

THE SELF-EFFICACY OF VETERAN SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS IN
CONTEXT TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

© Copyright by

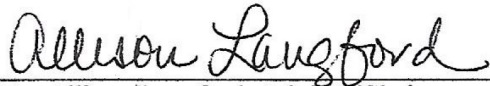
CHRISTINA O'NEILL

2023

The undersigned, approved by the Department Chair of Graduate Studies in Education, have examined a dissertation entitled:

THE SELF-EFFICACY OF VETERAN SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS IN
CONTEXT TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

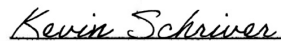
Presented by Christina O'Neill, a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Education and hereby certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.



Dr. Allison Langford, Advisor/Chair
Graduate Education



Dr. Mick Arnold, Committee Member
Professor Emeritus



Dr. Kevin Schriver, Committee Member
Professor of Psychology

THE SELF-EFFICACY OF VETERAN SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS IN
CONTEXT TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

A Dissertation
Presented to
The Faculty of the Graduate Education Department
Southwest Baptist University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

By

Christina O'Neill, B.S., M.S., Ed.S.

Dr. Allison Langford, Dissertation Advisor

April 2023

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation and doctoral degree would not have been possible without the support of the village of amazing people who surrounded me with love, motivation, and encouragement. First, I want to say thank-you to my parents, Bob and Gina Stuart, for always being my biggest cheerleaders. Thank-you for your unwavering support and consistent reminders to stay on track and keep pushing one step at a time. I also want to thank my children, Addi and Robbie, for your continued patience as I worked through this research. I spent a lot of late nights and weekends writing and you were so kind and understanding through the whole process.

I also want to thank my dear friends, too many to name, who encouraged me throughout the process. Shayne, your grace and gentle reminders kept me going when I did not think I could do it anymore. Brigette, thank-you for your wisdom and guidance and for always being patient with me when I had a million questions. Brian, you have been with me for more than a decade of college and I truly only started this journey because of your encouragement. Thank-you for always being so supportive. I told you I would get the letters. Thank you for being purple.

I would also like to thank Dr. Allison Langford for your wisdom and patience as I navigated this dissertation. Through the years of ups and downs, and topics changes, you have been a positive beacon of hope that I would one day accomplish this. In addition, thank-you to Dr. Mick Arnold and Dr. Kevin Schriver for serving on my committee. Your knowledge and input have been instrumental in my research and I appreciate your taking your time to help me on my journey.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iii
LIST OF TABLES	x
ABSTRACT.....	xi
INTRODUCTION	1
Theoretical Framework	6
Problem Statement	7
Purpose of the Study	8
Research Questions	8
Significance of the Study	9
Limitations	9
Delimitations	10
Assumptions	11
Design Controls.....	11
Definition of Key Terms	14
Summary	15
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE	16
Introduction	16

Self-Efficacy.....	16
Emotion and self-efficacy.....	18
Inclusion of special education students and self-efficacy.	19
Professional development and self-efficacy.....	20
Age, gender, and self-efficacy.....	21
General education versus special education and self-efficacy.	22
Veteran teachers	23
Special education teachers and self-efficacy.....	26
Special Education Teachers’ Responsibilities and Experiences	29
Impact of COVID-19 on Students With Special Needs, Families, and Teachers	33
COVID-19 and families.....	33
COVID-19 and students with disabilities	36
COVID-19’s influence on the lives of teachers.....	38
Professional changes.....	38
Working from home	41
Teaching virtually	43
COVID-19 and Veteran Special Education Teachers	45
Summary	46
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY	47
Introduction	47

Participants	48
Research Setting.....	49
Research Design.....	50
Instrumentation.....	51
Validity and Reliability	51
Data Analysis	54
Summary	56
ANALYSIS OF THE DATA.....	57
Introduction	57
Pilot	59
Participants	59
Validity and Reliability	62
Triangulation	63
Member checking	63
Peer review	63
Clarifying bias.	64
Data Analysis Procedures.....	64
Coding Procedures and Theme Development.....	65
Interview Topic 1:	66
Pre-COVID.....	67

Post-COVID	73
Interview topic 2:	74
Changes in perceptions of self-efficacy.....	75
Factors affecting self-efficacy	77
Self-efficacy by time period- frequency.....	82
Factors affecting self-efficacy— Increase or decrease	83
Interview topic 3:	84
Lack of closure	85
Mental health/ comorbidity.	86
Food insecurity	87
Academic and social regression.	88
Uninvolved or unstable home life	89
Lack of resources.....	90
Other	91
Interview topic 4:	92
Academic and social emotional gaps in learning	93
Increase of referrals and transfers.....	95
Increase in caseloads and paperwork.....	96
Other.....	97
Interview topic 5:	99

Bonding with others.....	100
Feelings of being valued and respected.....	101
Personal growth.....	102
Changes in students and families.....	102
Other.....	103
Interview topic 6:	104
Teachers are adaptable.....	104
Teachers learned to trust in themselves.....	105
Teachers learned to appreciate what they had.....	105
Teachers gained a new understanding.....	106
Research Questions	107
Research question 1	107
Research question 2.....	109
Research question 3.....	110
Research question 4.....	112
Summary	112
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	114
Introduction	114
Research Questions	114
Research Question 1	114

Research Question 2	115
Research Question 3	115
Research Question 4	115
Limitations	115
Delimitations	116
Summary of Methods	116
Summary of Findings	118
Themes from Research Question 1	118
Themes from Research Question 2	119
Themes from Research Question 3	120
Themes from Research Question 4	121
Discussion	122
Changes in self-efficacy	122
You have to Maslow before you can Bloom	123
Willingness to go above and beyond	125
We are not so different after all	125
Education Implications	127
Paperwork and burnout	127
Support and resources	129
Recommendations for future research	130

Conclusions	132
APPENDIX A	144
APPENDIX B	145
APPENDIX C	147

LIST OF TABLES

- Table 1.....Demographics of Participants
- Table 2.....Frequencies of Participant Demographics
- Table 3.....Changes in Perceptions of Self-Efficacy
- Table 4.....Factors Affecting Self-Efficacy
- Table 5.....Self-Efficacy by Time Period—Frequency
- Table 6.....Factors Affecting Self-Efficacy—Increases and Decreases
- Table 7.....COVID-19’s Effect on Special Education Students and Their Families
- Table 8.....The Lasting Effects of COVID-19 on Education
- Table 9.....Positive Outcomes

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this basic narrative qualitative study was to examine the experiences of veteran special education (SPED) teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic in order to gain a deeper understanding of the impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on their perceptions of self-efficacy regarding their ability to meet the needs of special education students and their families. The study recounted the lived experiences of 17 veteran special education teachers in Missouri. The participants reported the changes they experienced in their job descriptions, relationships with others, mental health, and perceptions of self-efficacy throughout 2020 and the COVID-19 pandemic. The teachers in this study spoke of lessons learned throughout COVID. The lingering effects the school shutdown in spring 2020 had on public schools in Missouri were also examined. Overall, this study gives a look into the lives of Missouri veteran special education teachers during a global pandemic and provides insight into how their lives changed, the lessons they learned, and what it means for the future of education.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 2020 COVID-19 changed the course of education in America when schools across the country were forced to close their doors and find a way to teach all students online (Schleicher, 2020). According to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2020) more than 826 million students and 185 countries were impacted by the school closures. Families, many not having formal training in education, had to step in and be their child's teacher (Asbury, Fox, Deniz, Code, & Toseeb, 2021; Cassinat et al., 2021; Young & Donovan, 2020). Veteran teachers and new teachers alike had to relearn how to teach in this new environment (Ehren et al., 2021). The entire world was in chaos and turmoil and teachers were expected to carry on educating young minds from their living rooms in an effort to keep students from falling behind (Hilger, Scheibe, Frenzel, & Keller, 2021; Young & Donovan, 2020). School districts were tasked with finding new methods of communication and curriculum delivery so their teachers could get back to teaching as quickly as possible (Jenkins & Walker, 2021). As a result, educational delivery shifted to a virtual setting and the role of the parent in their child's education was transformed.

The pandemic affected families in a variety of ways, and these changes, along with other societal challenges, impacted the educational experiences for their children. Families in America were struggling at this point because of anxiety, society changes, sick family members, pressure to teach their children, and loss of jobs. Those stressors in addition to learning new technology and being in charge of their child's education caused higher than normal levels of stress in many American families (Asbury et al., 2021;

Cassinat et al., 2021). Many families did not have access to the technology needed to help their child be successful in online school (Tumkan & Tumkan, 2020). According to UNESCO (2020), 43% (706 million) of students did not have internet at home and were not able to consistently access the curriculum and communication provided by their school district. Konikkal (2020) refers to this as the “Digital Divide.” As a result of this Digital Divide families relied on their communication with the teacher to make sure their child was getting their needs met while learning from home. Communication between students and teachers is just as important as the technology used for teaching. If the communication is lacking, the tools and technology are no longer important. Young and Donovan (2020) wrote that the teacher-parent team is critical to the success of students and that clear consistent communication is necessary. The pandemic caused a series of events that threatened the teacher-parent team and the communication between students and teachers.

The shift to virtual learning significantly altered day-to-day experiences of students, creating uncertain and strained environment for some. Students who were accustomed to the routine and schedule of school were suddenly expected to complete “school” in their dining room. Overnight, mom became teacher. While some parents were formally educated teachers, others held different professions and had no formal training in educating children (Asbury et al., 2021; Cassinat et al., 2021; Young & Donovan, 2020). Boundaries and expectations were blurred, and students struggled to make this shift. Some students were hands-on learners and they had to quickly adjust to learning without hands-on tools and manipulatives (Asbury et al., 2021; Cassinat et al., 2021). For some students, school was the only place they felt safe, loved, warm, and well fed. For

students who did not get their basic needs met at home, school closures meant a drastic decrease in their overall well-being (Ehren et al., 2021). Many students relied on the close personal relationships they had with their teachers and other staff members and suffered from not having those daily interactions. Many students and families are not confident in their abilities to utilize the technology needed to be successful in an online setting (Safta-Zecheria, Stefaniga, Negru, & Virag, 2020; Teachonline.ca, 2020). While some students thrived in their new learning environment, others found it detrimental to their education.

One population of students impacted was the special education community. Special education students have a variety of needs that general education students do not. Most of these needs require specialized instruction or therapies. Students with an Individual Education Program (IEP) often need individual education from a teacher trained in that area as well as related services such as speech therapy or occupational therapy, both of which should be administered by a trained therapist (Asbury et al., 2021; Brunson McClain et al., 2021; Young & Donovan, 2020). These are not areas that can be easily supplemented by parents in a home setting. Children can have comorbidity, which is two or more simultaneous conditions occurring in the same patient (“Comorbidity,” 2022). Comorbidity can occur with any combination of diagnosis including Specific Learning Disability, Attention Deficit Disorder, Autism, Anxiety, Depression, and psychological disorders. Comorbidity is prevalent in students with special needs so these children may experience higher than average adverse effects to changes in schedule, environment, and service provider. According to Padhy, Sahoo, and Biswas (2015) children with specific learning disorders have a comorbidity rate between 10% and 60%

depending on the specific conditions being examined. They also tend to have higher than average levels of anxiety and depression (Asbury et al., 2021; Brunson McClain et al., 2021). The potential impact on special education students and their families was significant.

In addition to students and parents, teachers were also markedly affected by the impact of the pandemic and transition to virtual learning. Most veteran teachers have high levels of self-efficacy when it comes to doing their job. According to Hasselquist and Graves (2020) veteran teachers are better at building relationships, balancing home and work, and connecting with the community. When COVID-19 caused schools to shut down, teachers suddenly had to learn new ways to teach what they had always taught (Fauzi & Sastra Khusuma, 2020; Scull, Phillips, Sharma, & Garnier, 2020). Some veteran teachers were not familiar with technology and struggled to adjust to the changes in pedagogy. Others embraced the new methods and enjoyed getting to know their students' families better, a side effect of consistent phone calls and Zoom meetings.

The relationship between teachers, students, and parents was altered in both positive and negative ways. Teachers reported COVID-19 having a positive effect in regard to cooperation and empathy with parents. Most teachers were worried about their students and how they were facing being home and not getting some of the needs met that were usually met at school (Ehren et al., 2021). Since the country had safe-at-home orders put into place, many teachers were not allowed to do home visits to check on their students and had to rely on parents' communication when checking on students' progress and well-being (Brunson McClain et al., 2021). Teachers rely on their relationships with

students as much as the students do and the school closures greatly impacted those relationships.

Teachers, like many other adults, need consistency, relationships, and security for their mental health to flourish. COVID-19 not only negatively impacted students but teachers' mental health suffered as well (Hilger et al., 2021). They dealt with the same anxieties, depression, and insecurities as the rest of the world while also trying to navigate this new way of doing their jobs (Bitan et al., 2020; Matiz et al., 2020; Q. Li, et al, 2020; Stanculescu, 2021; Talidong & Toquero, 2020;). Many families and students relied on teachers to be their anchor in those troubling times, therefore increasing the pressure for many teachers.

Special education teachers had a particularly difficult time completing their jobs during the COVID-19 school shutdown. Individualized Education Programs are legal documents that have a certain amount of service minutes that each special education student must be provided (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [DESE], 2021). These minutes were expected to be provided even with the move to learning from home. Special education teachers had to determine a way to consistently communicate with students and families to make sure these service minutes were being provided (Young & Donovan, 2020). Some districts and schools were lenient on minutes for the time of the shutdown, but teachers were still expected to make every effort possible to provide these students with their services (Jenkins & Walker, 2021). Many special education students struggle to use technology, which made it difficult for teachers to try and communicate through a computer screen. Students with Autism and intellectual deficits were especially difficult to teach because they require proximity, eye

contact, and social cues to be able to affectively teach them (Brunson McClain et al., 2021). Special education teachers rely on the resources available in their school buildings to be able to meet the needs of this population of students. School closures made it increasingly difficult for them to get access to resources and communities they needed to do their job with fidelity. As a result, the self-efficacy of many teachers may have been affected during this time.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this research was grounded in Albert Bandura's (1997) theory of perceived self-efficacy. According to Bandura, "perceived self-efficacy refers to beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (p. 3). He claimed the more positive someone is about their ability to complete a task, the more confident they are in other areas and the more easily they are able to solve problems that may arise. He also reported that people with higher self-efficacy rates will be more committed through adversity.

Bandura (1997) determined people gain this self-efficacy through experiences in which they were successful and through social models. Bandura's theory of self-efficacy was chosen as the theoretical framework for this research because it encompasses the very ways people's self-efficacy can be created, grown, and changed based on their experiences.

According to Bandura (1997):

Self-efficacy beliefs are constructed from four principal sources of information: enactive mastery experiences that serve as indicators of capability; vicarious experiences that alter efficacy beliefs through

transmission of competencies and comparison with attainments of others; verbal persuasion and allied types of social influences that one possess certain capabilities; and physiological and affective states from which people partly judge their capableness, strength, and vulnerability to dysfunction” (p.79).

These will be expanded upon in Chapter Two. This research used Bandura’s models of self-efficacy as a lens to understand the changes in efficacy for veteran special education teachers during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Problem Statement

Research has shown that special education teachers have higher than average levels of self-efficacy (Johnson, King-Sears, & Miller, 2020). This is especially true for veteran special education teachers (Bandura, 1997; Orlando, 2014). Veteran teachers are highly motivated and committed to the profession and have greater content knowledge (Carillo & Flores, 2018). Positive attitudes, strong social connections, and affective administrators all contribute to high self-efficacy in veteran special education teachers (Lowe, Gray, Prout, Jefferson, & Shaw, 2019).

In the spring of 2020 everything changed when the COVID-19 pandemic hit and caused schools around the world to close their doors. Teachers found themselves trying to maintain high self-efficacy while teaching from home. Although veteran teachers are able to recover more quickly from setbacks than newer teachers, they still struggled with the new way of conducting the business of education (Bandura, 1997; Pearman, Bowles, & Polka, 2021). These teachers were now expected to be caregivers at home as well as continue teaching and meeting the needs of their students (Fox, Tuckwiller, Kutscher, &

Walter, 2020; Sayman & Cornell, 2021). As teachers were struggling with new pedagogy and location of teaching, emotional labor was high and made it difficult to maintain self-efficacy (Buonomo, Fiorilli, & Benevene, 2019; Sayman & Cornell, 2021).

While there is some research around self-efficacy and COVID-19 (Fauzi & Sastra Khusuma, 2020; Hilger et al., 2021; Raghul, Aravind, & Rajesh, 2021; Sayman & Cornell, 2021) there is limited research on how COVID-19 and the changes it caused to education have altered the self-efficacy of veteran teachers. There is a need to study whether the changes in resources, pedagogy, and location of instruction caused by the pandemic affected the perceived self-efficacy of veteran special education teachers regarding their ability to meet the needs of special education students and their families.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic narrative qualitative study was to examine the experiences of veteran special education teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic in order to gain a deeper understanding of the impact the Covid-19 pandemic had on their perceptions of self-efficacy regarding their ability to meet the needs of special education students and their families. For the purpose of this research veteran special education teachers were generally defined as educators who had been teaching public special education for at least 5 years in spring of 2020. For the purpose of this research the COVID-19 pandemic was generally defined as the time period between spring 2020 and present day, fall 2022.

Research Questions

The intent of this study was to determine the impact the COVID -19 pandemic had on the self-efficacy of veteran special education teachers. The central question for

this study was this: How did the perception of self-efficacy change for veteran special education teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic? The researcher sought to answer the following questions:

1. How did teaching during a pandemic (COVID-19) affect veteran special education teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy?
2. How were job expectations for veteran special education teachers affected during the pandemic?
3. What challenges did veteran special education teachers face during COVID-19?
4. What lessons did veteran special education teachers learn during COVID-19?

In addition to research questions, limitations are defined in the following text.

Significance of the Study

A study of the self-efficacy of selected veteran special education teachers in context of the COVID-19 pandemic is important for several reasons. First, it adds to the body of research already available regarding self-efficacy and teachers, specifically veteran special education teachers, an area lacking in current research. Second, it examines not only the impact of the school closures due to COVID-19 but strives to uncover the aftereffects of what happened when everyone returned to in-person learning and how that changed selected veteran teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy. Third, it gives administrators ideas for how to increase their teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy and maintain that efficacy if another school closure situation were to occur in the future.

Limitations

The methodological limitations for this study were as follows:

1. The research is limited by the number of veteran teachers selected by criterion-based probability sampling who agree to complete the interview process.
2. The research is limited by the honest responses from the participants.
3. There may be unintentional bias of participants due to opinions of the school district.
4. There may be unintentional bias of participants due to opinions about the politics surrounding COVID-19.
5. Self-reports from participants are difficult to verify.
6. The study can only determine a correlation between self-efficacy and COVID-19 and not causation.

The researcher limitations for this study were as follows:

1. Unintentional bias due to researcher being part of the target population.
2. Access to documents.
3. Consistency in interviewing and transcribing.

In addition to the limitations, delimitations for the study were also defined as follows.

Delimitations

The delimitations of this study were as follows:

1. The study was delimited to special education teachers who had been teaching in that area at least 5 years, who were employed in public education at the time of the spring 2020 school closures, and who continued to be employed in public education for the 2020- 2021 school year.
2. Participants were teachers from varying grade levels and demographics (rural, urban, suburban).

3. Gender of participants was included for demographic purposes.
4. The study was delimited to Missouri public education teachers.
5. Interviews were conducted via Zoom due to geographical accessibility and data collection.

In addition to limitations and delimitations, assumptions are also defined.

Assumptions

The assumptions of this study were as follows:

1. Teachers would answer the interview questions honestly and completely.
2. Teachers would not let any potential bias for or against their school district influence their answers in the interview.
3. Special education directors would be helpful and forthcoming when recommending participants for the study.
4. The participants of the study would be generalizable to other districts in Missouri as well as other public schools throughout the United States.

In addition to assumptions, design controls were also defined.

Design Controls

This was a qualitative interview-style study where the researcher interviewed veteran special education teachers about their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, interpreted and evaluated those experiences, and reported on the meanings participants attributed to those experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The purpose of the study was to gain insight into the lives of veteran special education teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact of that experience on teacher self-efficacy.

Interviews are a meaningful way to gain insight into a phenomenon that will not be replicated and was not witnessed firsthand (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The interviews were a semi-structured format where an interview guide was used to ensure consistent, guiding questions, but the interviews were flexible, and the researcher was able to ask more specific questions as they arose. The interviewees were given opportunities to share their own information not directly tied to a question. There was no predetermined order to the questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The synchronous interviews were conducted via Zoom and were recorded and transcribed after the interview concluded. Zoom was chosen so interviewees could remain in their own environment where they experienced the issues (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) and so the researcher could easily interview teachers from all over the state of Missouri quickly and efficiently without needing to travel.

The researcher asked a series of predetermined questions about the participants' demographics, years of teaching, experiences and opinions of teaching during COVID-19, and overall thoughts on how education had changed since spring 2020. Previous research has examined gender and years of teaching when conducting self-efficacy research with teachers. This researcher sought to examine whether the data collected in this study aligns with previous research. Experience questions as well as opinion and values questions exposed the true feelings of the participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researcher implemented both cross-case and single-case analysis when evaluating her data. Cross- case analysis was used by looking at certain responses, questions, or themes across all of the interviews. Single-case analysis was used when examining each

individual interview and comparing each response with one another (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The limitations of this study included the number of selected veteran special education teachers who agreed to complete the interview process due to lack of time to complete the interviews or other contributing factors. Another limitation was honest responses from the participants. They could respond with unintentional bias if they had ill feelings about how their district handled the COVID-19 school closures or if they had strong political views surrounding COVID-19. Another limitation was self-reports from participants are difficult to verify. The researcher endeavored to increase validity by cross referencing accounts from participants with emails and other data from their districts. The final limitation was the study could only determine a correlation between self-efficacy and COVID-19 and not causation. There were researcher limitations including access to documents and consistency with interviewing and transcribing. The final limitation was the researcher was a veteran special education teacher and therefore could have had unintentional bias in the research.

The delimitations of the study are the study was limited to special education teachers who had been teaching in that area at least 5 years, who were employed in public education at the time of the spring 2020 school closures, and who continued to be employed in public education for the 2020- 2021 school year. The researcher was specific about this because she wanted to ensure the teacher was a veteran at the time of the COVID-19 school closures to provide the most accurate accounts. Another delimitation was participants were teachers from varying grade levels and demographics (rural, urban, suburban) so the information could be as generalized as possible. Gender of participants

was another delimitation and was included for demographic purposes and to support earlier research that said gender played a role in self-efficacy. Another delimitation was the study was limited to Missouri public education teachers. Districts outside Missouri were not considered because the data gained from Missouri would not be transferable to other states. Interviews were conducted via Zoom as the final delimitation to make gaining access to interviewees easier and because Zoom can be recorded for data collection purposes.

The study assumed participants would be honest and complete in their answers and would not let any potential bias for or against their school influence their answers. Another assumption was that special education directors would be helpful and forthcoming when recommending participants for the study and would willingly give the researcher the contacts they needed to complete the interviews. The final assumption was the participants of the study would be generalizable to other districts in Missouri as well as other public schools throughout the United States.

Definition of Key Terms

In addition to design controls, key terms were also defined.

Self- efficacy. Bandura (1997) defined self-efficacy as people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce effects.

Veteran teacher. For the purpose of this study, veteran teacher was any teacher who had taught in the same field for 5 or more years prior to the 2020-2021 school year as literature indicates that 5 or more years is a critical amount of time for teacher experience (Beck, Lunsmann, & Garza, 2020).

