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The Current Training Practices and Perceived Training Needs of Special Education Assistants in Texas

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The Current Training Practices and Perceived Training Needs of Special Education Assistants in Texas

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Abstract

Special education assistants (SEAs) have been a vital source in the classroom since the early 1950s. When SEAs first began helping in the classroom, they were responsible for helping with clerical needs such as copying, filing, and data recording. However, those roles have evolved into more involved tasks well outside their job description and such as lesson planning and major delivery of classroom instruction. This phenomenological study delved into the training practices designed for SEAs in one Texas school district to determine if the current practices prepared SEAs to fulfil their state mandated job descriptions. The researcher also sought to learn what it took to facilitate the role of a SEA using their lived experiences. This study employed a qualitative design using two sources of data collection: survey and focus group. The population sample included 10 SEAs and 19 teachers who participated in the survey. Then three SEAs and three teachers who took part in the focus group. The major findings of this study implied that SEAs are not receiving the training they need as mandated by their job descriptions. Furthermore, most SEAs revealed to effectively facilitate their role, they require guidance from supervising teachers, and prior experience working with disabled children. Moreover, without these accommodations, coupled with the lack of training, SEAs reported having significant difficulty performing their job effectively. Recommendations for change are provided to address this ongoing and problematic issue.

Keywords: special education assistants, training practices, training needs, self-efficacy, retention

Dedication

"Delight thyself also in the LORD: and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass" (Proverbs 37:4–5, King James Version). I surrender this manuscript to the Lord with the understanding that it was He who granted me the wisdom, knowledge, and grace to complete this journey. I continue to yield my calling, as an educator, to Him; Lord, use me as you please.

I dedicate this dissertation to my loving children, Benali, India, and Nyla. They are 16, eight, and five. Back in 2004, I set foot in Hopkinsville Community College Campus to begin my collegiate studies. At the time, my son, Benali, was almost two years old and here I stand today, 14 years later, I can say I am finally done!

I love you all dearly for letting mommy do homework in "Chuck E. Cheese" or attempt to draft an essay on the sideline of some basketball game. My heart goes out to each of you for helping me reach my goals and not forcing me to give up on my dreams. I hope I showed you all that with love, support, and resilience, you could do absolutely anything! Mommy loves you, you, and you.

I would also like to dedicate this research to special education assistants (SEAs) everywhere. On behalf of every special education teacher, you have assisted in any way and every student you have helped to instruct, thank you! Although it may not feel like it at times, you are a valuable part of the team.

To Virgie and Lucy, my lovely SEAs for five years, I will always appreciate and value the work you do.

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I recognize that I could not have completed this journey on my own, so I would like to acknowledge those who contributed. Timothy, thank you for all the many years of encouragement and support. You are the epitome of selfless love and one whom I can always depend on, no matter the challenges this life may bring. I love and appreciate you!

To my mother, father, aunt, sisters, brother, nieces, nephews, Warring Ministries, TRC, and Clarksville families; everyone, in one way or another, was of some assistance to me during this process. Whether you prayed for me, looked after my children, or gave me words of inspiration, I say thank you.

Special thanks to my G.P.I.S.D. family for lending me your wonderful assistants and teachers to participate in the study. Likewise, to my colleagues, thank you for volunteering and for your kind words of encouragement along the way.

Last, but not least, thank you to Concordia University–Portland and my wonderful dissertation committee: faculty chair, Dr. Mark Jimenez, content specialist, Dr. John D'Aguanno and my content reader, Dr. Juan Vives. You fine men were awesome in helping me to develop my scholarly writing skills and taking my dissertation from basic information to a reputable study. Thank you.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

To address critical shortages of licensed special education teachers in the 1950s, schools began to employ aides to assist teachers with non-instructional tasks. These tasks included clerical work, preparing bulletin boards, and monitoring lunchrooms, playgrounds, and restrooms (NRCPARA.org). Throughout history, these employees have been referred to as classroom assistants, teacher assistants, paraprofessionals, paraeducators and teacher aides. Considering this study focused on assistants who work in the special education setting, assisting special education teachers, they are referred to as special education assistants (SEAs) throughout.

According to the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015), SEAs are responsible for the following duties in the classroom: (a) providing one-on-one or small-group tutoring for students, (b) assisting with classroom management, (c) providing instructional assistance in a computer lab, (d) conducting parental involvement activities, (e) providing instructional support in the library or media center, (f) acting as a translator, and (g) providing instructional support to a student under the direct supervision of a teacher. Studies reveal that the role of the classroom assistant has recently progressed into more involved tasks such as providing assessments to students, planning and delivery of instruction, implementation of behavior plans, and instructional interventions; all without training and preparation for fulfillment of these tasks (Giangreco & Boer, 2005; Killoran et al., 2001; Riggs & Mueller, 2001).

The two major goals of this study were to understand what is involved in facilitating the role of a SEA and if they are being trained to adequately do so. The hope was that by completing this study, any adverse training factors affecting the success of SEAs could be adjusted or eliminated to their advantage. For the purpose of this study, success of SEAs was measured by high levels of self-efficacy and job satisfaction.

Background, Context, History, and Conceptual Framework for the Problem

The nature of this study is to look at one of the major factors that adversely affect SEAs on the job: the efficacy of training initiatives. This study is designed to identify the perceived training needs and the actual training practices being provided to SEAs in public schools. This is a single-site qualitative study that took place primarily online and after-hours with the selected participants, using multiple sources of data collection tools, namely survey and focus group. This study employed a technique to help increase validity and credibility referred to as member checking. More on the data collection and the member checking processes are discussed further in Chapter 3.

The research methods used in this study were rooted in the concept of phenomenology. Phenomenology is a qualitative research method used to describe how people experience a certain phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The goal of phenomenological research is to set aside bias and assumption about human feelings and experiences in a situation to focus solely on the lived experiences of the participants. Using Edmund Husserl's phenomenological framework, the researcher gathered data on training initiatives and role facilitation using the lived experience of the SEAs to gain a better understanding of the problem area (Moustakas, 1994). The researchers' goal was to distinguish between perceived training needs and actual training practices for SEAs to better understand and reveal any gaps contributing to the problem area.

According to Husserl (1994), there are two conscious processes that must take place to arrive at a phenomenological standpoint: "epoché and bracketing out." The first concept "epoche" is the act of suspending judgements and biases about a subject matter which allows a person to freely express their ideas based on personal experiences and feelings of the phenomenon.

The second is “bracketing out” which involves separating all truth or reality and simply describing the conscious thought. Using phenomenological reduction provided an opportunity for participants to express their concerns or acclamation of training initiatives provided to them based on their real experiences void of any judgments or biasness.

The theoretical framework that supported this study was French’s (2003) theoretical framework for managing and supervising SEAs. French developed a theoretical framework intended to serve school districts with resources in working with its paraprofessional staff and this included the responsibilities of hiring, training, and supervision of SEAs. According to French (2003), some of the main concerns of special education personnel for both assistants and teachers are their lack of preparation, supervision, and training for their jobs.

French developed several research-based practices that school administrators can use to ensure the proper use of its paraprofessional staff. Under French’s guidance for successfully working with SEAs, the researcher created questions for the instruments that were used for the data collection phases of the study. In addition to using these theoretical frameworks to guide the study, the researcher sought to know if the standards rendered by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) were being utilized to ensure the highest levels of success and effective use of classroom assistants.

Effective use of SEAs in Texas. When accessing the current success rate of SEAs in the classroom, it is important to identify if these individuals have been provided with a clear idea of what excellence should look like. If SEAs are not provided with clear roles and expectations, they will not have a threshold by which they could ascertain successful execution of their roles. Thereby, they are left to contend with their own ideas of success. Texas Education Agency offers a manual for educators to use that defines the effective use of SEAs.

The following information was extracted from the manual written by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) entitled *Working with Paraprofessionals: A Resource for Teachers of Students with Disabilities* (2013). This information is important because it provides some foundational groundwork to those hiring and working alongside SEAs to ensure proper use of their role. By assimilating the information found in the quote below to special education personnel, it would remove any gray areas as it relates to working with SEAs. Because TEA uses the term paraprofessional, it is used interchangeably with SEA in this section:

> According to TEA, a SEA (2012), performs and assumes responsibility for tasks under the general guidance of a certified teacher or teaching team; releases the teacher from routine tasks and participates in selecting, planning, organizing, and evaluating; helps the teacher implement methodology and use instructional media to yield an educational environment for all students; assists the teacher with instructional activities; works with individuals or groups of students in a variety of educational experiences; relieves the teacher of selected exercises and instructional drills with students; or performs equivalent activities determined by the local school district. It is the responsibility of campus administrators to consult the manual to ensure that their SEA is working in accordance with the job they were hired for and that training is provided to meet the needs of the job. (p. 7)

This next section also provides clear roles and responsibilities for SEAs by advising what work they should and should not perform. By utilizing this information regularly, education practitioners could ensure that SEAs are not overworked or involved in tasks in which they have not been trained. Furthermore, using the contents of this manual would ensure SEAs are not performing tasks outside their scope of knowledge and/or pay grade.

According to TEA (19 TAC §230.560) SEAs may not:

- Develop lesson plans
- Introduce new material/content
- Provide the direct teach portion of the lesson
- Select materials for implementation of the lesson
- Assign final grades
- Be responsible for any IEP-related responsibilities without supervision of a certified special educator
- Develop IEP goals/objectives
- Design the classroom management system
- Be responsible for determining or reporting student progress (general class progress or IEP-goal progress; p. 11)

Furthermore, the manual states that when a paraprofessional is providing services required by a student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP), he or she must do so under the supervision of a certified special education teacher. It is also recommended that each local education agency or campus create its own specific list of duties for a paraprofessional; this list should link to the classroom schedule and provide the SEA guidance on what to do during points in a lesson.

Lesson implementation. SEAs may implement supports directed by teacher(s) during the direct instruction portion of the lesson. They may also work with small groups for re-teach, as directed by the teacher(s). They can assist individual students, as directed by the teacher(s) and pull individual students out of general education classroom only if required by IEP. SEAs may also work one-on-one with an assigned student, assisting with activities as listed in the students; IEP and under the direct supervision of the classroom teacher.

Evaluation of student learning. SEAs may assist in grading objective assignments/ tests (i.e., multiple choice, fill in the blank). They may assist in clerical recording of grades however; they may not enter grades into online grading systems. Finally, they may assist in the collection of data on student mastery of material using criteria/ checklist developed by the special educator.

Behavior management. SEAs should assist teacher(s) in implementation of the classroom management system, including established classroom routines, as directed by the lead teacher(s). They can also assist in the implementation of the behavior intervention plans under the supervision of a classroom teacher. SEAs may assist in the collection of data on student mastery of behavior goals/objectives using criteria/checklist developed by the special educator. SEAs should support students per student's IEP, as directed by lead teacher(s) and fade supports to individual students, as appropriate. SEAs may also document fading of supports per student's IEP, as directed by lead teacher(s).

Administrative/classroom duties. Per TEA, SEAs should spend much of their time on instructional duties, not on administrative duties. In keeping with that, SEAs may assist in collecting and recording attendance information. They may also assist with other clerical duties in classroom (i.e. organization of materials, making copies, etc.) as directed by lead teacher(s). Outside of classroom duties include supervision of students in the hallways, play areas, etc. as directed by the schools' administration.

Communication. As indicated in the research, successful communication tactics are essential to the success of classroom teams (French, 2003). The certified teacher should always be the primary communicator to the parent regarding a student's academic and behavioral progress.

All adults in the classroom must be "on the same page" in order for students to receive a consistent message. Expectations must not vary from person to person. This needs to be clear in communication to both the students and to parents. According to the research done by TEA, students are able to easily tell when there is a lack of communication between two (or more) adults in the classroom (2018). Effective teamwork is an essential component of the success of SEAs. SEAs are hired to work under the leadership of a classroom teacher. If the relationship of the SEA and the teacher are impaired, it has been proven to have an adverse effect on the classroom dynamic and student achievement.

Delvin (2008) noted that "The experience of working as an instructional team may be a positive or negative, having various implication for students" (p. 1). Giangreco and Doyle (2002) found in their research that if SEAs can feel respected and seen as an integral member of the classroom team, they would be eager to stay on the job despite poor working conditions, lack of preparation, and low pay.

Performance evaluations. SEAs require ongoing supervision and regular performance evaluations which are based on their job descriptions and clearly defined district/campus processes and procedures. While the teacher may not be responsible for the "formal" performance evaluations of the paraprofessional, the teacher(s) is responsible for supervision of the day-to-day workings of the paraprofessional.

Both federal regulation (§200.59(c) (2) Title I Regulations) and state regulation (19 TAC §230.560) require that a SEA be directly supervised by a certified teacher. The local education agencies (LEAs) need to determine what documentation to keep concerning supervision, possibly including notes from observations or meetings, locally developed forms, or other documentation as determined the LEA staff.

Supervising teachers. Supervising teachers are not expected to automatically know how to effectively supervise or train SEAs to be successful on the job. According to TEA's manual, administrators are responsible for providing professional development to supervising teachers on how to supervise SEAs. Below is a list mandated by TEA that entails the duties that supervising teachers are responsible for in order to ensure SEAs are successful in the classroom. According to TEA, In addition to these items listed below, campus administrator can add to training resources per the need of the teachers.

- Planning time and communication with SEAs
- Managing SEAs' schedules
- Delegating tasks and responsibilities
- Orientation of a new SEAs
- Informing the SEA of professional development opportunities
- Modeling academic and functional activities, instructional supports, skill sets, fading supports
- Evaluating SEAs' job performance
- Managing the work environment
- Maintaining student confidentiality
- Providing constructive and corrective feedback based on objective rather than subjective evidence of instructional and non-instructional activities
- Schedule continuous professional development opportunities that align to the SEAs' job descriptions and tasks they will perform in the educational setting, (i.e., webinars, trainings, etc.)
- Ensure all staff receives training in maintaining confidentiality

Teachers to SEAs. The following is a list provided to teachers and administrators to offer a guideline and insight into the supervising and coaching role of teachers to SEAs: Teachers can utilize the items listed below to help ensure that the are effectively utilizing their SEAs.

- Orientate a new SEA to a new district/campus, educational setting, or situation such as one-on-one assistance
- Refreshers/continuous professional development on providing supports in academic and functional settings, confidentiality, skill sets, and fading supports
- Implementing students' IEP goals and, where appropriate, objectives/benchmarks
- Train, coach, and model academic and functional activities, instructional supports, skill sets, and fading supports
- Maintain confidentiality

Duties of SEAs. SEAs are responsible for requesting professional development, coaching, or modeling of academic and functional activities, instructional supports, skill sets, and fading supports. They are also expected to maintain confidentiality concerning vital information and records of students. The certified educator is always responsible for effective, meaningful instruction for all students in his/her class, whether they are students with disabilities and regardless of the paraprofessional supports provided for them. It is the teacher's responsibility to remain actively involved with the paraprofessional; in delegating/assigning tasks to him/her, monitoring his/her implementation of those tasks, and providing timely feedback on their implementation of those tasks. It is critical that the certified teacher ensures that SEAs roles and responsibilities, including those related to communication, are clearly delineated and that the paraprofessional understands how to implement each task assigned to him/her.

Statement of the Problem

Based on prior research, SEAs are inadequately prepared and trained for the tasks that await them in the classroom (Boudreau, 2011; Hawkins, 2008; Uresti, 2017). Not only are they ill prepared for their job, but the tasks they perform differ greatly from their job descriptions in accordance with state and government laws. This phenomenon has had a negative effect on special education personnel to include issues of job satisfaction, unclear roles and responsibilities and retention of special needs classroom assistants and teachers (Berry, Gravelle, & Farmer, 2011; Chopra & French, 2004; ESSA, 2015; Giangreco et al., 2001; Hale, 2015; IDEA, 2004; Jones, 2006; NCES, 2017; Tillery et al., 2003; Uresti, 2017).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceived training needs of as well as the actual training practices of (SEAs) in Texas as professed by the classroom assistants and the teachers they work with to understand how they are currently achieving success in their role. The intent was to collect data on this subject from a SEAs vantage point using their lived experiences. The participants in the study were purposefully selected by the researcher because they were either assistants or teachers who work in the special education setting daily. In the eyes of the researcher, this group of people would be able to provide the best insight into the area of study. This research was qualitative in nature with a phenomenological design.

Currently, much of the prior research revealed that what classroom assistants are trained for does not readily align with their training needs (Hale, 2015; Jones, 2006; NCES, 2017; Uresti, 2017). Therefore, this research was beneficial in that it took a firsthand account of training needs and practices and analyzed them through the lenses of SEAs, which in turn, could help districts better align training standards going forward.

Research Questions

1. What is the lived experience of facilitating the SEA role in special education programs in Texas public schools?
2. Are SEAs in Texas being trained to a level needed to satisfactorily fulfill to their state-mandated job descriptions?

Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study

The rationale of this study was to develop a clear outline of the training practices received as well as a layout of what trainings were needed by this population sample to help them be most effective on their jobs. Another intent was to add to the current research that has already been performed in this area. The hope was to possibly answer any questions that have yet to be addressed

During the literature review process, there were several issues that surfaced concerning SEAs in the classroom such as low pay, high turnover rates, unclear job descriptions, and lack of training. According to current research in the last 10 years, the issue with the lack of training is still a growing concern across the land (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Through this study the researcher delved into the phenomenon of training practices from both a perceptual and actual perspective. Utilizing a phenomenological method, one can view this issue from the standpoint of real-life experiences. Later, in Chapter 2, the researcher acknowledged some questions that were still lingering as a result of prior research.

Lastly, school districts in the area and throughout are encouraged to utilize the findings from the study to help develop more beneficial trainings for the effective use of SEAs. It is also the intent of the researcher to utilize the findings of this study to help to alleviate this issue going forward.

Definition of Terms

Special education assistant (SEA). Employees who provide instructional support, including those who:

- Provide one-on-one tutoring is such tutoring is scheduled at a time when the student is not being taught by a teacher
- Provide instructional support under the direct supervision of a teacher
- Assist with classroom management
- Provide instructional assistance in a computer laboratory
- Conduct parental involvement activities
- Act as a translator (U.S. DOE, 2018)

Special education teacher. A person who is state certified to teach in the public-school system and specially trained to work with children and youths who have a variety of disabilities (U.S. DOE, 2017).

Texas Education Agency (TEA). The Texas Education Agency is the state agency that oversees primary and secondary public education in the state of Texas. It helps deliver education to more than five million students (https://tea.texas.gov/, 2018).

Effective use of a SEA in Texas. According to TEA, there are three main areas that certified teachers and SEAs are to be trained on yearly to ensure the most effective use of their classroom assistant (Texas Education Agency, 2018). Those areas include role and responsibilities, communication, and documentation. Campus administrators should team up with the classroom teachers to list specifically what responsibilities a SEA will be responsible for within their specific education setting and this information is to be communicated with the SEA team member upon the start of the year.

Certified teachers are responsible for handling all communication concerning the roles of their SEA to other teachers, students, and parents. Finally, certified teachers should have appropriate documentation forms in place to monitor the supervision of SEAs as well as appropriate implementation of students' Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). In addition to following these steps, according to TEA there are some non-negotiable tasks that SEAs should never do while assisting in the classroom. These tasks include (19 TAC §230.560):

- Develop lesson plans
- Introduce new material/content
- Provide the direct teach portion of the lesson
- Select materials for implementation of the lesson
- Assign final grades
- Be responsible for any IEP-related responsibilities without supervision of a certified special educator
- Develop IEP goals/objectives
- Design the classroom management system; and/or
- Be responsible for determining or reporting student progress (e.g., general class progress or IEP-goal progress; Texas Education Agency, 2018, p. 11)

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a law enacted in 2004 that makes available a free appropriate public education to eligible children with disabilities throughout the nation and ensures special education and related services to those children (ed.gov/IDEA, 2018).

