PERSPECTIVE AND EXPERIENCES OF SPECIAL EDUCATION ALTERNATIVE ROUTE TEACHERS WORKING IN CULTURALLY LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE CLASSROOMS

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A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in Curriculum and Instruction

Northern Arizona University

May 2023

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ABSTRACT

PERSPECTIVE AND EXPERIENCES OF SPECIAL EDUCATION ALTERNATIVE ROUTE TEACHERS WORKING IN CULTURALLY LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE CLASSROOMS

William P. A. Terrill

This research investigated the teaching experiences of alternative route special education teachers working in urban Title I schools with a high population of students from a culturally and linguistically diverse background. Five alternative route special education teachers along with five school-based administrators who supervise ARL special education teachers who work in Title I schools within a large urban school district located in the southwestern portion of the United States were interviewed. Data were collected in the form of a semi-structured, six-question interview. Phenomenology was used, along with narrative analysis and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), to analyze the data collected from the responses given during the interviews. Answers from the interviews were coded and categorized based on themes that emerged from the responses, which showed that ARL special education teachers felt supported by their school-based administrators, however they did not feel like they were prepared to teach when starting their career. School-based administrators reported that ARL teachers lacked pedagogy, however they did not feel that the route taken made on impact on student achievement. Common themes between participant groups showed that there was a need for more support and more hands-on experience.

Keywords: Alternative Route teachers, special education, culturally and linguistically diverse

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Dedication

First and foremost, I want to thank my mom, Vicki Terrill, for being there with me for the past 35 years. I know these last 5 were not fun for you, but it is over now, and you never have to hear me talk about my dissertation or ARL special education teachers ever again. Thank you for all the love and support you have given me. I would not be here without you.

Second, I would like to thank my uncle, Leo Michael Terrill (Mike), who is not here to celebrate with me. Without him I would not have known about this grant, nor would I have had the opportunity to be here today. Sometimes it is luck and sometimes it is fate that gets you to your dream; luckily Mike had a little bit of both the day he found out about this grant.

Third, to all my family in Arizona and Florida, thank you so much for all the love, help, support, and time you gave me. Now you never have to ask, "How is your dissertation coming?" because it is over! Without you guys behind me I know I would have never made it across the finish line, so thank you so much for everything.

Fourth, all my Las Vegas friends, you are so special to me. All the movie nights with Billy, all the baseball trips with David, all the Sunday Night football watch parties with Amy. You guys are the best and gave me an escape that I needed. Thank you for listening to me and supporting me all along the way.

I would say more about all of you and drag on and on about how much you all mean to me, but I wrote over 150 pages in this thing, and I am done writing. Know I love you and appreciate you for all you are. Thank you is not enough but it is all I've got for now.

Finally, my dissertation committee. Without you all I would not be able to call myself Dr. Terrill. Dr. Peterson, your leadership on this committee and at NAU is unmatched. You have provided so many people with an opportunity to further their careers and better their lives. You

are an amazing person and NAU is lucky to have you. Dr. Markel, thank you so much for your insight, wisdom, support, and kind words. You were always there to guide me and make sure my message was clear. Thank you! Dr. Tu, you are so smart and so knowledgeable. Thank you so much for helping me, giving me guidance, and always putting me on your research projects. I appreciate you so much! Dr. Powell, you were always so easy to work with and gave such great suggestions and provided so much insight. I know my paper is better because of all that you all have done. Thank you so much.

Again, if I forgot anyone, I am sorry, but I have written a lot over the past few years, and I think I am done for now. Thank you. Love you.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This research examined the experiences, perceptions, and challenges of special education teachers who have taken an alternative route to licensure and work in a special education setting in a school with a high population of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Particularly, this research was interested in knowing if the perceptions of individuals who obtain alternative licensures and work in a special education setting were seen as an asset or burden to the school, which supports students from culturally, linguistically, and diverse backgrounds.