Summary

The research will fill the gap in literature where COVID-19 and veteran teachers self-efficacy is concerned. There is a lack of research about the changes COVID-19 had on the self-efficacy of veteran special education teachers. The purpose of this basic narrative qualitative study was to examine the experiences of veteran special education teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic in order to gain a deeper understanding of the impact the Covid-19 pandemic had on their perceptions of self-efficacy regarding their ability to meet the needs of special education students and their families. Albert Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy was thoroughly examined in regard to its significance with teachers and education. The four sources of self-efficacy were explained and were used to guide the study.

This chapter introduced the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact it had on families, educators, and special education. The chapter also examined the theoretical framework of Albert Bandura, who wrote to the importance of self-efficacy in task completion and overall accomplishment. The limitations, delimitations, and assumptions were also included in this chapter as well as key terms.

Chapter Two will contain a review of literature on teaching during periods of trauma, the self-efficacy of veteran teachers, special education, how job changes impact people, and growth through trauma. The review of literature will address self-efficacy and its impact on teacher retention and overall teacher confidence. Chapter Three will explain the methods for determining participants for the study. Chapter Four will present the findings of this study, followed by chapter Five with the results of the study, implications of the findings, and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter presents the literature review involving themes around COVID-19, special education, and self-efficacy. The chapter is divided into two sections, self-efficacy and teaching, and COVID-19 and teaching. The first section of this literature review provides a description of self-efficacy and how it applies to teaching. The section goes into detail about how self-efficacy is impacted by teachers' emotions, the inclusion of special education students, professional development, age and gender, and general education versus special education. Veteran teachers are discussed, followed by special education teachers and their responsibilities and experiences.

The second section examines COVID-19 and its impact on teachers and families. The section begins with COVID-19's impact on the families of special education students and then on the students themselves. The chapter delves into COVID-19 and its influence on teachers in their personal and professional lives, as well as reports on the experiences of teachers regarding virtual teaching and working from home. Finally, the chapter discusses the lack of information post-COVID-10 pandemic and the need for further research in this area.

Self-Efficacy

According to Albert Bandura (1997), "perceived self-efficacy refers to beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (p. 3). Bandura determined self-efficacy is typically influenced by mastery experiences, social modeling, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal. He also stated

self-efficacy is not a fixed ability and can be learned and strengthened based on experiences. Although Bandura is the main theorist for self-efficacy, other authors have sought to clarify and define self-efficacy as it applies to teachers. These researchers sought to investigate the characteristics of self-efficacious teachers, how self-efficacy relates to job satisfaction, and professional development's impact on self-efficacy.

Mielke (2021) agreed these four areas should be built into how teachers work. Mielke stated that the most critical element of an effective teacher was a belief in their own abilities. He used Bandura's (1997) four sources of influence of self-efficacy, - mastery experiences, social modeling, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal,- to advocate for high-quality coaching to increase self-efficacy. High-quality coaching can involve social modeling and emotional arousal depending on the positive emotional impact of the coach. Mielke claimed coaching also increases instructional bonding, which can lead to higher perceptions of self-efficacy.

Pearman et al., (2021) conducted a study attempting to clarify a definition of self-efficacy according to teachers. They were unsuccessful in coming to a consensus for a definition, but did report many common characteristics of people with high self-efficacy that align with Bandura's (1997) definition. After interviewing educators and asking them what common characteristics they noticed in people they thought had high self-efficacy, the results showed there were many common characteristics including having a strong knowledge base and an ability to apply it in their classroom. Teachers with high self-efficacy are also confident in their decisions regarding both curriculum and classroom management and are confident that those decisions will positively impact student mastery. Educators in this study also reported that self-efficacious teachers were life-long

learners and always sought to improve themselves personally and professionally. The authors tied this back to Bandura's theory of mastery and vicarious experiences influencing self-efficacy and how observation of veteran teachers can lead to resilience and the ability to overcome obstacles. Finally, they found a correlation that high levels of self-efficacy lead to higher levels of overall job satisfaction (Pearman et al., 2021). Similarly, Caprara, Barbaranelli, Steca, and Malone (2006) supposed that a teacher's self-efficacy could be influenced by student achievement and job satisfaction. Job satisfaction tends to be a common theme among teachers with high self-efficacy.

Teachers with high levels of self-efficacy tend to have higher job satisfaction rates, lower levels of burnout, greater willingness to try new technologies and pedagogies (Mielke, 2021), higher rates of parent involvement, and are more open to coaching and support (Mielke, 2021). They also tend to view difficult tasks as welcome challenges. Self-efficacious teachers can adapt quickly to changes and do not get overwhelmed when being asked to make sudden changes. They are able to recover quickly after something goes wrong or they fail in some way (Bandura, 1997; Pearman et al., 2021). They are task focused and enjoy setting and achieving goals (Bandura, 1997). Thus, teachers with high self-efficacy have many things in common.

Emotion and self-efficacy. Teachers with low self-efficacy tend to shy away from domains or skills they do not feel confident completing. Overall negativity can cause emotional labor that can result in low self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). If they suffer a setback, they take a long time to recover and often do not recover fully. Teachers with low self-efficacy also tend to become anxious or depressed more easily. Analytical thought and problem solving can be difficult for these teachers. Yin (2022) alleged

teachers' subjective well-being and self-efficacy went down when they had a high locus of control. When teachers believed things were out of their control and their lives were being directed by outside forces, their self-efficacy went down. However, when they had high levels of internal locus of control, they had higher levels of self-efficacy. Regulation of emotions plays a large role in self-efficacy (Yin, 2022).

A 2019 study by Buonomo, et al., had similar findings. They studied positive and negative emotions teachers had toward students and examined how those affected the teachers' self-efficacy. They confirmed the findings of Mielke (2021) and Yin (2022), reporting the higher a level of positive emotion felt, the higher the level of self-efficacy and conversely the more negative the emotions felt, the lower the teacher's self-efficacy. The negative relationship was so strong the positive emotion results could not mediate the negative. This study supports Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory about emotional labor being an important factor in self-efficacy. Emotional labor can become more involved when working with a new set of expectations or students with different needs (Buonomo et al., 2019).

Inclusion of special education students and self-efficacy. In a study conducted with Chinese preservice teachers, K. Li and Cheung (2021) researched inclusion and preservice teachers' self-efficacy as they related to inclusion with special needs students. They purported attitudes toward inclusion directly impacted teachers' feelings of self-efficacy and the more positive the feelings, the greater the efficacy. Although emotional feelings were the highest predictor, other factors including workload, feasibility of implementation, and adequate training impacted self-efficacy (K. Li & Cheung, 2021).

A 2020 study on inclusivity and self-efficacy conducted with British secondary teachers found similar results. Woodcock and Jones (2020) alleged that attitudes toward inclusivity had direct impact on the self-efficacy levels of secondary teachers. The highest levels of self-efficacy were reported in teachers who believed inclusion was an effective way to teach children and those who believed all children could learn at high levels. The researchers also discovered that British secondary teachers had the highest level of self-efficacy in classroom management while the lowest levels of self-efficacy were in engaging all students. Attitudes are important in determining self-efficacy but they are not the only determining factor. Sometimes teachers may have a positive attitude but do not have the necessary skills required and need further education themselves (Woodcock & Jones, 2020).

Professional development and self-efficacy. Sometimes further education is needed to assist teachers with becoming more self-efficacious. McCullough, Granger, Sutherland, Conroy, and Pandey (2022) sought to discover whether a professional development program could increase teacher self-efficacy. They implemented the plan BEST in CLASS-E, a program designed to increase student-teacher relationships in hopes of seeing an increase in teacher self-efficacy and classroom management as well as a reduction in teacher burnout. They found teachers who went through the BEST in CLASS-E program did not have higher self-efficacy by the end of the trial than teachers who maintained Business As Usual (BAU). This indicated that self-efficacy cannot be acquired solely through professional development and just learning how to communicate with students may not be enough (McCullough et al., 2022). Self-efficacy must be

attained over time and through various experiences (Bandura, 1997; McCullough et al., 2022).

Tschannen-Moran and McMaster (2009) also examined professional development and its role in self-efficacy. They asked teachers to implement a new reading strategy and offered four different types of professional development, then measured the self-efficacy levels of each teacher in regard to implementing the new reading strategy. What they discovered was twofold. First, they found the implementation of the professional development did not take a significant impact. The teachers with high self-efficacy remained high. However, there was a slight dip in the self-efficacy initially as teachers realized there was a new strategy they were not familiar with and they reoriented themselves to the new ways. But those groups that experienced coaching as part of their professional development never saw that initial dip. The second thing they purported was that most all career teachers had high levels of self-efficacy, stating that typically teachers either raised their level of self-efficacy or they got out of the professional early on. These researchers agreed with Bandura (1997) that mastery experiences were the most effective way to maintain and grow self-efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & McMaster, 2009).

Age, gender, and self-efficacy. Contrary to earlier findings, when studying English as a First Language (EFL), teachers in Iran, Rezaeian and Abdollahzadeh (2020), reported neither gender nor years of experience affects the self-efficacy rates of educators. They also found age of the educator was not a contributing factor. They did find there was a slightly higher level of collective efficacy among male teachers than females (Rezaeian & Abdollahsadeh, 2020).

When looking at self-efficacy and information and communication technology, Šabić, Baranović, and Rogošić (2021) conducted a study comparing gender and age and how those impacted self-efficacy. They compared male and female teachers with different grade levels and years of experience and varying levels of comfortability with computers and technology. They discovered there was a small but statistically significant difference between male and female teachers with male teachers having more self-efficacy overall. They also discovered that the older the teachers were, the more that gap widened, with the largest gap in self-efficacy occurring amongst older teachers. The researchers claimed that older female teachers had the lowest self-efficacy when it came to teaching with computers and technology even though they had the most teaching experience. However, training in computers and technology did increase these self-efficacy levels, even in older female teachers (Šabić et al., 2021). While genders were sometimes compared when looking at self-efficacy, other demographics were also examined.

General education versus special education and self-efficacy. In 2020, Johnson et al., conducted a study to determine the self-efficacy of general education teachers and special education teachers in a co-teaching situation and the impact their personal compatibility had on their self-efficacy. The researchers found that general education teachers were the ones most highly involved in the academic instruction. Although special education teachers had lower levels of self-efficacy than their general education peers, they still maintained high levels of self-efficacy. They also reported teachers' self-efficacy was not impacted by their personal connection to their co-teacher or by their co-teachers own level of self-efficacy. They predicted special education teachers still

maintained a high level of self-efficacy because they were continually learning from their co-teachers (Johnson et al., 2020).

Overall, the authors found self-efficacy relies more on experiences and a desire to learn and grow than on gender, age, or grade level taught. Teachers often become more self-efficacious as they progress in their career and gain more experiences. The next section reviews the literature related to self-efficacy for veteran teachers.

Veteran teachers. While the literature on teacher self-efficacy is deep, studies focusing on veteran teachers are less common. In general, veteran teachers typically have higher perceptions of self-efficacy because they have been doing the job longer and have a greater bank of content knowledge. Veteran teachers have high levels of motivation and are committed to the profession (Carrillo & Flores, 2018). They have had more time to establish ways of building relationships with students (Yerli Usul & Yerli, 2017). They also have a larger community surrounding them for support. Veteran teachers are well versed in how to find the resources their students may need. However, when the integration of technology came along, they found themselves trying to learn new ways of teaching.

When it came to initial technology integration, veteran teachers seemed to struggle the most. In Orlando's (2014) study veteran and novice teachers were interviewed in regard to new technology policies that were being implemented in their school. Although veteran teachers typically have higher levels of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) in this case, the veteran teachers struggled the most with the new changes. They discovered large gaps in their knowledge. The implementation of technology challenged teaching as they knew it brought up feelings of inadequacy. Orlando claimed these

veteran teachers also believed the dynamic in their buildings shifted, reporting newer teachers who were already more familiar with technology were being given special privileges in the building. Veteran teachers also reported feeling a dynamic shift in their classrooms as students were starting to understand more about technology than they were. They felt conflicted because they understood the curriculum and the pedagogy but not this new way of using technology to implement it. Veteran teachers typically draw on previous mastery experiences when learning new things (Bandura, 1997) but in this instance they did not have any previous knowledge to draw from, leaving them feeling isolated and left behind (Orlando, 2014). These feelings of being overwhelmed and the shift in overall pedagogy left some teachers burnt out and ready to leave the field of education.

In a study conducted in 2019, Admiraal, Veldman, Mainhard, and Tartwijk asked what causes burnout for veteran special education teachers, and they reported that poor job satisfaction was the main reason. Poor job satisfaction was comprised of poor policies, the burden of paperwork, long hours, and private circumstances. Veteran teachers who had good job satisfaction reported it stemming from good student outcomes and favorable relationships with students and their colleagues. Van Maele and Van Houtte (2012) found similar results, reporting that experienced teachers had lower rates of job satisfaction due to career exhaustion.

Positive attitudes and overall emotions are influential in a teacher's perception of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Buonomo et al., 2019). In 2019, Lowe et al. discovered the same was true for veteran teachers when they conducted a study of 145 teachers from across Australia. They researched male and female teachers, 40 years old and older, who

were from varying areas of the country and taught both primary and secondary. They were searching for which demographic of veteran teachers was the most positive overall. They revealed the most positive veteran teachers overall were females 60 years old and older. They found that women were positive twice as frequently as men, and primary teachers were more positive than secondary teachers. Lowe et al., speculated the reason the most positive teachers are 60 and older is because those who are not as positive about the job would have quit long before then. Overall, their research supports others studies done that have found positive attitudes have a direct correlation with high self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Lowe et al., 2019; Orlando, 2014).

Prout, Lowe, Gray, and Jefferson (2019) took the findings from their positive veterans survey and extended their research in this area, requesting follow-up interviews with the 66 participants who scored within the positive range on their previous study, 11 of which chose to participate. These researchers discovered that positive social connections was the most important indicator of positive mindsets for these teachers. Social groups were listed among things most valuable to these positive teachers, offering accountability, shared values, and mutual trust. Some participants listed this sense of belonging and the belief that they were safe to take calculated risks as essential to their perceptions of self-efficacy (Prout et al., 2019).

Overall, veteran teachers experience higher levels of self-efficacy until they reach the point of burnout. One population of teachers has greater levels of stress and burnout rates than their peers. The next section includes information about special education teachers, their self-efficacy, and how high stress can attribute to burnout.

Special education teachers and self-efficacy. The previous section discussed how self-efficacy relates to veteran teachers; this section examines self-efficacy of special education teachers, including beginning and veteran educators. In 2016 Gavish, Bar-on, and Shein-kahalon conducted a study in Israel with beginning special education teachers. They examined the self-efficacy of these teachers and found for new teachers just beginning their career, the highest occurrence of self-efficacy was in the area of respecting people with diverse disabilities and understanding diversity as a whole. They credited understanding and respecting diverse learners to the teacher preparation programs that teach directly to this topic. High levels of respect for people with disabilities is also something inherent in most people who are driven to teach special education and does not require special training or mastery experience. Gavish et al. also discovered as they interviewed special education teachers later on that mastery experiences created the greatest levels of self-efficacy in many participants. This aligns with Bandura's (1997) theory that mastery experiences create high levels of self-efficacy. In this study beginning teachers reported it was through crisis intervention and hands-on experiences with students with disabilities that they were able to gain trust in themselves and in turn their self-efficacy increased (Gavish et al., 2016).

Lee, Patterson, and Vega (2011) also studied beginning special education teachers and their self-efficacy. They agreed that gender and age did not make a difference in self-efficacy. They discovered beginning teachers' self-efficacy could be directly tied to how much control they believed they had over a situation and how adequately they had been prepared for it ahead of time. The relationship between the level of support they received from their administrators and mentors and their level of self-efficacy were statistically

significant with a standard deviation of 1.07. They also supposed beginning teachers had greater levels of self-efficacy when they were given some control over their classroom and curriculum with a standard deviation of 1.14 (Lee et al., 2011).

The correlation of job satisfaction and self-efficacy spans the entire globe as noted in a 2012 study in Oyo, Nigeria. Oyuwumi, Ibitoye, and Sanni (2012) found similar results to Lee et al. (2011). They found positive correlations between job satisfaction, job commitment, and self-efficacy. The researchers reported special education teachers have a higher level of self-efficacy because they are accustomed to trying out multiple forms of instruction to see which works best for their students and they are more willing to seek out resources they may need to accomplish their job. Oyuwumi et al. reported overall special education teachers are generally more self-efficacious than most other teachers because of the highly specialized area of their work.

Although the majority of research reviewed indicates a positive correlation between special education teacher self-efficacy and increased student achievement, a 2014 study by Guo, Dynia, Pelatti, and Justice reported conflicting results. They examined self-efficacy rates of Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) teachers and discovered although their self-efficacy rates were high in comparison to general education teachers, they showed low self-efficacy in surprising ways. When looking at the language and literacy gains of the ECSE students, they discovered the higher the students' achievement rates, the lower the teachers' self-efficacy. The researchers did indicate that high-quality classrooms and curriculum resulted in higher levels of student achievement. They attributed the decline in self-efficacy to the possibility that teachers are fostering self-reflection and are attempting to acquire new skills and strategies

themselves, which could cause a dip in self-efficacy. Guo et al. reported teacher beliefs about themselves do not impact the ECSE setting as much as quality education and environment. When self-efficacy levels decline it can be difficult to not become discouraged.

There are a variety of factors that contribute to teacher self-efficacy including gender, numbers of years teaching, and student needs. In a 2017 study, Nuri, Demirok, and Direktor interviewed special education teachers with a variety of ages, backgrounds, and education. They discovered that although gender did not play a role in overall perceptions of self-efficacy, when it came to student engagement and classroom management, female participants reported high levels of self-efficacy. This contrasts with Šabić et al. (2021), who claimed male general education teachers having higher levels of self-efficacy than female general education teachers in all areas. Nuri et al. (2017) reported special education teachers having higher levels of self-efficacy congruent with the number of students they served. The more students they had, the higher their level of conveyed self-efficacy. The researchers also examined the burnout rates for special education teachers and found they were higher than those of general education teachers. They attributed this to the intense interventions needed by students with special needs and the amount of direct student involvement special education teachers have compared to general education teachers. They reported the rate of burnout for special education teachers who had been teaching 1-5 years was “medium,” whereas the burnout rate for those teaching 11-16 years was “high” (Nuri et al., 2017).

Martin (2011) similarly examined the correlation between special education teachers’ self-efficacy and burnout, indicating personal accomplishment was a leading

factor in high rates of self-efficacy. The researcher maintained that high levels of emotional exhaustion led to low levels of self-efficacy, citing the leading causes of emotional exhaustion to be teacher stressors, emotional demands, and quality of leadership. She also indicated that an increased number of students with learning disabilities led to a decrease in self-efficacy while high levels of involvement and support from administrators led to higher levels of self-efficacy. Overall, Martin found that special education teachers have higher than average levels of stress and emotional exhaustion, leading to higher than average levels of burnout.

Self-efficacy varies among special education teachers based on a variety of factors. In addition, special education teachers often have more roles and responsibilities than general education teachers. The following section examines the roles and responsibilities of special education teachers and how those affect their job satisfaction and self-efficacy.

Special Education Teachers' Responsibilities and Experiences

Special education teachers have experiences and job responsibilities that are different from their peers in general education. Along with teaching, grading, and professional development, special education teachers are responsible for complying with all government mandates and laws. The Education for all Handicapped Children Act was enacted in 1975 and it changed the course of education for children with disabilities. After that time, it was mandated that students be provided a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in their least restrictive environment (LRE). This meant that schools were responsible for making a productive learning space in their schools for children with

disabilities and these children had the same rights to an education as children without disabilities (“Individuals With Disabilities Education Act,” n.d.).

This new act afforded students many rights including the right to a specialized education plan known as an IEP or Individual Education Program. When a teacher or parent suspects a child may have a disability that is impacting their education, they can request the child be evaluated for special education services. The special education teacher as well as the districts Process Coordinator, begin the process of evaluating the child for special education services. The responsibilities for this depend on the district. In some smaller districts, the teacher is responsible for the entire evaluation process while larger districts with more resources may have Process Coordinators or Psych Examiners who assist with the testing. The teachers will gather as much information as they have on that child and then begin the process of testing them. The teachers typically do the academic testing and classroom observations while a counselor or school psychologist does cognitive testing. If there is a suspicion that the child had an executive functioning disorder or a social emotional disorder, the teacher will do additional testing. All parties then write their findings into an evaluation. If the team decides the student qualifies for special education services, a special education teachers is then assigned as case manager (DESE, 2022).

Once a student is assigned to a teachers caseload, that teacher write the students IEP. This is a legally binding document that is constructed by the teacher but the entire IEP team, including the parents, has input on what goes into the plan. This IEP consists of narratives explaining child’s disability and how it impacts them, the child’s present level of functioning, goals the team has set forth for the child and a prescribed number of

minutes that child will be seen each week to work on those goals and who is responsible for implementing them. The IEP team then meets to discuss and agree upon the IEP and then it is finalized. An IEP is in place for one calendar year and then the team gets together again to update and renew the IEP. Special education teachers are responsible for completing a quarterly progress report which explains where they child is on their progress toward their IEP goals at that time.

Special education students can also require related services, physical or occupational therapy, and speech and language therapy. The needs for these services is determined by testing done during the evaluation. According to the United States Department of Education (n.d.), these services along with academic minutes must be provided each week according to the IEP. Many students have an allotment of minutes per week that they are seen by the special education teacher for academic, social/emotional, and executive functioning help as well. Along with these services, resources and accommodations must be provided. If these services are not given as written, the school can be held out of compliance and with the Department of Education. More importantly if these needs are not met, the student could fall behind academically or suffer greatly from a loss of ability or function. If their social/emotional or sensory needs are not met, there could be drastic side effects such as mental health issues and loss of skill (United States Department of Education, n.d.). It is the responsibility of the special education teacher, as the case manager, to ensure all the student accommodations and minutes are being served appropriately. The teacher is required to take consistent data on each of the child's IEP goals and have that data available if or when it is asked for by parents or administration.

To ensure students are receiving FAPE, special education teachers have legal documents they must complete and follow on a regular basis. According to the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs, in 2013, 53% of special education teachers spent more time doing paperwork than any other responsibility, including IEP meetings, planning, and grading. Teachers listed legal mandates and paperwork as the largest causes of stress in the workplace (Fox et al., 2020). Fox et al. (2020) reported teachers were more stressed, have more paperwork and meetings, and have more pressure in spring, even on a good year due to an influx in end of the year paperwork, an imbalance of work and school, and mental and physical exhaustion. These legal mandates and paperwork can also make it harder for general education teachers to relate to special education teachers (Fox et al., 2020). From the time a child is referred for testing until that child has been in services one year, the special education teacher will have completed a Review of Existing Data, academic testing, academic observations, an evaluation report, an IEP, continuous data tracking of goals, 4 progress reports and a minimum of 3 meetings with the parents and IEP team. All of that is for one student. Special education teachers can have up to twenty-five students on their caseload.

In addition to excessive paperwork, teachers listed feelings of isolation as causes of stress. Special education teachers do not always get collaboration with other teachers. There is often not time in their schedule to collaborate. Fox et al. (2020) found some special education teachers believed general education teachers pity them and some others do not want to co-teach with them. These teachers reported feeling devalued and isolated in the school environment.