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Congress most recently amended the IDEA through Public Law 114-95, to Every Student Succeeds Act, in December 2015.

This law states that disability is a natural part of the human experience and in no way diminishes the right of individuals to participate in or contribute to society. Improving educational results for children with disabilities is an essential element of our national policy of ensuring equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency for individuals with disabilities (IDEA, 2004).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

It was the assumption of the researcher that the participants answered interview questions in an honest and candid way. To help ensure this, the researcher only asked questions that directly pertained to the research study and the questions were not intrusive or abrasive in any manner. It was also assumed that participants participating in the study had a sincere interest in the study topic and did not feel coerced in any way to volunteer their time or input. The researcher ensured that all participants signed a dated voluntary consent form fully explaining the goal of the study, steps of the data collection process, their role as participants, and the responsibilities of the researcher to assure integrity and confidentiality. Some of these responsibilities included inflicting no harm or risks to the participants, keeping all records confidential, and documenting only the information that pertained to the research problem.

The limitations of a qualitative research design are many and a researcher must take careful consideration not to allow the design limitations to affect the credibility of the study (p. 190). There were some noted limitations for using interviews as a data collection tool. While this instrumentation provided indirect information from the subjects it was filtered through the perception of the interviewees and provided information in a designated place rather than the natural setting. Additionally, some information was recorded that could not be used and to negate this issue, the researcher discarded all data not directly related to the study.

Another limitation of the study was that all the potential participants were employed by the same school district. Therefore, it was likely they were offered the same professional development and training courses, which may have yielded some of the same responses to the survey and interview questions. However, it is probable that each participants' training experience varied from person to person, considering professional development does differ based on campus personnel, grade level, and job description.

A delimitation of this research study was the small population sample. Following the advice of other scholarly researchers, the researcher purposefully chose a small sample size to meet the needs of this study's design approach (Creswell, 2014). By creating this boundary and choosing a small sample size for the focus group the researcher ensured that everyone's voice was heard, and people were not fighting for a space to express their views. The small sample size, however, will not allow for a greater generalization of the data beyond this group of people and geographical locale. This delimitation lends itself to future research where another researcher could replicate the study but in another area with possibly a larger sample size. More on these issues are discussed in Chapter 3, the methodology section.

Summary

This phenomenological qualitative study was conducted to gain a better understanding of perceived training needs and actual training practices for SEAs in public schools in the hopes of understanding the training needs in conjunction with the training programs provided. It was the hope of the researcher that by addressing the training concerns of SEAs from their perception, retention and attrition rates could potentially decrease and job satisfaction rates could increase. The researcher understood that this could only be made possible if SEAs were then trained in the areas identified as lacking for their development.

The researcher used multiple data sources (surveys and a focus group) in this study to promote a triangulation of data through various sources to improve the quality of the information collected. The goal was that with the merging of these data sources, the two research questions were adequately answered. If the findings of this study are utilized, this research has the potential to help school districts in their initiatives to prepare trainings and professional development for SEAs to help them be more effective in the classroom.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction to the Literature Review

SEAs have been the focus of many studies over the last several years, and while they are an integral part of the special need's classroom, studies show they are overworked, underpaid, underappreciated, and inadequately trained **(**Carter, O'Rourke, Sisco, & Pelsue, 2009; Moeller, 2010). Carter et al. (2009) queried 313 SEAs working in 77 elementary, middle, and high schools about (a) the contexts within which they support students with disabilities, (b) their knowledge about core competencies in educating these students, (c) the job-related tasks they perform most frequently, (d) their perceived ability to perform these tasks effectively, and (e) their need for further training across these knowledge and task areas. The authors found that SEAs worked with a broad range of students within varied instructional contexts. Some SEAs reported moderate levels of understanding across core knowledge standards, while other SEAs expressed additional training needs in each area.

In this chapter the researcher reviews the evolution of SEAs, their state-mandated job descriptions, state regulated measurements for effective use of SEAs. This researcher also examined past and current roles of SEAs in the classroom, as well as training needs and initiatives based on previous studies. The argument for the conceptual framework and methodological design choice are discussed as well. Chapter 2 concludes with a synthesis and critique of previous research and a case was made for future research studies focused on the training needs of SEAs. Since their inclusion in the public-school setting, the country has enacted several laws to help govern the civil rights of the special need's students. The need for the revisions came as the country saw a rise in the number of special education students requiring services in the last 50-plus years.

In 1970, schools in the United States only educated one in five special needs students whereas today more than six million students with disabilities are being serviced in public schools everyday (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). The special services provided to special needs students ensure that they have access to a free and appropriate education while receiving an education conducive to their special learning abilities (IDEA, 2004).

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, a landmark decision, was the very first law governing civil rights for people with disabilities. It cited that all youth ages three to 21 years old with a disability shall be provided with a free and appropriate education by specially trained teachers with the assistance of supervised staff. In 1975, this law was replaced with the Education of Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142) which would later go on to be renamed and amended in 1997 and then again in 2004 to the modern law referred to as the Individual with Disabilities Act (IDEA). In addition to amended rules and regulations, IDEA further states that special education personnel, including all assistants, should be properly trained and highly qualified to accommodate the special needs of their students and that assistants should fall under the direct supervision of the classroom teacher (Fisher, 2007; IDEA, 2004).

SEAs are defined as those persons who have not received a teaching certification but who are appropriately trained and supervised (in accordance with state law, regulation, or written policy) to assist in the provision of special education and related services to students with disabilities (IDEA, 2004). After IDEA was enacted, SEAs were subject to higher hiring demands such as having two years of college and taking certification exams during the hiring process (A Union of Professionals, 2009; Mueller, 2010). Due to the rise in learning disabilities and special needs students, special education personnel (assistants and teachers) are in high demand across the country (U.S. Department of Education, 2018).

Special education programs have the responsibility of including students with disabilities into the general education setting using supplementary aids and services. SEAs are instrumental in this inclusion process. SEAs assist teachers to ensure that the needs of special education students are fully serviced throughout the school day. Students who are included in the general education setting often require a great of deal of assistance to be successful in their classes.

These services include modifying classwork, read-alouds, pullouts, escorting, and even sometimes feeding and toileting, depending on the severity of needs. In addition to this, SEAs were required to support the teachers in clerical work including taking attendance, checking papers, preparing materials, bulletin boards, and other housekeeping duties (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2012).

It is evident that SEAs are vital personnel within the school system, yet they are in short supply (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017; U.S. Department of Education, 2017). In the 2015–16 school year, the U.S. Department of Education (2017) reported a massive shortage of qualified special education teachers and personnel in 49 states, which is approximately 98% of the nation's school districts. The number of students enrolled in special education services has increased 30% in the past 20 years steadily increasing the need for more special education personnel (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017).

Although, recently, the laws concerning the hiring of SEAs have changed, possibly affecting the shortage as well. Signed by President Obama in 2015, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), states that in addition to being highly qualified and working, SEAs are also required to have at least two years of college or pass a specially designed exam before they are considered hirable (ESSA, 2015). Due to these rise in demands, SEAs who were once qualified for the job, are now unable to meet the demands of the new criteria.

Study topic. In a review of prior literature, a 2011 study revealed that there is a significant lack of evidence of preparation and training initiatives for special education assistants to be effective in their roles across the country (Boudreau, 2011). Boudreau (2011) performed a qualitative descriptive case study and the purpose of this research project was to develop a better understanding of the specific roles and responsibilities assigned to SEAs. What she found through her research was that SEAs require more training and preparation for their jobs as well as teachers for their roles as supervisors. Concluding that, improving SEA training and supervision not only affects the work of SEAs but could help improve the overall performance and outcomes in the classroom environment.

The use of well-trained and supervised special education assistants has proved to increase standardized test scores and attendance rates of students (French, 2003). One-to-one tutoring offered by SEAs has also proven effective in accelerating student-reading achievement (Carroll, 2001; French, 2003; Giangreco & Boer, 2005; Sands, Kozleski, & French, 2001). Unfortunately, though, the lack of training not only affects retention rates and school environments but also leads to negative outcomes for students (Boudreau, 2011; Prechotko, 2009; Webster et al., 2010).

Research also supports the fact that SEAs are not performing the roles assigned to them as per their government mandated job descriptions and this causes an influx in job dissatisfaction and poor job performance (ESSA, 2015; Hughes & Valle-Riestra, 2008). In a grounded theory study performed in 2010, the researcher found that SEAs have high level of responsibility but low levels of training and support to help them do their jobs effectively (Leger-Rodriguez, 2010). In a 2001 study, a researcher found that SEAs in her district were responsible for implementing behavior strategies, instructional interventions, and planning and delivery of instruction which in times past that job was the sole responsibility of the certified teacher in the room (Carroll, 2001).

The topic of study for this research project is the training practices provided to SEAs in some Texas schools. The goal of the researcher was to take an in-depth look into the actual training practices and perceived training needs of SEAs to determine if the training provided aligned with the training they actually received to be effective on their job.

Context. The purpose of this literature review was threefold. The focus was to first identify the need for SEAs in the special needs classroom and understand how they assist the classroom teachers. Secondly, the intent was to analyze the data to determine the SEAs perceived roles in comparison to their actual roles. Lastly, to review prior data to determine what trainings are being provided to help SEAs succeed in their current roles across the country.

Over the last few years, educational researchers have made significant advances in its efforts to understand what is required of SEAs by way of role clarification, training, teacher supervision, and preparation efforts (Banerjee, Chopra & DiPalma, 2017; Boudreau, 2011; Dorel, 2009; Edmisson, 1995; Leger-Rodriquez, 2010; Wigstrom, 2015).

Based on the evidence of previous research studies, it has been proven repeatedly that there are major role discrepancies, insufficient training, and preparation initiatives for SEAs in most school districts across the country and is still a prevalent problem today. A recent studied performed by Ramos in 2017, revealed that SEAs are still being thrust into a position for which they are inadequately trained.

Ramos found in her study that SEAs reported having absolutely no training on issues like behavior management and disability specifics, two of the main descriptors of their job (US. DOE, 2018). The results of her study revealed that this lack of training has a negative outcome on the quality of instruction received by students and the overall success of students in the special education classroom (Ramos, 2017).

Retention rates. Research shows that the lack of training not only affects SEA retention rates and the school environment but also leads to negative outcomes for students (Boudreau, 2011; Prechotko, 2009; Webster et al. 2010). Boudreau found in her qualitative case study that there are no specifications of the types of training required for SEAs which also causes more confusion of the issue of training initiatives (2011). Even though prior researchers found that SEAs are affected by the discrepancies in job performance and lack of training and preparation, no research has been done to examine if there is an actual causal relationship among these variables and the mass shortage. This study was not designed to determine if there is causal relationship between the lack of training and shortage as there was a need to determine what training was needed versus what trainings were provided. Once SEA training needs are identified, future research lends itself to examining if there a relationship between training practices and the national shortage.

Significance. SEAs are continuing to leave the classroom daily due to issues with low pay and poor job conditions including workload, lack of respect, and unclear job descriptions, and most importantly lack of training (Chopra & French, 2004; Giangreco et al., 2001; Tillery, Werts, Roark, & Harris, 2003). A study performed by Hughes and Valle-Riestra (2008) found that due to the onset of federally mandated requirements (IDEA, 2004; NCLB, 2001).

The role of paraprofessionals has changed dramatically from that of a clerical aspect to a more hands-on job. Adversely, paraprofessionals have not been properly trained to meet the demands of their changing roles. Numerous studies have been performed on the various issues concerning training needs of SEAs in the classroom and studies show this is a growing concern (Boudreau, 2011; French, 2003; Hawkins, 2008; Leger-Rodriquez, 2010; Nirnick, 2010; U.S. DOE, 2017).

Where they were once only responsible for clerical tasks such as copying, filing, and small duties in the classroom, SEAs role has evolved over time. Their roles now consist of one-on-one instruction without teacher supervision and involvement in planning lessons in a more profound way (Hughes & Valle-Riestra, 2008; Wallace, 2003; Walter & Petr, 2006). As a result of the more intricate role-played by SEAs, the need to train and supervise them accordingly is becoming more crucial. Presently, the data reveals that SEAs are not prepared to adequately meet the needs of the students or teachers they are assigned to assist (Pickett, Likins, & Wallace, 2003).

This qualitative study delved into the phenomenon of SEA training practices from both a perceptual and actual perspective. Utilizing methods such as phenomenological reduction, one can view this issue from the standpoint of real-life experience versus perceptions. The intent of this study was to add to the current research that has already been performed in this area and utilize the findings to help further develop a framework designed to yield more beneficial trainings for effective use of SEAs.

In a 2001, study by Schonewise, the researcher investigated the perceived training and the actual training activities of SEAs in the state of Nebraska. She found that administrators reported more training occurring than both teachers and assistants reported. The difference in perception is important to note because it creates the potential for misunderstanding and conflict.

When administrators perceive more training is taking place then what is, there could be a misunderstanding on qualifications needed to perform certain tasks or a need for additional training. Likewise, if training coordinators are preparing programs based on the job they think SEAs are performing, it is highly likely that they may receive training that is not parallel with their current duties.

Problem statement. Based on prior research, SEAs are inadequately prepared and trained for the tasks that await them in the classroom and this phenomenon has had a negative effect on overall job satisfaction and retention of special needs classroom assistants (Berry, Gravelle & Farmer, 2011; Giangreco et al., 2001; Hale, 2015; Jones, 2006; NCES, 2017; Tillery et al., 2003).

Furthermore, research shows that the lack of training not only affects SEA retention rates but also leads to negative outcomes for students. When SEAs are ill advised on their role in the classroom, they cannot provide the teacher with the support needed to make individual students successful (Boudreau, 2011; Prechotko, 2009; Webster et al. 2010).

Not only are they ill prepared but the jobs they perform differ greatly from their job descriptions in accordance with state and government laws (ESSA, 2015; IDEA, 2004). After synthesizing the literature, two issues kept resurfacing in most of the studies: (a) there is a major lack of training and preparation for special educators to effectively perform their job; and (b) the jobs performed by SEAs significantly vary from their actual job descriptions (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2012; Carter et al., 2009; Uresti, 2017).

It is the assumption of the researcher that if SEAs were more prepared for their roles and their jobs aligned with that of what is required of them, they would be more successful in their jobs. It is also an assumption that correcting these issues could potentially decrease the mass shortages in the field. It is virtually impossible to examine the above issues in a single research study; therefore, it was the goal of this research to study one of the major factors that adversely affect SEAs on the job, and that is the quality of training received. This study was designed to identify the training needs for SEAs and the current training practices being provided to them in some Texas public school as perceived by SEAs and special education teachers.

Answers to the research questions could help school districts identify if SEAs are properly prepared for their roles and if the roles they perform align with what they think is expected of them and vice versa. This research project was guided by the following two research questions:

1. What is the lived experience of facilitating the SEA role in special education programs in Texas public schools?
2. Are SEAs in Texas being trained to a level needed to satisfactorily fulfill to their state-mandated job descriptions?

Organization. To conduct a thorough study, it was useful to identify the perceived and current roles of SEAs. Also, the researcher identified how training and preparation initiatives affected the self-efficacy of SEAs. Several procedures were followed to ensure a high-quality review of literature about SEAs in the special education classroom. First, a comprehensive search of peer-reviewed journals and relevant academic books was completed based on a wide range of key terms which is included in the following list:

- special education assistants
- paraprofessionals
- leadership
- self-efficacy
- team player
- preparedness and supervision
- inclusion
- communication
- training
- professional development

Five databases were searched, including ERIC, Education Database, Education Source, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global: The Humanities and Social Sciences Collection, and Google Scholar. In addition to these sources, the reference section of articles found was utilized to identify further research on the topic. The search process unveiled 41 peer-reviewed articles published from 2001–2017. The remainder of this literature review is divided into the following sections: (a) conceptual framework, (b) review of research and methodological literature, (c) synthesis of research findings, (e) critique of previous research, and (f) a summary.

Conceptual Framework

In reviewing the literature on the subject, an issue that kept resurfacing was the lack of training and preparation of SEAs and their supervising teachers (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2012; Carter et al., 2009; Uresti, 2017). Without properly trained staff, the millions of students in America with disabilities may not receive the services they need. This ongoing issue can lead to other critical problems in our schools, communities, and homes. While is not possible to fix every problem that lie within the special education classroom, it would behoove the education system to resolve some known issues for the sake of the profession and the students involved. After all, it is the students' education that is at stake.

During the literature review some common terminology emerged relevant to the topic of study. Leadership, collaboration self-efficacy, communication, and training, or the lack thereof, all seem to affect the dynamics of the special education classroom team (AFT, n.d.; Ashbaker & Morgan, 2012; Biggs, Gilson, & Carter, 2016; Uresti, 2017). From these terms, a concept map (see figure 1) was developed to guide the research study and provide a visual display of how concept derived from the literature review of the study related to one another.

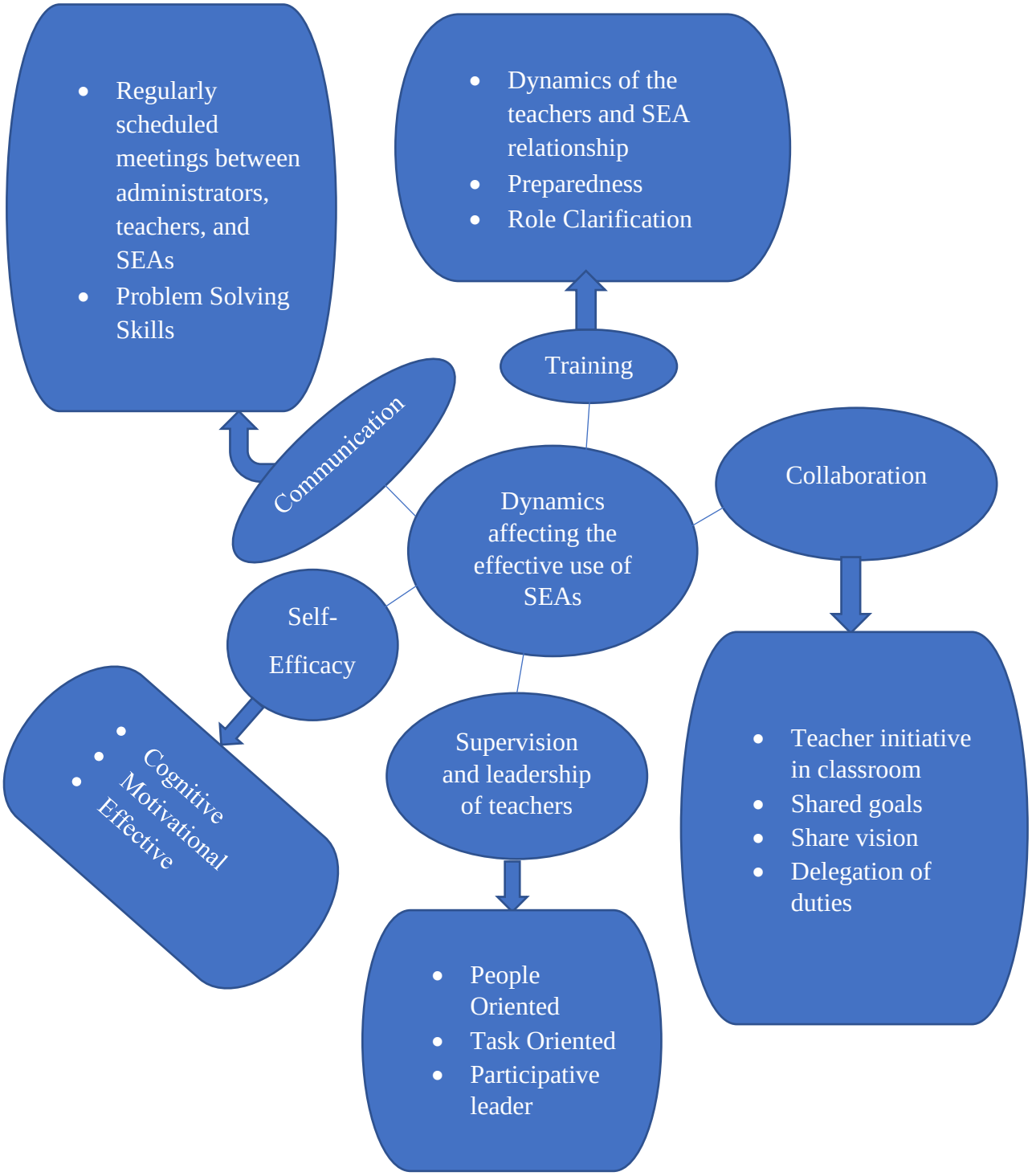

Figure 1. Conceptual framework map.