Statement of the Problem

Classrooms in school districts across the nation are experiencing teacher vacancies due to a national shortage of teachers (Sutcher, 2019). An example of this teacher shortage was seen in one of the largest school districts in the nation, which employs around 16,000 teachers to provide educational services to students (Clark County School District, 2021). At the start of the 2021-2022 school year, the district reported a shortage of 631 teachers, meaning that students in these 631 classrooms would not have a full-time licensed teacher at the start of the school year (DeLancey, 2021). Depending on the school and classroom setting for the missing teachers, this vacancy impacted at least 20 (elementary) to more than 200 (middle or high school) students daily. This is just one real-life example involving the impact that the nation's teacher shortage has on students in one school district, but it is far too common for students across the nation, specifically students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

To combat the issue of vacant teaching positions due to the national teacher shortage, school districts and state boards of education have implemented different programs to attract individuals to work in classrooms. Individual schools will sometimes hire a long-term substitute

teacher to fill the vacant teaching position until the school can hire a full-time licensed professional (Henry & Redding, 2020). Other times, schools will have a rotation of daily substitute teachers fill in for a day or two while the school continues to search for a licensed professional. Another option for schools involves hiring an alternate route to licensure (ARL) teacher to fill the vacant teaching position. An ARL teacher is a fully licensed (e.g., has a state teaching license) professional who did not earn a degree in education. ARL teachers still have a state teaching license; however, they have earned a degree in a field or major other than education (Baeten & Meeus, 2016). This option is more optimal for schools compared to hiring a long-term substitute or relying on daily substitutes because ARL teachers have a full teaching license from the state, they can be hired at the start of the school year, and they can stay in that position for the entire school year (Bowling & Ball, 2018).

Rather than having a rotation of daily or long-term substitute teachers, schools can hire ARL teachers and students can have an alternatively licensed teacher in their classroom every day. ARL teachers still have the same job duties and responsibilities as traditionally trained teachers, meaning that they are responsible for lesson planning, whole group and small group instruction, and assessing (through progress monitoring and summative assessments) the students in their classroom. Although ARL teachers may not have had the same training through prior experience, educational background through courses taken, and pedagogy compared to their traditional route peers, they still have the same classroom responsibilities as their traditional route peers. School-based administrators may like ARL teachers being in their classrooms because they fill a vacant position with a licensed professional; however, some school-based administrators may be more apprehensive when hiring an ARL teacher due to their perceived lack of preparation compared to traditional route teachers (Bowling & Ball, 2018).

Alternative Route to Licensure (ARL) Teachers

As stated in the previous section, ARL teachers are licensed professionals who do not have a degree in education but rather they have earned a degree in another subject outside of education (Baeten & Meeus, 2016). They did not take a traditional route in the field of education (e.g., earn a 4-year degree in education with a practicum and student teaching) in order to receive their teaching license, but rather are given a provisional (alternative) license from the state board of education in order to teach (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Conditions within the provisional license stipulate that the ARL teacher must complete a certain amount of course credits within the field of education within 3 years to earn their full teaching license. Usually, this means that the ARL teacher will earn a master's degree in education based on the coursework needed to earn their full teaching license. Universities will often work with local school districts and state departments of education to provide the ARL teachers the coursework needed to complete the stipulations within the provisional (alternative) license. States are often granted autonomy to define their own criteria for ARL teacher requirements through the passage of Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015.

ARL teachers are at a disadvantage when compared to traditional route teachers due to their lack of classroom experience and preparation. According to LoCascio et al. (2016), many ARL teachers are not given the appropriate induction programs as outlined by the state guidelines. Boyd, Lankford et al. (2008) have also reported that ARL teachers have less classroom experience compared to their traditional route peers, meaning that ARL teachers had fewer opportunities to practice implementing different teaching and behavioral strategies with students compared to their traditional route peers before they enter the classroom. This means that if ARL teachers are not given the appropriate training within their first year of teaching, they

may not have the skills needed to work with all students, including those from a CLD background (Boyd, Lankford et al., 2008). This lack of training may have a negative impact on the academic and behavioral progress of the students they work with as well as a negative impact on their feeling of teacher efficacy (LoCascio et al., 2016).