Teaching special education is a high stress job under the best of circumstances. Special education teachers often require coping mechanisms to help with the stress, including counseling, alcohol use, and eating. However, in one study, eating actually increased the stress level in veteran teachers. Being part of a community of peers and involvement in professional organizations such as the Council for Exceptional Children helps teachers feel more support and less isolated in their jobs (Cancio et al., 2018). During the COVID-19 pandemic, those organizations became vital in helping teachers support their students and families with special needs.

Impact of COVID-19 on Students With Special Needs, Families, and Teachers

In March of 2020, school buildings across the world were being closed due to COVID-19 and teachers and families alike were in a state of chaos and confusion. Most families were not even sure where to begin. Schools in the United Kingdom were allowed to stay open for “key workers” children and children with disabilities (Asbury et al., 2021). However, schools in the United States did not provide this option and students with disabilities were made to learn from home. During those first few weeks most teachers focused on getting in touch with their students and ensuring the students’ families had everything they needed, including food, technology, safe supervision, and mental and physical health services (Schuck & Lambert, 2020). Overall, the pandemic led to varying levels of uncertainty and the potential for unmet needs of both students and their parents.

COVID-19 and families. Parents were struggling with their own uncertainty and mental health during the pandemic. Changes in routine as well as restrictions and

mandates increased anxiety and uncertainty (Asbury et al., 2021). These parents were attempting to balance their new roles along with their own job demands and restrictions (Cassinat et al., 2021). Parents and children had to learn differently as parents had to get involved in their children's education like never before (Asbury et al., 2021; Rahmadi, 2021). Some parents struggled with deciding whether to follow government mandates and isolate their children, or bring their children together for the socialization they needed (Starkey, Shonefeld, Prestridge, & Cervera, 2021). Parents who relied heavily on their communities for support had to find new ways to access those resources.

Some parents were culturally or linguistically diverse and struggled to communicate with the teacher and help the child with work while others did not have access to internet or the technology necessary (Brunson McClain et al., 2021; Ehren et al., 2021; Toquero, 2021). Financial constraints also played a large role in whether or not families had access to the things they needed, including technology (Toquero, 2021). In one study, families with higher income reported higher satisfaction overall during the shutdown. They attributed this to the possibility that higher income could correlate to parents with higher levels of education, and therefore more educational buy-in and support (Starkey et al., 2021). In Kazakhstan, access to personal technology was limited so the state broadcast educational program on television so everyone had access. Turkey followed suit and also provided televised resources and websites not only for students and families but also for teachers' professional development and psychological support (Starkey et al., 2021). Other families simply did not have education as a top priority during this time. They met their children's basic needs but were unwilling or unable to meet their educational needs (Sayman & Cornell, 2021). Akbayrak, Vural, and Agar

(2021) indicated that families' attitudes played a large part in the quality of education their special needs child may have received during this time. Overall, many students' and families' needs were unmet.

Educators endeavored to provide the resources and support needed by students and families. Teachers were able to record and share instructional videos for parents so they had a better understanding of how to meet their child's academic and therapeutic needs (Mounjid, Hilali, Amrani, & Moubtassime, 2021). Regular communication was also crucial to making sure students' needs were being met. Some schools were able to send assistive technology home with students to aid in their communication or academics. There are many universities and agencies who donated assistive technology to help students at home (Young & Donovan, 2020). Despite educators' endeavors to provide as much assistance as possible, each family unit handled the pandemic differently.

Each family operated with a unique set of circumstances and responded to the pandemic and assistance from educators in their own way. Online learning was flexible and some students found it hard to stay on task. It was also difficult to build a connection with teachers (Mounjid et al., 2021). In a study conducted by Cassinat et al. (2021) the researchers found some family relationships were strained by the lockdown of 2020 but others were strengthened. Young children reported a greater intimacy with their mothers. Sons reported more conflict with their fathers. They also found that the greater the conflict, the more likely the conflict would last over time. This family chaos was also linked to a decrease in sibling intimacy. One participant in Toquero's (2021) study found that many families enjoyed having more time to spend together and used it as a time to

build stronger bonds. Many parents were concerned that the loss of instruction may mean the gap between their child's ability and the grade level would widen, putting their child even further behind (Asbury et al., 2021; Toquero, 2021).

COVID-19 and students with disabilities. Students with disabilities who need an IEP require certain services while at school. These students have specific needs that were difficult to meet during the Covid-19 shutdown in the spring of 2020. These students may have had difficulty self-regulating or keeping pace without their normal routine (Asbury et al., 2021). They may also have had physical needs that were not able to be met due to lack of exposure to service providers (Asbury et al., 2021; Young & Donovan, 2020). Parents were also worried about the long-term consequences the shutdown may have had on children with disabilities. An increase of anxiety and depression and a decrease in child development were both strong concerns for some parents (Brunson McClain et al., 2021).

Students with disabilities, especially Autism and mental health disorders, had a disproportionately hard time with the transition to learning from home as well as behavioral and well-being concerns including restricted food preferences (Asbury et al., 2021). Some students who had previously relied on personal tutoring were no longer able to access it because the demand became so high for tutors (Raghul et al., 2021). Some students had severe disabilities and had to have someone with them at all time. At school that can be teachers and nurses but at home that means they may need to hire more qualified care than parents can provide (Asbury et al., 2021; Young & Donovan, 2020). Many children with Autism and other disorders saw an increase in student behaviors due to the changes in routine and structure. Many parents struggled with this and relied on

teachers to help them sort out the behavior issues (Asbury et al., 2021; Schuck & Lambert, 2020). Parental support and encouragement can make a difference in the grit and resilience of children with disabilities (Toquero, 2021).

Children with disabilities struggle with comorbidity, or multiple diagnoses. Many who have ADHD struggle with distractions at home (Young & Donovan, 2020). They have a more difficult time learning outside the traditional school settings. Some students have Executive Functioning Disorders and struggle with self-regulation. Students who self-regulate do better in virtual learning environment than those who do not (Young & Donovan, 2020). While learning from home there was more chaos and less regulation and routine (Cassinat et al., 2021). In a study by Asbury et al. (2021) students with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) struggled with fear and anxiety. They worried about whether or not they would contract and die from COVID-19 if they left their bedrooms. They constantly washed their hands until their skin was raw. Some parents in the same study reported that their Autistic child refused to eat because his food restrictions became worse with his heightened anxiety. Some students even reported feeling like they had to stay home because they were being punished for something they did wrong.

Some families were stuck in limbo during the shutdown. Their children had been struggling throughout the year and they were finally being evaluated for special education services when the shutdown happened. Families who were in the process of having their student evaluated for an IEP may have had their progress halted or discontinued altogether due to lack of ability to evaluate the child in person (Brunson McClain et al., 2021). This resulted in the child falling further behind and more “catchup” paperwork for the teacher to do when they returned to seated school the following year. In summary,

students with disabilities and their families were both negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19's influence on the lives of teachers. While the COVID-19 pandemic significantly affected students and their families, the lives of teachers were also impacted. When the schools shut, teachers experienced significant changes in their personal and professional lives. They were expected to fulfill their professional duties while working from home and while taking care of their own families (Fox et al., 2020; Sayman & Cornell, 2021).

Professional changes. The pandemic and the resulting shutdown led to a cascade of changes for teachers. In the early weeks teachers were often getting conflicting messages from administration or no communication at all. Teachers reported having greater job satisfactions when they were supported by administration, were able to maintain collaborative relationships with peers, and when they were valued by their community (Fox et al., 2020). Teachers were grieving who they thought they were as teachers and were simultaneously being asked to embrace a new way of teaching for an uncertain amount of time (Sayman & Cornell, 2021). A study conducted by Raghul et al. (2021) found more than 90% of teachers interviewed had difficulties with insufficient e-learning resources, lack of classroom environment, meeting the learning needs of students, motivating students, and difficulties with not being able to see their students face-to-face. Most aspects of the teaching and learning process, including location, resources, social groups, and pedagogy were altered as a result of the pandemic.

In a 2021 study conducted by Mounjid et al. they examined the challenges teachers in Morocco faced after COVID-19 pandemic forced the schools to switch to

online learning. They surveyed a total of 421 participants ages 20-60. Of those participants, 96.9% reports facing significant challenges when switching to online learning. They listed the students' inability to be able to afford internet as the biggest challenge they faced, followed by students' lack of interest, and low or slow internet for those families who could afford it.

Previous to the shutdown teachers primarily focused on academic goals and social emotional goals and family life were issues that existed on the periphery. However, once teachers were asked to teach from home, they had to create and maintain a balance between academic goals, social emotional goals, and their own mental health and well-being (Schuck & Lambert, 2020). Fox et al. (2020) reported teachers struggled to juggle between administrative demands, upset parents, and academic standards. In a study done by Davis (2022), he found a positive correlation between positive parent involvement and teacher self-efficacy. A solid partnership between the teacher and the parents with consistent and clear communication is valuable in ensuring a student success (Ehren et al., 2021). This increased support and need for communication were being demanded within a new modality—remote learning.

There were no policies in place for virtual learning, specifically for students with disabilities. It became imperative that the Department of Education, as well as school districts, quickly create policies to protect and ensure inclusivity for this population of students (Toquero, 2021). Many states worked quickly and released Individual Continuous Learning Plans (ICLP). This plan was created in addition to an already existing IEP and was added on as an amendment. These plans were to include the child's disability and goals as well as accommodations. Each teacher was responsible for filling

out an ICLP for every student on their caseload by a certain deadline. While it was appreciated to have guidance on how to help students while also staying in compliance with the law, this added one more piece of paperwork to special education teachers' already existing pile (Sayman & Cornell, 2021). Although teachers were glad to have some administrative directions, many reported wishing they could have a say in what was decided or at least a justification of the changes that impacted them and their students (Fox et al., 2020). Even with new policies to support these new expectations, teachers faced technological and social barriers.

Teachers and parents knew seeing their students "face-to-face" was important to maintaining those relationships so they set up routine video meetings via Zoom or some other platform to ensure their students could see not only their faces but the faces and voices of their peers as well (Asbury et al., 2021; Schuck & Lambert, 2020). Although they knew connections were the most important things, teachers felt guilty because they were not able to cover the academic standards like they would during a regular school year (Sayman & Cornell, 2021). Unfortunately, technology was not always reliable and could malfunction at inopportune times. Teachers conducting IEP meetings via Zoom or Google Meet were often cut off or suffered severe lag times. It is critical at an IEP meeting for everyone to understand what is going on and be on the same page. Poor internet connections made it very difficult to conduct these meetings successfully (Toquero, 2021). As teachers adjusted to reaching students via new technologies, they discovered that parents also needed additional support.

Traditional teaching means seeing your students every day and touching base with their parents periodically as needed. However, during the spring 2020 shutdown, teachers

found that parents needed additional help and support. Some teachers had individual Zoom meetings with parents to check on them and help them through any parenting or education issues they had and offer behavioral support consultations. Many students had challenging behaviors during this time that teachers needed to coach the parents through (Schuck & Lambert, 2020). Teachers also met with parents regularly to boost their confidence and assure them that they were not alone (Toquero, 2021). Bandura (1997) believed that teachers with high self-efficacy enjoyed a challenge and did not mind teaching the harder to reach children. Teachers with higher self-efficacy believed that all children were teachable. Overall, teachers experienced significant change in how they delivered education and support to students and families; in addition, teachers adjusted to fulfilling their job responsibilities from home.

Working from home. In addition to changes in their professional roles, teachers had to balance home and career within their homes (Mounjid et al., 2021). Sometimes teachers are parents too and the demands to both teach and be a caretaker can be too much. Hilger et al. (2021) found teachers who were also parents had significantly more changes to deal with than their peers who were not caretakers for anyone. As a result, those who were caretakers had a decrease in their job satisfaction. Some teachers without caretaking responsibilities may have felt relieved at the reduction in work task; those who were taking care of a child or loved one did not feel the same relief. Although they had a reduction in work tasks, they often had an increase in personal tasks and often the emotional demands were just as high. Hilger et al. proposed that if long-term closures happened it would result in reduced motivation and withdrawal from work. Hilger et al. also found when social support and feedback were decreased, job satisfaction also

decreased. They also found that while in lockdown, the task variety and demands on teachers was reduced, which caused fatigue to be lowered even though psychosomatic complaints were not.

There were some positives to working from home. In a study conducted in Turkey, Akbayrak et al. (2021) reported that some teachers found teaching independent living skills lessons was actually easier when taught from home because the students' resources and supplies were already there in their homes. Teachers reported having more time for self-care and the freedom of being able to schedule their day and be more comfortable while working from home (Sayman & Cornell, 2021). Teachers reported that although there were fewer demands put on them on a day-to-day basis, they were also being asked to achieve the same outcome (student growth) with fewer resources. They enjoyed the freedom to organize their day and tasks how they saw fit. They embraced new ways of teaching and learning (Hilger et al., 2021). This freedom of scheduling allowed teachers to work important tasks, like video calling families, into their days.

In conclusion, although teachers and service providers were working from home, they had to find and develop ways to meet individual students' needs virtually. Schools were expected to make every effort possible to assist families while still complying with state and local mandates (Young & Donovan, 2020). Teaching in general was difficult during the COVID-19 shutdown but it was even more challenging when teaching children with disabilities. These children come with their own set of needs that differs from general education students. Teachers had to be able to supply learning materials specific to how each child learned and in some cases write their own curriculum (Raghul et al., 2021; Toquero, 2021). Special education requires a lot of paperwork and

confidentiality. Teachers were also charged with finding ways to maintain confidentiality while having IEP meetings, getting signatures on legal documents, and discussing students' cases with service providers and other members of the IEP team (Sayman & Cornell, 2021). All of these changes occurred within the context of virtual learning, a new format for special education teachers.

Teaching virtually. Bandura (1997) argued that self-efficacy has more to do with how you apply your skills than it does with how many skills you have. People with many skills, may not live up to their abilities if their self-efficacy in that area falters. Self-doubt can overshadow skill. However, people who already have a high level of self-efficacy may have a perceived capability and may more readily trust their ability to take on new tasks such as virtual teaching and learning.

Teachers went into virtual learning at varying levels. Toquero (2021) alleged some were more advanced in technology and made the shift easier, while some were more dependent on hands-on learning, and therefore struggled with the shift. Everyone was thrust into the same situation (virtual teaching) but how each person handled it poked to their self-efficacy. The change to teaching virtually happened abruptly and without notice. Teachers had little to no time to adjust to teaching virtually. Many special education teachers use hands-on methods for teaching that do not translate well to online learning. They did not have an online curriculum they could follow to make the transition to teaching virtually easier (Toquero, 2021).

When teaching virtually there is a shift in the complexity level of work that teachers can give students. Students in one study on virtual learning reported they felt as though they were getting a good amount of information but were not prepared for

examinations because the rigor was not what it should be (Starkey et al., 2021). In person teachers are able to do large group projects where the students all work together. When teaching virtually, students are doing more test-based, individual assignments that often have less rigor. Students do not always have the materials necessary for more project-based learning (Rahmadi, 2021).

In Rahmadi's (2021) study they created a Teachers' Distance Learning Adoption Level where they categorized teacher ability to adopt to distance learning into five categories: innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards. They explained that teachers who were already innovators or early adopters are more likely to be open to incorporating new technology when teaching virtually. Bandura's (1997) theory supported this when he stated that teachers who already had high levels of self-efficacy would maintain that efficacy even through trials and demanding situations.

Teachers had to start using, and become proficient with, technology with which they were not familiar with (Ehren et al. 2021). Teachers had additional challenges when trying to work with students with vision or hearing problems because traditional technology did not work for them (Akbayrak et al., 2021). A study by Rahmadi (2021) found that 56% of teachers were using WhatsApp, a video calling app that was new to many of them before COVID-19. They also found that 35% of teachers were not comfortable teaching live via WhatsApp or Zoom. A change in pedagogical knowledge as well as technical knowledge was necessary (Rahmadi, 2021). It was common in the Philippines to use Facebook groups as a way of communicating. Parents and teachers alike were able to find a sense of community and stay informed via social media (Toquero, 2021). Parmigiani, Benigno, Giusto, Silvaggio, and Sperandio (2020)

concluded that communication with families and having an agenda or plan was an important part of a successful virtual learning experience. Generally, teachers and families worked together and made it through the pandemic shutdown of the school buildings. The next step was to slowly work on reentering the school buildings in a safe and successful way the following school year.

COVID-19 and Veteran Special Education Teachers

During COVID-19 special education teachers could no longer do their jobs the way they always had. They had to learn new methods of communicating with students and parents. They were stripped of their resources and their communities. Their efficacy suffered because the new pedagogy did not account for specialized instructions, sensory needs, and other services. Special education teachers rely heavily on their community and it was taken from them. They were forced to work on an island, operating mostly on their own, with phone calls from colleagues to help offer support and answer questions.

People with a strong sense of self-efficacy were not be deterred by setbacks like this. Because they have a higher rate of perseverance, success, they believe that they can overcome most difficulties (Bandura, 1997). During the COVID-19 shutdown they were given opportunities to learn new technologies, strategies, and pedagogy. According to Bandura (1997) people with high self-efficacy appreciate adversity and the opportunity for growth. Teachers were given many opportunities for growth during the pandemic and beyond.

Once schools slowly re-opened teachers and students had to adapt to a “new normal,” which included physical distancing, masks, shields, and new learning models where students worked more independently (Ehren et al., 2021). Most teachers welcomed

a return to in-person learning but some were hesitant and chose to continue teaching virtually if that was an option. Bandura (1997) suggested that restoring a sense of control is a positive step. He wrote that reengagement in previous routines will aid in recovery.

There is currently a gap in the literature related to the pandemic and self-efficacy of veteran special education teachers. This study sought to examine the connection between the COVID-19 pandemic and veteran special education teacher self-efficacy. Bandura's theory of self-efficacy and the four sources of information for self-efficacy were the framework for the study.

Summary

This chapter was organized into two main sections: self-efficacy and teaching, and COVID-19 and teaching. The first section presented Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy and described how it related to special education teachers. The second section discussed COVID-19 and its impact on both families and teachers. The researcher presented the ways that special education teachers' responsibilities and experiences changed during COVID-19 and how those changes, including virtual teaching, impacted their perceptions of self-efficacy. The researcher also addressed the lack of current literature on the topic of COVID-19 changes to self-efficacy and veteran special education teachers.

In Chapter Three the researcher will describe the methodology and research design of this qualitative study. In Chapter Four the research will discuss the results obtained from the qualitative study and will describe in detail the themes and messages gleaned from the interviews. Chapter Five will discuss the implications for education and ideas for further research.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of COVID-19 pandemic by examining the experiences of veteran special education teachers. The researcher interviewed twenty veteran special education teachers from various school districts throughout Missouri and asked how COVID-19 impacted their perceptions of self-efficacy. The researcher asked a series of demographic and direct questions and also closed the interview with an open-ended prompt for participants to provide feedback.

The researcher sought to answer the following questions:

1. How did teaching during a pandemic (COVID-19) affect veteran special education teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy?
2. How were job expectations for veteran special education teachers affected during the pandemic?
3. What challenges did veteran special education teachers face during COVID-19?
4. What lessons did veteran special education teachers learn during COVID-19?

Chapter Three identifies the participants in this study as well as the sampling procedure. This chapter also describes the research setting and design. Instrumentation as well as validity and reliability are also found in this chapter. Finally, a data analysis will be included.

Participants

Prior to participants being contacted, permission was given to conduct this study from the Research and Review Board and Southwest Baptist University. The participants of this study were 20 Missouri teachers who had been teaching in special education for at least 5 years, as of spring 2020. Participants were chosen using criterion-based probability sampling. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016) criterion-based sampling is used in a qualitative study where the participants need to meet certain criteria in order to be included in the study. Criterion-based sampling was used to select participants who had been teaching in special education at least 5 years as of the spring of 2000. The researcher used criterion-based sampling to focus on special education teachers who had been teaching at least 5 years in a public school setting. They were chosen from a variety of school sizes, locations, and demographics. The researcher focused on selected veteran teachers because they were more likely to have started with a high level of self-efficacy (Yerli Usul & Yerli, 2017). The researcher selected participants she knew would understand the problem and research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher used non-probability and criterion-based sampling. The researcher gained consent from participants via a written consent form (Appendix B).

Two sources were used to recruit participants. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), it is important to obtain the approval of the gatekeepers for each organization the researcher intends to contact. Getting these gatekeepers on your side makes it easier to gain access to the participants. Because special education directors are often the gatekeepers for special education teachers, the researcher contacted the special education director in her home district and asked for a list of other special education

directors in Missouri. The researcher then contacted those special education directors for approval and suggestions for qualified participants. Some directors reached out to their perceptive participants on the researcher's behalf. Some did not, so the researcher reached out to the potential participants on their own. The researcher also used personal connections to locate and recruit participants. Geographic location determined the type of interview that would be conducted, whether it be in person or via Zoom. All interviews were recorded via audio device or screen recording and the researcher personally transcribed all interviews and provided each interviewee a copy for review to ensure reliability.

Participants remained anonymous to everyone except the researcher. The participants' names and the names of their schools were not used in the study and they were instead given a participant number that was used when referencing them. Only the research knew which number corresponded with which participant. The information about each participant was kept on a password-protected device to further ensure personal security and confidentiality. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time if they wished to do so. There was no known risk to participants. The follow section explains the research setting for this study.

Research Setting

The research setting for this study varied based on the geographic location of the participant. All interviews took place at various times, either in person near the researchers own site or via Zoom. The type of interview was dependent on the location of the participant and their geographic proximity to the researcher. Creswell and Creswell (2018) wrote about the importance of making the setting for the qualitative study as close

as possible to the site where the participants experienced the issues they were discussing. This allows them comfort and a greater ability to remember key details. The researcher wanted the scope of the study to include participants from all areas of Missouri so a wide variety of demographics could be represented.

Research Design

The focus of this qualitative study was to interview and examine the experiences of selected veteran special education teachers who taught during the spring of 2020, to gain an understanding of the impact of the pandemic on their self-efficacy. A basic qualitative interview design was chosen along with examination of emails and other related documents (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The goal of the study was to determine the perceived self-efficacy of those selected veteran special education teachers during the school shutdowns in spring 2020 to determine whether COVID-19 impacted their self-efficacy. The interviews were conducted in fall of 2022 after approval was granted from the Research Review Board. The interview process began by using criterion-based sampling to determine the participants.

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews either face-to-face or via Zoom depending on each participants' geographic location, allowing participants to be in their own environment (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The information obtained during these interviews was kept confidential. The names of participants and school districts were not shared with anyone outside the researcher. All emails and transcriptions were kept on a password-protected device. The researcher transcribed all the interviews to further observe confidentiality. The interview questions are in Appendix C.

Instrumentation

The instrument for this study was an interview guide with open-ended questions. The questions were related to the perceptions of self-efficacy before, during, and after the COVID 19 pandemic of 2020. Questions were added as necessary when participants' answers brought up concepts or ideas the researcher had not previously considered. Professional development, e-mails, and other documents were also used to help the research gain a better understanding of the overall effects of COVID-19 pandemic on the participants.

Validity and Reliability

The researcher used several methods to ensure validity and reliability of the study. The first approach to ensure validity was piloting the interview guide. The researcher chose two educators who were outside her target population, a novice special education teacher and a veteran general education teacher, in order to ensure her questions made sense to all teachers at all levels. Interviews were conducted according to the guide with each participant individually and then the researcher solicited their feedback. The researcher inquired as to whether the questions made sense, whether they seemed timely and valid, and whether the participant believed they were able to tell everything they wanted to tell. She took their feedback and made changes to her interview guide to reflect that feedback.