Phenomenological standpoint. The term *phenomenology* dates to 1765 where it was used in philosophy and occasionally in Kant's writings, however it was Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) who conceived phenomenology in the way it is used today (Kockelman, 1967, as cited in Moustakas, 1994). Husserl defined phenomenology as the scientific study of the essential structures of consciousness. Husserl's method describes a series of actions to ensure that the research findings are certain and void of ethical issues and presuppositions. Husserl's explanation of phenomenology involves a process known as phenomenological reductions.

According to Husserl there are two conscious processes that must take place to arrive at a phenomenological standpoint, "epochè and bracketing out" (Moustakas, 1994). "Epoche" is the act of suspending judgments about what is real about a phenomenon to focus on analysis of experience. The main reason for "epoche" or suspending judgments in this research study is to gain a true essence of the phenomenon using the participants lived experiences. The assumptions that people have been making concerning SEAs training needs has been part of the problem. The second aspect involved in phenomenological reduction is "bracketing out" which involves separating all truth or reality about a phenomenon to simply describe the conscious thought.

Husserl's perspective is relevant to the framework of this study considering that the data collected were gathered using the experiences of the participants in the setting whereby they were experiencing the research problem. The researcher created an environment where the participants felt a sense of safety and free of anxiety to release their experiences concerning the trainings. This information allowed the researcher to space to compare the actual experiences to the perceived.

Oppositions to phenomenology. The act of separating perception from reality is the foundation of phenomenology and if done efficiently, will give way to the formation of a new theory surrounding the issue of training needs for SEAs. However, a common argument in phenomenology is that one cannot completely remove themselves and offer a perception that is free of bias. Biasness can appear in the form of respondent and researcher bias and while there is no way to avoid all bias, there are several ways to minimize it (Sarniak, 2015).

For this purpose, the researcher took several steps to ensure that participants felt at liberty to reveal their true feelings without misrepresentation. First, to reduce any cultural bias on behalf of the researcher, the researcher ensured that the participants came from multiple cultural backgrounds. Secondly, to lessen question bias, the questions developed in the initial training assessment for both SEAs and teachers (see Appendices A & B) were carefully constructed to engage the respondents in "bracketing out" the idea that they are being trained accordingly and to expound on their actual training needs.

Review of Research and Methodological Literature

The shortage of special education personnel, as well as the need to support the initial grassroots reform efforts to provide services to children with special needs, fueled the growing need for additional classroom assistance (Hawkins, 2008; Pickett et al., 2003). A study performed in 2012 revealed that 43% of the nation has struggled with the supply of special education personnel (Berry, Petrin, Gravelle, & Farmer, 2012). The mass shortage of special education personnel began during the post-World War II era and has been on the rise ever since. Issues that took place during that time to aide in the shortage were male employees being called to service or lower paying jobs (e.g., teaching) being replaced with more lucrative high paying jobs (e.g., plants and refineries) (Doyle, 2009).

The shortage of special education personnel has led to other issues. According to research, school districts have been reduced to hiring less qualified personnel with insufficient training to fulfill the growing need (Berry et al., 2012). The hiring of less qualified personnel leads to higher attrition rates (Berry et al., 2012). Moreover, inadequately trained staff leads to higher levels of job dissatisfaction (Berry et al., 2012). Ultimately, the shortages lead to SEAs providing services outside of their present level of training and expertise (Berry et al., 2012).

Researchers in the field of education noted the evolving roles of special education assistants down through the years and how much things have changed since the induction of special needs students into the public-school setting (Baker, 2012; Boudreau, 2011; Giangreco & Doyle, 2002; Leger-Rodriquez, 2010; Uresti, 2017). When taking a snapshot of current policy governing the roles of SEAs against their current role in the classroom, it does not align. It appears SEAs have assumed the roles of certified educators under a classified title and much less pay.

> Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) states this about SEAs and their job description: providing one-on-one or small-group tutoring for students, assisting with classroom management, providing instructional assistance in a computer lab, conducting parental involvement activities, providing instructional support in the library or media center, acting as a translator and providing instructional support to a student under the direct supervision of a teacher. (Para. 3)

However, recent studies revealed something a little different taking place in the classroom. SEAs serving in a special education setting assist teachers as they perform both instructional and/or non-instructional duties (Mueller, 2010). According to a qualitative study performed by Ashbaker and Morgan, they are now directly linked with teaching and learning (2012).

Studies show SEAs are now considered by many as key to the delivery of special education and related services and are critical to classroom management and student success (Ashbaker & Morgan 2012; Giangreco & Doyle 2002; Hughes & Valle-Riestra 2008). Where SEAs used to be responsible for those jobs listed in their job descriptions, now they are considered the "backbone of early education and are frequently serving as the students' primary interventionists" (Killoran, Peters, Templeman, & Udell, 2001, p. 68).

Some other evolving roles of SEAs include providing assessments to students, planning and delivery of instruction, implementation of behavior plans, and instructional interventions (Giangreco & Boer, 2005; Killoran et al., 2001, Mirondo, Meyer, & Xin, 2001; Riggs & Mueller, 2001). Subsequently, the research revealed that there were some significant issues that occurred due to the evolving roles of SEAs. There is a gross overreliance on the support of SEAs and student achievement.

Giangreco (2003) notes that "sometimes relying on paraeducators may feel effective because it relieves, distributes, or shifts responsibility for educating a student with specialized needs, but educators should not confuse this outcome with effectiveness for students" (p. 50). Roberts (2010) found that students who received support yielded no greater progress than peers who did not receive support. This was due in part to high levels of dependency and a failure to scaffold learning based on the students' current academic ability.

IDEA (2004) and ESSA (2015) both state that SEAs fall under the direct supervision of teachers; however, the major contradiction is that teachers report they have not received adequate training to manage the roles of SEAs (Jones, 2006; Mueller, 2010). In a 2009 study, Conderman and Johnson-Rodriguez found that teachers have not been properly trained for their roles as supervisors of their classroom team affects the roles that SEAs perform in the classroom.

Boudreau (2011) utilized French's (2003) framework in her study and confirmed that teachers are inadequately trained to supervise paraprofessional staff. In this case study design, Boudreau argued that the confusion surrounding the roles and responsibilities of special education assistants and lack of teacher preparation is evident and needs to be remedied (Boudreau, 2011; Giangreco & Doyle, 2002; Pickett et al., 2003).

In 2001, French developed a qualitative study on "Supervising paraprofessionals: A survey of teacher practices." A questionnaire consisting of 28 items, of which had multiple parts for teachers to expound on their level of supervisory practices. For this study, 23 special education teachers representing 11 school districts in the Denver area were surveyed. The teachers answered the items, then provided written comments on the clarity of items. The results were as follows: 25% of teachers reported they did not supervise paraprofessionals; 51.6% reported that they supervised a single paraprofessional; 32.5% reported supervising two paraprofessionals, 11.3% reported supervising three paraprofessionals; 2.1% supervised four paraprofessionals; and 2.5% supervised four or more paraprofessionals. Based on these results one-third teachers surveyed admit they do not supervise their SEAs at all! This is a total contradiction to the federal mandate stating that a SEA should be directly trained and supervised by a certified teacher.

Based on the evidence yielded from the research, it was hypothesized that teachers lack the training necessary to prepare them for their supervisory roles thus leading to paraprofessionals lacking the skills to be successful in their roles as well (Biggs et al., 2016; Boudreau, 2011; French, 2001; Gerlach, 2002). Literature supports the fact that teachers need to have the skills to supervise and collaborate with paraprofessionals to provide an effective classroom for their students (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2012; Chopra, 2009; French, 2001).

Training. Leading the lists of concerns of SEAs is the lack of training and preparation provided to them to be effective on the job. Based on the evidence of previous research, it has been proven there is a significant lack of training and preparation initiatives for special education assistants in most districts across the country (Carter et al., 2009). In a 2006, quantitative study, the researcher found that more than 88% of SEAs receive their training from teachers who use real life experience as their learning application (Jones, 2006).

Subsequently, most SEAs are trained on the job by other (untrained) assistants or inexperienced teachers (Carroll, 2001; Mueller, 2002). The teachers were inexperienced on how to manage other adults and how to effectively handle issues like conflict management and ways to involve the SEA in the daily routines. The research consistently proved that schools are not providing the required level of supervision to SEAs to help them be successful in their roles and this lack of training not only affects retention rates and the school environment but also leads to negative outcomes for students (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2012). In their 2012 study, Ashbaker and Morgan found that improved training could increase retention of SEAs based on SEA self-reports.

Concerning training practices, Carter et al. (2009) conducted a study entitled "Knowledge, Responsibilities, and Training Needs of Paraprofessionals in Elementary and Secondary Schools" that addressed this problem. Some key terms identified in this study were paraprofessionals, educational quality, research, students with disabilities, responsibilities, job tasks, and training. Ten school districts were invited to participate and of 631 surveys that were sent out 331 were returned. Half of the participants reported working with students with severe disabilities, and the other half reported working with high incidence students. They reported high levels of knowledge in ethical practices and low levels in assessments and IEPs.

The percentages below represent the perceived knowledge SEAs reported when assessed: training on the job (48%); in service trainings (25.5%); high levels of preparation for monitoring halls, study hall, lunch, detention (85%); clerical 85%; small group support (76%); speech therapy assistance (44%); participate in planning IEP (32%). The findings indicate that there is considerable variability in the extent to which paraprofessionals report having enough knowledge of these minimum standards needed to perform their roles effectively.

Training programs. In his 2008 mixed-methodology study, *The Preparation Requirements for Effective Paraprofessionals,* Hawkins used a traditional case study design to describe in detail the partnership between the public-school district and a community college to help paraprofessionals meet certification requirements. Hawkins found that most of the training paraprofessionals receive in his state occurs in the "Paraeducator to Teacher" training programs while enrolled in local colleges. But after that there is very little formal training and professional development offered to help them succeed in their roles (Hawkins, 2008). The research that Hawkins performed adds to the findings that prove, beyond college, SEAs rarely receive the ongoing training necessary to maintain success in their role. This study agrees with the notion that a large part of the problem concerning SEAs is the lack the appropriate training while performing task that are beyond their scope of qualifications.

An educator service center in Texas offers paraprofessional training programs to help SEAs succeed in their positions. While this is not a requirement for school districts to use upon hiring SEAs, it is designed to help them in their new role and to ensure they are equipped to meet state mandated protocol. This three-day certification training offers instruction on the following: orientation to the role of paraprofessionals, training on the stages of learning, and scientifically based strategies for paraprofessionals to assist in reading, writing, and math instruction.

Participants are also administered a locally developed assessment to demonstrate knowledge of, and the ability to assist in instructing reading, writing, and mathematics as well as special education topics which meet requirements for ensuring that all paraprofessionals are highly qualified (Paraprofessional Program, 2018).

Patrick Lencioni's (2002) book, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable*, depicts five dysfunctions of an unsuccessful team: absence of trust, fear of conflict, lack of commitment, avoidance of accountability, and inattention to results. These concepts are useful in helping teachers and administrators develop working relationships with their SEAs to provide them a comfortable working environment where they feel prepared and motivated to perform their jobs.

Creating effective classroom teams. Much of the success of SEAs effectively executing their roles is directly related to the cohesiveness of the classroom team (Delvin, 2008). As indicated by ESSA (2015), SEAs fall under the direct supervision of their supervising teacher. If the teacher is not capable of properly supervising the supplementary staff member it could result in poor job performance and high rates of attrition. Devlin conducted a study in (2008) entitled, "Create Effective Teacher-Paraprofessional Teams" to better look further into the issue of classroom teams.

In his study, Devlin noted seven researched-based practices that were useful in helping teachers effectively lead their support staff. The first step is to create a healthy, open relationship where the SEA feels respected and safe to communicate openly with their supervising teacher. The next step is for the classroom teachers to be active listener as their SEAs voice any concerns about classroom issues. This helps to not only build team partnership but allows for the SEA to feel as though they are a valued part of the classroom dynamic.

The third practice is to avoid communication barriers as open communication is key to any relationship. The fourth practice is to remember to include the SEA in the planning of classroom instruction. Most teachers fail to include their SEAs in the classroom planning causing the assistant to feel useless and underrated. The fifth protocol is to assert mutual respect to cement the classroom. The sixth step, and one of the more important ones, is to clearly define roles and responsibilities to prevent confusion and conflict. Lastly, Delvin (2008) advised teachers to use any feedback given to them from their SEA to help build the classroom team.

Review of Methodological Issues

Using the literature, this next section reviewed the methodological decisions and issues derived from various design choices. This section served as a guide to help choose a methodology design that was best suited for the current study on training practices and training needs of SEAs. According to Creswell (2014) there are three main research approaches: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods and the selection of a research method is based on the nature of the problem to be addressed (Creswell, 2014, p. 2). The issues identified were design feasibility, limitations of various designs, the ethics involved with choosing participants, and finally the reasons why or why not certain designs did not work for this research study.

Qualitative design. Carter et al. (2009) performed a case study using qualitative descriptive statistics to examine three areas of need from a SEA point of view. The authors queried 313 SEAs working in 77 elementary, middle, and high schools about (a) the contexts within which they support students with disabilities, (b) their knowledge about core competencies in educating these students, (c) the job-related tasks they perform most frequently, (d) their perceived ability to perform these tasks effectively, and (e) their need for further training across these knowledge and task areas.

This qualitative design was suitable for this type of research project because it allowed the researcher to survey the participants while guiding them to specifically answer the research questions. The limitations, however, of self-reports are the data collected is unaccompanied by direct observation of the participants to ensure validity. Descriptive statistics was not useful for this study because the researcher was not trying to guide the participants to answer questions in a specific manner but rather the researcher was looking for honest answers as it related to the participants personal training experiences.

Descriptive case study. Baker (2012) performed a qualitative descriptive case study to determine the current responsibilities of SEAs at *The Special Education Collaborative* (TSEC) training center based in California. The goal was to identify the supervision, training practices, and needs of these SEAs. The descriptive case study method was useful to this type of research because the researcher's goal was to observe SEAs in a natural setting to study their environment and gather data to answer the research questions proposed with rich and thick text to inform the uninformed reader (Baker, 2012). Although the descriptive case study method was effective in fulfilling the purpose of this research, the small sample sizes from each group of SEAs may have impacted the reliability and validity of results. Out of 5,888 SEA employees only 173 participated in the study. Therefore, caution should be taken when considering and interpreting the results of the study.

Hawkins (2008) conducted a similar case study considering a program designed to certify SEAs to teachers. The purpose of this study was to describe one partnership that was created between a school district and a community college to prepare SEAs. A case study methodology was used to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the program as viewed by the participants, and to find out what they gained from the curriculum.

In 2011, Boudreau conducted a descriptive qualitative study entitled “Paraprofessionals as educators: differing perceptions, responsibilities, and training”. In this study the seven executive functions associated with paraprofessional’s supervision were utilized to analyze the literature and frame the questions. These functions are orienting paraprofessionals to the program, school, and students; planning for paraprofessionals; scheduling for paraprofessionals; delegating tasks to paraprofessionals; on-the-job training and coaching of paraprofessionals; monitoring and feedback regarding paraprofessional task and performance; and managing the workplace.

Boudreau used a sampling selection strategy to identify participants from four middle school special education programs. The purpose of this research project was to develop a better understanding of the specific roles and responsibilities assigned to paraprofessionals who work in the special education setting. To analyze the data, Boudreau used a constant comparative method. Boudreau found that paraprofessionals require more training and preparation for their jobs as well as teachers for their roles as supervisors. Improving paraprofessional training and supervision not only affects the work of paraprofessionals but it could help improve the overall performance and outcomes in the classroom environment.

A single case study design would not have been beneficial to this research project simply because the researcher was not looking to highlight the experience of a few individuals to determine a causal relationship. These projects use certain procedures that help elicit new information and new ideas surrounding a certain phenomenon. This type of research design was not beneficial to this research study because the researcher was not trying to generate new ideas about training practices but rather glean off the participants’ current feelings about the practices that were already in place.

Quantitative design. Dorel (2009), conducted a descriptive quantitative study. The design of the study was descriptive yet causal-comparative. Causal comparative research is a nonexperimental design where the researcher seeks to identify relationships between variables, but no attempt is made by the researcher to influence the study. Conderman and Johnson-Rodriquez (2009) also used a quantitative design with surveys as their choice for a research tool. This pilot study examined the perceptions of beginning elementary and secondary school special and general education teachers in a Midwestern state in the United States regarding their preparation for and the importance of their new roles, as well as their current training needs and plans to remain in teaching.

There were two major limitations to this study—both relating to the participants. First, the pilot study included a small sample size, and second, all the teachers were from Illinois. The small sample size does not allow great generalization beyond this group of people and geographical locale. A casual-comparative design did not suit this study as the researcher did not compare any variables to identify relationships between them.

Focused interviews. Prechotko (2009) conducted her research using structured interviews as the research tool and SEAs as the subject participants. The researcher looked at the preservice training in the Developmental Services Worker program in five classroom settings to examine the ability of paraeducators to support the development of student autonomy. Observational sessions were also used to corroborate information collected in the interviews. The framework of focused interviews yielded some limitations to the study. One issue was that participants were expected to be honest with their answers to produce valid results and furthermore the data collected was representative of only those individuals who participated in the study.

The researcher in this study, did however, utilize focused interviews during the second phase of data collection. Research revealed a good focus group consist of about eight to 10 persons to help keep the meeting under control and so that all voices can be heard. The researcher's main purpose for using a focus group in the methodology design was to gather data from a group of volunteers who had the same intended goal. In this case that goal was to improve the training standards by which SEAs are trained to help them be more effective on their jobs. The focused interviews gave the participants an opportunity to express their concerns and voice their opinions on areas they felt improvement was needed.

