire instrument was used to identify the perceptions of 156 first-year teachers in South Carolina, and determine whether or not mentoring was effective in addressing their needs more effectively (Whitaker, 2000). The aim of the study was to examine how mentoring was used to impact special education teacher attrition and to improve the likelihood that they would remain in the field over time (Whitaker, 2000).

Williams et al. (1991) evaluated the effectiveness of teacher assistance programs at the beginning of their careers, to determine how to alleviate high rates of attrition in rural

school districts. Ten teachers were selected for a comprehensive mentoring program, involving pairing new and experienced colleagues to evaluate the mentoring relationship more closely, to advance education and training for newer teachers (Williams et al., 1991). The intent of the study was to determine how mentoring relationships impact on younger teachers who lack significant field experience (Williams et al., 1991).

Yost (2006) aimed at measuring retention, using a qualitative research design, to determine how teachers experience their daily routines, and if these issues impact on retention rates. Interviews and observations were used to evaluate graduates of the same program, and it was determined that teacher education is instrumental in enabling these professionals to develop a reason to remain in the field (Yost, 2006). This study was intended to provide further evidence on the importance of teacher education in achieving the intended outcomes in promoting a higher quality experience (Yost, 2006).

Vierstraete (2005) created a study to address different approaches of mentoring in teaching, to determine what is required to ensure that teachers consistently gain the most from mentoring experiences. The study provided a history of mentorship programs and tools, using a review of literature format, emphasizing the importance of these tools in achieving the intended outcomes for teachers (Vierstraete, 2005). The intent of the study was to examine these variables and to be effective in evaluating a framework whereby mentorship is a critical component of success and achievement in the field of teaching (Vierstraete, 2005).

Zabel and Zabel (2001) compared a study regarding teacher burnout to the results of a new research study to examine changes within the field, using a sample of 300 teachers. The study indicates that age, experience, and certifications are higher, yet burnout is currently high due to factors such as stress and the quality of educational delivery (Zabel & Zabel, 2001). The study was designed to determine how burnout plays a role in shaping the environment in which they can perform efficiently and to remain on the field longer (Zabel & Zabel, 2001).

Finally, the purpose of the study by Billingsley (2004) was to identify how quality and retention are related in the field of special education. A number of factors that contribute

to levels of attrition within the field were identified, thereby contributing to a limited desire for teachers to remain in the field for many years (Billingsley, 2004). The findings highlighted the critical factors that must be addressed that define differences among teachers, and how these differences impact on their overall ability to grow and thrive within the field (Billingsley, 2004).

Methodology

The proposed research design for the study will be qualitative in nature because it intends to provide a framework and a more effective understanding of what characteristics drive the parameters of the field and create an environment in which retention in special education is addressed. Most importantly, the survey instrument is likely to provide insight into this process, and should be reflective of the issues that plague the teaching profession, and specifically, the needs of special education teachers. This process reflects a need to evaluate teachers in the context of their ability to contribute to the profession, their drive and motivation to stay in special education, to leave for a different focus area or to leave the profession altogether.

The proposed design and survey instrument will require a means of validating the data effectively; therefore, open-ended questions are not likely to be as valid as a series of questions with a designated set of responses. In this context, the study's validity will be secured, due to the type and content of the questions that will be asked of the study participants. The internal validity of the research design must be evaluated in the context of the questionnaire instrument and how the questions are framed so that participants must respond in a specific manner to provide a realistic approach to the study design to ensure that the needs of the designated study population are met.

The study findings will be limited by the population that is selected for inclusion, along with the general challenges of the subject matter in question. There must be an emphasis on specificity, but also a recognition that a high degree of specificity may not make the study results applicable to a wider audience. Therefore, a balance between these two areas must be drawn, so that there is sufficient information to be identified,

yet not too specific or too general in nature. Simply, the study design is valid in its efforts to provide important information that will further contribute to the field.

The proposed study methodology will be used to provide further evidence on the need to improve education and support for special education teachers, to reduce attrition and increase retention rates throughout the field. Although a relatively small sample of participants will be used, it is the expectation that they will provide further evidence of the problems within the field and help further determine what may be required as an intervention. The intervention methods this study aims to highlight and examine are designed to ensure that teachers receive the education, training, and guidance necessary to improve their desire to remain within the special education field longer. This also reflects the importance of data measures, such as experience with mentoring, years of service to date, the level of certification, the level of education, the population of students in the classroom, and other elements. All variables aim to specify some of the issues that plague the special education profession in different ways, leading to higher attrition rates and lower retention rates.

An evaluation of the questionnaire responses using a valid statistical method will also be identified to reflect upon the responses and to determine patterns of these responses that will lead to a higher level of validity within the study results. This is important because it conveys the realities of the situation and highlights what is necessary to support outcomes for special education teachers. The population faces these issues as they work in the profession over time; therefore, enabling their participation in the study is important. This requires their full understanding of the study's intent and purpose, as well as how their responses will be used. This is an important reminder of the need to provide meaningful answers to the questions, to provide the best possible outcomes for the study and the results derived from it.

Ethics and Human Relations/Timeline

This study will not pose any threats or potential harm to participants because the questions are specific enough to obtain information but will not specifically identify any

individual participant. However, all prospective participants will be required to agree to have their information used for the study via informed consent forms. The data collection process will include the development of a framework that will identify potential participants and enable them to participate via their principals, who will be asked to disseminate the study information and recruit volunteers. No one will be penalized for not participating in the study; however, taking part will be encouraged by the principal. It is important to obtain data from the special education teacher pool for this purpose.

The research participants chosen for the study will be provided with detailed information regarding the study, its overall purpose, what the questions will generally entail, and how this information will be used. This is necessary to evaluate the conditions under which the study will take place and how each step will be achieved. Therefore, a timeline for the study is as follows:

- Discussion with school principals regarding the study and its contents: Week 1
- Recruitment of study participants: Weeks 2–3;
- Dissemination of the questionnaire instrument and collection of completed surveys: Weeks 3–5
- Data analysis: Week 6
- Discussion of findings and results: Weeks 7–8
- Begin to create finalized study summary: Week 9

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