To further ensure validity the researcher used triangulation, member checking, clarification of bias, theoretical validity, and peer debriefing. Triangulation is a validation method that involves the use of multiple methods, theories, and sources of data to confirm findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researcher

used a personal vita from each participant to verify their years of service, interviews with individuals, and emails from their principals outlining what resources were made available during the COVID-19 shutdown, as ways of triangulating the research. While triangulation is less used in qualitative studies, it is still appropriate in qualitative research because it ensures trustworthiness (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). When multiple data sources are being examined, the researcher should check information against other data collected (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). These data can be used to find themes throughout the research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Triangulation was implemented by incorporating multiple forms of data including interviews, emails, professional development information, observations, and follow-up conversations, all of which were kept confidential on a password-protected device.

Member checking is when a researcher solicits interviewees for feedback on the findings of the research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Member checking is appropriate in qualitative research because it ensures the researcher did not misinterpret anything the interviewee might have said or done. It also ensures the researcher did not unintentionally include any personal bias into the findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Member checking was utilized after the researcher interviewed the participants and then transcribed the interviews. The researcher took parts of the final product and sent them back to the interviewees for their review, asking them if they thought the findings were accurate to what they knew to be true. This gave the participants an opportunity to comment on the findings and clear up any misconceptions.

Clarification of bias, also called reflexivity, is how the researcher affects, and is affected by, the research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Reflexivity is appropriate in qualitative research because it shows the reader the possible interpretations the researcher may have made and how they arrived at their findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researcher clarified the bias by discussing how their own experience in special education affected their interpretation of the findings. Reflexivity was used throughout as the researcher continually evaluated how their own personal experiences in the field impacted the way they were conducting this study.

Peer examination is conducted by sending findings and parts of the research to a peer for review (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Peer examination is appropriate in qualitative research because having peers with a strong content knowledge will ensure their findings are plausible based on the data provided (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researcher utilized peer examination throughout the study by consulting a peer that worked in their building. This peer was also a veteran special education teacher, but they were not part of the formal study. The researcher often asked questions of the peer or discussed their ideas with them to ensure they made sense and were valuable to the overall study.

Theoretical validity is ensuring the research can be logically tied to the theoretical framework (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Although qualitative research does not test theories, theoretical validity is appropriate in qualitative research because it does relate theory to methodology. Due to the unique impact COVID-19 had on the educational system and how they do business, this method would produce the most beneficial information. The researcher used theoretical validity by cross-checking the participants' answers with Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy, which was addressed in Chapters One and Two.

Reliability is the extent to which research could be replicated (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To ensure reliability Creswell and Creswell (2018) recommended documenting all the steps of the study as clearly as possible so that others can easily replicate or follow the procedures and arrive at similar findings. A researcher should be able to repeat the same study with the same methodologies and arrive at the same, or similar, results every time (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This is difficult in qualitative studies because interviewees and reports of personal experiences are not always consistent and reliable. When looking at reliability in a qualitative study it is best to determine not if the interviews and reports are consistent each time, but if the interviews and reports are consistent with other data collected (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This researcher double checked all transcripts to ensure they did not have any errors. They made sure codes were clearly defined and recognizable. The researcher utilized their peer from the peer debriefing stage to cross-check the codes for intercoder agreement (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In summary, a variety of methods was used to determine validity and reliability of this study. The following section the data analysis of this study is explained.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the qualitative data collected in this study was conducted simultaneously with the collection. The researcher did not use software to transcribe the interviews and instead personally analyzed the data throughout the process to look for patterns they could use to direct the interviews. The researcher personally transcribed each interview right after conducting it to look for themes or other questions they could add to their interview guide. In doing this, the researcher was able to gain a deeper

understanding of the interviewees' perspectives and was able to adjust the interview guide as needed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Both content analysis and thematic analysis were used. Content analysis was used to analyze the findings to measure the frequency and variety of responses given. This helped the research code the findings later on. It is used in qualitative research to look for latent meaning in the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

In addition, thematic analysis was also used to look for recurring themes in the participants' responses. The researcher used a cross-question analysis by examining each question and segmented the data as they were related to the research and research questions, looking for patterns, themes, and key words (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). These were then arranged into codes using category names, symbols, and key words. The researcher used inductive codes that came about as the researcher was segmenting and coding the data. Once there were codes that showed up across all the data, a thematic analysis was used to determine the themes present in the study. The researcher then took those themes to drive the following interviews. The responses to certain themes and codes were then analyzed. The researcher did not use any predetermined codes and instead collected and organized codes after each interview was completed (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

During each interview the researcher recorded the interviews and then transcribed them soon after. This enabled the researcher to quickly determine if any more questions needed to be asked or if the interview guide needed to be changed to reflect any new information. Portions of these transcripts were shown to the participants to ensure accuracy and to provide an opportunity to include further information (Creswell &

Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researcher included that feedback in her findings. In summary the researcher analyzed the qualitative data simultaneous with the collection of the data, looking for themes and codes throughout the entire process.

Summary

In this chapter the researcher presented the methodology used to obtain and analyze the interview responses for this study. The participants were Missouri teachers who had been teaching in the field of special education for at least 5 years prior to spring 2020. Based on this criterion the researcher chose 20 participants to interview via face-to-face meetings or via Zoom. After each interview, the researcher transcribed the interviews and then coded each one looking for themes and patterns. Chapter Four provides an analysis of the data collected from these interviews. Chapter Five provides recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Introduction

Chapter Four presents the results of the data gathered during this narrative qualitative study. The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of veteran special education teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic in order to gain a deeper understanding of the impact COVID-19 had on their perceptions of self-efficacy regarding their ability to meet the needs of special education students and their families. Chapter Four outlines the findings from this study and describes the lived experiences of veteran special education teachers who taught through the COVID-19 pandemic. Interviews were conducted via Zoom with 17 veteran special education teachers from Missouri. The teachers were identified and recommended by their special education director. Interviews lasted 25-45 minutes and an interview guide (see Appendix C) was used to establish consistency throughout the interviews.

The theoretical framework for this research was grounded in Albert Bandura's (1997) theory of perceived self-efficacy. According to Bandura, "Perceived self-efficacy refers to beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (p. 3). Bandura determined self-efficacy is typically influenced by mastery experiences, social modeling, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal. He claimed the more positive someone is about their ability to complete a task, the more confident they are in other areas and the more easily they are able to solve problems that may arise. He also wrote that people with higher self-efficacy

rates will be more committed through adversity. Bandura believed self-efficacy is not a fixed ability and can be learned and strengthened based on experiences.

There were four research questions for this narrative qualitative study:

RQ 1: How did teaching during a pandemic (COVID-19) affect veteran special education teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy?

RQ 2: How were job expectations for veteran special education teachers affected during the pandemic?

RQ 3: What challenges did veteran special education teachers face during COVID-19?

RQ 4: What lessons did veteran special education teachers learn during COVID-19?

The interviews for this study were conducted via *Zoom* to accommodate the geographic locations of the participants. Face-to-face interviews were offered but no participants chose that option. Through this research, the researcher interviewed 17 Missouri veteran special education teacher. The researcher transcribed and coded the information, then grouped it thematically to provide a comprehensive picture of the changes in self-efficacy of the participants as well as the impact the changes in resources, pedagogy, and location of instruction had on the teachers' perceptions of their self-efficacy.

Chapter Four is divided into four sections. The first section identifies the participants of this study. The second section describes the process used to verify the methods and trustworthiness of this study. The third section examines the themes that developed from the interviews. The fourth section discusses the research questions.

Pilot

The researcher conducted a small pilot study where she followed the approved interview guide while interviewing two teachers who were not part of the target demographic. One teacher was a veteran general education teacher and the other was a novice SPED teacher. Since the eventual sample size was unknown, the researcher chose participants for the pilot study that has similar characteristics to the target population but did not match the criteria exactly. The purpose of the pilot study was to ensure the interview guide flowed smoothly and the questions were easy for both participants to understand. The researcher also ensured the answers to the interview questions could be related back to the research questions. The researcher took notes throughout and adjusted the interview guide to make it flow more efficiently.

The pilot interview led to two nonsubstantive changes. In the original interview guide the researcher had written “how important was support...?” but realized after the pilot that this was confusing because the pilot participants were not sure how to describe “importance” and tried to answer using a 1-10 scale, which was not the intended response. Instead the researcher changed it to “what impact did support have...?” The researcher also realized after the pilot study that the changes in law were not part of the research questions or purpose of the study so the questions regarding law were not asked of the participants. Once the pilot interviews were conducted and the interview guide was adjusted, the researcher began the process of identifying and contacting participants.

Participants

The participants in this study were 17 special education teachers from various areas of Missouri, who had been teaching at least 5 years in the spring of 2020 and who

continued in public education during the 2020-2021 school year. The gender of the participant, district size, and grade level taught were taken into consideration for demographic purposes but participants were not chosen based on any of these criteria. The researcher sent an email to SPED directors in Missouri asking them for recommendations of special education teachers in their district who fit the criteria (see Appendix A). In some cases, the SPED director forwarded the email to their teacher and the participant reached out to the researcher to set up an interview. In other cases, the SPED Director passed along the contact information to the researcher, and she then extended an offer to participate to the individual. Participants were asked to sign a Letter of Informed Consent (Appendix B) and return it to the researcher prior to the interview. Once the participant agreed to be in the study, an interview time was established, and the researcher sent a Zoom link for the interview.

The participants were identified as T1-T17 rather than by name to ensure their confidentiality. There are two stories where participants named their student. These names were changed to protect the confidentiality of the student and participant. There were no known risks to participants in this study. All participants were kept confidential, and information was stored on a password-protected device. Participants were allowed to remove themselves at any point in the study.

Demographic information was collected from each participant at the beginning of the interview (Table 1). The participants came from a variety of districts that ranged in population size from 178 to 22,268. The participants were comprised of three early childhood teachers, five elementary teachers, one junior high teacher, four high school teachers, and four teachers that taught across multiple levels. The number of years

teaching in special education (as of spring 2020) ranged from 5-29 with an average of 15 years in special education. Once participants were identified, the researcher considered the validity and reliability of their research as they were conducting interviews with the participants.

Table 1

Demographics of Participants

Participant number	Number of students in district	Years taught in spring 2020	Grade level taught in spring 2020
T1	276	16	JH- HS
T2	216	21	HS
T3	770	20	HS
T4	1,549	11	HS
T5	178	14	EC-MS
T6	1,701	15	ES
T7	1,366	26	EC
T8	1,302	8	MS - HS
T9	1,366	6	ES
T10	687	16	HS
T11	1,375	7	JH
T12	2,227	5	ES
T13	22,268	29	EC
T14	7,906	17	ES
T15	4,503	14	ES
T16	22,268	25	EC
T17	1,405	9	MS - JH

Note. JH= Junior High School, HS= High School, EC= Early Childhood, MS= Middle School, ES= Elementary School

Table 2

Frequencies of Participant Demographics

Number of participants	Average number of students in district	Average years taught in spring 2020	Grade level taught in spring 2020
17	4,198	15	3 early childhood 5 elementary 1 junior high 4 high school 4 multiple levels

Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability are necessary aspects to consider regardless of the type of research being conducted (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For this study, a narrative qualitative approach was used. Data collection occurred through interviews, transcriptions, triangulation, member checking, peer review, and clarifying the bias. Interviews were designed to allow participants to recall and report their lived experiences of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. The information collected allowed the researcher to gain insight into the experiences of the participants. Due to the large number of participants, the researcher was able to thoroughly look for themes and commonalities across all participants while noting any outliers in their field notes. Each interview was about 35 minutes, thus the researcher gathered approximately 10 hours of data.

Triangulation. The researcher used triangulation of data to evaluate the interviews as well as other documentation to aid in ensuring validity to the study. The interview process allowed the researcher to examine experiences from multiple perspectives. Each participant was recommended for participation by their special education director, or they were the special education director themselves but had been teaching during the COVID period. This correspondence helped to verify the participants' credentials at their schools as well as their qualifications to participate in the study. To further the data-mining process, the researcher examined the school board policy of the participating school districts, when possible, to verify the participants' recollection of the policies in place during 2020.

Member checking. Member checking allowed participants to view the findings of the research before it was published to ensure accuracy in the reporting. Participants were given the opportunity to make any additions, comments, or omissions they desired before final publication. Upon completion of member checking, no adjustments needed to be made. These correspondences were conducted via email.

Peer review. Peer reviews were conducted to increase the internal validity of the study. The peer review process included a dissertation committee comprised of three educators from the graduate department at Southwest Baptist University as well as a review by the director of graduate education. One committee member served as advisor throughout the research process and provided guidance, check-in, and editing and revising advice. This advisor communicated with the remainder of the committee participants and relayed input and information on their behalf. The dissertation committee reviewed the research questions, theoretical framework, literature review, and

methodology implemented during the study. The researcher was then able to apply the feedback from the committee to refine their literature review and methodology.

Clarifying bias. In qualitative research, it is imperative to clarify bias in order to monitor the researcher's biases so it can be made clear how they may be influencing the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). During this study the researcher was a veteran special education teacher in Missouri. She matched the criterion for the participants. The researcher had experienced teaching through COVID-19 and had many of the same experiences as the participants. This could have led to potential confirmation bias. However, the researcher was aware of this potential for bias and carefully designed the interview guide to cover many areas of the COVID-19 experience, not just the ones with which the researcher was familiar. She was also mindful when asking questions to not ask any leading questions that might confirm what she was already thinking based on her own experiences, instead using the research conducted in Chapter Two to drive the line of questioning. Once the researcher completed the checks for validity and reliability, she was able to begin interviewing participants and started the process of collecting and analyzing data based on the interviews.

Data Analysis Procedures

The interview for this study was organized chronologically to examine the experiences of veteran SPED teachers before, during, and after the spring of 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic caused school shutdowns statewide. For the purpose of this study "winter 2020" refers to January and February of 2020, just before the schools in Missouri shut down. The interview started with demographic questions. The researcher then asked about SPED teachers' job duties and responsibilities as well as their self-

efficacy in winter 2020, before the school shutdowns. The researcher transitioned to questions about the shutdown logistics and what it was like to return in the fall of 2020. The interview ended with questions about changes in job descriptions after COVID, changes in self-efficacy, positive outcomes, and lessons learned. After each interview was conducted, the researcher transcribed the interview and began looking for codes and patterns. She adjusted the interview questions slightly each time based on the participants' responses, but the primary questions remained the same.

Coding Procedures and Theme Development

The researcher conducted an exploratory analysis of the data while transcribing the interviews herself. An initial exploratory analysis was helpful because the researcher was able to explore the information as she went, write field notes on the transcriptions, and begin to notice emerging themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). She color coded the transcripts by theme and circled commonly occurring words. The researcher used both a priori codes as well as inductive codes. The a priori codes were based on the research that was previously conducted and reported in Chapter Two. These codes were “experience,” “support,” and “caseloads,” because research suggested these may be common themes in the interviews. The inductive codes were developed as the researcher was transcribing and coding. Examples of these are “food insecurity” and “gaps.”

When looking for code words, there were occasions when the exact word was not used by the participant, but the meaning was implied. For example, participants did not always use the term “food insecurity” but they did say “We do not know how the kids are going to eat,” and “Our parents were really worried about where their next meal would come from.” Not all participants used the term “flexibility” but many referred to “making

it work,” “adaptable,” or being “willing to do anything it takes.” A spreadsheet was made to track the emerging themes and codes as transcripts were completed. As themes emerged, the researcher began grouping data into spreadsheets that would eventually be used to create tables. Memoing was implemented through the use of a field notes journal used to keep track of insights, ideas, or questions as they came up. Quotes were underlined and a review of the video was conducted to make sure all quotes were accurate to the participants’ statements. Recordings were kept on a password-protected computer. The researcher also marked any specific stories from the participants that clearly or uniquely expressed the emerging themes. Once the interviews were concluded and the transcripts were complete, she reviewed each transcript multiple times looking for codes and themes.

There were six topics discussed in the interviews. The following section will discuss the primary jobs of special education teachers and what factors affect the self-efficacy of special education teachers. Both topics will examine the participants’ experiences from January 2020 (pre-COVID shutdown) to fall of 2020 when schools resumed in-person learning and what changes they saw over that time period. The section will also discuss the biggest challenges special education students and their families faced during the school shutdown in spring 2020 as well as the lasting affect the COVID-19 shutdown had on schools. The final themes in this section will examine the positive outcomes and lessons learned during 2020, as reported by the participants in the study.

Interview Topic 1: What are the primary job duties of special education teachers and how did those change from winter 2020 to fall 2020?

Responses related to job duties were divided chronologically and described the themes within each time frame. Pre-COVID, the themes were paperwork and collaboration. During COVID the themes shifted to inconsistent expectations, student engagement, and nontraditional tasks. After COVID, the themes revealed a focus on community involvement and changes in the position or district.

Pre-COVID. For the purpose of this study “pre-COVID” refers to the time during the 2019-2020 school year right before schools shut down in the spring. Teaching students is the primary goal of all teachers. However, for special education teachers, teaching is often only a small percentage of their job duties. In this section the researcher examined the other duties the participants reported including managing large paperwork loads and collaborating with administration and colleges. Of the 17 participants, 15 mentioned paperwork as being an instrumental part of their day, 13 mentioned meetings or collaboration being impactful, and two mentioned other duties, such as lunch duty, taking up a large portion of their day.

Paperwork. One common theme throughout the study was the overwhelming amount of paperwork involved in special education teachers’ jobs. While the grade level of the teacher and how they ration their time makes a difference, most participants agreed that paperwork takes up as much if not more time than teaching students. This paperwork includes evaluations, observing students, achievement testing, reviews of existing data (RED), writing IEPs, keeping data on the goals related to the IEPs, grades, Behavior Intervention Plans (BIP), and quarterly progress reports. IEP goal progress, grades, and progress reports are required daily or weekly for each student. For example, T12 reported having 15 students on her caseload and 20 referrals for new students, each of those

students requiring multiple hours of paperwork. Prior to COVID, T1 explained that her job was a combination of high school resource teacher and SPED coordinator and that paperwork was approximately 80% of her job.

The amount of paperwork required a large portion of time at work and often necessitated time outside of work hours. Of the 17 participants, five mentioned working on paperwork at home regularly, coming into work early, or staying late to get paperwork done. T10 mentioned, “I spend an extraordinary amount of my time working non-contracted because I want to do a good job.” For T10, that meant spending as much school time as possible with students and taking all paperwork home each night. T10 also testified feeling like “paperwork has increased tenfold” since she started teaching. This was not due to increase caseloads, but to increased requirements from the Department of Education and her school district. T2 believed much the same way and claimed that doing work from home was the only way she could get all of her students’ SPED minutes met. Although she reported paperwork only took about 50% of her time, T5 also completed most of her work at home. T14 testified paperwork took 50% of her time. Some participants chose to not work at home and instead came in early to do their work. T15 recalled coming in an hour and 20 minutes early each day so she could have enough time to get all necessary paperwork done and prepare for the students. Although T15 had been teaching for 14 years at this point, it was not all in a row. She reported becoming so frustrated with the workload that she actually quit teaching for a number of years and only recently returned to teaching.

Not all participants felt overwhelmed by their amount of paperwork. T9 reported she was able to spend about 90% of her time with students. She was able to efficiently set

up her day in a way that allowed for data collection and paperwork to be done while teaching students and she utilized her districts early out on Fridays do get the majority of her paperwork done.

Collaboration with colleagues. Aside from paperwork and serving students' educational minutes, collaboration with colleagues is also an important part of a special education teacher's job. For some, there are weekly times set aside for these meetings. For others, it means a quick conversation in the hallway. T2 recalled the majority of her collaboration was conducted while passing in the hallways or at lunch. Special education teachers also get tasked with building duties because their schedules often allow more time free from students. T12 reported spending an hour and a half everyday supervising lunch duty. Thus, in the pre-COVID era, the responsibilities of special education teachers often focused on collaboration and paperwork.

During COVID. For the purpose of this study, "during COVID" refers to the time period beginning when Governor Parson mandated school shutdowns in March 2020 until students arrived back in seated class in fall 2020. For 15 participants their districts returned to seated school in August 2020, but two participants did not return to seated school until October 2020. During this period all 17 participants experienced a change in their job duties. The schools in Missouri were going through unprecedented times and there were no immediate mandates on how schools should handle the shutdown and how they were to meet students' needs. Because of this, all 17 participants dealt with inconsistent expectations in the beginning weeks of the school shutdown. Teacher priorities shifted from lesson plans and paperwork to reaching out to families and student engagement. There were also nontraditional tasks that emerged including food delivery

and childcare. The methods of teaching and the priorities of teachers and students shifted dramatically during this time.

Inconsistent expectations. School districts handled the COVID-19 shutdown in various ways and there was little consistency in teachers' job expectations at that time. Some teachers were expected to see their students as often as possible while others were not allowed to contact their students at all in the beginning, and then only after the district gave them very specific guidelines. T1 remembered the time during the COVID shutdown being harder than working at school. She was required to meet with 20 students daily. She had emails to respond to and meetings with colleagues throughout the day as well. She conveyed that it was a "six a.m. to eleven p.m. job." T5 had an opposite experience, reporting her district did not place any educational expectations on their families and instead encouraged them to concentrate on their mental and physical health. Unsatisfied with her district's lack of direction, T5 took it upon herself to use her own resources, including her own internet, technology, and vehicle, to check on families. Aside from annual IEP meetings, there were no district expectations placed on teachers in her district.

Participants mentioned feelings of loss and confusion related to their job expectations during the school shutdown. T12 recalled being directed to check on students and make sure their needs were met first but then did not have clear directions after that. She was not sure what or how much she was supposed to be teaching. The teachers in her district were instructed to "teach what we know. Do not teach new concepts because this is just temporary. Once we realized it was permanent, it was too late." T15 explained a similar mandate from her district not to teach anything new and

just assign and keep track of lessons students were doing on a computer program called iReady. These teachers felt lost and helpless because they knew what students should be learning but were unable to help them learn and grow. Although teachers were given an inconsistent amount of direction as to how to proceed, teachers knew from previous experiences that getting students engaged in learning was going to be a crucial part of learning going forward.

Student engagement. Early childhood teachers had the unique task of trying to use technology to teach children who were too young to use it on their own. These teachers relied heavily on parent involvement to be able to access and teach the children. T7 was able to utilize Zoom once per week to have face-to-face communication with her students. She often tried to make it as fun and exciting as possible, having special events like pet show and tell. She would also use the platform SeeSaw to post science experiments and other activities parents could download and do on their own throughout the week. T7 was always looking for new ways to keep the students engaged. She even sat in her chicken coop at home to read a story and went on an adventure walk to her pond to look for tadpoles. T13, also an early childhood teacher, met with her students three times per week for a 30-minute session. In those times she would do a circle activity, read a book, and do a learning activity. All of these activities had to be done on parent devices because the students did not have devices from the district they could use to access the information. T13 also got creative with her instruction and sent a “flat” version of herself through the mail and the kids could take their “Ms. Teacher” on adventures with them.

Early childhood teachers were not the only ones willing to do whatever it took to keep students engaged. T10, a high school math teacher, described a student named James and the lengths he was willing to go to in order to learn algebra,

We (teachers) would take turns on the school bus delivering meals. I would use that as part of my zoom time because this young man did not have internet, a hotspot, nothing would work where he lived, way down in a hollow. I would ride the bus, it was still cold then. The bus would park. I would use my dry erase board. He would sit in an abandoned car in front of the travel trailer they lived in and he would sit in that car and hold up his whiteboard. He was actually a really good math student. He went on to OTC and I was really proud of him actually. His name was James. He would do the multistep equations. Then I'd erase and we'd move on to the next concept. While we did not progress as far as I would have liked to in that year, we still made progress. The fact that he was willing to sit there in an abandoned car for one hour a week was pretty amazing. The funny thing was the bus driver wrote a letter to the school board and said, "I learned algebra this year. I had never taken algebra." That was a really powerful and emotional experience. This kid just wanted to learn.