Mixed-methodology. Banerjee et al. (2017) conducted a study using both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. This mixed-methods approach was feasible due the fact that the authors sought to use quantitative data collection methods such as experiments and clinical trials as well as questionnaires and interviews as their design tools. This was also a sufficient choice because it "provides a more complete understanding of a research problem than either approach alone (Creswell, 2013, p. 4). The limitations of this study were concerning the small sample size. Despite the best efforts of the researcher, only 26 of the 49 invited participants responded to the survey.

Harris (2012) also conducted a mixed-methods study to determine if there was a difference in perception between a student's team members (general education teacher, special education teacher and special education assistant) regarding the roles and responsibilities of Special education assistants in the general education classroom. The researcher used a combination of interviews and surveys to collect data to answer her research questions with a randomized population. According to Harris (2012) this mixed-method approach allowed for a greater depth of working knowledge of each team.

The study participant size was a limitation in this research, too. The study was limited to five educational teams in five school buildings for a total only 15 participants. A mixed-methods approach did not work for this study simply because the data collected were qualitative in nature and there was no quantitative data to analyze. Mixed-methods approach works best when the researcher has a need to collect qualitative and quantitative data to better understand the research problem.

Action research. Action research design is used when a researcher is trying to solve a direct problem or integrate a reflective process of the progress of problem-solving strategies already in place (Creswell, 2014). Moeller (2010) used an action research design to determine if paraprofessionals are appropriately trained and educated when working in the early childhood special education setting. Moeller surveyed paraprofessionals, teachers, and administrators from three different schools using a survey questionnaire tailored to their specific roles and responsibilities.

Moeller translated her results from the surveys using a Likert scale to make it easier for her readers to understand the results. Moeller reported that using action research was beneficial because it examines the research problem directly in its natural setting to answer research questions determined by the researcher. This type of research plan can help avoid any unintended outcomes of a study.

One major issue noted in action research studies is that the researcher works too closely with the study and the participants which could potentially affect the validity of the results. Moeller (2010) added some participants felt obligated to appease the researcher when answering questions as to not offend the researcher. This study utilized pre- and post-surveys and expressed some limitation regarding these data collection tools.

The responses were limited by number of responders who returned surveys and for the surveys to be useful it requires true honesty from all participants, which may or may not have been the case. During the time of this research there had not been any practices put in place concerning the training phenomenon in the district being studied for this research project. It is the understanding of the researcher that this is the first study of its kind being performed in that region concerning training practices and training needs.

Future research lends itself to an action research study once a clear problem has been identified concerning training practices and needs and action steps are put in place to rectify the problem. While this research study utilized surveys just as Moeller did, the researcher incorporated a third data collection phase that allowed for member checking to increase validity and help avoid issues of researcher bias and lack of credibility. Member checking is discussed further in Chapter 3.

Distinctive research. In the case of Blatchford et al. (2010), they used a distinctive quantitative research design to explore and explain the negative effects on special education personnel in terms of three 'frames'—deployment, practice and preparedness. Then then used those same frames to identify specific implications on pupils with special needs. The authors employed a distinctive research design that was longitudinal and performed on a much larger scale than that of other research projects in the field. The study was performed in a naturalistic design and did not involve a targeted intervention.

The first phase of data collection involved surveys that generated data on school support staffs' characteristics and employments. The second phase was a multi-method approach using quantitative and qualitative analyses. This design method worked for this research because it specifically had three lenses from which the researcher planned to collect data through.

The limitations of this design were that the research was limited to the three frames studied; preparedness, deployment, and practice. This design did not work well for this type of study because the researcher was not trying to limit the participants to discuss certain aspects of the training phenomenon but rather give a holistic view. In not limiting the research to specific areas, the researcher gained a wider scope of the research problem.

Synthesis of Research Findings

Among the varied findings, there were some results that were common to most of the studies. Because of the hiring shortage of special education personnel, human resource departments have resulted to hiring less qualified individuals for the job. This problem is further complicated when the under qualified individuals fail to receive the training resources necessary to perform their job effectively.

Several studies found that SEAs come to and stay in the position because they have genuine care and concern for the students. Contrary to what management may feel, a SEAs main concern is not the money (Banerjee et al., 2017; Dorel, 2009; Edmisson, 1995). Giangreco and Doyle (2002) found in their research that if SEAs can feel respected and seen as an integral member of the classroom team, they would be eager to stay on the job despite poor working conditions, lack of preparation, and low pay. Another common result among the studies were that districts are working hard to remedy the problem of appropriate training, preparation, and education for SEAs although there was no evidence of any improvement in the research findings (Banerjee et al., 2017; Carter et al., 2009).

Based on the data yielded from the studies it can be proven that teachers have not been properly trained for their supervisory roles of SEAs nor have SEAs been fully equipped for their roles in the classroom (Baker, 2012; Conderman & Johnson-Rodriquez, 2009; Moeller, 2010).

This ongoing issue of training preparation is a problem for most special education classrooms and is a number one attributor to high rates of attrition (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Another shared finding and possibly the most important one to note is that there is a well-documented need for preparation and performance standards for SEAs to ensure they master the knowledge and skills needed for their role. Presently, SEAs are performing tasks that are not outlined in their job descriptions or included in any of their training sessions.

Despondently, supervising teachers, who are supposed to be helping to set the guidelines for these support staff members, are not prepared for their roles either (Banerjee et al., 2017). Research also revealed that the support system for special education personnel is highly questionable and that administrators do not show a genuine care and concern for special education assistants or their counterparts (Carter et al., 2010).

Critique of Previous Research

Based on the findings of previous research, it can be theorized that the shortage and low retention rates of special education assistants are possibly related to the discrepancy of job duties as well as lack of training and preparation. However, a casual-comparative study would need to be performed to determine any direct relationship that may exist between the identified job discrepancies of SEAs to the high number of shortages in a specific district. Research regarding the roles and responsibilities of SEAs in education revealed that they are increasingly involved in instructional activities outside their scope of knowledge and pay (Ramos, 2017). Yet, at the same time most of them do not receive precise training to aide in successful execution of such tasks (Martinez, 2017; McVittie, 2007; Walter & Petr, 2006). In a similar research study out of Nebraska, the researcher noted significant discrepancies in actual training practices when compared to perceived training needs.

In her 2001 qualitative study, Schonewise used a survey method to question 1,904 special education teachers and assistants on their actual and perceived training practices. The findings revealed that much more training was needed than what was provided across 11 topic areas including: school policies, legal and ethical issues, job roles and responsibilities, knowledge of disabling conditions, behavior management, tutoring techniques, recording and reporting student behavior, instructional materials, equipment operations, first aid, and job specific skills. By releasing these findings to the participating districts, Schonewise offered some useful advice to school administrators and training personnel on how to best meet the training needs of their educational staff.

Subject participants. Another significant point to critique is that prior research included several studies performed that used teachers as their main subject participants which does not give voice to the needs and concerns of special education assistants (Berry, Petrin, Gravelle & Farmer, 2012; Edmisson, 1995; Peterson, 2009). There was a small number of studies that utilized SEAs as the study participants but not enough to give a consensus of the matter (Blatchford, Bassett, Brown, Martin & Russell, 2010; Carter et al., 2009; Dorel, 2009; Moeller, 2010).

Still, there are limited studies conducted using both SEAs and teachers as their subjects which would make the most sense provided a classroom team consist of SEAs and a classroom teacher. Moreover, the classroom teacher is responsible for managing and supervising the SEA upon being hired. Therefore, it is important to gather data from both parties. Malone and Gallagher (2010) reported that very little research has been done with regards to teachers and SEAs working directly with advisors to train them on how to be effective in the roles.

Future research is needed in training and preparation of SEAs from a point of view of teachers and SEAs to a full scope of the problem and to derive a plausible solution. Teachers can provide researchers with an understanding of their classroom needs while SEAs can give an understanding of their training level of need and comfort level of performing such task.

Chapter 2 Summary

This literature review served as guide to lay foundational groundwork for future studies in the realm of special education assistants working in the classroom. The articles surveyed provided insight into the current state of this ongoing issue. This summary provides a recap of the research problem from a holistic point of a view. Next, the unveiling of any gaps in the literature between what is known about the effective use of special education assistants and what we still need to know. Finally, by conceptualizing multiple studies theoretical frameworks, methodological choices, design issues and findings, the hope if that the foundation is laid for future research in this area.

The law and educational systems support the use of educational assistants in the special education classroom. The use of trained supervised staff helps the teacher to provide the special needs child with a fair and appropriate education. This is done through varying levels of support, accommodations, modifications, and one-on-one guidance. Special education assistants by law can assist with diverse tasks under the direct supervision of a certified teacher. Yet, this is not the report coming from the schools. Not only are SEAs performing task that are not outlined in their job description, they are not trained to perform such task efficiently.

The need to further research this area is apparent. While it is not possible to access every special education team in the United States, steps must be taken to tackle this issue state by state.

The purpose of this current research was clear. This study explored the perceived training needs and the actual training practices of SEAs in the classroom from both an assistant and teachers point of a view and document the findings. This study offered the findings of this research project to the education community to assist as they plan and prepare future trainings and for the proper use of its special education assistants.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This qualitative study sought to unveil the perceived training needs and the actual training practices involving special education assistants (SEAs) in Texas. As previously stated in Chapter 2, this study was based mainly in Husserl's phenomenological theory (Moustakas, 1994) to facilitate a separation of perception from reality with the hopes of unmasking any areas of concern or need.

SEAs are an integral part of the classroom team and have been assigned a role by the government to aide and assist teachers with ensuring special needs students receive adequate care and instruction as mandated by the teacher of record (ESSA, 2015; NCLB, 2011). Behind the mass shortage of SEAs are issues like lack of preparation, unclear job descriptions and poor training initiatives. Based on prior research, lack of training ranked the highest among the list of major concerns (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2006; Chopra et al., 2004; French, 2003; Giangreco et al., 2001; Tillery et al., 2003; Uresti, 2017).

To assess the training needs and current practices, the participants were asked to participate in two sources of data collection in three separate phases. The first phase consisted of a training needs assessment in the form of a 10-question survey (see Appendices A & B). The survey questions were created by the researcher and two separate questionnaires had been developed for the assistants and the teachers. Following the survey, participants participated in a focus group (see Appendix C) to discuss the issues surrounding training needs. The focus group served as a second source of data collection to ensure the data were credible and reliable across multiple sources. Finally, the researcher allowed for follow-up one-on-one interviews for participants to member check the data gathered (see Appendix D).

The interview questions were designed to elicit the true feelings of the participants as it relates to the accuracy of the final study and whether the findings were synonymous with their experiences. These interviews also served as an opportunity to provide participants who participated in the focus group a final chance to share their views on training needs and practices and to verbalize any relevant information they may not have previously been expressed.

The researcher held interviews one person at a time until the data began to saturate. Data saturation happens when the data collected starts to repeat itself (Creswell, 2014, p. 189). Once data saturation happened, the researcher stopped conducting interviews and began the coding process. More on these processes are discussed in detail later in this chapter under data collection and analysis section. As noted in the basic consent form (see Appendix E) all data collected was coded and was not be linked to a specific participant. Furthermore, for confidentiality and privacy of the participants, records from this study are in a password protected file, where they will remain until they are discarded, in three years.

Research Questions

1. What is the lived experience of facilitating the SEA role in special education programs in Texas public schools?
2. Are SEAs in Texas being trained to a level needed to satisfactorily fulfill to their state-mandated job descriptions?

Purpose and Design of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceived training needs and actual training practices of SEAs as professed by the assistants themselves and the teachers who work with them in the special education classroom. The intent was to collect information on SEAs perception of their ability to effectively perform their jobs given their current training practices.

The participants were purposefully selected because they were either assistants or teachers who work in the special education setting daily. This study was qualitative in nature with a phenomenological design. Per Creswell (2014), there are some core characteristics of qualitative studies. They include "natural setting, researcher as key instrument, multiple sources of data, inductive and deductive data analysis, participants' meanings, emergent design, reflexivity, and holistic account" (Creswell, 2014, p. 186). According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research studies take on a different approach than quantitative in that they rely more on text and image data as well they have unique steps in analyzing data.

The researcher normally analyzes the data thoroughly to look for common themes and terminology. In qualitative studies, the design is emergent, meaning it can change and evolve as the study evolves. Finally, in qualitative studies, the researcher aims to paint a picture of the research problem from a holistic point of view versus a partial or divided vantage point. Considering that this research took place in the same place the problem occurred as well as the multiple sources of data collection, is what made a qualitative design the best fit for the study.

Phenomenological method. According to Creswell (2014), there are five most common approaches to qualitative research: narrative research, case study, ethnography, phenomenology and grounded study. Each of these methods are specially equipped with their own design strategies for gathering and analyzing data. Narrative research relies on the written and spoken word of participants. Creswell (2014) stated that case study and ethnographic research "involve a detailed description of the setting or individuals, followed by analysis of the data for the themes or issues" (p. 213). Grounded theory, on the other hand, involves systematic steps of categorizing data and placing it within an existing theoretical model and then deriving a story of how they interrelate.

Finally, phenomenological research involves the exploration of participants lived experience as noted in interviews, questionnaires, and other acceptable documentation to gain a realistic perspective of a research phenomenon (Schroeder-Davis, 2009). A phenomenological design suits this project the best because the data collected were gathered by the researcher using the lived experience of the participants in the setting whereby, they were experiencing the research phenomena.

The primary purpose of this study was to gather data from special education teachers and assistants to better understand the actual training experiences with that of perceived training needs for SEAs. The act of separating perception from reality is the foundation of phenomenology which is what makes this design a good method of choice. The main reason a phenomenological perspective was used to frame this research project was to potentially help uncover the perception of training needs and the reality of the training experiences as perceived by two groups who represent the special education population.

Research Population and Sampling Method

After receiving written permission from the selected school district to conduct the study and Concordia University–Portland's Institutional Review Board (IRB), the researcher began the recruitment of participants from schools within the district using purposeful sampling (see Appendix F). Creswell (2014) argued that purposeful sampling is a non-probability sampling technique widely used in qualitative research studies to identify participants and data collection sites that are closely related to the research phenomenon. While there are a few sampling techniques that fall under purposeful sampling, the researcher used criterion-I (Creswell, 2014). The objective for criterion-I is to identify and select all cases who meet the specified criterion.

The criteria for the population of this study are those special educators who have at least one-year experience working in the selected district and a willingness to share and expound on their training experiences. Using the purposeful sampling method, the researcher selected participants who had the experience and knowledge that would help to best understand the research problem and answer the research questions (Creswell, 2014).

The participants of this study were comprised of special education assistants and teachers who work in various special programs in a Texas metropolitan area. The researcher utilized surveys, focus groups, and one-on-one follow-up interviews as the main sources for gathering data. The researcher sent an email to special educators in the participating district asking them to participate in the research study and to return the informed consent document before sending the link to participate in phase one of the study.

The goal was to have at least 10–12 participants to volunteer in this phase of the study. Due to the small population sample for this qualitative study there was a need for diversity to ensure a vast representation of all races and ethnic backgrounds. The researcher designed the following layout to ensure diversity of the population sample: at least two SEAs and one teacher from each of these four main ethnic backgrounds (Black, White, Hispanic, and any other ethnicity not listed).

The plan was to purposely exclude any participant who worked directly with the researcher as well as those individuals who fell in the vulnerable population group. Per Creswell (2014) children, elderly, socioeconomically disadvantaged, or those with certain medical conditions fall under the vulnerable population group. By eliminating these target groups, the researcher decreased the chances of the participants being subjected to any risk or harm due to the study being performed.

Instrumentation

As noted by Creswell (2014), qualitative studies do not rely on questionnaires or instruments developed by other researchers. Although qualitative researchers may use certain instruments to help collect data, they are the ones who gather the information (Creswell, 2014, p. 213). In this qualitative study, the researcher served as the key instrument, collecting data through surveys and focus groups. To ensure validity and reliability of the data collection instrument used, the researcher took several steps.

When creating the questionnaires, Qualtrics provided a reliability scale by which the researcher was able to adjust the questions to ensure the intended outcome. Next, the researcher tested and retested the survey on three volunteers to guarantee the results would give valid results based on research questions. Based on the results from the piloting stage, the researcher had to make a few adjustments to questions five and six of the survey to increase the validity of those answers.

The questions in the survey that were used in this study were crafted by the researcher to certify that the answers given yielded pertinent information to the area of study. The outline of the survey was taken from Northwest Center for Public Health at the University of Washington School and permission was granted by their evaluation manager to use the template for the survey in whatever capacity needed (see Appendix H).

The questionnaire consisted of 10 questions all addressing an area of training needed for a SEAs to be reputable and successful in the classroom. Since SEAs and special education teachers took the survey, the survey questions were developed to tailor to specific job duties expected of a SEA. The answers from the survey helped to develop a consensus of the perceived training needs as interpreted by both parties.

Using themes and patterns, the researcher triangulated the data through these sources to ensure robustness of the research study and incorporated a thick description of the findings with participant quotes in the final production in Chapter 5 when discussing the results.

Data Collection

This was a single site data collection study. However, the data collection took place in three different phases. Permissions were granted from Concordia University–Portland's IRB and the participating school district in November 2018 to perform the research study (see Appendix F). The researcher began the data collection process in January 2019 and finished the last data collection phase in March 2019. The population sample received an email requesting their participation in the study and the informed consent document to solidify their approval.

Upon receiving the signed informed consent back, they received a follow-up email explaining the components and benefits of the study. Of the participants who agreed to take part in the study, the researcher sent all the volunteers a link to complete the initial training assessment survey. The participants who received an email with the link to the survey could elect to take the survey during non-work hours to assess their current training needs and training programs they have already taken part in for the past school year.

Survey results were received and held securely in the Qualtrics data collection program offered Concordia University–Portland. Qualtrics is a data collection program that allows researchers to create, distribute, and analyze surveys. The method in which Qualtrics was used to analyze the survey results are discussed later in Chapter 4. Next, participants were emailed a note thanking them for their input in the surveys and asking them to take part in the next phase of data collection, a focus group. Of the respondents who agreed to participant in this phase, the researcher randomly selected eight persons to take part in the final focus group.

The final phase of data collection were the face-to-face interviews. These interviews served as a follow up to provide participants who participated in the focus group an opportunity to member check the data to ensure credibility of the information. These interviews also provided a final opportunity for participants to share their views and verbalize anything they may not have said before in the training assessment survey. The interviews were held over the phone and via email conversations.

Member checking was accomplished by allowing the participants the opportunity to review the data that was transcribed and check it for accuracy and integrity. The participants received a copy of the transcripts of the data from the focus group via email and were asked to respond to four questions (See Appendix D). Transcripts of those conversations were printed and held securely in a password protected file with all the other data collected. This concluded all the data collection and follow-up phases.

Identification of Attributes

According to prior research findings, the training experiences of personnel working in special education programs across the country differ significantly; some feel somewhat prepared for the job while a vast amount feel completely ill-prepared and untrained for their specific job duties (Baker, 2012; Boudreau, 2011; Uresti, 2017). Some SEAs are trained on the job, while other untrained personnel train others, yet and still some are left completely untrained after their initial orientation period (Banerjee et al., 2017; Moeller, 2010).

The need for consistent training for SEAs is necessary as it can have either a negative or positive effect on job performance and student achievement as indicated in the review of literature. Furthermore, training practices need to be aligned with training needs for job success as well as job satisfaction among SEAs.

Before the researcher can present data collected in a qualitative data study, the researcher must define some measurable attributes of that study. These attributes are defined through an in-depth understanding of the literature. The attributes of a study act as variables that affect the outcome of the research (Creswell, 2014). After reviewing the literature, it is confirmed that the experience of facilitating the role of a SEA differs significantly from district to district across the United States.