Many school districts have teacher shortages, but certain schools are impacted more so than others. Students in lower socioeconomic status (SES) schools (Title 1 schools) are left with vacant teacher positions at a higher rate compared to schools with a higher SES (García & Weiss, 2019). This means that lower SES schools may have more ARL teachers due to the higher number of vacant teaching positions at the school. The greater amount of ARL teachers in lower SES schools can be related to the higher rates of teacher attrition (teacher turnover) when Title 1 (lower SES) schools are compared to higher SES schools, which leads to a greater amount of teacher vacancies and the need for more ARL teachers in order to fill these vacancies (DeAngelis et al., 2013; Lambert, 2018).

Based on the findings from García and Weiss (2019), ARL teachers account for just over 13% of the teachers working in low poverty schools compared to accounting for close to 19% of the teachers working in high poverty schools. Although the ARL teacher is a consistent licensed teacher in the classroom, compared to a long-term substitute or a rotation of daily substitutes, the ARL teacher would nevertheless have less teaching experience compared to a typical traditional route licensed staff member (García & Weiss, 2019).

Ingersoll and Merrill (2010) also found that schools in lower SES urban areas with a high population of students from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds had higher rates of teacher attrition compared to schools in higher SES areas with lower rates of students from CLD backgrounds. Not only do low SES–high poverty schools have a higher rate of teacher

attrition, but they also have a higher rate of teacher turnover compared to their high SES–low poverty peers (Chiang et al., 2017). Podolsky et al. (2016) have reported that schools that are identified as high poverty schools experience a teacher turnover rate 55% higher than schools that were identified as low poverty schools. This means that for every one teacher who left a lower poverty school, two or more teachers would have left a higher poverty school. Boyd et al. (2012) and Chiang et al. (2017) have all reported that ARL teachers are more likely to work in schools located in an urban setting due to the higher amounts of teacher attrition rates found in these schools with higher rates of poverty and in lower SES areas. Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) reported that special education teachers were 46% more likely to leave their current teaching position when compared to their general education teaching peers.

According to Ronfeldt et al. (2013) and Ramos and Hughes (2020), teacher attrition has a negative impact on student achievement, meaning that students who are at schools where there is a high rate of teacher turnover score lower on high-stakes assessments and do not pass their classes at the same rate when compared to peers in schools with a lower rate of teacher turnover. Klakamp (2004) along with Ramos and Hughes (2020) found that teacher attrition had a more negative impact on students located in a lower socioeconomic status (SES) school setting when compared to higher socioeconomic schools. This negative impact on overall student achievement in both high-stakes assessments and passing courses for students who qualify for special education services was due to a disruption in the collaborative relationship between the general education and special education teacher, because one or both teachers left the school (Ronfeldt et al., 2013). This means that students who qualify for special education services in a low SES school located in an urban area will have a higher chance of having an ARL teacher due to a vacant teaching position caused by teacher attrition or teacher turnover compared to their peers

in a higher SES school in an urban setting. This also means that the student may have a new general education teacher as well, meaning that the ARL special education teacher and general education teacher will have no experience working together prior to the start of the upcoming school year.

High poverty schools, categorized as Title I schools, had a lower rate of experienced teachers overall when compared to their low poverty counterparts as well (García & Weiss, 2019). This lack of experience had a negative impact on the students and their overall achievement scores on high-stakes testing (Boyd et al., 2008a; Wolff et al., 2016). Additional studies came to the same conclusion—that teacher experience (the amount of time the teacher has been in the classroom) made an impact on overall student performance when working on high-stakes assessments (Wiswall, 2013; Papay & Kraft, 2015; Ladd & Sorenson, 2017). ARL teachers have little to no experience when walking into the classroom on their first day of teaching because they have a degree in a field other than education, and not every ARL program offers hands-on training (e.g., experience in the classroom prior to the start of the school year).

The lower scores on these high-stakes tests impacts the yearly evaluation that the teacher is given, but it can also impact the overall feeling of teacher efficacy that the ARL teacher has within themselves, causing them to leave the teaching profession earlier compared to their traditional route peers (Boyd et al., 2008a). Lack of student achievement (showing growth, passing high-stakes assessments) as a result of a lack of experience from ARL teachers can have a negative effect on the ARL teacher, the students, and the school, since it caused the ARL teacher to leave which in turn would create another vacant teaching position.