Non-traditional tasks. Delivering food and teaching from buses was not the only unexpected job duty some teachers faced during COVID. In one case, a teacher engaged in a completely new task during the COVID shutdown. T12 explained, her school offered daycare services to essential workers, and teachers were asked if they would like to volunteer for those jobs. T12 felt safe enough to volunteer and was glad she did because she was so excited to get to see the students, but reported that the program was quickly

terminated because it became hard to determine who was considered “essential employees” and who should be allowed to receive the babysitting services. Overall, it was evident that teachers were willing to do whatever it took during this trying time.

Post-COVID. For the purpose of this study “post-COVID” began when schools returned to seated school in fall 2020 until fall 2022. Fifteen of the participants returned to in-person seated school, one participant was asked to continue teaching virtually, and one person started at a new school that was implementing a hybrid model. Although all 17 participants went back to the same amount of time spent teaching students, completing paperwork, and having meetings, there were a couple other changes they noticed. First, community involvement and influence increased considerably. In addition, 12 participants changed job positions or moved to a different district since returning in fall 2020.

Community involvement. When fall of 2020 came and it was time to make decisions about returning to in-person learning, many of those decisions were made with the community in mind. T1 recounted that her community was “very God-centered” and they “put our beliefs in our Christianity instead of our government.” Because of these beliefs, T1’s school went back to in-person learning with very few mandates. They were required to keep their students 6 feet apart, but they did not mask or quarantine. This meant T1’s job duties returned to normal once school was back in session. While some had very lax mandates, others were from districts that were very strict. T16 described how teachers were not allowed to go back to school in the fall until they were vaccinated, with no exceptions. She reported even though she was older, the people who served a medical need, such as occupational therapists and physical therapists, took priority. It was

a few weeks into the school year before T16 was allowed to get vaccinated and go back to work.

Changes in position or district. Many participants changed schools or positions in the fall following COVID so their job duties changed as well. T10 went from a small district to a much larger district. She testified although she appreciated the fresh start, the school she moved to was doing a hybrid model of seated and virtual school and she felt like they were doing double work trying to keep track of all the students. She felt more inundated with paperwork than she did pre-COVID. Some participants did not have the option of choosing their position upon returning to school. T14 was selected by her district to teach virtually in the fall of 2020. When students returned to school in October 2020 T14 was given a brand new caseload of students and had to essentially start over with all new students, new general education teachers, and a brand new way of teaching and learning.

Interview topic 2: What factors affected the perceived self-efficacy of veteran special education teachers and how did that efficacy change from winter 2020 (January 2020) to fall 2020 (September 2020)?

For the purpose of this study, self-efficacy was defined to participants as “your beliefs in yourself and your ability to do your job.” Participants were asked to describe their level of self-efficacy before, during, and after COVID and then explain what factors contributed to their perceptions. This first topic examined in this section is the changes in perception of self-efficacy from winter 2020 (pre-COVID) to fall 2022 (table 3). The researcher then evaluated the participant responses when asked about the factors that influenced their self-efficacy (Table 4). The researcher then further examined those

factors to determine which ones affected the participants before, during, and after COVID (Table 5) and whether those factors decreased or increased the participants' self-efficacy (Table 6).

Table 3

Changes in Perceptions of Self-Efficacy

Participant	January-winter 2020 (pre COVID-19 shutdown)	March- spring 2020 (during the COVID-19 shutdown)	September- fall 2020 (after COVID-19 shutdown)
T1	low	medium	high
T2	medium	low	high
T3	high	medium	medium
T4	high	medium	high
T5	medium	low	high
T6	high	medium	high
T7	high	high	high
T8	high	medium	high
T9	high	medium	high
T10	high	high	medium
T11	high	high	high
T12	low	medium	high
T13	high	medium	high
T14	high	low	high
T15	high	low	high
T16	high	low	high
T17	high	low	medium

Changes in perceptions of self-efficacy. All the participants in this study were veteran special education teachers who had been teaching for a minimum of 5 years. They had experience and knowledge that contributed to their feelings of high self-efficacy. During the interview, participants were asked to assess their self-efficacy at three different time periods, using high, medium, and low as possible descriptors. In winter 2020, 14 participants described themselves as having high self-efficacy. There were two who had medium self-efficacy and two who rated themselves as low. Those

who were medium or low claimed burnout or lack of support from their district as the reasons for their low self-efficacy. Participant T5 was in the medium range in winter 2020. While seven others found their years of experiences to be a positive influence on their self-efficacy, T5 recalled that after 14 years in teaching, she was reaching the point of burnout. She carried many of the responsibilities in her small district and was almost to the point of leaving education all together. She was experiencing some staff turnover and was struggling to be happy with her job. None of the participants attributed their low self-efficacy to themselves or their lack of abilities to do their job. They believed outside sources were the contributing factors.

Once COVID hit and the schools closed, only three participants ranked themselves high while eight claimed to be medium and six were low. Fifteen participants decreased in self-efficacy during COVID. However, T1 and T12 saw an increase in their self-efficacy. T1 claimed her self-efficacy and overall well-being improved during COVID because she was so burned out and dragged down with paperwork pre-COVID and she was depressed and anxious and it was taking a toll on her family. However, once COVID happened she was able to be home with her family more and her anxiety decreased. According to T12, some “unique experiences” with her job led to her low self-efficacy in winter 2020. T12 also believed that the increased time at home with her family helped to increase her self-efficacy.

Once they returned to school in the fall 2020, 15 participants’ self-efficacy returned to high, or reached it for the first time. In 2020, T1 was teaching and was the special education coordinator for her building. However, in 2021 she was able to make the transition to only being the special education coordinator, without teaching, and

reported her workload was much more manageable then, resulting in a high self-efficacy. Two participants conveyed their self-efficacy going down to medium in fall 2020. T3 stayed at the medium level she was at during COVID. She testified that the needs of the students had increased so drastically since returning that she was not able to keep up with the gaps in education and the ever-growing needs of the students. In fall 2020 T10 started a new position, which caused her self-efficacy to drop to medium. She was going from a small school to a very large school with very high expectations. The new school was also doing a hybrid model of teaching, which T10 claimed was confusing and a lot of work to keep up with. There were no participants in the low category. All 17 participants claimed the experience of going through COVID and the lessons they learned contributed to the increase in their self-efficacy.

Factors affecting self-efficacy. There were multiple factors that influenced their perceptions including support from others, years of experience, mental outlook, availability of resources, job duties, attitude, mental health, and other. All 17 participants discussed more than one factor that affected their self-efficacy. These factors can be found in Table 4.

Table 4

Factors Affecting Self-Efficacy

Participant	Availability of resources	Community support	Peer support	Administrative support	Experience	Attitude/flexibility	Job duties/caseloads	Mental health	other
T1							X	X	X
T2	X		X	X					X
T3		X				X	X		
T4	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
T5							X	X	
T6			X	X			X	X	X
T7		X		X	X	X	X		X
T8			X		X	X	X		
T9	X	X					X		
T10	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
T11				X	X	X			X
T12				X			X		X
T13	X			X	X		X		
T14			X	X	X			X	
T15		X	X			X	X		
T16					X	X			X
T17			X	X			X		
Total	5	6	7	10	8	7	13	5	8

Support from others. Support from administration, peers, and the community was a leading factor in effecting self-efficacy. Overall, 14 participants claimed support was an important factor in their self-efficacy. Prior to COVID-19, nine participants reported one of the greatest contributors to their self-efficacy was administrative support. T2 recalled having great support from her district. She was not required to do a lot of paperwork. “In my district I always felt safe to say what I really thought, and I did not really think there was going to be backlash. I felt like the district supported me really well.” T10 felt confident with her district’s leadership and commented, “When you have confidence in who is leading you, this is really empowering.” She also reported her process coordinator and SPED director knew a lot about their jobs and were able to be supportive while also

giving her autonomy. T16 reported that although her years of experiences had heavily influenced her self-efficacy, in winter 2020 she also had a very good support system and her district was very supportive as well, both contributing factors in their self-efficacy. Conversely, one participant did say that lack of administrative support contributed to her low self-efficacy. T11 believed her district was not using her to the best of her abilities and she was experiencing frustration and burnout. While many participants reported administrative support among their top influences before COVID, there were no participants who reported it affecting them one way or another once they came back to school in fall 2020.

Support from their peers was also important. Eight participants related that peer or community support was a factor for them before COVID. T15 had good relationships with general education teachers in winter 2020, which she believed significantly helped her self-efficacy. Support from peers was most heavily reported as a contributing factor during the COVID shutdown.

Years of experience. According to Bandura (1997), mastery experience is the most influential factor for growing self-efficacy. Consistent with Bandura, eight participants listed years of experiences as a top reason for their high self-efficacy. Participants listed experiences as a reason for high self-efficacy only during the part of the interview that focused on the pre-COVID time period. T7 had been teaching 26 years and felt confident in her abilities. T11 attributed her high self-efficacy in winter 2020 to the variety of her experiences. Although she had only been teaching 7 years, she had already taught high school, severe emotionally disturbed, and residential. She also had multiple graduate degrees. She mentioned although she was not feeling much support

from her current administration, her beliefs in her abilities were still high. T16 had been teaching 25 years at the time of the COVID shutdown and was very confident in her abilities to do her job, reporting, “I’ve got a masters plus in education so I feel like I am pretty well educated and even though a lot of that education was a long time ago, this structure for finding out information has only changed a little.” T16 believed that with enough education and experiences, she could overcome any new challenges she might face. Overall, participants listed experience as the most common factor affecting their self-efficacy.

Mental outlook. The effects of COVID caused a shift in the mental health of some participants. For five teachers, high-stress jobs and feelings of burnout played a part in their poor mental health. T5 explained her mental wellness was not great in spring 2020. She was insecure about what was going to happen during COVID and it was causing stress. “My self-efficacy tanked, and my feelings of burnout were exacerbated.”

Although for some COVID made their mental health worse and more unstable, the opposite was true for T11. She reported “thriving” during the COVID shutdown. She was positive about her experiences, recalling her freedom to take hikes during the day, jump on Google meets when she had a chance, and use that time as a reset. T11 also attributed her high efficacy to being able to adapt and be flexible. Seven participants attributed their level of self-efficacy to their attitude and flexibility. Although the changes in mental health impacted their self-efficacy, participants acknowledged that changes in resources and responsibilities influenced their self-efficacy as well.

Resources and responsibilities. Just as the job expectations varied from district to district, the available resources also varied. Thirteen teachers recognized the availability

of resources as well as the responsibilities given to them affected their self-efficacy. T2 worked in a small district where all the curriculum was out of date. She did not have updated resources, books, or supplies. She did not feel like they were teaching what they should be according to state standards. During COVID she felt even worse, stating, “I felt like I was not doing anything for the kids and there was not anything I could do about it.” Although T2 did pick up more responsibilities in fall 2020, she described feeling high self-efficacy because the district finally updated its curriculum and T2 felt she was finally able to give students what they needed.

While T2’s efficacy was initially low due to lack of resources, T9 attributed her high efficacy to an abundance of resources. She recounted in winter 2020 she had all the resources she needed to be able to do her job well. She felt this made it easier for her to problem solve and be productive. However, that all changed during COVID. T9 stated, “I did not feel like I had the right tools in order to do my job.” For her, the job duties changed but the resources to perform those, did not. When the job expectations changed, the need for resources changed as well. All the resources T5 normally taught with were papers and hard copies. During the COVID shutdown, she knew what content needed to be taught but struggled with teaching it in a virtual format. T5 recalled, “I felt like I was shaving off parts of myself to give to each responsibility and could not give all of myself to any one of them.”

While the COVID-19 shut-down caused a decrease in some teachers’ self-efficacy, it was not the case for everyone. In some districts, there was an increase in resources available to teachers during COVID. T10 experienced such an increase and her self-efficacy actually increased during COVID-19 because she felt she was able to give

students what they needed with transition services and making connections and opportunities for students in the community. However, T10's self-efficacy decreased when she came back to school in fall 2020. This decrease was due to an increase in responsibilities and paperwork. She stated, "I am not attracted to my profession right now." T10 described being inundated with paperwork and not having enough resources, later stating "Either give me more time or value my time." T15 also experienced an increase in self-efficacy because she had a low caseload in winter 2020 with far fewer behavior students.

Other. While the majority of responses fell into one of the previous categories, there were eight participants who listed a factor other than those above. T7 conveyed her faith in God is what contributed most to her self-efficacy. She felt God had called her into teaching and she was working with the talents and gifts he had given her. T12 also mentioned being purpose driven in her job, stating, "I am here for a purpose. I was chosen for this purpose and I need to figure out this purpose." T1 and T12 both mentioned having increased time with their families as a positive influence on their self-efficacy. A breakdown of the factors affecting self-efficacy can be found in Table 4.

Self-efficacy by time period- frequency. During the course of the interview, the participants were asked about their self-efficacy and the factors affecting it three times: once when referencing the time pre-COVID (winter 2020), again when referring to the times school was shut down during COVID (spring 2020), and finally once schools were opened again (fall 2020). Participants claimed the factors influencing their self-efficacy changed throughout the year. Table 5 refers to the number of times each factor was mentioned during the three time periods.

Table 5

Self-efficacy by Time Period — Frequency

Participant	Availability of resources	Community support	Peer support	Administrative support	Experience	Attitude/flexibility	Job duties/caseloads	Mental health	other
Winter 2020	4	4	7	8	7	0	5	1	5
Spring 2020	3	1	4	1	0	3	7	1	5
Fall 2020	2	0	1	2	0	5	10	3	1

Factors affecting self-efficacy— Increase or decrease. When reviewing the findings for this study it was important to note just because someone listed “administrative support” as a contributing factor to their self-efficacy, it is not inherently known if that contributed in a negative or positive way. Table 6 shows which of the factors increased self-efficacy and which decreased it. In some cases, such as resources, four participants reported that having enough resources increased their self-efficacy, while five claimed that a lack of resources negatively impacted their efficacy. Similarly positive administrative support increased self-efficacy while a lack of administrative support decreased self- efficacy. The presence of community support, peer support, experiences, and attitude only increased participants’ self-efficacy. Yet, the opposite was true when it came to mental health. There were five participants who discussed their mental health decreasing their self-efficacy while no participants discussed good mental health as a contributing factor to their self-efficacy. Factors and how they increased or decreased self-efficacy are found in Table 6.

Table 6

Factors Affecting Self-Efficacy—Increase or Decrease

Participant	Availability of resources	Community support	Peer support	Administrative support	Experience	Attitude/flexibility	Job duties/caseloads	Mental health	other
Increase	4	5	12	8	7	8	8	0	8
Decrease	5	0	0	3	0	0	14	5	3

The school shutdowns that occurred in the wake of COVID-19 caused a shift in the self-efficacy of teachers in this study. Although there were many factors that contributed to the fluctuation in self-efficacy, the majority of participants ended 2020 with a higher perception of self-efficacy than when they started. Factors such as support, caseloads, and availability of resources had both negative and positive impacts on self-efficacy. Factors such as community and peer support as well as experience and attitude only caused an increase in self-efficacy whereas mental health concerns only caused a decrease. Special education teachers were not the only people affected by the school shutdowns. Special education students and their families also faced many challenges during this time.

Interview topic 3: What were the biggest challenges special education students and their families faced during COVID-19 shutdown?

The COVID shutdown affected students in a variety of ways, some of which may never be known. The school closures in spring 2020 happened so quickly that no one got to say goodbye. This lack of closure impacted many families and teachers. There were also many children impacted by mental and physical health issues and for some these remained untreated due to lack of connection with the school. There were students across Missouri who struggled with food insecurities and each district handled this need differently. Academic and social regression due to lack of instruction and practice in the

school setting was also a challenge for students in Missouri. Students also faced home lives that were not always healthy or stable. While this was a reality for some students before COVID, during the pandemic, teachers had a hard time intervening and helping these students. Finally, students suffered from a lack of resources in many areas. These challenges are summarized in Table 7 and discussed in the following section.

Table 7

COVID-19's Effect on Special Education Students and Their Families

Participant	Mental health/ comorbidity	Food insecurity	Regression	Uninvolved /unstable home life	Lack of resources	Other
T1	X	X		X		X
T2	X	X		X	X	
T3	X	X	X	X		
T4				X		X
T5					X	X
T6		X		X		X
T7	X	X				
T8	X		X			
T9	X			X		
T10		X			X	
T11		X		X		
T12		X				
T13						
T14				X		
T15		X	X			X
T16	X		X			
T17						X
Total	7	9	4	7	3	6

Lack of closure. When the school buildings closed in spring 2020 contact and communication was lost with families. School districts had to find ways for teachers and students to safely and effectively communicate. Although teachers tried to reach out, many families did not keep in contact with their teachers, and it is unknown how the pandemic affected the students in those families. The shutdown happened so quickly and

T10 mourned the loss of her class saying, “I felt like my kids never really left me. That’s something the pandemic stole from me was the ability to say goodbye.” T12 also recalled how hard it was to not get to say goodbye. She had students who were moving to a new building in fall of 2020, and they were not going to have any closure with those students. T12 decided to have a socially distanced meeting in the park so they could say goodbye to their students who were moving to a new building. She stated the students were upset that they could not hug and she “had to use a lot of facial expressions so they kids knew everything was ok.” This lack of support and communication led to some students suffering from mental health issues such as anxiety and depression.

Mental health/ comorbidity. COVID may have caused a shift in the mental health of special education teachers, but it affected special education students and their parents as well. T9 noticed an increase in anxiety with her students and their parents, recalling she spent a lot of time on the phone with parents comforting and guiding them just as much as the students. Some of her students were so anxious they would not leave their homes and their behavior issues increased. Some students who had mental health issues prior to COVID only saw those get worse, as told in a story from T3. She stated:

This one boy was going to be in trouble whether COVID hit or not. That was just the kind of kid he was. I was on the phone with his mom and I guess he was on probation. He came back for a while last year wearing an ankle bracelet. He was one of those kids who tugged at your heartstrings because he was very likeable, he just did not want to do much. His whole motivation went south because his best friend was killed in a motorbike accident during COVID so he was like, “I do not want to do anything.”

Physical issues were also a major concern for some teachers. T10 told a story of Bobbie, a medically fragile student she had that year. At school everyone knew and loved Bobbie and did whatever they needed to do to ensure Bobbie's safety. However, when the school closed, T10 had to figure out how to make sure Bobbie was getting his physical therapy. She would go to Bobbie's house once a week and meet up with his physical therapist (PT). T10 would stand in the garage and the PT would stand in the driveway. T10 would put on masks and gloves and would meet Bobbie with his parents in the garage to complete his physical therapy. T10 worked with Bobbie in a way she had never been able to before because those tasks were always done by the PT or paraprofessionals in the classroom. T10 was determined to be the constant in Bobbie's life.

T16 also had a medically fragile students to whom she would attempt to read stories via Zoom but the student's attention span was about seven minutes, so his participation was limited. She recalled another student of hers who was medically fragile, and the family could not leave the house for fear the child might contract COVID. That family went several months without leaving their home. T16 did the best she could to try to help the family out and give the child some kind of connection to the outside world. Students not only relied on the schools for mental and physical health services but for consistent meals as well.

Food insecurity. In the 2000-2001 school year, 51.3% of students in Missouri were receiving free and reduced lunches (National Center for Educational Statistics, n.d.). At the time of this study, nine participants listed food insecurities as a challenge for their students. T2 and T10 both recalled that their primary focus when the school shutdown

was to make sure their students were getting fed. So many of their students relied on the school to provide breakfast and lunch. Making sure those students were getting what they needed was a top priority. T15 was also worried about how her students were going to get fed. Her district provided breakfast and lunches for families during the COVID shutdown, and they offered pickup as well as delivery for those families who were not able to leave their homes.

In addition to not having food at home T12 reported that several of her students had food issues including sensory problems and food sensitivities. She spent a lot of her time trying to get those students to eat in the first place and she had to coach parents through how to do feedings with those students at home. T6 worked for a district that delivered food to the students. She knew how important basic needs were, stating, “This [delivering food] was just as important as the academics because if a kid is not getting the food they need, they are not going to learn as well as they could.” The primary goals for all of the participants were contacting students and making sure their base needs were being met. Once those needs were met, they could move on to focusing on academic and social success. Unfortunately, due to lack of time at school, regression in both academics and social skills occurred.

Academic and social regression. During the shutdown only four participants noticed a regression in their students (Table 7). However, 16 participants would go on to list gaps in academics and social skills as a long-term effect of COVID (Table 8). T15 noticed regressions in her students due to lack of instruction during the shutdown. She was not able to provide the kind of IEP services the students were accustomed to and it led to many students falling back academically. Regression was also a concern for T3 as

she described how she could provide students with activities but could not teach new skills due the lack of ability to provide the scaffolding the students needed. This loss in support led to regression in most of her students. The need for parental involvement increased during COVID because students were at home all day, leaving their parents to play a greater role in their academic and social education. For some, their home lives were not stable or healthy, which led to even more challenges.

Uninvolved or unstable home life. COVID hit all families differently and for some that meant their child's education went on the back burner and they concentrated on more pressing matters. For others, learning from home shed some light on already struggling families. Seven of the participants believed an uninvolved or unstable home life was a challenge for their students. T2 claimed many of her families were uneducated and trusted the school to make sure the students were getting what they needed because they were unable to provide it themselves. T9 recalled that in winter 2020 only about 50% of families were reachable and willing to work with the school. She reported the families who were involved before the shutdown remained in touch and that relationship grew stronger during COVID, but some families dropped communication altogether and she did not hear from them until school started back in August.

In some cases, participants had concerns as to whether the basic needs of students were being met at home. T10 remembered having many students whose home lives were fraught with neglect and "sad domestic situations." She told one story of a young girl who was tasked with taking care of her three siblings because her parents had dependency issues. T11 remembered being very concerned for her students' well-being, saying, "We had a lot of concerns about the amount of time kids were spending with their

parents in their homes and not at school getting fed and in front of another adult's eyes. Concerns for the kids were high." When students are in the school building each day, it is easier for teachers to keep an eye on them and make sure their needs are being met, but it was nearly impossible to provide this same level of safety during COVID. The schools not only offered a safe place for students to get their needs met, but that was also where all of the resources were. Most parents did not have learning materials and resources readily available in their homes.

Lack of resources. There are many resources needed to teach students in a school setting: Internet, devices, hands-on manipulatives, papers, and lab equipment. These resources are designed with a student's learning in mind. When the transition to learning from home happened, students were without most, if not all, these resources. Three participants recalled lack of resources being a challenge for their students. T2 reported that many of her families were without Internet so if an IEP meeting was required, the principal would drive to the family's house and deliver any necessary paperwork, get signatures, and bring the paperwork back. For some the lack of resources was so profound the school did not even have any educational expectations for families. This was the case with T5. Her district did not have the resources to provide the families, nor did any of the families have Internet capabilities to connect with their teachers if they did have the devices. T5 used own her cell phone to attempt to connect with families when possible, but most were unwilling to work with the school. In addition to Internet and technology, families were also lacking resources such as paper, rulers, and supplies to write with, counting blocks or other hands-on tools needed for teaching, and general school supplies needed to complete work. With a lack of resources, frustrations soon set

in for families and teachers alike. While lack of resources is a universal issue, there were some other challenges students faced.