The primary attributes of this study were SEA training/development/or proficiency. According to the U.S. Department of Education, special education assistants (SEAs) are employees who provide instructional support under the supervision of a certified teacher. According to the Texas Education Agency (TEA), training for SEAs should consist of general district staff development as well as training specific to their job duties. This training is assigned by campus administrators and supervising teachers (TEA, 2017). This attribute was measured using the 10-question training assessment (see Appendix A) and the focus group session (see Appendix C). The survey was designed to assess the training/development and proficiency of SEAs as professed by SEAs and certified special education teachers.

The assessment was comprised of 10 questions and participants were expected to answer based on their experiences from the past school year. Questions one through four of the assessment covered the participant demographic information. There were three questions related to training/development. Question six used a Likert scaled response to assess the training SEAs received per job tasks. These tasks were derived from the job description of a SEA as found on the Texas Education Agency's website. Questions seven and eight asked what type of formal and informal training was received, respectively. The choices for formal training were professional development, technology -based learning, coaching, on the job training, and lecture.

The selections for informal training were learning from a colleague, work in a team setting, self-reflection, and networking. The choices for formal and informal training were derived from Nancy French's work in "Managing Paraeducators" (2003). The researcher also sought to know how proficient SEAs feel to perform certain job skills and those questions are answered using a rating scale assessing level of training needed. The scale ranged from low training need to mid to high level of training needed. The areas analyzed were team communication, legal rights of students, conflict management, use of data forms, and behavior management of students.

The secondary attribute of the study was self-efficacy (SE) of SEAs, which comes as a result of the primary attribute. Self-efficacy is defined as one's perceived ability to perform certain task (Bandura, 1997). When considering the training/development and proficiency of SEAs, the researcher needed to assess the levels of SE. High levels of self-efficacy in individuals work in concert with their levels of proficiency to produce a constant flow of motivation to succeed. Contrarily, low levels of SE lead to lack of motivation and willingness to succeed (Bandura, 1997). To measure SE of the SEAs, the researcher used the data collected from the focus group session. Specifically questions three, nine, and 10 of the 12 focus group questions spoke to the SE of SEAs.

When assessing preparedness, question three asked how prepared do SEAs feel to perform their role. Question four asked has the SEA spoken with either administrators or supervising teachers to help create a specific list of duties for their assigned daily tasks. According TEA, SEAs should meet annually with supervising teachers and administrators to get a clear list of duties they are responsible for that school year as well be provided with the training necessary to be successful in that role.

The need for consistent training and development for SEAs are necessary as it can have either a negative or positive effect on job performance and student achievement as indicated in the review of literature. Even still, the need for a high sense of self-efficacy fused with effective training practices have been proven necessary for job success as well as job satisfaction among special educators (Schonewise, 2001; Uresti, 2017).

Data Analysis Procedures

Creswell (2014) argued that the data analysis phase consists of making sense out of text and image data. The researcher analyzed the data collected using various forms of qualitative coding methods and a data analysis program. The first step the researcher took after the data collections phase were complete, was to "winnow" the data. This is the process of focusing on some of the data and disregarding unnecessary parts (Creswell, 2014, p. 194). The research then took the useful data and aggregated the data into themes. Creswell suggested creating a small number of themes: like five to seven. The researcher hoped to find common themes to help sort through the data with the hope of developing a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena. To begin the coding process the researcher reviewed the data as it was collected and transferred it to the coding software program, NVivo: a qualitative data analysis & research software. NVivo is a computer-based program designed to analyze large bodies of text, graphics, and video data.

After the participants completed the survey, they were invited to take part in a focus group. Once the focus group data collection was complete, the researcher used a program called TEMI to begin coding that data. TEMI was used to transcribe the data from the recorded focus group session into a word document and from there the researcher transported that data into NVivo. Again, the sole purpose of using NVivo was to look for themes and patterns in the data.

The final step of a data collection was for some participants to member check the data to ensure accuracy and increase accountability for the researcher. The process of member checking is discussed in detail in the credibility section later in this chapter. The researcher triangulated data through the referenced sources (survey, focus group, and member-checking interviews) to ensure that the data collected were reliable, valid and consistent. Data triangulation occurs when data are collected through multiple sources for the purposes of strengthening reliability and establishing internal validity in a research study (Creswell, 2014). Once the researcher uploaded all the data into the analysis software, the coding process can begin.

Qualitative coding. In research, data are coded to reduce complexity. In going through the coding process, it allows for the large amounts of data to broken down into smaller chunks of information to analyze. In the first cycle of the coding process data are broken up into categories related to the study and the second cycle of coding involves identifying the themes (Saldaña, 2016). To further assist in the coding process, the researcher utilized some qualitative coding practices as recommended by researcher and educator, Saldaña. Professor Saldaña is best known for his research in qualitative inquiry, data analysis, and performance ethnography from which he has received numerous accolades and awards for his work.

Saldaña (2016) suggested some best practices for fellow researchers to pattern after in their efforts to better assist with the data analysis phase in qualitative studies. One important note for coding is for researchers to be organized including tasks such as labeling and dating incoming data and maintaining multiple hard and digital copies. Another suggested best practice is to be creative as researchers will have to come up with many ways and terms to code the data. Two other important factors are for researchers to be flexible and exercise integrity.

Saldaña (2016) also expressed that there is no one way that is better than any other and that it is best practice to mix and match coding methods based on what is needed for each research project (Saldaña, 2016, p. 69). There are 33 methods for coding data and researchers are to choose which method best suits their research project (Saldaña, 2016, p. 6). When coding data, Saldaña suggest the "five R's: routines, rituals, rules, roles, and relationships as a basis for solidifying observations into concrete instances of meaning" (p. 6). Also, when looking for patterns in data, one should consider that data can consists of commonalities with varying differences.

While the process Saldaña suggested may seem a bit tedious, it allowed for the large amounts of data to broken down into smaller chunks of information, which made it easier to analyze. Based on the research questions and the methodological needs of this study, the best coding methods for this research project were descriptive coding and in vivo coding. Saldaña suggested utilizing at least two coding methods sequentially to give a richer perspective on the same data set. To find out the actual training practices and perceived training needs, the researcher used multiple sources to gather data (interview transcripts, field notes, questionnaires).

To answer the first research question, what is the experience of facilitating the SEA role in special education programs in public schools as professed by special education assistants and their supervising teachers in Texas, the researcher utilized in vivo coding to help gain a better understanding of the participants' perceptions. The researcher documented the experiences of the participants as they described how they facilitate their current job duties and how they achieve success in their roles daily.

To answer the second research question, are SEAs in Texas being trained to a level needed to satisfactorily fulfill to their state-mandated job descriptions, the researcher used descriptive coding to help identify any common training practices among the special education staff and any trainings needs as relayed by those serving on the front lines. To begin this process, the researcher used these coding themes as identified in the conceptual framework: on-the-job training; informal training (trained by another colleague); classroom training; distance learning; district-based staff development; campus-based staff development. An unexpected and emerging theme that developed from this study was the need and desire of SEAs to be supervised by their classroom teachers, as they are viewed as the resident expert.

Limitations of the Research Design

According to Creswell (2014), the limitations of qualitative research design are many and a researcher must take careful consideration not to allow the design limitations to affect the credibility of the study (p. 190). The use of interviews as a data collection tool can be intrusive. Also, private information may be noted that cannot be used in the study. Creswell (2014) promotes the following protocol for researchers to follow when using for recording data: researchers should use a single sheet of paper divided into two sections to separate descriptive notes from reflective notes. This form should also include demographic information about the time, place, and date of the field setting where the observation takes place.

Qualitative interviews are conducted by the researcher in face-to-face conversations with participants, telephone interviews, or focus group interviews with six to eight persons in a group. These interviews general, unstructured, open-ended questions designed to elicit facts and opinions from the participants about their training needs and current experiences.

During the data collection phase, a researcher can also collect qualitative documents such as personal journals, notes, newspapers, minutes from meetings, or any other official report. Interviews are useful when participants cannot be directly observed. Through interviews, participants can provide historical information and allow the researcher control over the line of questioning. According to Creswell (2014), limitations of this instrumentation style is it provides indirect information filtered through the views of the interviewees, it provides information in a designated place rather than the natural field setting. There may also be an issued with biased answers due to the researcher being present.

Finally, Creswell (2014) noted some limitations to focus groups as being the size of the group and environment where the focus group is held. These both, can hinder the participants' output. Creswell noted that focus groups that have too many participants run the risk of some participants being unwilling to speak while others may feel like their voices were not heard. Furthermore, he noted that if the environment is not conducive to the participants' comfort level, they may feel prohibited to openly respond to questions.

Validation

Several steps were taken to ensure validity of this research project. Triangulation of data was one way the researcher ensured validity. By cross-checking data across multiple sources, the researcher searched for regularity of the information collected. The researcher used rich, thick descriptions to convey the study's findings. By providing detailed descriptions of the findings, the researcher brought the reader into the setting and the experiences of the participants, thus increasing validity by making the results more realistic and richer (Creswell, 2014). Member-checking interviews was another way the researcher validated the study's findings by cross-checking the data across a few of the study's participants to check accuracy and integrity.

Credibility. The researcher established credibility in two ways: meeting with participants one-on-one and by giving the participants the opportunity to fact check the report before final submission. Creswell (2014) argued that member checking is one way to help researchers establish credibility by having some of the population sample fact check a semi-polished draft of the final research report. The participants who agreed to member check were emailed a semi-polished copy of Chapter 4 about a week after the focus group session and they were asked to follow up with the researcher upon completing their review of the results. To execute the member check, a follow-up interview was conducted to elicit the reactions of the participants based on their input and experiences. The participants checked for things like accuracy and validity of the data reported.

The questions that were asked in the follow-up interviews helped to determine if the report generated was plausible and synonymous with the participant's experience. Although it was a polished report, it was not final and could edited as needed to reflect a more accurate research experience. Note that all identifying participant information such as personal demographics and exact work locations were removed from the final study. Some quotes were edited for the purposes of grammatical issues encountered during the transcribing phase, but the participant's views and thoughts were explicitly stated.

Each participant was furnished with a semi-polished report via email and was asked to read it within a span of three days. After that time had passed, they were contacted for a follow up interviews to discuss their views. There were four questions in the member checking interview, and they included asking the participants if the final report matched their experience and if there was anything they wanted to change and/or want to add to the final report (see Appendix D).

Dependability. The survey questions used in this study were derived from the research of Nancy French's text on hiring, managing, and training paraeducators. Dr. French has over 30 years of experience in the field of education and began her research study of special education assistants in the year 2000. She found in her studies, that over the course of 30 years, special education teachers and assistants were no more prepared than when she began her teaching career all those years ago. Dr. French is the director of the PARA Center located in Colorado, which provides training for SEAs using research-based models to help them be successful in their roles. French recommended that anyone involved in working with SEAs utilize the contents of her book.

Expected Findings

Through this study, the researcher expected to uncover the perceived training needs and actual training practices of special education assistants in some Texas schools. Based on prior research findings and personal experience, it is expected that the training practices received do not readily align with the training needs of SEAs. The researcher expected to find there are many differences between the perceived training needs and the current practices of special education assistants in some Texas schools.

Through the study findings, the researcher looked to find if there are any basic training guidelines in place for training special education assistants and how they vary by grade level. Lastly, using focused interviews, the researcher expected to find if the participating district utilized the paraprofessional training programs offered by Texas Education Agency to help their SEAs succeed in their role and how that has been helpful to their job success.

Ethical Issues

The researcher was trained to conduct research under the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program). The program was mandated by Concordia University–Portland as a method to ensure the researcher was educated in how to conduct professional, ethical, and credible research. Additionally, utilizing online data collection tools, helped eliminate possible human error in interpreting data as well as provided a safe place to store data during the processes. The information was kept in the online databases and secured. They are protected by a password only known by the researcher. The researcher also followed the ethics code for conducting research as outlined by the American Psychological Association's (APA) Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct (2010) was conformed to during this research study.

Finally, as a certified Texas educator, I am bound to the Texas Administrative Code, Educator Code of Ethics. According to the Texas Educator Code of Ethics (2010) standard 2A.2.1, the information each participant submitted to me was personal information and will not be disclosed to the campus or district unless it serves a lawful professional purpose or is required by law. In keeping with the ethics code for conducting research as outlined by the American Psychological Association's (APA) Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct (2010), the goal is to resolve all conflicts within a reasonable fashion to avoid or minimize harm.

Conflict of interest assessment. The researcher has no personal or financial gains in connection to the research study that could be construed as a conflict of interest. As the principal investigator of the project, the researcher ensures that the sole purpose of this study was to gain understanding of the training practices and needs in some Texas schools. The hope is that the findings are used to make a positive impact on the effective use of SEAs.

Researcher's position. According to Creswell, the main role of the researcher using the phenomenological method, is to transform the lived experience of the participants into decodable data (2014). The goal then, was to take the data collected and attempt to understand those experience based on the written artifacts from interviews and surveys from the participants and categorize the data into common themes. The last stage was to record the experiences into rich and thick descriptions of the phenomena being studied.

As a 11-year veteran in the field of education, I am confident I conducted a thorough, credible study. I spent the first four years of my educational career as a SEA and currently I am a high school special education teacher in Texas as I have been for the past seven years.

The knowledge gained working in both capacities not only made me confident in my ability to perform this study but allowed me to experience the training phenomenon first hand. My intentions were not to point blame on any one person or district but to bring to light the perception versus reality of training experiences for SEAs. As the researcher, I had two goals for conducting this study; one goal was to add to existing body of literature pertaining to training efforts for special educators and the other goal was to educate others on the findings of the study to hopefully improve training practices for SEAs going forward.

The researcher also took steps to reduce and avoid bias. One way the researcher avoided bias was to collect data from a diverse population to include multiple ethnic and gender groups. By utilizing programs such Qualtrics, NVivo, TEMI, the researcher reported out exactly what was synthesized within each database as submitted directly by the participants. The researcher recorded the focus group session and transcribed the data, reporting only the information given in relation to the research question while omitting and discarding any unnecessary information.

Ethical issues in the study. There are some ethical situations that can arise in a qualitative study providing the researcher has the immense responsibility of interpreting and evaluating data collected. Some specific issues that have been noted in past qualitative studies are confidentiality, informed consent, researchers' potential impact on the participants and vice versa. It was the goal of the researcher to maintain and follow a well-defined role clarification as well as stick to a strict guideline when analyzing and interpreting data.

The goal was that this investigation added to the existing body of research already performed in this area in hopes informing the literature in new ways and possibly answering some of the remaining unanswered questions. It was the goal of the researcher to remove any form of deception from the study by asking only questions centered on answering the research questions. The data collected were used specifically to answer the research questions and all other information was discarded.

This study utilized human participants and the researcher understands that the rights of the participants must be protected. Each participant was asked to sign an informed consent form (see Appendix E) which explained the researcher's efforts to protect human rights throughout data collection, analysis, and dissemination phases.

As the principal investigator of the project, the researcher ensures that the sole purpose of this study was to gain understanding of the training practices and needs in some Texas schools. It was not the intention of the researcher to point blame on any specific group of people of highlight misuse or abuse of this class of workers, namely SEAs. The hope is that the findings are used to make a positive impact on SEAs as they aide teachers in educating and serving special needs students. The goal of the researcher is that administrators will use the data collected to help align training programs that will meet the needs of SEAs.

Chapter 3 Summary

This phenomenological study was designed to describe the training phenomenon of special education assistants based on their lived experiences and those teachers who work closely with them. The survey and interview questions were designed in such a way to help set aside bias and preconceived notions and document real experiences. As noted in Chapters 2 and 3, the phenomenological perspective was used to frame this research project to help uncover the perception of training needs and the reality of the training experiences as perceived by two groups who represented the special education population.

Participants of the study came from various elementary, middle, and high schools assigned to one independent school district in Texas. They either worked as a SEA or special education teacher in the classroom. To uncover the initial training experience of special education assistants, all the participants answered a training assessment questionnaire. The answers to the questions yielded information on the participants years of work experience, types of training offered and areas where training was still needed.

The survey responses were then followed up by a focus group where teams of assistants and teachers sat with the researcher to discuss training experiences provided to them and they affect those training had on the level of expertise they display in the classroom. The groups discussed whether the district participates in training provided by the state and to what extent. The final data collection method was one-on-one interviews where the researcher sat with each participant and allowed for the participants to share any information, they may not have been able to share in the other settings. The researcher triangulated the data across the three data sources.

As previously noted, by triangulating the data, the researcher hoped to establish validity by documenting common themes found in the research to develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena. The researcher also chose to triangulate the data for purposes of minimizing data. Triangulation allowed the researcher to gather answers to the same questions from both individuals and groups. Triangulation of data allowed the researcher to combine shorter engagements with the participants with longer engagements where individuals had more time to give considered responses.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

SEAs have been an integral part of the special education classroom since the early 1950s. They play an important role in providing the specialized services offered to students with disabilities. Even though SEAs are considered to be an integral part of the classroom team, they are often inadequately trained for the job (Hughes & Valle-Riestra; 2008). An objective of this study was to understand the experience of facilitating the SEA role given their current training practices. The experiences were understood through the perception of the SEA and supervising teachers. From this objective and from the data provided in the study, one may be able to discern if there is a dissatisfaction with the training provided and what changes can be made to help SEAs be more effective at their job. Below are the major research questions that helped to inform this study:

1. What is the lived experience of facilitating the SEA role in special education programs in Texas public schools?
2. Are SEAs in Texas being trained to a level needed to satisfactorily fulfill to their state-mandated job descriptions?

This chapter begins with a brief overview of the purpose of the study, the sample population, the methodology, a summary of the findings, and finally a presentation of the data and results. This phenomenological study aimed to identify the training initiatives provided to SEAs and their supervising teachers to help them be efficient at their job.

This study explored the perceived training needs as well as the actual training practices of SEAs as professed by SEAs along with input from special education teachers. The intent was to collect data about training initiatives, training needs, and personal work experiences of SEAs. The researcher also collected data on what training preferences and platforms SEAs felt were most beneficial to them.

The hope is that the information provided through this study adds to existing research and provides some resolution to a problem that has plagued the education system for years: insufficient or unaligned training. Based on prior research, SEAs are inadequately prepared for the tasks that await them in the classroom; much of what SEAs are trained for does not readily align with their training needs (Giangreco et al., 2001; Hale, 2015; Jones, 2006; NCES, 2017; Uresti, 2017). Therefore, this study is beneficial, in that, it took a firsthand account of training needs and practices to understand and assesses them based on the actual experiences of SEAs, which could, in turn, help districts better align training standards going forward.

Description of the Sample

Upon receiving written permission from the school district to conduct the study and clearance from Concordia University–Portland's IRB to begin, the researcher began the data collection phase January 2019 (see Appendix F). The researcher sent an email to all the special education teachers and assistants within the school district, around 360 people, on January 11, 2019. After expressing their willingness to participate, the chosen sample (10 SEAs, 19 Teachers) then received an email requesting them to read and sign the informed consent document (see Appendix E).

The logic behind the chosen sample size was disclosed in Chapter 2 and is discussed in greater detail later in this section. Upon receiving the signed informed consent back, the participants received a follow-up email explaining the components and benefits of the study. A link to take the training assessment survey was provided also. The participants were asked to take the survey during non-work hours to assess their current training needs and training programs they had already taken part in the previous school year. Moreover, the training assessment asked SEAs to reveal their training preference they felt prepared them the most.

There were some intentional participant demographics, as discussed in Chapter 3. The researcher hoped to gain the support of at least 12 participants total including eight SEAs and four teachers. The goal was to have two SEAs and one teacher from each of the four main ethnic backgrounds (Black, White, Hispanic, and Other). After the participants were broken down by position and ethnicity, those groups were divided in by gender. Although there was a small projected sample size, the researcher felt it was important to collect data from a diverse population.

The participants were recruited across one school district from 22 different schools in Texas. The schools included two high schools, four middle schools, and 16 elementary schools. According to a performance report released by TEA (2017–2018), the participating district houses 120 special education teachers and 240 special education assistants. When broken down by ethnicity and gender, 30% are African American, 35% are Hispanic, 28% are White, and 7% make up the other races, and 25% male and 75% female (TEA, 2017).

Using purposeful sampling, the researcher aimed to recruit SEA and some special education teachers for gathering and reporting on the actual training experiences of this group of people. Although this study is centered on the needs of SEAs, the researcher felt it beneficial to include insight from the supervising classroom teachers to increase the wealth of knowledge.

The final population sample consisted of a combination of 29 participants who voluntarily responded to the training needs assessment and of those 29 participants, six participated in the focus group. Based on the final demographic number, the researcher concluded that the goals for the population sample were reached and that each ethnic group was represented in the data collection process.

The final population sample consisted of a combination of 29 participants who voluntarily responded to the training needs assessment and of those 29 participants, six participated in the focus group. Finally, the ethnic breakdown was as follows; 34 % were Hispanic or Latino, 13% were Black or African American, 15% were Caucasian or White, and 9% were of "other ethnic backgrounds not listed." Table 1 reflects the overall population sample for this study, based on their position in the classroom, gender and ethnic breakdown respectively.

Table 1

Demographics of study participants by position in the classroom, gender, and ethnicity.

Position	%	Total Count (N = 29)
Special Education Assistant	38.71%	10
Special Education Teacher	61.29%	19
Gender		
Male	19.35%	6
Female	80.65%	23
Ethnic Background		
Hispanic and Latino Americans	34.38%	11
Black or African Americans	40.61%	13
Caucasian or White	15.63%	3
Other race than those listed	9.38%	2

Research Methodology and Analysis

As noted in Chapter 2 this study was designed to understand the experiences of facilitating the role of a SEAs while utilizing the current training practices in some Texas schools. Data were collected from SEAs and the teachers who work with them. Prior research revealed that SEAs were highly dissatisfied with their jobs and it was mainly due to issues with low pay, unclear job descriptions and inadequate training.

The notion of understanding SEA experience of facilitation their role was explored through phenomenology. Using phenomenology as the qualitative research method of choice encouraged participants to describe how they experience the training phenomenon in their own words. The goal of the phenomenological research was to set aside bias and assumption about human feelings and experiences in the situation and gather data based on their lived experiences. Using Husserl's phenomenological framework (Moustakas, 1994), this study gathered data using the actual experiences of the participants to gain a better understanding of the problem area. The researcher hoped to distinguish between perceived training needs and actual training practices for SEAs.

According to Husserl (1994), there are two conscious processes that must take place to arrive at a phenomenological standpoint, "epoche and bracketing out". The first concept "epoche" is the act of suspending judgements and bias about a subject matter and allow a person to freely express their ideas based on personal experience and feelings of the phenomenon. The second is "bracketing out" which involves separating all truth or reality and simply describing the conscious thought. Using this framework provided a space for SEAs to express their concerns or praises of training initiatives provided to them based on their real experiences void of any judgments or biasness. The researcher was able to bracket out all preconceived notions during the data collection and analysis process, allowing participants the space needed to freely express this issue from their vantage point. The goal was to interpret and report the data directly from the experiences of the participants. This study triangulated data through multiple sources (questionnaires and focus group). Data triangulation occurs when data are collected through multiple resources for the purposes of strengthening reliability and establishing internal validity in a research study (Creswell, 2014).

The research questions were designed to assess the current training practices and the perceived training needs of SEAs in Texas schools. In self-administered, computer-based questionnaires, the researcher sought to use the surveys to gather initial data about the training experiences of the selected participants. The survey used in this study focused on subject areas that special educators would need to be well-versed in their job based solely on their state mandated job description. This information was based on information gathered from the job descriptions of SEAs, the research that was done by previous researchers and personal work experience.

Phase 1. Concerning the survey questions, the researcher had to make a few changes to the design due to some unintended outcomes. The first change surfaced when the researcher was test piloting the actual questions from the survey. The researcher chose three persons who were not in the final population sample to take the survey and provide feedback on the layout and ease of use of the format. The researcher found that upon receiving their results, the answers they provided did not provide enough information to adequately answer the research question. Therefore, the researcher had to make some minor changes to the questions before the survey was finalized and distributed.

French (2003) noted in her manual that "the most effective needs assessments are designed with the roles and responsibilities of special education assistants in mind" (p. 126). Initially the researcher had developed a different set of questions for SEAs and a set of questions for supervising teachers. After reviewing those results the researcher realized that the graphs that were formulated in the analysis process were insufficient because the data were separated versus being on one graph or table for easier comparison.

To ensure consistency of the data and to generate accurate tables and graphs, each participant in the population sample were asked the same set of questions in the training assessment survey. This issue caused the researcher to combine the survey into one single questionnaire for both SEAs and teachers to respond. The participants so graciously retook the survey allowing the researcher to collect data in one place versus trying to analyze several different graphs from each group represented.

Survey analysis. Upon completion of the surveys, the data were analyzed. After the surveys were analyzed and the results were generated the researcher exported the information into a word document. The word document provided for an easy transition into NVivo to provide an easy translation of the graphs that were created from the survey analysis. In further analyzing the data the researcher queried the results to identify common terminology, themes, and patterns.

The survey used in phase one of data collection process was designed to assess the training/development and proficiency of SEAs as professed by SEAs and certified special education teachers. The assessment was comprised of 10 questions and participants were expected to answer based on their personal work experiences from the past school year or any time prior to.

Questions one through four of the assessment covered the participant's demographic information. The next set of questions were related to training and staff development. These questions were measured on Likert scale and the responses assessed the training SEAs received per job tasks assigned in accordance with their job descriptions. The assessment also surveyed the likelihood that a SEA would take part in one training platform over another. Lastly, the assessment gathered data on the use of informal training versus formal training environments.

The tasks used in the questionnaire were derived from the job description of a SEA as found on the Texas Education Agency's website. Questions seven and eight asked SEAs specifically what type of formal and informal training was received over the past year, respectively. The choices for formal training were professional development, technology-based learning, coaching, on the job training, and lecture. The selections for informal training were learning from a colleague, work in a team setting, self-reflection, and networking. The choices for formal and informal training were derived from French's work in "Managing Paraeducators" (2003).

Phase 2. The focus group served as the second component to the data collection phase of the study and a follow up to the survey responses. The purpose of the focus group was to connect directly with the participants and allow for any other feedback from them that they were not able to express while taking the survey. The focus group consisted of 12 open-ended questions that allowed the participants to expound on their input as well offer insight into what it takes to facilitate their current role.

The personal in-depth engagement of the focus group helped to establish a secure relationship among the researcher and the participants. The focus group consisted of three basic topics of discussion: training received, training needs, and self-efficacy of SEAs. The focus group session took place using a video conference website. The focus group session was held on February 22, 2019 at 8:30 p.m. There were three SEAs and three teachers who made up the final numbers. The six participants were from the original 29 who participated in the initial training assessment. The meeting lasted for one and half hours. The focus group participants were encouraged to email the researcher if they had any further thoughts to share after the meeting was adjourned. No emails were received. The focus group session was transcribed.

Phase 3. Finally, the third component of the data collection phase of the study was member checking interviews. Member checking also known as fact checking is a tool used to help establish credibility and trustworthiness between the researcher and the participants. Creswell (2014) described member checking as a method for checking the accuracy of the findings by providing participants with a semi-polished report of the research analysis and providing them an opportunity to comment on both its validity and credibility. There was a total of four participants who participated in the member checking interviews. Although there were more participants willing to take part in the member checking interviews, once the data began to saturate, the researcher suspended the interview process as the consensus was the same.

Interviews. The interviews were conducted after the data were collected and a final written report was drafted. Each participant was furnished with a semi-polished report of the transcribed data via email and was asked to read it within the span of three days. After that time passed, they were contacted for a follow up interview to discuss their viewpoints of the data presented. There were four questions in the member checking interview, and they included asking the participants if the final report matched their experience, if there was anything they wanted to change and/or wanted to add to the final report (see Appendix D).

Coding process. The researcher found the coding process to be a very insightful activity while on this journey. It was helpful to see all the responses in one place and be able to get an overall understanding of the training perceptions from the participant's point of view. Coding the data helped to reduce complexity. Through coding the data, the researcher was able to locate patterns to quantify the data. As explained in Chapter 3, the researcher used the analysis function built within the Qualtrics data collection program for the first cycle of coding the data.

For the second cycle of coding the researcher began looking for themes or patterns in the data using another coding software, NVivo. The researcher imported all the data collected for the study into NVivo, including survey results, emails that were sent to the researchers with answers from the focus group questions as well as the transcribed report of the entire focus group session. While reading through each file, the researcher looked for themes that were essential to answering the research questions and patterns of data that seem to repeat itself. Once a theme was identified, the researcher created a node for that theme. There was a total of 11 themes that were used to code the data: positive perceptions, negative perceptions, expectations, planning and preparation, self-efficacy, and role clarity.

Summary of the Findings

Most SEAs reported that having prior experience with children and other job experience was a strong reliable source of training that helped to support them in their current role. During the focus group, Participant 3, a female SEA stated, "I was in the nursing field right before I started working here so that has helped me help the students." While others, felt it important to credit the teachers who work alongside them as their main source of training for success. "If there is something that I do not know, I am comfortable to ask my classroom teacher and that helps," one SEA reported. According the training assessments survey administered for this study, at the start of a given school year less than half of all SEAs and teachers questioned received the training necessary to be effective on the job as reported by TEA. Per the focus group, teachers were not fully equipped with TEA expectations. Teachers are tasked with the supervision of and most of the training for SEAs, while not having received proper training themselves. One teacher Participant stated, "I don't even know what the job description of a SEA looks like," but she went on to say that she will read it once the focus group session is over!

Team communication. When it comes to team communication and functioning, 75% of SEAs surveys were trained and 25% were not. As it pertains to legal rights of the students and the use of data recording forms, 67% of participants were trained while another 32% were not. Concerning assisting with lesson planning, working with second language students, and conflict management, 46% of the SEAs surveyed received training while another 53% had not. Based on these current results and previous findings, one can say most SEAs are still being asked to perform task in areas they have not been trained for or adequately prepared.

Demonstration of self-efficacy. SEAs raised some very vital concerns during the focus group session as it relates to self-efficacy. In relation to the research problem concerning SEAs and their role in school, if SEAs are to become a more valuable part of the special education team, then their levels of self-efficacy need to be high as do their motivation to achieve. As noted in Chapter 2, there are several factors that can raise or lower one's feelings of self-efficacy. According to Bandura (1994) and other academic scholars, self-efficacy is the belief in one's own capacity to achieve while motivation is the desire to achieve.

During the focus group session, the six participants were asked several questions to show how they demonstrated self-efficacy in their role. SEAs were asked, if the work they do is synonymous with their job descriptions, and they responded emphatically, no! One SEA reported, "Sometimes I feel uncomfortable performing certain task I am asked to do because I do not know how . . . still I don't want to say no to my supervisors and risk getting into trouble." Another SEA spoke out in agreement, "Yes I feel the same way!" This data were synonymous with that of prior researchers further concluding that SEAs are inadequately prepared for the jobs that await them in the classroom.

Presentation of Data and Results

In this next section the data and results of the study are discussed. Listed below is a reiteration of the two research questions central to the study. As discussed in Chapter 3, data were collected in two phases, using surveys and a focus group session. The participants were expected to answer based on their personal work experiences from the past school year or any time prior. The survey was designed to elicit responses from the participants to gain insight into their work experience with their current training levels. From there, the researcher sought to know what training SEAs felt they needed to be more prepared for the job. The participants lived experiences helped to provide a detailed description of the phenomenon as it is from their vantage point.

Research question 1 answered. When asked what level of training that was needed to facilitate these seven tasks: (a) team communication /functioning, (b) roles and responsibilities, (c) supervision of classroom assistants, (d) how to best utilize classroom assistants, (e) how to utilize assistants with lesson planning, (f) conflict management/resolution with classroom assistants, and (g) strategies for non-compliant classroom assistants, over 50% of the respondents revealed that the greatest level of training needed was in the area of conflict management and resolution with SEAs and classroom teachers

Using the same seven tasks from question one, the participants were asked if they received training in these areas in the past school year and the respondents revealed lack in every area. Team communication and roles responsibilities were the top two areas with 75% of the respondents stating that they received some level of training in that area, while another 25% stated no, they were not trained. Table 2 reflects data taken from the training assessment survey for SEAs and teachers alike:

Table 2

Results from Training Needs Assessment

Description	No Training Needed	Low Training Need	Mid Training Need	High Training Need	Total
Team Communication /Functioning	7.14%	21.43%	42.86%	28.57%	100%
Roles and Responsibilities	10.71%	10.71%	42.86%	35.71%	100%
Legal rights of students with disabilities	14.29%	10.71%	21.43%	53.57%	100%
Use of data recording forms	7.14%	21.43%	39.29%	32.14%	100%
Working with ESL (English Second Language) students	3.57%	25.00%	42.86%	28.57%	100%
Assisting with lesson planning	14.29%	35.71%	35.71%	14.29%	100%
Conflict management/resolution with classroom teachers	14.29%	17.86%	32.14%	35.71%	100%
Operate equipment such as assistive technology, fax machines, and copiers	21.43%	25.00%	32.14%	21.43%	100%

All the other areas revealed that at least half of the SEAs surveyed received training in the areas, while the other half did not. One participant stated in the focus group session, "I was hired mid-year and I have not received any level of training on how to perform my job or handle my group of students." Another reported, "I used my prior experience with children to be able to facilitate my role as a SEA.

The researcher also sought to know how proficient SEAs felt to perform certain job skills and those questions were answered using a rating scale assessing level of training need; the scale ranged from low training need to mid to high level of training needed. The areas analyzed were team communication, legal rights of students, conflict management, use of data forms, and behavior management of students.

Research question 2 answered. Are SEAs in Texas being trained to a level needed to satisfactorily fulfill to their state-mandated job descriptions, are discussed in this next section. Participants were asked which formal training they had received to help them meet the challenges of their role and to rank in order which was most beneficial to them. Forty percent stated they received some type of professional development which they preferred followed by 18% of whom received training via technology-based learning. The remainder of the results from the formal training results were listed as 10% wishing to take part in a coaching/mentoring environment and about 22% prefer on the job training which is consistent with prior research. Finally, 5% preferred a lecture-style as their formal training environment.

In the final section of the training assessment, SEAs and teachers were giving the opportunity to elaborate on any area of perceived training needs. The researcher analyzed the results from this section and top areas of concern for SEAs are: clarity of job duties, one teacher felt they needed more descriptions of what workers should be doing on a daily basis.

Participants were also asked which types of informal training they have received over the past school year in relation to their current role. The options for informal training were learning from a colleague, working in a team setting, self-reflection, and networking. Thirty-two percent of the participants stated that they preferred learning from a colleague followed by 28% who learned best working in a team setting. Seventeen percent of the participants polled stated that work analysis and self-reflection was preferred choice of informal training.

Training platform preferences. Another useful component of the training assessment survey was the results of the training platform preference. The researcher asked the participants to rank in order from one to five their preference of how they would like to be trained in the future. The options were classroom training, day-long style workshop events, webinars, and technology-based learning. Providing a place by which the participants feel comfortable to learn could potentially increase their levels of acquiring and retaining the information given. From the results of the data collection, it was evident that classroom training was the most preferred (33.33%) while day long workshop-style events (8%) was the least preferred option. Following classroom training was technology-based learning completed at one's own pace (28%). A combination of technology-based learning and classroom training ranked in the middle with 19% of the participants' vote.

Teamwork. Concerning the role of the team, one of the questions of the training assessment survey questioned the level of training received as it pertains to the functions of a classroom team. Twenty-five percent of participants reported they had not received training on proper team communication and functioning. More than half of the study participants revealed that they have not received any training on how to effectively handle conflict within the special education classroom.

Table 3

Training Received for Successful Team Work

Description	Yes %	No %	Total %
Team Communication /Functioning	75.00%	25.00%	100%
Roles and Responsibilities	82.14%	17.86%	100%
Legal rights of students with disabilities	60.71%	39.29%	100%
Use of data recording forms	67.86%	32.14%	100%
Working with ESL (English Second Language) students	46.43%	53.57%	100%
Assisting with lesson planning	46.43%	53.57%	100%
Conflict management/resolution with other special education personnel	46.43%	53.57%	100%
Operate equipment such as assistive technology, fax machines, and copiers	53.57%	46.43%	100%

The next area was help in the classroom, some felt that specialists who come and visit the classroom should spend a little more time in the room with teachers observing student behaviors to know how to better equip the teachers and SEAs on how to effectively handle the students. The third area of concern was how to deal with other people that always have a (bad) attitude. Finally, the survey revealed that more than half of the SEAs who participated in the study were not instructed on how to properly handle conflict in the classroom. In the future, administrators can utilize this information to create training exercises that correlate the current level of need.

Member checking interviews. Once all data were collected, coded, and analyzed, the researcher conducted the final phase of the study, member checking interviews. These interviews allowed participants of the study to read and reflect on the data to check for accuracy and increase researcher credibility and validity of the data. There were four member-checking interviews that took place. The researcher asked them a total of four questions and the answers given by the participants during the one-on-one interviews were then translated into a Qualtrics report to check for accuracy and ensure validity.

The report from the member checking interviews revealed that the participants agreed unanimously that the unpolished written report of the data collected matched their experience and they add nothing but good comments. Some of the comments recorded during the interview were, "WOW I can see how much thought and work went into your report" and "Yes, this is the experience I have. No, I would not change anything!"

Chapter 4 Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to describe the research study's population sample, methodology, plan for analysis, and present the data and results. This phenomenological qualitative study sought to unveil the actual training practices and perceived training needs for SEAs in Texas. Essentially both research questions were answered through the findings of the research study. The data revealed, in general, that the experience of facilitating the role of a SEA is affected by the overall prior experience of the SEA and the supervising teacher. Those SEAs with prior classroom knowledge and supportive teachers have better experiences than those who have no experience or effective collaboration with their supervising teachers. A summary of the findings is discussed in further detail in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

Introduction

The following chapter is the conclusion and summation of this research study. The significance of the research and context of the data collected are examined. This chapter also discusses the findings as they relate to prior literature, as well as reveal any new findings discovered from similar studies performed since the start of this study. The study's limitations and suggestions for future research are also provided in this chapter. This study was designed to explore the perceived training needs of as well as the actual training practices of (SEAs) as professed by the classroom assistants and supervising teachers.

The purpose of the study was to take a deeper look at the training phenomenon using the actual experiences of SEAs and supervising teachers and then separate all perceptions from reality. The hope is that if this study revealed any gaps between what training is received and what training is needed, administrators would take the initiative to adjust professional development and other training practices accordingly to meet the needs of SEAs.