Other. No two stories are the same and although there were many common challenges, some participants reported a challenge that was different from the rest. T12 recalled what a traumatic time this was for everyone, telling a harrowing story about returning student supplies during the COVID shutdown. Once the schools shut down, teachers had one hour to gather all the children's things and line them up in the gym.

Our parents were in charge of getting all the kids' stuff back to them. That was very eerie seeing all the kids' stuff lined up in the gym. It was almost like there was a school shooting and here was all their stuff and parents were picking it up but the students were not there.

T6 reported an increased bond with her families during the shutdown. She stated she became even closer with their students. She had some low-functioning parents who did not know how to read so T6 was able to teach the parents as well as the students.

Students and families faced many challenges during COVID. Those with mental and physical health disorders saw an increase in those symptoms as well as a rise in issues not otherwise seen. Some students lived in homes with less than ideal conditions where their needs, such as adequate food, were not being taken care of. These students also experienced instability within their home environment. For some districts in Missouri, there was a lack of resources available to the families to help them during COVID. These factors and the lack of access to quality education caused regression in some students. Some of these challenges were short term and others has lasting effects. The school districts also saw lasting effects as a result of COVID.

Interview topic 4: What lasting effects has COVID-19 had on schools?

School districts all around Missouri were affected by the closing of their doors in spring 2020. The way they do business was forever changed. Most did get to return to seated school in the fall but there were still lasting impacts for everyone. The mostly widely reported effect was the increase in academic and social learning gaps. Due to these increasing gaps, schools saw an increase in referrals for special services and additional supports as well as new students transferring schools. This rise in referrals has led to larger caseloads and more paperwork for special education teachers. Table 8 shows these lasting effects on education.

Table 8

The Lasting Effects of COVID-19 on Education

Participant	Gaps in academics or social emotional	Increase in referrals	Increase in caseloads	Increase in transfers	Other
T1	X				X
T2	X		X		X
T3	X	X	X	X	X
T4	X	X	X		X
T5	X	X	X	X	
T6	X	X	X		
T7	X				X
T8	X	X	X		X
T9	X	X	X	X	
T10	X		X	X	
T11					X
T12	X	X			
T13	X	X			
T14	X				
T15	X	X			
T16	X				X
T17	X	X		X	
Total	16	10	7	5	8

Academic and social emotional gaps in learning. Missouri students lost several months of in-person education during COVID. Whether it be due to lack of motivation or lack of instruction—both academic and social-emotional— participants reported many children returned to school with gaps in their academic and social learning. Sixteen participants noticed some gap in their students learning, whether academic, social-emotional, or both.

Lack of motivation. Teachers had a difficult time keeping students on task and motivated during COVID. T2 attributed the gaps in learning to parents being too lenient and on students “getting lazy.” She believed many families used COVID as an excuse to

underperform and now that they did not have that excuse anymore (since returning to school), they had fallen behind. These gaps were still being seen in fall 2022. T8 saw similar behaviors with students, recalling how hard it was just to get them to do their work. The students were just no longer motivated. He explained that his third grade (in fall 2022) had the lowest test scores in the district because they were still trying to make up for learning lost during COVID.

Lack of instruction- academic. When students reentered school in fall of 2020, some of them were getting instruction for the first time in over six months. Children lost out on direct instruction during the school shutdowns in spring and teachers began to see the results upon returning to school. T12 described how her fifth graders still could not tell time or count money because those are skills that are typically taught in the spring for third grade, but those children never got that instruction because their third-grade year was spring 2020. They had entire gaps in their math content knowledge because they were simply never taught those skills. The regression was so involved at T17's district, they hired a reading interventionist for their middle school to hopefully give some additional support to those students who were falling behind and to help close that reading gap the entire building was experiencing.

Lack of instruction: Social emotional. In fall 2020 some teachers noticed that the newly arriving kindergarteners did not have the social skills most students come to school with. T6 claimed she had never seen so many kindergarten students who did not know how to show respect or how to treat people. T12 agreed, speculating this was because they were home with their parents instead of in a preschool and were not expected to use the manners or social skills that would typically be taught in preschool. Behavior

concerns were also noted by T4, who noticed that his preschool program was seeing social emotional issues on all levels. He also reported students who chose to remain virtual in the 2020-2021 school year had increases in behavioral concerns upon arriving at in-person learning for the 2021-2022 school year. He said the students who really needed to be in school chose to stay virtual and suffered because of it. T4 felt these students did not understand how to socialize anymore and they were not developing or practicing empathy.

Another example of students lacking social skills came from T16, a preschool teacher, who noticed her students did not have the social skills she would expect them to have at that age. Simple tasks such as turn taking during a game are often concepts they have not grasped yet. She explained that when she first starts working with a child, she begins with a game so she can assess the child's ability to take turns, wait patiently and handle upset. She found that recently, children lacked these basic social emotional skills. They often did not even know how to look a person in the eye when they talked to them.

Social regression was not limited to young children. T8 noticed that those students who were freshman in high school during spring 2020 suffered some social emotional setbacks from missing part of that formative high school year. He also noticed anxiety and depression had increased along with the other social emotional concerns. Due to these gaps in student learning, there was an increase in students who were being referred for special services as well as students transferring into schools who more readily met their students' needs.

Increase of referrals and transfers. Referrals are common in special education as children fall behind in general education and show a need for additional services.

Transfers also happen on occasion as families move into and out of school districts. However, from fall 2020 to present day, teachers had seen an increase in the number of students who were being referred to special education and the number of students moving into their district. Ten of the participants noticed an increased in referrals for their district and five reported in increase in transfers from other districts. T5 has noticed a lot of gaps with students who remained virtual or who moved into the district from somewhere else. It is very difficult to track what, if any, education these students received since spring 2020. T17 claimed that as of fall 2022 her elementary building of about 500 students had 24 pending referrals for special education, a large increase over what they would typically see this time of year. She was also seeing a “fair amount” of transfers coming into her district, most of which were behind academically.

T5 also noticed an unusual pattern of referrals in her district. Typically, students were referred for special education services in elementary but since COVID, T5 had noticed an increase in referrals at the secondary level. She claimed her SST (student support team) process was efficient at catching students early. Although there had not been an increase in referrals at the elementary level, she had seen an increase in students referred to the SST team. As students are referred to special education, evaluations and paperwork increase. If students qualify for services, it increases the caseloads of teachers.

Increase in caseloads and paperwork. Due to the increase in referrals and transfers, SPED teachers’ caseloads are at an all-time high. Seven participants claimed their district had seen an increase in caseloads and paperwork. For T6 this increase in caseload made her feel like she was a SPED teacher in a general education setting. She had so many students that it was not possible to provide small group instruction anymore.

Intensive instruction was not an option at this point. She was having a hard time meeting the needs of all students in the short amount of time given.

When schools returned to learning in fall 2020, the DESE had nothing in place to protect special education students and their rights during the shutdown. DESE (n.d.) quickly created and required Form G, which is an Alternative Method of Instruction plan that teachers were required to complete for each student. This process involved calling the parent and discussing a plan, amending the student's IEP, adding the new plan (Form G) to the IEP, and activating their IEP once again. This had to be done with every single student before September 2020. This added hours of work to teachers' already heavy caseload. T4 mentioned there were no compliance standards for Form G and no one truly knew the right way to complete it. It was very confusing and difficult to complete with fidelity. T8 and T6 also mentioned their schools had no plans for how to fill out Form G and they were just doing what they thought was best. Although gaps in learning that lead to increased referrals and paperwork are a large part of the impact on schools, there were other contributing impacts as well.

Other. Community involvement and their communities' lack of buy-in to COVID procedures made a lasting impact on school districts. T2 told about how her entire town went to the rodeo in August because they did not believe in COVID and then the school had to close down in September because they had less than 20% of their population at school due to illness and quarantining. A similar story was told by T5 where her school did not believe in masking mandates and did not require any precautions to be taken. T5 was consistently worried about her students' and families' well-beings and described it as

a very stressful time. She claimed there was then, in fall 2022, an increase in RSV and flu cases in her school.

For some students, the masking and social distancing requirements that were imposed when arriving to school in fall 2020 were traumatizing. T12 reflected that although her school required masking, her students with autism were frustrated and scared and they made a decision to make her classroom mask-free so those children would feel safer. When others questioned her decision she stated, “I am not going to be the scary person in that room anymore,” and ultimately chose to do what she felt was best for the social emotional health of her students.

Although most aftereffects of COVID are stressful or scary, T7 told a different kind of story. This year, her school went back to using real trays and utensils in the cafeteria for the first time since COVID. Previously they had been using disposable trays and cutlery. She noticed at the beginning of fall 2022 that students were throwing their trays and utensils away. Teachers were confused and could not figure out what the problem was. Once they asked the students, they realized those second graders had never known anything except disposable items at lunch. They could not remember a time before it was all just thrown away. That was a lesson that no one had realized they would need to be teaching.

Some schools changed their way of doing business whether it was knocking down walls to accommodate for more room like in T8’s case or changing from a typical high school structure to being in A-B style cohorts like in T17’s district. She reported her students were very unhappy to go to cohorts because it meant the students had less

socialization with their friends, something they desperately needed. It also meant eating lunch in classroom instead of the cafeteria, further isolating students to their small cohort.

COVID changed the ways schools did business and it had a lasting impact on students, families, districts, and teachers. Gaps have become apparent in not only academic but social emotional learning and teachers are working to identify those students with gaps and get their needs met as quickly as possible amid the increase in paperwork and caseloads. Although many of the health and safety mandates they abided by in fall 2020 had dissipated by 2022, teachers were still seeing the last effects of students missing so much in-person learning. Although there were many challenges and changes that came along with COVID, not all experiences were negative.

Interview topic 5: What were the positive outcomes that occurred because of the COVID-19 shutdown?

It is easy to focus on the negative impact of COVID and the challenges it brought. However, there were some positive outcomes that participants noticed. For some, the COVID shutdown brought people together. They found an opportunity to bond with their families and their communities. Participants also experienced feelings of being value and respected. Changes were noticed not only in personal growth but also in their districts and in students or families. The positive outcomes of COVID-19 can be found in Table 9.

Table 9

Positive Outcomes

Participant	Bonding with others	Family time	Felt respected/valued	Personal growth	Change in district	Change in students or families	Other
T1		x				x	
T2	x			x	x	x	x
T3			x			x	
T4	x	x			x		x
T5		x	x	x			x
T6						x	
T7					x		
T8				x	x	x	
T9	x			x		x	
T10			x		x		x
T11					x		
T12					x	x	
T13				x			
T14				x			
T15				x	x		x
T16		x		x	x		x
T17			x	x		x	
Total	3	4	4	9	9	8	6

Bonding with others. Bonding was something that increased for participants throughout COVID and three reported that it was a positive outcome for them. T9 reported becoming closer with her families and her SPED team during the shutdown. Her students' families were more willing to create a relationship with her once they saw what it took to teach their children. She also described her department as being a "tight knit family," with after school get-togethers being a regular occurrence.

In addition to building relationships with families, some participants noticed an increase in bonding among students. For example, T4 was able to use the fall 2020 time to make connections with students. The students were not allowed to eat in the cafeteria

and instead had to eat in the classrooms. He recalled that students who previously did not have a homeroom, got to have one that year and that everyone in their homeroom became very close. They had time to talk and get to know each other. T17 spoke fondly about her new bonds with her students, stating,

Honestly I feel like with that group of students that I had during that time, I have bonded with them. It is different from what I have with my other students. Almost like whenever you've been through something traumatic together.

Teachers were beginning to feel connected and valued not only by students but by families and administration as well.

Feelings of being valued and respected. The mindset of some people shifted after COVID, and people's values and opinions changed in many ways. Four of the participants remembered feeling more valued and respected post-COVID. T10 recalled an "almost hero feeling of parents being grateful" during COVID and how nice it was to be appreciated for her hard work. Many teachers including T3 recalled parents showing new levels of respect, some of which said, "I do not know how to you do this." A parent in T17's school felt much the same way, stating, "I appreciated you before but now I'm thinking you are a saint." She also felt they got a little more respect from their fellow teachers as well.

Some teachers were shown respect in the way of awards. T1 received Teacher of the Year in 2020 because her district saw how much effort and work she had put into her job. T7 was also given an award that year. She received a local award which was offered to teachers in their district. This award was one where the teacher is actually nominated

by a parent. She was honored to receive this award during such a hard time in their community.

Personal growth. COVID provided an opportunity for personal growth. Nine participants testified that they experienced personal growth of some kind during COVID. Two participants described specific examples of sharpening a skill or mindset. For example, T2 took the opportunity to learn more about technology by taking a second job with Instacart so she could become more familiar with working apps on her phone. T13 got very sick and almost died during COVID. This taught her to not sweat the small stuff anymore. She learned not to take things for granted. Although there were many who experienced changes in personal growth, there were some whose districts and students also experienced positive changes.

Changes in students and families. Students not only faced challenges during COVID but they made some positive changes as well. Eight participants saw positive changes in their students and the way they learned. As a result of the exposure to virtual learning T2 learned some of her students really did learn better through virtual means. She commented that some of her students who never talked in person due to their disability, felt more comfortable talking to the teacher through the screen while using Zoom or FaceTime. She was able to continue FaceTiming certain students even when they were back in seated learning. T2 also discovered how easy it was for students to arrange and organize their resources digitally. They could take pictures of charts or notes on their device and save them all in one place, aiding in organization.

T3 enjoyed watching her students embrace the new challenges and make changes for the better. She said, “It was like getting to watch them climb their own personal Mt.

Everest,” when she saw students overcoming obstacles set in place by COVID. For some students, their positive change came in the form of an attitude change. The students in T8’s school had a renewed appreciation for being at school. They did not like working from home and appreciated being able to go back to in-person learning.

Districts and administrators changed in positive ways as well according to nine of the participants. Administration was starting to listen more according to T12.

Administrators were asking questions and actively working to meet teachers’ needs.

Parents became much more involved during and after COVID. T12 recalled how parents began asking questions about what the kids were doing throughout the day. Overall, several participants reported positive changes in students, administrators, and districts.

Other. There were other small but equally significant changes after COVID. T10 realized post-COVID that her students who were transitioning into adulthood were going to need additional skills to be ready for skills-based jobs. She claimed, “there is a renewed value in helping with the transition piece and making school fit where you are and where your skill set and your strengths are.” T15 claimed teachers got a lot more creative and worked out new ways to make the curriculum engaging. The time during and after COVID also raised awareness about mental illness and helped strip the stigma away. T5 found it “raised awareness of how precious time is and how quickly things can change.” She also learned that “change can be very healing and refreshing.”

Although some teachers found it difficult to name any positives that happened as a result of COVID, some were able to recognize when things changed for the good. Some participants were able to use that time to grow closer to their families and bond with their loved ones. Still others grew personally and recognized their own strength and virtues.

Recognition from administration and the public helped those feelings of positivity. Even though not everyone had a positive outlook most participants were able to say they grew from that period of time and were able to learn some valuable lessons.

Interview topic 6: What lessons did veteran special education teacher learn during COVID-19?

Students were not the only ones learning lesson during COVID. Teachers came away with a few lessons as well. The first thing they learned was how adaptable special education teachers are. The next thing they learned was to trust in themselves and their capabilities because they were able to do so much more than they realized. They also learned to recognize and appreciate what they had, finally gaining a new understanding of themselves, their students, and the world around them. This section will describe these lessons learned.

Teachers are adaptable. It is widely known that teachers have to be adaptable, but nothing showed that more than COVID. Teachers were asked to step up and perform in unprecedented ways. T10 and T16 mentioned how adaptable people had to be to be able to do whatever was asked of them. T15 agreed, stating, “You’ve never had to be a flexible as you had to be during the shutdown and on the return. Things changed daily when we returned. In SPED you are used to it but this was hyper drive changes.” T4 remarked on how people in public education always find a way, stating, “We are going through it right now, underfunded, teacher shortage, regardless we find a way.” T3 recalled, “We did really well adapting and continuing to serve our students in spite of everything.” T7 said, “I almost feel like if we can make it through that we can make it through anything. If they come back today and said ‘Hey we are going online’ I’d say

‘Ok. Let’s go.’” Through these trials and experiences, teachers learned to trust in themselves and their capabilities.

Teachers learned to trust in themselves. During COVID things were called into question and it was important for teachers to be able to believe in themselves and their abilities to serve students’ needs. T17 recalled how she used to be a perfectionist and how going through COVID helped her realize, “Just like our students whenever they have hard days and we have to pick what battles to fight, we need to do the same thing with ourselves.” T9 learned to be patient with herself while she learned technology and a new way of teaching. T11 discussed slowing down and taking care of her own mental health. She stressed the importance of learning how to incorporate slowing down into your normal routine. T1 was unhappy with her job going into 2020 and she learned to listen to her gut and said, “I’m done with this.” She asked for a different job placement and was granted it. She knew what she wanted and trusted in herself enough to get it. Many teachers loved where they were but gained a new appreciation for it after COVID.

Teachers learned to appreciate what they had. Many teachers have children of their own. Sixteen participants had children of their own, whether grown or still in the home, and they gained a new appreciation for their families. T12 learned to treasure her time with her own children. T7 appreciated her relationships with God and learned to trust in Him more, understanding that, “He has it all under control even when I do not.” T8 learned not to take things for granted. T1 spoke to the importance of putting family first. As appreciation grew, participants were able to take a good look at their lives and gain a better understanding of the situation around them.

Teachers gained a new understanding. Teachers are always growing and learning. For some, COVID helped them gain a deeper understanding in many areas. T16 learned she had to become much more organized to teach online. T14 learned how important social emotional learning is for students and how missing those opportunities can harm them. T2 spoke about gaining a new understanding of students' home lives. She told the story of a student who was trying to do his algebra with his brothers screaming in the background and that was when T2 finally realized all the distractions her students were dealing with at home. T13 appreciated the importance of building relationships with students and their families. T9 and T12 both spoke about learning new technology and how trying that was for them. T12 had never used computers with her students at all and experienced a steep learning curve during COVID. T10 gained a new understanding of what her values were and that there were other options for occupations available to her. Overall, COVID offered many opportunities for change, both positive and negative, and the teaching world will never be the same again.

Generally, participants came through COVID with a general sense of pride; they made it through while simultaneously never wanting to repeat that period of time again. They were able to step back and appreciate everything they overcame. Bonds with friends and families strengthened. Communities rallied behind the participants and made them feel valued and appreciated. The fortified bonds and unwavering support led to personal growth for participants including a reaffirmation of their self-efficacy. Although their job expectations, pedagogy, and location of teaching changed multiple times throughout 2020, their love of teaching and belief in themselves did not.

Research Questions

This qualitative study sought to answer the following research questions:

- 1: How did teaching during a pandemic (COVID-19) affect veteran special education teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy?
- 2: How were job expectations for veteran special education teachers affected during the pandemic?
- 3: What challenges did veteran special education teachers face during COVID-19?
- 4: What lessons did veteran special education teachers learn during COVID-19?

These questions were answered through the use of tables as well as narrative examples. A synopsis of the answers to each question is found in the following section.

Research question 1. How did teaching during a pandemic (COVID-19) affect veteran special education teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy?

Bandura (1997) wrote about mastery experience relating to high levels of self-efficacy, therefore, it may be presumed that veteran teachers with many years of experiences would report high levels of self-efficacy. This was apparent in this study where the majority of teachers began 2020 with high levels of self-efficacy, many reporting it was due to years of experience. Most teachers saw a reduction in their self-efficacy as their job duties and expectations changed. They no longer had a good idea of what their job entailed, and they were attempting to meet student needs while navigating virtual learning, loss of resources, and a global pandemic. In fall of 2020, participant reports once again aligned with Bandura's (1997) findings that once a person has high-self efficacy, they may suffer a dip in their efficacy if outside changes occur, but they are

likely to regain their high self-efficacy once again. This was the case with the majority of participants.

Of the 17 veteran teachers interviewed, 13 started out with high self-efficacy. A variety of reasons contributed to this including peer and administrative support and years of experience. Those teachers who did not start with a high level of self-efficacy had extenuating circumstance to explain their lower self-efficacy. When shifting into the COVID school shutdown of spring 2020, two teachers' self-efficacy went up, two stayed the same, and 13 teachers' self-efficacy went down. This was mostly due to changes in job description, lack of resources, and confusion about how to do their jobs properly.

When transitioning from spring 2020 to fall 2020 and then returning to in-person learning for many districts, overall, 13 teachers' self-efficacy went up, one went down, and three stayed the same. The return to school meant a return to the way things were before and an increase in self-efficacy once teachers were allowed to start seeing their students and begin teaching in person again. The teacher whose self-efficacy dropped upon returning reported they switched to a new job that next year that had much higher demands and a larger caseload with more homework. That in addition to a hybrid model of teaching made it difficult to regain their self-efficacy.

Overall, from winter 2020 to fall 2020 10 teachers' self-efficacy remained the same, which means even though they had a dip during spring, they felt their self-efficacy was back up to the level it was at before. Four teachers reported their self-efficacy going up from winter 2020 and three claimed their self-efficacy went down. These decreases in self-efficacy were all due to an increase in paperwork and caseloads or switching to a

new job in which they were not self-efficacious yet. The variations in placement and caseload were just a couple of the job expectations that changed during the pandemic.

Research question 2. How were job expectations for veteran special education teachers affected during the pandemic?

In winter 2020 before COVID-19 many teachers reported paperwork being their biggest job expectation. Between IEPs, evaluations, progress reports, and constant data collection, most teachers reported paperwork taking up more than 50% of their time, some even taking the work home because there was not enough time to do it during the day. The expectations for teachers were pretty much the same regardless of district. Paperwork, meetings, and teaching students were the three biggest requirements for teachers pre-COVID.

Once COVID hit in spring 2020 all 17 participants experienced changes in their job description. All the participants were suddenly less concerned with paperwork and more concerns with making sure students were fed and that their other needs were being met. Teachers learned new methods of teaching via technology and did their best to keep their students engaged when they could. All IEPs were expected to be completed, but collecting data on IEP goals became nearly impossible. Teachers had limited access to their students and were not able to monitor their progress like they normally would. The expectations for teachers during spring 2020 varied greatly depending on the school. Fifteen schools required teachers to be in contact with students as much as possible, conducting Zoom meetings when necessary. Two districts had no requirements at all for their teachers aside from the mandatory IEP meetings. Teachers were left largely to their own devices most of the spring.

In fall 2020 teachers resumed their paperwork, meetings, and teaching duties. However, for the majority of teachers, new duties such as cleaning and monitoring for social distancing were added to their list of job duties. Teachers were spending hours a day cleaning between groups, reworking seating charts and contact tracing, and keeping up with safety protocols. In fall 2022 most of the safety and social distancing policies had been eliminated and teachers were largely back to the same job expectations they had pre-COVID.

Although the expectations have largely returned to normal, the number of transfers and referrals schools are dealing with has led to an increase in caseloads and in turn, more paperwork for teachers with no increase in resources or support. The gaps in academic and social learning led to many students falling behind and gaps forming in their knowledge. The number of students who are qualifying for special education services has increased dramatically, as reported by participants, but schools have not increased the amount of resources or personnel to adequately meet the needs of the students and teachers. Teachers are expected to produce the same results with more students and fewer resources. The need to address the academic and social emotional gaps in children's learning was not the only challenge veteran teachers faced during COVID.

Research question 3. What challenges did veteran special education teachers face during COVID 19?