From personal experience and prior research findings, the training that SEAs received did not readily align with what was needed to effectively and properly fulfill the demands of the job. In addition to this, there were other problems that SEAs faced on daily basis, such as, unclear job assignments, low job satisfaction rates, high attrition, and turn-over rates (Chopra & French, 2004; NCES, 2017; Tillery et al., 2003; Uresti, 2017)

This study examined the experiences of SEAs in relation to training received, training needed, overall feelings of self-efficacy as it relates to how they effectively fulfill their assigned job duties at their current level of knowledge. The research was performed using a qualitative phenomenological design aimed at identifying the experiences from their perception.

To gather data from a range of sources, the researcher used multiple data collection tools; questionnaires and a focus group. After careful review of various methods of design, the researcher chose a qualitative design since the study had to do with using texts, interviews, and surveys to report the training experiences of SEAs.

Summary of the Results

The researched findings in the study have extended what preceding researchers in the field have previously found-SEAs are leaving the profession at an alarming rate due to issues of low pay, unclear job descriptions, and lack of adequate training (TEA, 2018; Uresti, 2017). As previously stated in Chapter 1, it would be an insurmountable task to try to tackle all three of these issues in one study, so the researcher chose to focus on the training phenomenon, since it was the most prevalent of all the issues presented (Berry et al., 2011; Boudreau, 2011).

Through purposeful sampling, phenomenological reduction and in-depth conversations with the participants, this study provided insight into the actual experiences of SEAs as they attempted to perform their jobs daily. SEAs were asked to report on their lived experiences given their current level of training. SEAs were asked to expound on what areas they felt they needed more training in and in what ways education practitioners can improve their levels of self-efficacy and job satisfaction.

The following two questions guided this study:

1. What is the lived experience of facilitating the SEA role in special education programs in Texas public schools?
2. Are SEAs in Texas being trained to a level needed to satisfactorily fulfill to their state-mandated job descriptions?

The survey and interview questions were formulated and based on the knowledge of each research question and the findings were presented in the appropriate section of Chapter 4. In relation to SEAs facilitating their role, this study revealed new observations not yet reported on; SEAs with prior experience of working with children and effective collaboration with their supervising teachers are more successful on the job even without direct training. This information extends on a study performed by the American Federation of Teachers (n.d.), that if teachers and SEAs maintain open lines of communication, they had success in the classroom. The results from this study also extended Boudreau's (2011) findings that SEAs are not trained to a level necessary to fulfil their state mandated job descriptions. SEA participants reported that in a given year there are at least three to four essential areas they are not trained in that are needed to adequately fulfill their job descriptions.

Updated findings. Since the onset of this study, research on the training phenomenon surrounding SEAs has been updated. After searching back through education databases EBSCHO host and Education Source, it was revealed that there were about 50 studies performed on the topic of training and special education personnel. Specifically, the researcher performed an advanced search of these sets of keywords: training/paraprofessionals, training/special education personnel and special education assistants/self-efficacy.

In 2017, Brown and Stanton performed a mixed-methodology study on the experiences of SEAs in the special education and general education classroom. They found five common themes as they studied the literature surrounding SEAs and their experiences: experience/knowledge, job training, classroom responsibilities and understanding roles, relationships with teachers and students, and job satisfaction. Brown and Stanton (2017) argued that there is still a problem with experience and knowledge of the job concerning SEAs.

SEAs in the U.S. often lack formal educational training and background knowledge about children and teaching practices (Brown & Stanton, 2017). Some states require paraprofessionals to comply with No Child Left Behind regulations and obtain a high school diploma, up to 30 college credits, or pass a standardized test (IDEA, 2004; TEA, 2018). However, many states forgo these requirements for SEAs working with special education students and only require a high school diploma due to the high need for personnel in this field (TEA, 2018). This issue along with lack of training once on the job, creates a recipe for disaster for SEAs. Furthermore, Brown and Stanton (2017) argued that job training, for SEAs, is imperative for both the social and academic progress of students, due to the amount of time these paraprofessionals spend with children who have specific educational needs.

Banerjee et al. (2017) performed a study not too long ago on the early intervention of paraprofessional standards. This study was primarily centered around SEAs who work with young children in a home-based setting. Still, they found that there is a lack of guidance on both a state and national level for training these SEAs who work in a home-setting.

Much like their in-school counterparts, SEAs are thrust on the job with insufficient preparation and suitable training. Even though there have not been many studies performed on the subject recently, the findings revealed were synonymous with past research projects and the results of this study. Further concluding the matter and proving that the training SEAs receive does not readily align with what is needed per their state-mandated job descriptions.

Discussion of the Results

The goal of this phenomenological study was to look at the research problem from the vantage point of a SEA and to understand their plight in relation to having very little training paired with unclear job descriptions.

One objective was to see if there is in fact a lack of training as perceived by SEAs and classroom teachers. If there is a known problem, how does this issue affect the self-efficacy of SEAs and their ability to perform their jobs. To sufficiently answer these questions, the researcher had to first lay out clear expectations as to what an effective SEA looks like on the job. To fulfill this objective, the researcher included a section in Chapter 1 entitled, "Effective SEAs in Texas."

This section housed laws and bylaws enacted by the Texas Education Agency for the effective execution of the SEA role. Per the presentation of data and results, it was clear that the lack of training professed by SEAs in prior research studies was and still is as much of a problem today as it was then. Another objective of the study was to use the information gathered by the participants to create a framework for improved training platforms for SEAs based on their perception of what they are lacking on their jobs. Through the training assessment surveys and focus group SEAs revealed that the top areas of high training need and they were: effective team communication/conflict resolution and dealing with the legal rights of disabled students.

The study also queried SEAs to understand what it took to facilitate their role considering the training phenomenon. The results from the data collection phases revealed through the experiences of SEAs, facilitating their role required two things: a great deal of life experience and one-on-one support from supervising teachers. Finally, the study confirmed overall, the training SEAs receive does not readily align with what they need to be proficient on the job and they are not being trained to a level needed to fulfil their job descriptions.

Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature

The primary goal of this study was to gather data from several SEAs and teachers to understand if the SEAs are being trained to level necessary to successfully complete their assigned jobs.

The participants were asked to report on their personal experiences, which eliminated any perceived ideas of training needs and focused solely on their lived experiences and how they facilitated their role from day to day. It is important to note, that even though SEAs reported being inadequately trained many times throughout the data collection phases, they still try very hard to perform their jobs and an overwhelming amount report their desire to work and be successful in their job. Data gathered from similar research studies matched this same sentiment (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2012; Boudreau, 2011).

This notion really puts the pressure on training coordinators to provide the training services SEAs so deeply desire. The hope of the researcher in completing this study was the results could provide a framework for better alignment of future SEA training programs. Currently, research showed that SEAs are inadequately prepared and trained for the tasks that await them in the classroom (NCES, 2017; Uresti, 2017). Not only are they ill-prepared but the jobs they perform differ greatly from their job descriptions in accordance with state and government laws (Berry, Gravelle & Farmer, 2011; IDEA, 2004).

This phenomenon has had a negative effect on special education personnel to include issues of job satisfaction, clear roles and responsibilities and retention of special needs classroom assistants and teachers (Chopra & French, 2004; ESSA, 2015; NCES, 2017). This study provided major insight into what SEAs felt they need to be successful as well highlighted training platforms that they felt were more beneficial to their success. By fully answering the two research questions developed for this study, the above-referenced objectives were met. The information collected revealed what it took to facilitate the SEA role in special education classroom using their lived experiences. Supervising teachers were also able to weigh in on the discussion to help determine if SEAs have been prepared for their classroom roles.

As noted in Chapter 2, according to the Texas Education Agency, there are several key factors that aided in the proper fulfilment of the role of a SEA. Some of those indicators involved proper training, supervision, and self-efficacy to support the SEA in being proficient on their job. The practice that comes from training and the feedback that comes from supervisors proved to be helpful in building a sense of self belief and self-efficacy to be successful at SEA tasks.

The main objective of the data collection phases of this study were to use phenomenological reduction to document the training received, needed, and the levels of self-efficacy of SEAs in some Texas schools as they facilitate their role. What the researcher found is that due to the lack of proper training, SEAs relied heavily on prior experience and the training/supervision of the classroom teacher.

In cases where there was little supervision or experience, the SEA often felt undervalued and overwhelmed with the task assigned. SEAs reported feeling unprepared to effectively support the students they served thereby possibly diminishing the value of education provided to that student. Research question two asked how SEA training in Texas public schools align with their state-mandated job descriptions for the position.

According to laws enacted by the Texas Education Agency, as documented in the manual *Working with Paraprofessionals; A Resource for Teachers of Students with Disabilities (2013),* it is the responsibility of campus administrators to consult the manual to ensure that their SEA is working in accordance with job they were hired for and that training is provided to meet the needs of the job. In the training assessment survey, when asked questions surrounding training needs and trainings received, all the areas queried revealed there was some level of training not provided to SEAs or supervising teachers.

This next section looks closely at Bandura's social cognitive theory, Rotter's social learning, and Bandura's theory for self-efficacy, Fishbein's expectant-value/goal theory to help better understand the plight of SEAs as they discuss their experiences, opinions, and beliefs about assessing training needs. In addition to these, Lencioni's theory for creating an effective classroom team and French's model for managing SEAs are discussed as well as they relate to the study.

Social learning theory. The social learning theory (SLT) is a combination of psychological processes used to help predict human behavior and SLT supports the idea that learning happens in a social setting (The Social Learning Theory, 2017). While many theorists have taken their turn at explaining the SLT in their own terms, this study expanded on the knowledge of Albert Bandura and Julian Rotter. The SLT helps to better understand research question number 1, as the study aimed to reveal the experience of facilitating the role of SEA given their current level of training from their viewpoint.

Bandura's social cognitive theory. Albert Bandura, an American psychologist, argued that behavior, personal thought, and environment helps one understand human behavior (Boudreau, 2011). This led him to develop and coin the term social cognitive theory in 1986. This theory holds that "persons are neither autonomous agents nor simply mechanical conveyors of animating environmental influences. Rather, they make causal contribution to their own motivation and action within a system of triadic reciprocal causation" (Bandura, 1986, p. 359). These three components (behavior, personal thought, and environment) have a reciprocal relationship with one another and work in a way to predict human behavior. Bandura's triadic reciprocity theory of determining behavior can be applied directly to the shortage of SEAs to help reveal if SEAs are products of their work environment.

Based on the results of the focus group session, there were at least three SEAs who felt they were useless because the lacked training and knowledge to understand their students' needs. The issue of being a product of this environment (little supervision and poor training), goes back to the SLT in which SEAs are learning in an environment that has not been primed for success and growth thus breeding untrained, unprepared products. Unfortunately, due to the lack of investment in the effective use of SEAs, they are not being set up to exercise greatness. However, this triadic theory also speaks to the element that changing their environment can work to change this outcome. In addition, when developing the questionnaires for this phenomenological study, the researcher took careful consideration to induce the components of triadic reciprocity to yield the most information concerning the experiences of both SEAs and teachers.

Rotter's social learning theory. Julian Rotter's theory of social learning has four main components used to predict behavior: behavior potential, expectancy, reinforcement value, and the psychological situation (The Social Learning, 2017). Behavior potential is the likelihood that a certain behavior will happen in a given situation. Reinforcement value is another way to say outcome of a behavior. Psychological situation is the idea that each person's experience is unique to them. Rotter claims that behavior potential is a function of expectancy and reinforcement value plus one's psychological situation.

Previous researchers like Dorel (2009) and Uresti (2017) found that looking at the issues involving SEAs through his framework helps to determine if a SEA has the right motive and interpersonal skills needed to succeed at such a self-less and low paying job. Therefore, this study sought to propel change in the areas of training, job satisfaction, and job performance to redirect the course of where SEAs will go in the future.

Bandura's theory of self-efficacy. In addition to his theory of social learning, Bandura (1994) also created a theory of self-efficacy; a concept related to one's perceived abilities. This theory is related to the belief that one has in their abilities to complete a task. Bandura believes that self-worth, self-esteem, and self-regulation can all work in concert to improve one's sense of self-efficacy. Bandura believes self-efficacy and motivation are deeply connected. The self-efficacy is the belief in one's own capacity to achieve while motivation is the desire to achieve. In relation to the problem seen with SEAs, if SEAs are to become a more valuable part of the special education team, then their levels of self-efficacy need to be high as do their motivation.

A high sense of self-efficacy is associated with positive experiences of success. These experiences consist of a positive cycle of self-esteem, motivation, and confidence all working together to increase self-efficacy. The more confidence a person has in their ability to achieve to success, the higher the self-efficacy. In turn, the higher sense of self-efficacy gives one the confidence to keep excelling and trying. In a 2017 qualitative study, Uresti found that teachers with a strong sense of self-efficacy have higher levels of productivity throughout the day. According to Bandura's theory (1994), there are some common examples of high self-efficacy and they can manifest in one or more of the following behaviors and traits:

- A person who is not gifted in an area but believes in their ability to learn
- A person who has bad outcomes but remains positive and expects a positive outcome if they keep trying
- A person who is nervous about a pending task but believe they have what it takes to succeed
- A person who constantly takes on insurmountable and unexpected challenges

Expectant-value/goal theory. Martin Fishbein, a pioneer in social psychology, defined the term expectant-value theory as "motivation that is regulated by the expectation that a given course of behavior will produce certain outcomes and the value of those outcomes" (Bandura, 1994, p. 74, as cited in Uresti, 2017). Self-efficacy beliefs influence motivational processes by determining goals set by the individual, the amount of effort placed, and perseverance when confronted with difficulties, and resilience when they fail (Bandura, 1997). This study included some self-efficacy questions in the core of the focus group that were designed with the expectant-value theory in mind.

The focus group session assisted the researcher in gathering data on the expectant-value behind the work that special education assistants and teachers perform. Therefore, the need for proper training and setting the right training environments are extraordinary. Furthermore, appropriate training and certification causes both assistants and teachers to feel effective in the roles and meet the demands of their positions (Berry et al., 2012).

Team-Based Model. For SEAs to be effective in their role they must be able to function well in a team setting. To assess the concept of teammate ship, researchers in the field utilized Patrick Lencioni's (2002) book, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*. Using a fable, this model provides an example for organizations to help their employees work as a team and collaborate to meet an objective or a set of objectives. Lencioni's model consists of five dysfunctions: absence of trust, fear of conflict, lack of commitment, avoidance of accountability, and inattention to results. Lencioni (2002) noted that there are two obvious truths regarding teamwork. He stated, "First, genuine teamwork in most organizations remains as elusive as it has ever been. Second, organizations fail to achieve teamwork because they unknowingly fall prey to five natural but dangerous pitfalls" (Lencioni, 2002, p. 187).

Delvin (2008) noted that "The experience of working as an instructional team may be a positive or negative, having various implication for students" (p. 1). Embedded within the roles of SEAs and classroom teachers, it is important to note the importance of teamwork and that dynamic affects the success of the students in the class. Using Lencioni's model, based on the results of the survey questions, the researcher was able to assess the participants as it related to their ability to function as a healthy classroom team. In his 2017 study, Uresti stated, "a team that is attentive to results retains quality staff members" (p. 64). Providing these results to the participants and their administrators could make space for improving the classroom dynamic and ultimately the success of the students.

French's theory of managing paraeducators. Nancy K. French, a well-known educator and researcher developed a theoretical framework intended to serve school districts with special education resources and responsibilities including the hiring, training, and supervising of special education assistants (French, 2003). This framework served as a catalyst to address some of the main concerns of SEAs including their lack of preparation, training, and supervision. In her book, *Managing Paraeducators in Your School* (2003), French described the seven executive functions associated with paraprofessional supervision. French (2003) found that substantial time must be spent on supervision for SEAs to be accomplished in their roles.

According to French, a single professional is responsible for performing all the functions associated with paraprofessional guidance, supervision, and support (2003). These functions are often performed by the individual teacher that the SEA is assigned to (French, 2003). The seven executive functions were: (a) orienting SEAs to the program, school, and students; (b) planning; (c) scheduling; (d) delegating tasks; (e) On-the-job training; (f) monitoring and feedback; and (g) managing the workplace (communication, problem solving, and conflict management).

These seven functions served as components of the survey questions and focus group topics. Looking at these functions from the vantage point of both SEAs and teachers in the survey helped to determine if the participants were performing jobs that aligned with their job descriptions as well as if they were trained on how to be successful in those areas.

French (2003) found in her study that this (conflict management) was a high area of need during that time as well. Based on conversations with SEAs during the focus group session, is it the culture of most schools that SEAs should automatically know how to work with their supervising teacher and vice versa. Although, the lack of direct training on the subject has proven fatal to the dynamics of the classroom team.

As previously mentioned in Chapter 2, the lack of training for SEAs not only affected their retention rates and school environment but also lead to negative outcomes for students (Boudreau, 2011; Prechotko, 2009; Webster et al., 2010). Per the conversations with SEAs, when they are inadequately prepared for their job, they tend feel less useful. As they are not performing as a skilled participant. Participant 3, a female SEA, stated "I did not know how to help my students, I had not received any prior training on my students' disabilities."

As per SEAs, in addition to retention rates, there were other factors affected by their lack of preparation and training. When speaking with SEAs on the lack of preparation there were some areas of concern noted; students suffer when SEAs are not adequately trained to support them. Participant 2, a male SEA, stated that, "the training I received was mainly, um, 'you're going to shadow for a day or two' . . . I had to figure out who my students were and how to help them." Another SEA reported, "For me there was no training, it was just, come to class and work with this student." Overwhelmingly, the consensus was SEAs felt they were just there to support the teachers and do whatever is asked of them, whether they knew how to do it or not.

Limitations

The intent of this section is to identify any components of the study that could be improved if the study is replicated. Time constraint was a limitation of this research study. The data were collected over a three-month period followed by the coding and analysis process. Participants were asked to speak to the training experiences they have had over the past school year up until the time of the study. The researcher admits the information gathered was merely a snapshot in time, considering that one's perceived experience can change over time, if given a new experience (Bandura, 1994).

Implication of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory

As reported in Chapter 1, existing scholarly research implied that the high attrition rates and low retention rates for SEAs are a result of low pay, unclear job descriptions and inadequate training. Furthermore, SEAs in the past have reported that the training they receive do not readily align with the training they need. Moreover, the training SEAs receive do not coordinate with the jobs they perform.

After careful review and consideration of prior results for this subject matter, the findings lead one to believe that poor training practices are the number one culprit of SEAs not being able to perform their job effectively. The ineffective use of SEAs has resulted in a low sense of self-efficacy and misuse of this group of workers. The issue is still ongoing thus creating a need for more research and some resolve in this area. It was an insurmountable task to focus on all the factors that may have contributed to the problem affecting SEAs in one study, so this study focused on the aspect of training. This phenomenological study attempted to assist in filling any gaps of existing research by focusing on the experience of facilitating the role of a SEA and what training they need for job success.

The data reported in Chapter 4 revealed the experience of facilitating the role of a SEA as perceived by SEAs and supervising teachers. The data also showed what training has been received and what training SEAs felt they still needed. For every performance area surveyed under the role of a SEA, all participants reported a lack of training in one performance area or another. This data implied that SEAs are currently lacking the training needed to be successful in their job.

When looking at the levels of self-efficacy, SEAs reported that they do not feel adequately prepared to comfortably perform their job. In addition to this, as per the information released in Chapter 4, the participants highlighted specific areas they need high level of training in and training platforms they felt would be most beneficial. Going forward policy makers and school board administrators are invited to use the results of this study to better align training practices with training needs to create a culture of success for SEAs in the future.