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers faced both personal and professional challenges. Professionally, the participants reported challenges such as lack of Internet for their families, lack of parental involvement in the child's education,

limited resources to affectively teach, and concerns for their students' home lives. In some districts, the school attempted to alleviate some of these challenges such as lack of Internet or food insecurity by providing resources to the community. Many schools attempted to get hotspots, Internet, and food out to families in need. There was little teachers could do about the lack of participation on the part of the parents. The teachers knew what they needed to be teaching but often the students were unreachable or they did not have the resources they needed to teach the skill.

Personally, some teachers struggled with having Internet access themselves. They also struggled to teach their own children while "working from home." Four of the participants had children who were seniors in high school, so they were working through the sadness that came with not being able to enjoy their senior year and all the celebrations that come with that. While some teachers thrived during the time at home, many struggled with anxiety and depression, feeling as though they were not doing enough for their students and their families.

Although the majority felt supported by their district, they did not feel as though they were being supported by the Department of Education and the state of Missouri. T17 stated,

It would be nice if we could have more participation from our representatives and have them stand up and back our teachers. We are the 48th least paid teachers in the country. It's disheartening. If we could get some more support that would be nice.

Veteran teachers faced many challenges during COVID, but they were also able to take those challenges and turn them into lessons.

Research question 4. What lessons did veteran special education teachers learn during COVID-19?

While each participant reported their own unique lessons, the common themes were flexibility, an understanding of self or others, and an overall appreciation for who and what they had. Many teachers came through COVID grateful for their families, their coworkers, their faith, and themselves. Many were appreciative for the growth they went through.

Participants had strong feelings about themselves and their abilities after teaching through COVID. T16 stated, “I feel like I can do anything, I’ve taught through a pandemic.” Throughout COVID, T8 was reminded, “We do what’s best for kids, not what’s easiest for adults.” Most participants understood the flexibility of thinking and action that it takes to be a teacher, especially a special education teacher. Overall, the lessons learned were positive and hopeful.

Summary

Chapter Four presents the results of the interview data gathered, the goal of which was to explore the perceptions of self-efficacy of veteran special education teachers before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic. This chapter contained the findings of the study and an analysis of the transcribed text including interview quotes from participants in the study. Data collection occurred through interviews, transcripts, email correspondence, and member checking. Tables were used to visually represent key words and phrases and to examine the themes that corresponded to those words and phrases.

Chapter Five synthesized the findings from this study and recommended further research within the realm of the study. Chapter Five concludes with a review of findings

of the study, recommendations for educators in the field, and suggestions for further research, followed by a summary of the chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of veteran special education teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic to gain a deeper understanding of the impact COVID-19 had on their perceptions of self-efficacy regarding their ability to meet the needs of special education students and their families. Participants were Missouri special education teachers who had been teaching a minimum of 5 years in the 2019-2020 school year. Interviews were conducted virtually and documents from the schools were acquired.

The theoretical framework of this study was Albert Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy. Additionally, the study included research regarding COVID-19 and its impact on the world as well as the education system. The characteristics of veteran teachers were also examined.

Chapter Five encompasses a summary of the problem and research questions while also examining the limitations and delimitations of the study. Additionally, Chapter Five includes the summary of methods used in this study as well as summary of the findings. Lastly, this chapter examines the implications for education practice along with recommendations for future research. Following Chapter Five a list of references is provided along with appendices.

Research Questions

The questions guiding the study were as follows:

Research Question 1. How did teaching during a pandemic (COVID-19) affect

veteran special education teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy?

Research Question 2. How were job expectations for veteran special education teachers affected during the pandemic?

Research Question 3. What challenges did veteran special education teachers face during COVID-19?

Research Question 4. What lessons did veteran special education teachers learn during COVID-19?

In addition to research questions, limitations and delimitations are also defined.

Limitations

The methodological limitations for this study were as follows:

1. The research was limited by the number of veteran teachers who agreed to complete the interview process.
2. The research was limited by the honest responses from the participants.
3. There may have been unintentional bias of participants due to opinions of the school district.
4. There may have been unintentional bias of participants due to opinions about the politics surrounding COVID-19.
5. Self-reports from participants are difficult to verify.
6. The study could only determine a correlation between self-efficacy and COVID-19 and not causation.

The researcher limitations for this study were as follows:

1. Unintentional bias due to researcher being part of the target population.
2. Access to documents.

3. Consistency in interviewing and transcribing.

In addition to the limitations, delimitations for the study were also defined.

Delimitations

The delimitations of this study were as follows:

1. The study was delimited to special education teachers who had been teaching in that area at least 5 years, who were employed in public education at the time of the spring 2020 school closures, and who continued to be employed in public education for the 2020- 2021 school year.
2. Participants were teachers from varying grade levels and demographics (rural, urban, suburban).
3. Gender of participants was included for demographic purposes.
4. The study was delimited to Missouri public education teachers.
5. Interviews were conducted via Zoom due to geographical accessibility and data collection.

Summary of Methods

The researcher identified the criteria for participants as being an educator in Missouri who had been a special education teacher for at least 5 years during the 2019-2020 school year, who remained in public education during the 2020-2021 school year, and who was willing to discuss their experiences in an interview. The researcher reached out to DESE and obtained a list of all Missouri special education directors. The researcher then emailed the directors and inquired about recommendations of educators on their staff who met the criteria. When directors made their recommendations, the researcher extended an invitation to participate via email to the recommended

individuals. She provided a synopsis of the purpose of the study, the qualifying criteria, and a letter of informed consent. Once the letter of consent was signed and the participant agreed, a time was scheduled for the interview to take place. Additionally, the researcher conducted two pilot interviews to ensure the validity and reliability of the interview questions. Once the interview questions were decided on, the interviews were conducted.

All interviews were conducted via Zoom. The researcher gave the option of conducting interviews face-to-face, but all participants chose Zoom. The researcher conducted 17 interviews over the course of 3 weeks. Before the interviews began, the participants were once again informed of the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw at any time. Interviews were recorded using Zoom. Participants were asked the same set of questions from the interview guide and were also given an opportunity to add any additional information they wanted. After each interview, the researcher transcribed the interview in its entirety.

The researcher transcribed the interviews to aid in data collection, coding, and looking for themes. Memoing captured annotations, color coding, and highlighting throughout the transcripts as the researcher looked for key words, phrases, and themes, which were then turned into categories.

Triangulation was used to evaluate the themes that developed throughout the study. The researcher evaluated each transcript as the study progressed to check for accuracy in reporting and to look for developing themes she could look further into. The researcher used interviews, member checks, peer review, review of transcripts, field notes, and a review of board policies to ensure validity and reliability and to minimize researcher bias.

Member checking allowed participants to review the findings and give them an opportunity to provide feedback or make any changes they wanted to make. Copies of the findings were emailed to each participant along with a note that they could make any changes they would like to make. None of the participants asked for changes to be made.

Peer reviews were conducted to increase the validity of this study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A committee of three doctorally qualified faculty provided guidance and feedback throughout the study. The researcher utilized the feedback to improve the methodology and to accurately reflect the findings.

Summary of Findings

A qualitative narrative study was chosen to examine the self-efficacy of selected Missouri veteran special education teachers through the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent school closures as well as the return to in-person school. A qualitative methodology allowed the researcher to gather and examine the experiences and perspectives of Missouri special education teachers regarding COVID-19 and its impact. This type of study allowed the participants' words to be enhanced by voice, tone, and expression, which allowed the researcher to obtain a richer, deeper level of data than would be possible through a quantitative survey or scale.

Themes from Research Question 1. Research Question 1 asked, "How did teaching during a pandemic (COVID-19) affect veteran special education teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy?" As data from each participant were analyzed the researcher discovered teachers began winter of 2020 with high self-efficacy but experienced a drop in their self-efficacy once schools shut down in spring 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the decrease after spring, most participants' self-efficacy rebounded

back into the high range by fall 2020. Regardless of their level, all participants reported similar factors that contributed to their self-efficacy.

As the researcher analyzed the data she discovered there were multiple factors that led to participants' self-efficacy. Positive support from administration, peers, and the community was an important factor to the self-efficacy of most participants. Mastery experiences also played a key role. The findings of this study agreed with Bandura's (1997) conclusion that mastery experiences greatly influenced perceptions of self-efficacy. The majority of participants listed their own mastery experiences as a key factor in their self-efficacy. They believed that between their college education, life experiences, and variety of job duties, they were capable of just about anything and it resulted in feelings of confidence and high self-efficacy. Healthy mental outlook and positive attitudes were other contributing factors to high self-efficacy for some, while poor mental health led to a decline in self-efficacy for others (Bunomo et al, 2019). For some, they went into spring 2020 with poor mental health due to burnout or unhappiness with their job and working through COVID actually increased their positivity and self-efficacy for a short time. This supports Yin's (2022) study that locus of control and attitude affect self-efficacy. Support from others, mastery experiences, and mental health were all major contributing factors to the changes in self-efficacy but nothing changed for participants as much from winter 2020 to fall 2020 as caseloads and job expectations.

Themes from Research Question 2. Research Question 2 asked, "How were job expectations for veteran special education teachers affected during the pandemic?" For special education teachers, hands-on teaching of children is only a small part of their day. Prior to COVID, paperwork was an instrumental part of most participants' day, while

others listed meetings and other duties as taking up a large portion of the expectations of their job. However, once the school doors were closed and everyone started learning from home, the priorities and job duties changed. During COVID, participants shifted their time and focus to making sure students' needs were met. Checking on student wellness became the top priority. Some were worried about food insecurity while others were concerned for the safety and welfare of students.

After COVID, in fall 2020, 15 participants went back to seated school. There were environmental changes such as masking, social distancing, and increased cleaning procedures but the biggest challenge they reported noticing was an increase in caseloads, specifically in the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 school years. As time went on, there was an increasing gap in student achievement both academically and social emotionally. Participants noticed an increase in both referrals to SPED and transfers into the district, both of which led to an increase in caseloads for teachers. Without an increase in resources or support, this quickly became one of the biggest challenges for special education teachers after COVID.

Themes from Research Question 3. Research Question 3 asked, “What challenges did veteran special education teachers face during COVID-19?” The first theme emerging from this research question was about resources. Many teachers had a lack of resources to teach with and a lack of means for reaching students. There were no districts fully prepared for the shutdown. Some districts had more resources at their disposal and were available to provide more for their students. Others had limited resources and chose to just dismiss school for the remainder of the year.

The second theme emerging from this research question was related to a changing environment. When returning to school in fall 2020, teachers and students were faced with an environment that was very different than when they left. Most participants mentioned being tasked with additional cleaning duties, as well as lunches being moved to their classrooms instead of the cafeteria, all while masking and social distancing. They struggled with all the new mandates as well as teaching and keeping the social emotional well-being of their students in mind. As time went on, the additional referrals and transfers led to an increase in caseloads for many participants.

Themes from Research Question 4. Research Question 4 asked, “What lessons did veteran special education teachers learn during COVID-19?” Overall, participants learned to trust in themselves and to prioritize themselves and their families. Some learned to trust in themselves and their abilities as a teacher while others learned family was the most important thing and they needed to be changing their priorities. They also learned that teachers are adaptable and capable of being flexible when necessary.

Many participants claimed they gained a deeper understanding through the COVID pandemic. They understood themselves and their abilities better. Some gained new knowledge in technology and teaching. Others gained an understanding of their students and how their lives were impacted by their disabilities, families, and environment. They also learned the power of community and peer relationships. T3 summed it up when she said, “I still think this is the greatest profession ever. We get to help kids and make a difference in people’s lives.” Overall, the participants gained the knowledge that no matter what their job or the education community throws at them, they will be able to handle it. Generally, the researcher found the major themes of the study to

be changes in self-efficacy, changes in job descriptions, and mental health and positive attitudes. These themes will be further discussed in the following section.

Discussion

When evaluating the data from the participants, four major themes emerged. The first theme discussed is how the self-efficacy of every participant changed throughout COVID. Following that, the theories of Maslow (1943) and Bloom (1956) are discussed in their relation to the changes in student needs. The third theme discusses participants' positive mental outlook and flexibility. Finally, the similarities are evaluated between teachers and the general population during the pandemic.

Changes in self-efficacy. When comparing the results of this study with Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy, they are greatly aligned. Bandura stated that self-efficacy came from mastery experiences, social modeling, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal. Evidence of these was present throughout the study. Eight participants reported their mastery experiences directly impacted their self-efficacy. Fourteen participants believed support from peers or administrators aided in their self-efficacy, similar to social modeling and verbal persuasion. Emotional arousal was represented by 12 participants who listed mental health or a positive attitude as contributing factors to their self-efficacy.

While self-efficacy did decrease for 12 participants during the initial months of the pandemic, 14 were able to recover and come back to a state of high self-efficacy by fall 2020. This is aligned with Bandura (1997), Pearman et al. (2021), and Tschannen-Moran and McMaster (2009), who wrote that a person with high self-efficacy may

experience a dip due to environmental circumstances but will typically always come back to the same level or a higher level of self-efficacy.

Upon returning to in-person school in fall 2020, 14 participants believed the increased duties and caseloads negatively impacted their self-efficacy. This was in opposition to a 2017 study by Nuri et al. where they reported special education teachers having higher than average levels of self-efficacy because they served so many students. This may have more to do with the opportunities for mastery experiences and less the amount of students and paperwork. Overall, most participants were able to regain their high level of self-efficacy despite all the challenges faced during COVID.

You have to Maslow before you can Bloom. Two foundational educational theories of education are Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs and Bloom's (1956) taxonomy. Maslow found that as humans, we have basic needs of nourishment, safety, and security that must be met before any higher-level thinking can occur. Once a person reaches the esteem and self-actualization phase of the hierarchy, they are then able to be taught and assessed on the higher level that Bloom suggested. Teachers and staff can monitor students' basic needs when they are physically present. The school is able to provide food, safety, a loving environment, and a sense of belonging. Once those needs are met, it is easier for the child to concentrate on their growth needs, self-actualization, and higher-level thinking. Teachers in this study did not think about providing these basic needs, because they were already doing it as part of the day-to-day routines they had at school. Participants were able to concentrate on teaching Bloom's higher-level thinking and on doing their other duties such as paperwork.

However, according to the teachers in this study, once the schools shut their doors in spring 2020, paperwork went on hold momentarily and participants shifted their focus to students' needs and well-being, making sure they had safety, food, and the resources they needed. When the participants were in school, they were able to access and meet those needs naturally throughout the school day but when they were learning from home, it was more difficult to make sure the children's needs were being met and they were safe. The biggest challenges affecting students and their families were mental and other health issues, food insecurity, regression, unstable home lives, and lack of resources. The needs described in this study were similar to the needs in the study by Schuck and Lambert (2020) who claimed during those first few weeks that teachers focused on mental health needs, securing food and resources, and making sure students were in stable environments. When attention shifted back to Maslow, high-level thinking and strong academics were no longer a priority.

According to this study, lack of resources was not only on an individual family level, but many schools did not have the resources needed either and were not able to help out their families. Food was a resource that was difficult to come by for some. Nationwide shortages as well as limited budgets made it difficult for some families to get the food they needed. Some participants reported their schools attempted to help by providing breakfast and lunches for the students but not all districts were able to do this. Overall, the shift in priorities, time, and resources meant needs were being met, but learning was halted. Most students referenced in this study did not receive any higher-level academics for over 6 months, resulting in large gaps that would manifest over the years to come. Though participants were tasked with spending the beginning of the

COVID lockdown meeting the basic needs of students, they were willing to do it because of their positive attitudes and flexibility.

Willingness to go above and beyond. An overarching theme throughout all the interviews was a teacher's willingness to go above and beyond the typical job description. Whether that was to read in a chicken coop, deliver lunches, babysit, or teach math from a school bus, they were ready and willing to do whatever it took for their students. Participants frequently described the flexibility needed from themselves and their coworkers during COVID.

A willingness to go above and beyond was evident in frequent terms such as "adaptable" and "flexible." Participants in this study reported learning that they were adjustable and that they needed to trust in what they have and what they know. The veteran participants' feelings closely align to a study conducted by Carillo and Flores (2018) where they discovered that veteran teachers have higher than average levels of motivation and are more committed to the profession of teaching than nonveteran peers. Participants understood before COVID that they had experiences, professionalism, and motivation but it solidified and became more important once they had taught their way through COVID and emerged on the other side as better teachers. Teachers in this study also learned they are not so different from all the other people who were just trying to make it through.

We are not so different after all. COVID-19 was an unprecedented time for the entire world. People's lives were changed forever in the blink of an eye as they tried to navigate the new policies and procedures put forth by the government, fear of sickness or death, health concerns that may arise, and protecting their families. Anxiety, depression,

and comorbidity with other health impairments were common themes among the participants, which is consistent with studies conducted by Asbury et al. (2021), Rahmadi (2021), and Cassinat et al. (2021), who all described mental health as a challenge for special education children and their families. Some participants spoke of working in a low socioeconomic area where money and resources are scarce, leading to further stress for families. Toquero (2021) found similar situations in their study stating that financial constraints played a large role in the mental health of some families.

Although teachers' jobs were impacted in different ways, their lives were changed in much the same ways as their peers and neighbors. Teachers still had children at home to take care of and elderly parents who needed care as well. Many teachers reported the difficulty in being a teacher, parents, and child at the same time. Because they were forced to teach from home, they often had their children in their home with them. Some reported having elderly parents move back in with them so they could be cared for more easily. Parents also learned what it was like to be teachers when they suddenly had to help their children learn from home. Parents everywhere gained a sudden and passionate appreciation for teachers and what they do every day. As difficult as it was, COVID helped the participants observe there are more commonalities among people than they typically realized. Overall, this study looked at the themes of self-efficacy, meeting students' needs, participants attitudes and mental health, and the understanding that teachers in the study went through the same COVID challenges as everyone else. The next section takes these themes and examines the implications for schools and administrators.

Education Implications

The educational implications of this qualitative study are connected to the research questions that directed this study. Overall, this study sought to fill the gaps in literature regarding COVID 19 and veteran special education teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy. Both the self-efficacy of teachers and COVID's impact on education have been investigated but there is limited research linking the two.

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of selected veteran special education teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic in order to gain a deeper understanding of the impact the pandemic had on their perceptions of self-efficacy regarding their ability to meet the needs of special education students and their families. Thus, the theoretical framework of Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy, and the recent research completed on COVID, combined with the qualitative data obtained in this study, offer a rich well-rounded look at how COVID impacted veteran special education teachers in Missouri.

Although the findings in this study were delimited to select veteran special education teachers in Missouri, the implications could be applied to any level of teacher in any state. According to Johnson et al. (2020), general education teachers' self-efficacy was even more impacted by academic instruction than special education teachers. Implications for educators emerging from this study with veteran special education teachers are consistent with the broader research (Orlando, 2014). These implications are related to paperwork, burnout, support, and resources (Admiraal et al., 2019).

Paperwork and burnout. This study was in line with current research that indicated that paperwork complying with legal mandates, as well as excessive meetings,

were the job expectations that take up the most time and cause the most stress in the school setting (Fox et al., 2020). Teachers are quitting the field of teaching because they are burnt out from all of the paperwork and extra duties that go above and beyond teaching (Admiraal et al., 2019).

During COVID DESE added additional paperwork that teachers were required to have filled out by September 1, 2020. Form G was added so there would be a plan in place for special education students, should a school-wide shutdown occur again. This form required teachers to put each IEP into a draft form, make an amendment, call and interview every parent about their experiences and preferences regarding COVID, develop a plan, and finalize the IEP for each student on their caseload. This new form added many hours of additional work to the already overextended schedule of the special education teachers.

In fall 2020 the schools reopened their doors and the job expectations changed once again. Teachers were expected to add in masking, contact tracing, social distancing, and extensive cleaning procedures (Ehren et al., 2021). This only added to the growing expectations for teachers (Asbury et al., 2021). As time went on, gaps began to emerge in students' academic and social emotional learning (Brunson McClain et al, 2021). This led to more referrals and larger caseloads for teachers.

Generally, teachers in this study got into education for the love of teaching. They enjoyed watching children grow and learn new things. Special education teachers especially love to watch the progress their students make and enjoy their time in the classroom. However, teachers are leaving the field at an alarming rate due to all the nonteaching tasks they are being asked to do (Asbury et al., 2021). Their “duties as

otherwise assigned” are taking up more of their time than actual teaching. Administrators both at the building and district level would benefit their teachers greatly by helping to lessen this load. Whether that be to hire additional support, lessen required paperwork, or give additional time to complete work during the work day, any effort would go a long way toward teacher retention. Also, while these demands increase, additional resources and help have not been given to districts and teachers in need.

Support and resources. Throughout COVID-19 many participants were faced with a lack of direction from their district. Their school districts were not ready, and teachers did not have a clear idea of their expectations or the resources to do the kind of teaching they were used to. Many districts told their teachers not to worry over spring break because they were “absolutely coming back.” The participants did not have basic school supplies in their homes, not to mention specialized supplies needed for instruction. Fifteen of the schools in the study did not have effective communication systems in place for staff to talk to one another or for communicating with families. In the future it would be beneficial for schools to have contingency plans in place in case something of this nature happens again. Having quick access to resources and effective communication with parents could have been life changing for many teachers and families.

Due to the lack of instruction and social emotional experiences students received during COVID, there is a large increase in special education referrals. Increasing gaps in academics and social emotional regulation are being noticed throughout the state (Brunson McClain et al., 2021). This rise in student needs has not come with an increase in resources. Schools are struggling to keep up with the demands for special education services. Teachers are overloaded and reaching burnout. Some are looking for jobs

elsewhere (Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2012). Veteran teachers have been through it all and are sticking with education for the final few years until retirement (Admiraal et al., 2019). However, new teachers coming in do not have the same level of commitment as their vested peers and are leaving the schools after a few years. Administration should consider increasing support and resources as a measure to address teachers leaving the field.

Recommendations for future research

The researcher limited this study to 17 veteran special education teachers throughout Missouri. The scope and reach of this qualitative narrative study left avenues for other researchers to expand and expound upon the results yielded. Future research could include novice teachers or teachers outside of Missouri for a greater scope. The gender of participants could also be evaluated more thoroughly. The interview process began by using criterion-based sampling to determine the participants. This study included two males and 15 females, because those are the participants who responded to the call for participants. However, there are conflicting studies on the self-efficacy of female teachers versus male teachers' feelings of self-efficacy. In 2017, Nuri et al. found that female teachers had higher self-efficacy whereas the 2021 study from Šabić et al. claimed males have higher self-efficacy. Further research could be conducted to determine if gender plays a role in this case.

The researcher also recommends examining the described gaps in academics and social emotional learning. Gaps in academics and social emotional skills was the most affected area of education as reported by the participants with teachers claiming they saw large gaps in these areas, even 2 years later. They noticed predominantly third graders

showing gaps in academics and kindergarteners showing social emotional gaps. At the time of reporting the students who were in third grade would have been in first grade during COVID. This is a crucial year for basic reading and writing skills to develop. The lack of instruction during that spring 2020 is evident in now third graders who struggle to spell and read. Present-day kindergarteners were toddlers during COVID. This was a fundamental time in their social-emotional development. Many children that were referenced in this study were placed in front of technology, or largely ignored while parents struggled to work from home, teach their older children, and maintain their daily lives. These toddlers seemingly did not get the social-emotional practice and developmental play they would normally get. This has resulted in a lack of social skills in kindergarten. As time goes on there is potential for these gaps to widen and for more and more children to fall behind in these areas. Research could be completed to examine how these students do in future grades and determine if the gap continues in following years or if educators are able to get students caught up and return to a rate of referrals that is closer to what was seen in previous years.