For the participating district, there needs to be a distinct definition of the different roles performed by non-certified staff such as SEAs. What the researcher found in her conversation with SEAs was, there not much distinction between the various roles assigned to SEAs. Based on a review of topical literature, a conceptual framework was developed that visualized the basic concepts of the study and their connection to the research problem. Some common terminology that emerged were leadership, collaboration self-efficacy, communication, and training, or the lack thereof (AFT, n.d.; Ashbaker & Morgan, 2012; Biggs, Gilson & Carter, 2016; Uresti, 2017).

The study's results revealed a major connection between the leadership of the teacher and the effective use of the SEA. Based on the results, it can be implied that SEAs who lack training to perform their job effectively grow weary of the job and tend to feel less effective while displaying feelings of low self-efficacy.

Recommendations for Further Research

In the future this study can be expanded, extended, strengthened, and altered to create more opportunities for research and learning. This study focused solely on training practices as it is a factor of the ongoing problem with SEAs. However, prior research identified that low pay and unclear job descriptions were also significant issues (Berry, Gravelle & Farmer, 2011; Giangreco et al., 2001; Hale, 2015; Jones, 2006). One could research either of these components separately to compare the results with the existing research and explore how these issues affect SEAs. Another suggestion is based on a delimitation of this study, the population sample. This study had a small sample size resulting from the methodological approach of choice. One could however, change the methodological approach to their study resulting in a larger sample size. A larger sample size, of course, would allow for a wider scope of the problem.

The study took place in small geographical location; therefore, the results cannot be generalized beyond that location. Future research lends itself to a larger geographical location to allow for greater generalization of the results. For this purpose, the study can be replicated and spanned across a larger area including more school districts in a given state.

The researcher also recommends researching how the special education classroom would function without the assistance of a SEA. The suggestion would be to remove the SEA from the classroom across the span of a few days for a few hours a day and then assess the function of the classroom from the classroom teacher experience. This information is not to prove the lack of need for SEAs but rather provide some insight into the dynamic of their role and possibly generate a greater appreciation for them. The findings from such research would not fit the needs of this study but are still related to the research issue and have the potential to inform the literature in new ways.

Conclusion

Over time, many studies delved into the growing phenomenon of the shortage of special education personnel to include both SEAs and teachers (Berry, Gravelle & Farmer, 2011; Giangreco et al., 2001; Hale, 2015; Jones, 2006; NCES, 2017; Tillery et al., 2003; Uresti, 2017). To add to the issue of the current shortage for special education personnel, SEAs are inadequately prepared for the tasks that await them in the classroom. Prior research illustrated that what classroom assistants are trained for does not readily align with their performance needs (Hale, 2015; NCES, 2017).

As a former SEA and current higher education practitioner, this ongoing problem compelled my interest. This study took a firsthand account of training needs and practices as perceived by SEAs and supervising teachers to assess if it is, in fact, as prevalent of an issue as reported in times past. The hope is that the education practitioners will utilize the findings of this study to better align training standards for SEAs going forward.

The research questions that guided this phenomenological study were as follows:

1. What is the lived experience of facilitating the SEA role in special education programs in Texas public schools?
2. Are SEAs in Texas being trained to a level needed to satisfactorily fulfill to their state-mandated job descriptions?

To answer question number one the researcher used the information from the focus group and questions five, six, seven and 12 from the training assessment survey. The researcher documented the experiences of the participants as they described how they facilitated their current job duties and how they achieved success in their daily tasks given their level of training.

Based on the responses of the participants, facilitating the role of a SEA is affected greatly by the prior experience of the SEA and the guidance of the supervising teacher. Those SEAs with prior classroom knowledge had a better understanding of how to best facilitate their role even without proper training. Additionally, supportive classroom teachers played an important part in effective facilitation of the role of the SEA. Subsequently, the SEAs who had no experience or effective training were still successful in their role when there was ongoing collaboration with their supervising teachers.

To answer the second research question, if SEAs were being trained to a level to fulfil their state-mandated roles, the researcher turned to the data collected from both the training assessment and the focus group. What the data revealed is that not all SEAs are receiving the training needed to be effective on the job. When the researcher analyzed the data from the training assessment, it was found that at least 30% to 50% of participants surveyed did not receive some level of mandatory training needed for success on the job.

The criteria for success was taken directly from a handbook for managing SEAs as found on the Texas Education Agency's website. The data from the collected research implied that if 250 SEAs are employed by a district, is it possible that half of them have not been trained properly to achieve success on their job. Aldous Hurley once said, "There are things known and there are things unknown, and in between are the doors perceptions." By taking the time to separate perception from reality, this study was able to consider the participants' first-hand experience on what they need to be better at their job. While it is understood this data reflects the views of a small population, the results of this study synchronize with prior findings to substantiate the fact that SEAs need more support by way of training and effective collaboration to be of greater use in their role.

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Appendix A: Survey Questions for Special Education Assistants

Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey today. Your honest responses are greatly appreciated!

This survey will be used to identify training needs for the special education department in your organization as well as identify current training practices already in place.

Screener

Before we begin, please identify your position within the organization:

- Special Education Teacher
- Special Education Assistant
- Other:

1. How many years have you been in education?
    - 0–5
    - 6–10
    - 11–15
    - 16–20
    - 20–30
2. For even distribution of the study, please indicate your ethnic background:
    - White
    - Hispanic or Latino
    - Black or African American
    - Asian
    - Pacific Islander

- Other

3. Please indicate your gender
    - Male
    - Female
4. Based on your experience, please indicate the level of training needed for each item listed below:

Analysis/Assessment checklist	No Training Needed	Low need for Training	High need for Training	Not Applicable to the Job
Team Communication /Functioning				
Roles and Responsibilities				
Legal rights of students with disabilities				
Use of data recording forms				
Working with ESL (English Second Language) students				
Assisting with lesson planning				
Conflict management/resolution				
Operate equipment such as assistive technology, fax machines, and copiers				
Strategies for student behavior management				

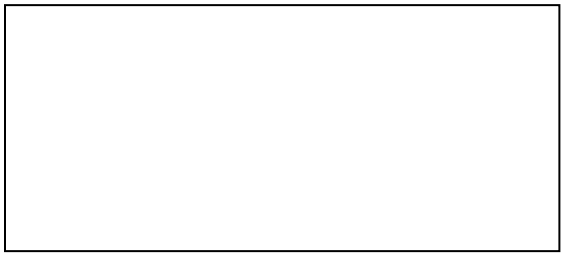
5. Please indicate which type(s) of formal training you received for the 2017–2018 school year to support your role as a classroom assistant? (Check all that apply)
    - Professional Development
    - Technology based learning
    - Coaching/Mentoring

- On-the-job Training
- Lectures
- None
- Other:

6b. Of the formal training you selected, which did you find most beneficial?

6. Please indicate which type(s) of informal training you have received for the 2017–2018 school year to support your role as a classroom assistant? (Check all that apply)
    - Learning from a colleague
    - Working in a team setting
    - Work analysis or self-reflection
    - Networking with others doing similar work
    - None
    - Other:
7. Of the informal training you selected, which did you find most beneficial?
8. Which of the following training formats would you be most likely to participate in? (Check all that apply)
    - Classroom training
    - Day long workshop-style event
    - Webinar presentations
    - Technology-based learning completed at your own timing
    - A combination of classroom and Technology-based learning
    - Other (Please specify)

9. Please specify any additional training needs related to working with special education students that you may have:



10. Please indicate if you are willing to participate in phase 2 (focus group) and 3 (Interview) of the study.
    - o Yes, I will be glad to
    - o No, Thank you

Appendix B: Survey Questions for Teachers

Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey today. Your honest responses are greatly appreciated!

This survey will be used to identify training needs for the special education department in your organization as well as identify current training practices already in place.

Screener

1. Before we begin, please identify your position within the organization:
    - Special Education Teacher
    - Special Education Assistant
    - Other:
2. How many years have you been in education?
    - 0–5
    - 6–10
    - 11–15
    - 16–20
    - 20–30
3. For even distribution of the study, please indicate your ethnic background:
    - White
    - Hispanic or Latino
    - Black or African American
    - Asian
    - Pacific Islander

- Other

4. Please indicate your gender

    - Male
    - Female

5. Based on your experience, please indicate the level of training needed for each item listed below:

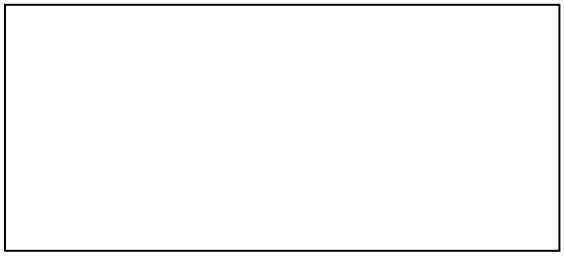
Analysis/Assessment checklist	No Training Needed	Low need for Training	High need for Training	Not Applicable to the Job
Team Communication /Functioning				
Supervision of classroom assistants				
How to best utilize classroom assistants				
How to utilize assistants with lesson planning				
Conflict management/resolution with classroom assistants				
Strategies for noncompliant classroom assistants				

6. Please indicate which type(s) of formal training you received for the 2017–2018 school year as it relates to working with classroom assistants? (Check all that apply)

    - Professional Development
    - Technology based learning
    - Coaching/Mentoring
    - On-the-job Training
    - Lectures
    - None
    - Other:

6b. Of the formal training you selected, which did you find most beneficial?

7. Please indicate which type(s) of informal training you have received for the 2017–2018 school year as it relates to working with classroom assistants? (Check all that apply)
    - o Learning from a colleague
    - o Working in a team setting
    - o Work analysis or self-reflection
    - o Networking with others doing similar work
    - o None
    - o Other:
8. Of the informal training you selected, which did you find most beneficial?
9. Which of the following training formats would you be most likely to participate in? (Check all that apply)
    - o Classroom training
    - o Day long workshop-style event
    - o Webinar presentations
    - o Technology-based learning completed at your own timing
    - o A combination of classroom and Technology-based learning
    - o Other (Please specify)
10. Please specify any additional training needs related to working with special education assistants that you may have:



11. Please indicate if you are willing to participate in phase 2 (focus group) and 3 (Interview) of the study.

    - Yes, I will be glad to
    - No, Thank you

Appendix C: Focus Group Session

Welcome

Good morning, my name is Carita Curry and I will be facilitating today's focus group. Welcome to this session. Thanks for taking the time to join me to talk about training initiatives for special education assistants. I am a special education teacher, conducting research in partial fulfillment for my Doctor of Education degree in transformational leadership through Concordia University–Portland. The focus of my research is to understand the perceived training needs and the actual training practices of your school as mandated by district standards for special education assistants. These assistants work alongside special education teachers in many supporting roles and responsibilities.

Current research shows special education assistants leaving the job at an alarming rate due to issues such as low pay, unclear job descriptions and the highest area of need and greatest concern is little-to-no training. I would like to gather data on what training programs are in place for your school, what programs need to be put in place, and how training initiatives might be improved. I am having this discussion like to gain a greater understanding of the phenomenon. The results from this research will be shared with my university and your district. However, on the interest of protecting participants and to ensure there are no harmful risk, names and any identifying data will be omitted.

You are invited because you have chosen to participate in this study.

Thank you for participating!

Guidelines

- No right or wrong answers, only differing points of view
- We're tape recording, one person speaking at a time
- We're on a first name basis
- You don't need to agree with others, but you must respectfully listen to others share their views
- I ask that you silence cellular phones and other devices as responses are being recorded as we want everyone's answer to be heard.
- My role as moderator will be to guide the discussion and take anecdotal notes while recording responses as well for increased validity.

Let's start by introducing ourselves, please state your name, your position and how long you have been in education: All answer

Discussion Questions:

1. At the start of this school year what training did you receive in preparation for your role? Was this training useful? What could have made it more beneficial?
2. Is the work that you perform synonymous with your job description and the training provided?
3. Do you feel adequately prepared for your role? If so, How? If not, please explain why?
4. For SEAs: What training do you think supervising teachers need to help them be more successful in their roles? Describe the training needs.
5. For Teachers: What training(s) do you feel SEAs need to help them be more successful in their roles? Describe the training needs.
6. Does your district utilize any of the training programs offered by the Texas Education Agency or [redacted] for training special education assistants?
7. For SEAs: How many times have you been involved in [redacted] trainings this year specific to your job description? Please identify the training session and what it was about and how it was beneficial to your job.
8. For Teachers: Considering teachers have a supervisory role over their assistants, what training, if any, have teachers in the room received any training on how to supervise or train their assistants?
9. For SEAs: Do you feel inadequately trained for the job? If yes, what resources do you use daily to execute a high level of success?
10. For Teachers: Have you in the past year, had a conversation with your campus administrator to create a specific list of duties for the SEAs in your classroom?
11. For Teachers: Have you received any forms for performance evaluations from your administrators to document your SEAs daily performance?
12. For SEAs: TEA has enacted some bylaws to ensure the proper use of SEAs. And according to (19 TAC §230.560) SEAs should never:
    - Develop lesson plans
    - Introduce new material/content
    - Provide the direct teach portion of the lesson
    - Select materials for implementation of the lesson
    - Assign final grades
    - Be responsible for any IEP-related responsibilities without supervision of a certified special educator
    - Develop IEP goals/objectives
    - Design the classroom management system;
    - Be responsible for determining or reporting student progress (general class progress or IEP-goal progress)

12b. Have you, in the last year, been solely responsible for any of the above referenced task? If yes, please expound.

Appendix D: Face-to-face Interview Questions (Member Checking)

Intro: Thank you for being willing to sit with me and share your experience concerning training initiatives for special education assistants in your school and how those experiences affect job performance and success rates.

My name is Carita Curry, and as you know I conducted this research on behalf of Concordia University in partial fulfillment for my Doctor of Education.

This final step involves semi structured interview questions designed to elicit your reaction to the final research product for member checking. The purpose of member checking an article in qualitative studies is to check for accuracy of the findings and help establish credibility.

The questions I will ask will help me to determine if I generated a report that is plausible and synonymous with your experience. Although this is a polished report, this is not final, and changes can be made if needed to reflect a more accurate experience. I will remove any identifying information per participant, however some quotes may be edited for the purposes of grammatical issues that take place during transcribing, but the participant's views and thoughts will be stated explicitly:

1. Have you received and had a chance to read the report "The Current Training Practices and Perceived Training Needs of Special Education Assistants in Texas?"

2. Does this report match your experience?

3. Would you like to change anything?

4. Finally, is there anything else you would like to add to the current study that has not been reported on already?

Thank you for your time and input!

Appendix E: Basic Consent Form

Research Study Title: The Current Training Practices and Perceived Training Needs of Special Education Assistants in Texas.
Principal Investigator: Carita Curry
Research Institution: Concordia University–Portland
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Mark Jimenez

Purpose and what you will be doing:
The purpose of this study will be to explore the perceived training needs of as well as the actual training practices of special education assistants (SEAs) as professed by special education teachers and their assistants. I expect approximately 15 volunteers to participate. There will be no monetary compensation or reward for participating in the study. I will begin enrollment on January 1, 2019 and end enrollment on March 1, 2019. To be in the study, you will need participate in three phases of data collection assessing your perceived training needs and actual training experience. The first step in to engage in a 10-question survey, after which you will be asked to participate in a focus group of 8 to 10 participants, and finally a face-to-face interview with the researcher. Doing these things should take no less than one week of your time.

Risks:
There are no risks to participating in this study other than providing your information. However, we will protect your information. Any personal information you provide will be coded so it cannot be linked to you. Any name or identifying information you give will be kept securely via electronic encryption or locked inside the Qualtrics Data collection program. When I look at the data, none of the data will have your name or identifying information. I will only use a secret code to analyze the data. I will not identify you in any publication or report. Your information will be kept private at all times and then all study documents will be destroyed 3 years after I conclude this study.

Benefits:
Information you provide will help training coordinators and administrations understand the actual training need for special education assistants and how we can best prepare them for the job. The goal is that in the future by adjusting and tailoring training practices to fit the needs of special education assistants and teachers we can make better use of their time and efforts.

Confidentiality:
This information will not be distributed to any other agency and will be kept private and confidential. The only exception to this is if you tell us abuse or neglect that makes us seriously concerned for your immediate health and safety.

Right to Withdraw:
Your participation is greatly appreciated, but I acknowledge that the questions I will be asking are personal in nature. You are free at any point to choose not to engage with or stop the study. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. This study is not required and there is no penalty for not participating. If at any time you experience a negative emotion from answering the questions, I will stop asking you questions.

Contact Information:
You will receive a copy of this consent form. If you have questions you can talk to or write the principal investigator, Carita Curry at [email redacted]. If you want to talk with a participant advocate other than the investigator, you can write or call the director of our institutional review board, Dr. Oralee Branch (email obranch@cu-portland.edu or call 503-493-6390).

Your Statement of Consent:
I have read the above information. I asked questions if I had them, and my questions were answered. I volunteer my consent for this study.

_____	_____
Participant Name	Date
_____	_____
Participant Signature	Date
_____	_____
Investigator Name	Date
_____	_____
Investigator Signature	Date

Investigator: Carita Curry email: [redacted]
c/o: Professor: Dr. Mark Jimenez
Concordia University–Portland
2811 NE Holman Street
Portland, Oregon 97221

Appendix F: Permission from Concordia University Institutional Review Board

DATE: December 7, 2018
TO: Carita Curry
FROM: Concordia University–Portland IRB (CU IRB)
PROJECT TITLE: [1311236-1] The Current Training Practices and Perceived Training Needs of Special Education Assistants in Texas.

REFERENCE #: EDD-20180908-Jimenez-Curry
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project
ACTION: APPROVED APPROVAL DATE: December 7, 2018
EXPIRATION DATE: October 30, 2019
REVIEW TYPE: Facilitated Review

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The Concordia University–Portland IRB (CU IRB) has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/ benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission. Attached is a stamped copy of the approved consent form. You must use this stamped consent form.

This submission has received Facilitated Review based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document. Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others (UPIRSOs) and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure.
All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

This project has been determined to be a Minimal Risk project. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with enough time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of October 30, 2019.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Amon Johnson at (503) 280-8127 or amjohnson@cuportland.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Concordia University–Portland IRB (CU IRB)'s records.

Appendix G: Permission from Washington State for needs assessment template

Megan Rogers [email redacted]
To: [email redacted]
Jun 29 at 6:47 PM

Hello Carita,

Thank you for your inquiry. The sample was from our 2013 Training Needs Assessment. You are more than welcome to use any of the items from the sample. Let me know if you are interested in seeing more from the 2013 instrument. We also did a training needs assessment in 2016 and modified the questions a little.

I will be out of the office July 3–12th, so please excuse my delay in responding.

Thanks,

Megan Rogers, MS, Evaluation Manager
Northwest Center for Public Health Practice
University of Washington School of Public Health

Appendix H: Statement of Original Work

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously- researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

Statement of academic integrity.

> As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

Explanations:

What does "fraudulent" mean?

> "Fraudulent" work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one's own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate's final work without full and complete documentation.

What is "unauthorized" assistance?

> "Unauthorized assistance" refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:
>
> - Use of unauthorized notes or another's work during an online test
> - Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
> - Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
> - Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.

Statement of Original Work (continued)

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University–Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.

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August 12, 2019

Date