Lastly, additional research would be valuable regarding special education teacher burnout post-COVID and the decision of many teachers to leave special education or switch to another school, grade level, or career. Thus, continued research could determine which factors contributed to teachers staying in the profession and could lend itself to research on teacher retention. The lessons learned presented in this study were articulated by veteran special education teachers within three years of when the pandemic started. As additional time passes, these educators may have the opportunity to reflect and learn from this season in ways they cannot identify at this early stage.

Conclusions

This qualitative narrative study set out to examine the self-efficacy of veteran special education teachers and to evaluate the changes COVID-19 caused on that self-efficacy. This study was fulfilled by expanding existing research and by providing a methodological examination of the experiences of veteran special education teachers in Missouri. Four research questions were examined during this study. The first research question was “How did teaching during a pandemic (COVID-19) affect veteran special education teachers’ perceptions of self-efficacy?” The second research question was “How were job expectations for veteran special education teachers affected during the pandemic?” The third research question was “What challenges did veteran special education teachers face during COVID-19?” The final research question was, “What lessons did veteran special education teachers learn during COVID-19?” Bandura’s (1997) theory of self-efficacy was closely studied and compared to more recent studies on self-efficacy and teaching.

Through the qualitative process, this study sought to fill in the gap in literature by examining the real experiences of 17 veteran special education teachers in Missouri. There is limited research regarding COVID’s effects on the self-efficacy of teachers, specifically veteran special education teachers. Participants were interviewed individually via Zoom to examine their perceptions of their self-efficacy in regard to their experiences teaching throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

This study also explored other areas of the participants’ experiences including the challenges they faced, the lessons they learned, the impact it had on their students and schools, and the positive outcomes they arrived at in the end. Each participant was

encouraged to be completely truthful in their storytelling and it led to very rich and informative retellings. Through this study, teachers were given a voice to testify to the challenges they overcame and the lessons they learned while teaching through one of the most difficult periods of time our country has ever endured.

Although the results of this study are not generalizable, it is reasonable to conclude that the experiences expressed by these participants could be similar to the experiences of many other teachers around the world. The participants began the 2019-2020 school year believing it was just another year. They went through the motions, taught their students, attended their meetings, and completed their paperwork. They were diligent and hard-working and had high self-efficacy. When COVID hit, their reality of teaching changed as did their priorities. Participants took that work ethic and drive and changed focus, concentrating on the basic needs of their students, their families, and themselves. They shifted their attention from piles of paperwork to safety and security. Once basic needs were met, they were able to access their resources and get back to teaching as best they could. Participants found their way again when the school doors reopened in the fall of 2020 and they were allowed to see their students in person. Although there were many changes including increased caseloads, state and local mandates involving masking and social distancing, and new safety protocols, all participants were relieved to get back into their classrooms and face-to-face with students. In conclusion, the testimonies of the special education teachers in this study showed although there were many challenges faced throughout COVID, teachers' flexibility and positive mental outlook remained steadfast and their dedication to teaching continues.

REFERENCES

- Admiraal, W., Veldman, I., Mainhard, T., & Van Tartwijk, J. (2019). A typology of veteran teachers' job satisfaction: Their relationships with their students and the nature of their work. *Social Psychology of Education, 22*(2), 337-355.
doi:10.1007/s11218-018-09477-z
- Akbayrak, K., Vural, G., & Agar, M. (2021). Özel Eğitim öğretmenlerinin koronavirüs pandemisi döneminde uzaktan eğitime ilişkin deneyim ve Görüşleri. *İnönü Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi, 22*(1), 471-499.
doi:10.17679/inuefd.863029
- Asbury, K., Fox, L., Deniz, E., Code, A., & Toseeb, U. (2021). How is COVID-19 affecting the mental health of children with special educational needs and disabilities and their families? *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 51*, 1772-1780. doi:10.1007/s10803-020-04577-2
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. New York, NY: W.H. Freeman.
- Beck, J. S., Lunsmann, C., & Garza, T. (2020). "We need to be in the classroom more": Veteran teachers' views on teacher preparation and retention. *The Professional Educator, 43*(1), 91-99.
- Bitan, D.T., Grossman-Giron, A., Bloch, Y., Mayer, Y., Shiffman, N., & Mendlovic, S. (2020). Fear of COVID-19 scale: Psychometric characteristics, reliability and validity in the Israeli population. *Psychiatry Research, 289*, 113100.
doi:10.1016/j.psychres.2020.113100

- Brunson McClain, M., Roanhorse, T. T., Harris, B., Heyborne, M., Zemantic, P. K., & Azad, G. (2021). School-based autism evaluations in the COVID-19 ERA. *School Psychology, 36*(5), 377-387. doi:10.1037/spq0000447
- Buonomo, I., Fiorilli, C., & Benevene, P. (2019). The impact of emotions and hedonic balance on teachers' self-efficacy: Testing the bouncing back effect of positive emotions. *Frontiers in Psychology, 10*. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01670
- Cancio, E. J., Larsen, R., Mathur, S. R., Estes, M. B., Johns, B., & Chang, M. (2018). Special education teacher stress: Coping strategies. *Education and Treatment of Children, 41*(4), 457-481. doi:10.1353/etc.2018.0025
- Caprara, G. V., Barbaranelli, C., Steca, P., & Malone, P. S. (2006). Teachers' self-efficacy beliefs as determinants of job satisfaction and students' academic achievement: A study at the school level. *Journal of School Psychology, 44*(6), 473-490. doi:10.1016/j.jsp.2006.09.001
- Carrillo, C., & Flores, M. A. (2018). Veteran teachers' identity: What does the research literature tell us? *Cambridge Journal of Education, 48*(5), 639-656. doi:10.1080/0305764x.2017.1394982
- Cassinat, J. R., Whiteman, S. D., Serang, S., Dotterer, A. M., Mustillo, S. A., Maggs, J. L., & Kelly, B. C. (2021). Changes in family chaos and family relationships during the COVID-19 pandemic: Evidence from a longitudinal study. *Developmental Psychology, 57*(10), 1597-1610. doi:10.1037/dev000121
- Comorbidity (2022). In Merriam-Webster.com. Retrieved, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/comorbidity>
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and*

- mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Davis, J. L. (2022). *An analysis of the relationship of elementary teachers' perceived teaching self-efficacy, parental involvement self-efficacy, and parental involvement practices* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Tarleton State University, Stephenville, Texas.
- Ehren, M., Madrid, R., Romiti, S., Armstrong, P. W., Fisher, P., & McWhorter, D. L. (2021). Teaching in the COVID-19 era: Understanding the opportunities and barriers for teacher agency. *Perspectives in Education, 39*(1), 61-76.
- Fauzi, I., & Sastra Khusuma, I. H. (2020). Teachers' elementary school in online learning of COVID-19 pandemic conditions. *Journal Iqra': Kajian Ilmu Pendidikan, 5*(1), 58-70. doi:10.25217/ji.v5i1.914
- Fox, H. B., Tuckwiller, E. D., Kutscher, E. L., & Walter, H. L. (2020). What makes teachers well? A mixed-method study of special education teacher well-being. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Education, 9*(2), 223-248.
- Gavish, B., Bar-on, S., & Shein-kahalon, R. (2016). Beginning special education teachers in Israel: Perceived self-efficacy. *International Journal of Special Education, 31*(1), 10-22.
- Guo, Y., Dynia, J. M., Pelatti, C. Y., & Justice, L. M. (2014). Self-efficacy of early childhood special education teachers: Links to classroom quality and children's learning for children with language impairment. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 39*, 12-21. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2013.11.005
- Hasselquist, L., & Graves, N. A. (2020). CTE teacher retention: Lessons learned from

mid-career teachers. *Career and Technical Education Research*, 45(1), 3-16.
doi:10.5328/cter45.1.3

Hilger, K. J., Scheibe, S., Frenzel, A. C., & Keller, M. M. (2021). Exceptional circumstances: Changes in teachers' work characteristics and well-being during COVID-19 lockdown. *School Psychology*, 36(6), 516-532.
doi:10.1037/spq0000457

Individuals With Disabilities Education Act. (2019). Retrieved from
<https://sites.ed.gov/idea/statute-chapter-33/subchapter-i/1400>

Jenkins, M., & Walker, J. D. (2021). COVID-19 practices in special education: Stakeholder perceptions and implications for teacher preparation. *Teacher Educators' Journal*, 14, 83-105.

Johnson, T. M., King-Sears, M. E., & Miller, A. D. (2020). High school co-teaching partners' self-efficacy, personal compatibility, and active involvement in instruction. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 45(2), 96-107.
doi:10.1177/0731948720919811

Konikkal, Z. (2020). Education in Covid 19 scenario--Challenges and opportunities. Retrieved from the mathrubhumi.com website:
<https://english.mathrubhumi.com/education/articles/education-in-covid-19-scenario-challenges-and-opportunities-1.4880403>

Lee, Y., Patterson, P. P., & Vega, L. A. (2011, Spring). Perils to self-efficacy perceptions and teacher-preparation quality among special education intern teachers. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 38(2), 61-76.

Li, K. M., & Cheung, R. Y. (2021). Pre-service teachers' self-efficacy in implementing

- inclusive education in Hong Kong: The roles of attitudes, sentiments, and concerns. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, 68(2), 259-269. doi:10.1080/1034912x.2019.1678743
- Li, Q., Miao, Y., Zeng, X., Tarimo, C. S., Wu, C., & Wu, J. (2020). Prevalence and factors for anxiety during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) epidemic among the teachers in China. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 277, 153-158. doi:10.1016/j.jad.2020.08.017
- Lowe, G., Gray, C., Prout, P., Jefferson, S., & Shaw, T. (2019). Positive veteran teachers: Who are they, and where are they to be found? *Issues in Educational Research*, 29(3), 823-840.
- Martin, A. M. (2011). *Predictors of burnout and self-efficacy among special education teachers*. Ann Arbor, MI: UMI.
- Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review*, 50(4), 370—396. Doi: 10.1034/50054346
- Matiz, A., Fabbro, F., Paschetto, A., Cantone, D., Paolone, A. R., & Crescentini, C. (2020). Positive impact of mindfulness meditation on mental health of female teachers during the COVID-19 outbreak in Italy. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(18), 6450. doi:10.3390/ijerph17186450
- McCullough, S. N., Granger, K. L., Sutherland, K. S., Conroy, M. A., & Pandey, T. (2022). A preliminary study of best in class—elementary on teacher self-efficacy, burnout, and attributions. *Behavioral Disorders*, 47(2), 84-94. doi:10.1177/01987429211010672

- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Mielke, C. (2021, November). The critical element of self-efficacy. *Educational Leadership*, 79(3), 14-19.
- Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. (n.d.). Retrieved October 13, 2022, from <https://dese.mo.gov/>
- Mounjid, B., Hilali, E., Amrani, F., & Moubtassime, M. (2021). Teachers' perceptions and the challenges of online teaching/learning in Morocco during COVID-19 crisis. *Arab World English Journal*, 7, 38-52.
<https://doi.org/10.24093/awej/call7.3>
- Nuri, C., Demirok, M. S., & Direktör, C. (2017). Determination of self-efficacy and burnout state of teachers working in the special education field in terms of different variables. *Journal of Education and Training Studies*, 5(3), 160-166.
doi:10.11114/jets.v5i3.2237
- Orlando, J. (2014). Veteran teachers and technology: Change fatigue and knowledge insecurity influence practice. *Teachers and Teaching*, 20(4), 427-439.
doi:10.1080/13540602.2014.881644
- Oyuwumi, A., Ibitoye, H., & Sanni, O. (2012). Job satisfaction and self-efficacy as correlates of job commitment of special education teachers in Oyo State. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 3(9), 95-104.
- Padhy, S., Sahoo, M., & Biswas, H. (2015). Psychological co-morbidity in children with specific learning disorders. *Journal of Family Medicine and Primary Care*, 4(1), 21-25. doi:10.4103/2249-4863.152243

- Parmigiani, D., Benigno, V., Giusto, M., Silvaggio, C., & Sperandio, S. (2020). E-inclusion: Online special education in Italy during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Technology, Pedagogy and Education, 30*(1), 111-124.
doi:10.1080/1475939x.2020.1856714
- Pearman, C., Bowles, F., & Polka, W. (2021). Teacher educator perceptions of characteristics of self-efficacy. *Critical Questions in Education, 12*(1), 81-99.
- Prout, P., Lowe, G., Gray, C., & Jefferson, S. (2019). An elixir for veteran teachers: The power of social connections in keeping these teachers passionate and enthusiastic in their work. *The Qualitative Report, 24*(9), 2244-2258. doi:10.46743/2160-3715/2019.4038
- Raghul, E, Aravind, B., & Rajesh, K. (2021). Difficulties faced by special education teachers during COVID-19 pandemic. *International Journal of Early Childhood Special Education, 13*(2), 1245-1251. doi:10.9756/int-jecse/v13i2.211172
- Rahmadi, I. F. (2021). Teachers' technology integration and distance learning adoption amidst the COVID-19 crisis: A reflection for the optimistic future. *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education, 22*(2), 26-41.
doi:10.17718/tojde.906472
- Rezaeian, S., & Abdollahzadeh, E. (2020). Teacher efficacy and its correlates in the EFL context of Iran: The role of age, experience, and gender. *International Online Journal of Education and Teaching, 7*(4), 1533-1548.
- Šabić, J., Baranović, B., & Rogošić, S. (2021). Teachers' self-efficacy for using information and communication technology: The interaction effect of gender and age. *Informatics in Education, 21*(2), 353-373. doi:10.15388/infedu.2022.11

- Safta-Zecheria, L., Ștefăniță, S.-A., Negru, I.-A., & Virag, F.-H., (2020). Challenges experienced by teachers regarding access to digital instruments, resources, and competences in adapting the educational process to physical distancing measures at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in Romania. *Journal of Educational Sciences*, 42(2), 69-86. doi:10.35923/jes.2020.2.05
- Sayman, D., & Cornell, H. (2021). "Building the plane while trying to fly." Exploring special education teacher narratives during the Covid-19 pandemic. *Planning and Changing*, 50(3/4), 191-207.
- Schleicher, A. (2020). *The impact of COVID-19 on education-Insights from Education at a Glance 2020*. Paris, France: OECD. Retrieved from <https://www.oecd.org/education/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-education-insights-education-at-a-glance-2020.pdf>
- Schuck, R. K., & Lambert, R. (2020). "Am I doing enough?" Special educators' experiences with emergency remote teaching in Spring 2020. *Education Sciences*, 10(11), 320. doi:10.3390/educsci10110320
- Scull, J., Phillips, M., Sharma, U., & Garnier, K. (2020). Innovations in teacher education at the time of COVID-19: An Australian perspective. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 46(4), 497-506. doi:10.1080/02607476.2020.1802701
- Stănculescu, E. (2021). Fear of COVID-19 in Romania: Validation of the Romanian version of the fear of COVID-19 scale using graded response model analysis. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, 20(2), 1094-1109. doi:10.1007/s11469-020-00428-4
- Starkey, A., Shonfeld, M., Prestridge, S., & Cervera, M. (2021). Special issue: Covid-19

and the role of technology and pedagogy on school education during a pandemic.

Technology, *Pedagogy and Education*, 30(1), 1-5. doi:

10.1080/1475939X.2021.1866838

Talidong, K. J., & Toquero, C. M. (2020). Philippine teachers' practices to deal with anxiety amid COVID-19. *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, 25(6-7), 573-579.

doi:10.1080/15325024.2020.1759225

Teachonline.ca. (2020). A new pedagogy is emerging... and online learning is a key contributing factor. Retrieved from

<https://teachonline.ca/tools-trends/how-teach-online-student-success/new-pedagogy-emerging-and-online-learning-key-contributing-factor>

Toquero, C. M. (2021). 'Sana all' inclusive education amid COVID-19: Challenges, strategies, and prospects of special education teachers. *International and*

Multidisciplinary Journal of Social Sciences, 10(1), 30-51.

doi:10.17583/rimcis.2020.6316

Tschannen-Moran, M., & McMaster, P. (2009). Sources of self-efficacy: Four professional development formats and their relationship to self-efficacy and implementation of a new teaching strategy. *The Elementary School Journal*,

110(2), 228-245. doi:10.1086/605771

Tumkan, F. & Tumkan, S. (2020). During the pandemic evaluating the impact of the change caused to elementary school education in light of the compulsory suspension of education. *Turkish Studies*, 15(4), 1163-1184. Retrieved from

<https://dx.doi.org/10.7827/TurkishStudies.44411>

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (n.d.). Education:

- From school closure to recovery. Retrieved from
<https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse>
- University of Florida. (n.d.). Bloom's taxonomy. Retrieved from
<https://citt.ufl.edu/resources/the-learning-process/designing-the-learning-experience/blooms-taxonomy/>
- Van Maele , D., & Van Houtte, M. (2012). The role of teacher and faculty trust in Forming Teachers' job satisfaction: Do years of experience make a difference? *Teaching and Teacher Education, 28*(6), 879-889. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2012.04.001
- Woodcock, S., & Jones, G. (2020). Examining the interrelationship between teachers' self-efficacy and their beliefs towards inclusive education for all. *Teacher Development, 24*(4), 583-602. doi:10.1080/13664530.2020.1803957
- Yerli Usul, S., & Yerli K. (2017). The differences between novice and experienced university prep-class teachers' classroom management, self-efficacy perceptions, and students' academic achievement. *International Journal of Language Academy, 5*(18), 123-133. doi:10.18033/ijla.3646
- Yin, W. (2022). External locus of control and elementary teachers' subjective wellbeing: Self-efficacy as a mediator. *Social Behavior and Personality: An International Journal, 50*(6), 40-48. doi:10.2224/sbp.11517
- Young, J., & Donovan, W. (2020). *Shifting special needs students to online learning in the COVID-19 spring: Challenges for students, families, and teachers*. Boston, MA: Pioneer Institute for Public Policy Research.

APPENDIX A

Email communication

Good Evening, _____ (participant),

I am a doctoral student completing my final requirements for the Ed.D. in Educational Leadership at Southwest Baptist University. I am currently working on my dissertation entitled “The Self-Efficacy of Veteran Special Education Teachers in Context to the COVID-19 Pandemic.” The purpose of this study is to understand the lived experiences of veteran special education teachers during the spring 2020 COVID-19 school shutdown and to examine how that shaped their perceptions of self-efficacy.

At this time, my research proposal is complete, and I have received Research Review Board approval from Southwest Baptist University. I am seeking to interview you for approximately 45 minutes about your experiences from the spring shutdown of 2020 through the conclusion of the 2020-2021 school year. Your interview will be used, along with other veteran special education teachers from Missouri public schools’ individual interviews, to examine the changes and challenges you faced during the COVID-19 experience. The teachers who will participate will represent all regions of Missouri.

If you are willing to be part of this study, please complete following Informed Consent Link and confirm with a return email.

If you have any questions or concerns and would like to further discuss this study, I would be happy to do so. Thank you in advance for considering participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Christina O’Neill, Ed.D. Student

Southwest Baptist University

Cell Phone: (417) 598-3032

Email: Chrissy.oneill@gmail.com

APPENDIX B

Participant Informed Consent

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this qualitative study to understand the lived experiences veteran special education teachers had during the spring 2020 COVID-19 school shutdown and to examine how those experiences changed their perceptions of self-efficacy. This research has been approved by the Southwest Baptist University Research Review Board. You may contact Dr. Allison Langford, Chair, at alangford@sbuniv.edu for any questions or concerns you may have related to this research. By participating in this research, you have the opportunity to add to the current body of research regarding COVID-19's impact on the self-efficacy of educators.

All information associated with project participants will be kept on a password-protected device accessible only to the researcher. In accordance with the federal regulations, the research materials will be kept for a period of seven years after the completion of the research project. No comments will be attributed to you by name in any reports or publications related to this study. You will be identified by a number. Neither the school nor the school district will be identified in any reports or publications related to this study.

Your voluntary participation in the interview is appreciated, and your responses will be kept anonymous. You may decline to answer any questions or discontinue participation in the study at any time without any negative consequences. If you choose to withdraw from the project, all interview data pertaining to you will be destroyed.

In the interview, you will be asked to relate the personal experiences you had during the spring of 2020 when schools shut down due to the COVID-19 pandemic as well as how your self-efficacy changed during the pandemic and how you are affected to this day. To provide flexibility and honor your time, the interview will be completed via a video call system, such as Google Meets or Zoom. If you do not have a preference for a specific product, the interview will be completed by a Zoom call that will be scheduled with you.

Request for the interview to be recorded will take place on the day of the meeting, which can help the researcher provide accurate transcripts of the participant's answers. You have the right to request the interview not be recorded, and the recording and/or

interview be stopped at any time. Recordings and transcripts will be destroyed seven years following the completion of this study.

Your input is very valuable, and your participation will be greatly appreciated. There are no foreseeable risks associated with this study. Please indicate your willingness and consent to participate in the survey by digitally submitting approval at the bottom of this Informed Consent form. By providing your digital signature, you are consenting to allow use of your interview responses in this study. You will also share your initial consent for the interview to be recorded for the researcher's accurate transcription process.

Questions: If you have any questions regarding the research project, please do not hesitate to contact me or my research advisor. I can be reached at Chrissy.oneill@gmail.com or (417) 598-3032. Dr. Allison Langford can be reached at alangford@sbuniv.edu If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Southwest Baptist University Research Review Board.

Sincerely,

Christina O'Neill, Ed.D. Student,
Southwest Baptist University

APPENDIX C

Interview Guide

Thank you so much for taking the time to meet with me today. My name is Christina O'Neill. I am a special education teacher in Nixa, Missouri. I have been teaching in the area of special education for 14 years. I am conducting this study as part of my doctoral program through Southwest Baptist University. The purpose of this study is to interview veteran SPED teachers to shine light on what they experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic and evaluate how it impacted their perceptions of self-efficacy. Everything you say will be kept confidential. School personnel and districts will not be shown your answers to any of these questions so please speak freely. I will be recording and transcribing this interview for my own data collection purposes. No names will be attached to any of the answers given. Do you have any questions before I begin recording?

Demographic questions:

- In spring of 2020 how long had you been teaching?
- How would you describe your school district? Urban, suburban, rural?
- What is your gender?
- What was your position in spring 2020?
- What is your current position?

Changes in job-When school shut down and went to learning from home in spring 2020, how did your job change?

- How did your school prepare you for the shutdown?
- What was your primary focus once school shut down?
- How did your self-efficacy change?
- How did your relationship with students and their families change when school closed?

Impact on personal life- How did the COVID-19 shutdown impact your personal/family life?

- Did you have children/family of your own and how did you handle both?
- How did having children at home affect the way you did your job?

- How did you stay in touch with your colleagues?

Resources provided- What resources did your district provide you and was it enough?

- What if any resources did your district provide for you to communicate with parents?
- Did they offer any professional development on teaching virtually?
- How did the resources (or lack of) impact your self-efficacy?
- Tell me about the community supports you had/ how important are community supports to you?

Challenges faced- What were the biggest challenges you faced during the shutdown?

Changes after the return to school- What was school like when you returned to in-person learning?

- Was virtual teaching an option? Which did you chose?
- How long did it take to return to “normal”?
- What were some positive changes that happened as a result of the shutdown?
- What resources or pedagogy did you continue to implement after returning to in-person school?

Reflections- What are some of the biggest lessons you learned through the whole process?

Follow-up questions if it feels right:

Do you feel you were more/less equipped to handle the shutdown than you would have been earlier in your career? Why?

How would your job be different if we were to shut down today?

How did your opinion about your job change after returning to in-person school?

How did your feelings about your own efficacy change throughout the pandemic?