Perception from Administration

ARL teachers also have challenges adapting to the pace and high rigor (standards-based instruction) associated with teaching that can negatively impact how their administration views them. In their research, Casey et al. (2011) found that ARL teachers struggled with adapting to the teaching profession in the areas of time management including lesson planning and differentiating lessons for all students, teaching strategies, and implementing classroom management and behavior strategies in their classroom. Many times, the administration must provide different structural support (expectations of the school, involving parents, providing a mentor, understanding the different cultures within the school setting) to these ARL special education teachers in order to offset the structural challenges that they are experiencing (Casey et al., 2011). Brenner et al. (2015) also reported that administrators stated that ARL teachers require additional mentoring and support compared to traditional route teachers during their first year of teaching.

Administrators often felt that ARL teachers are not as prepared in subject matter and lack the same subject matter knowledge that traditional route teachers have (Moffett & Davis, 2014). Along with a lack of subject matter knowledge, administrators reported a concern regarding ARL teachers and their lack of classroom management skills compared to traditional route teachers (Brenner et al., 2015; Brown et al., 2006; Moffett & Davis, 2014). Brown et al. (2006) reported that principals ranked ARL teachers as inadequate compared to traditional route teachers who the same principals ranked as adequate. In a study from Moffett & Davis (2014), principals reported that the licensure route (traditional versus alternative) was one of the most important factors when hiring new teachers.

Previous research has shown that administrators may believe that ARL teachers are not as committed to the teaching profession when compared to their traditional route peers. Gottfried and Straubhaar (2015) conducted research involving a group of teachers from Teach for America (TFA), an alternative route teaching program that targets individuals that are high performing in college (e.g., high GPA students at private school). Their research found that 57% of the 30 participants who were TFA teachers saw teaching as a short-term job rather than a career. Less than half of the participants (47%) stayed in the teaching field after their 2-year commitment. This means that nearly half of all TFA teachers will leave the teaching field within the first 2 years of teaching. Administrators may have had previous experience with ARL teachers who have left the field of teaching after a short amount of time and may be more apprehensive about hiring another ARL teacher because of this negative experience.

There is research showing that administrators have a negative perception regarding ARL teachers compared to traditional route teachers, but there is also research that finds the opposite is true. Beare et al. (2012) reported that principals did not feel that licensure preparation (traditional route or alternative route) made an impact on teachers being adequately prepared. Even with the mixed research involving administrative perceptions regarding ARL special education teachers, administrative perceptions can impact the ARL teacher and their desire to stay in the teaching profession (Casey et al., 2011).

Objective

This research was interested in seeing what factors from administration, the school district, and other members in the school community contributed to the special education ARL teacher staying in the profession and what factors contributed to the special education ARL teacher leaving the field. Administrators who work with special education ARL teachers are also

included as participants to see what challenges are associated with having an ARL teacher in their building, and in what ways the school administration supports these teachers.

Research Questions

RQ1: What are the real-life experiences of special education teachers working in Title I schools with a high population of students from a culturally and linguistically diverse background who take an alternative route to licensure?

RQ2: What are the perceptions from school-based administrators of alternative route special education teachers working in Title I schools with a high population of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds?

Theoretical Framework

This research took a qualitative approach in order to answer these research questions, specifically using the approach of a narrative analysis. According to Connelly and Clandinin (1990), narrative analysis is useful in conducting research in education because experiential data are collected from the participants. The experiential data were given through social stories that explained how the participant viewed the world and education as a whole and shed a deeper light on their experiences compared to using quantitative research methods. Participants had the opportunity to share their experiences and their stories in a deeper way as compared to filling out a Likert scale regarding their experiences working as an ARL special education teacher (Bruner, 1986). Narrative analysis helped participants explain complex ideas through their experience of being an ARL special education teacher working in a Title I school (Herman & Vervaeck, 2019; Webster & Mertova, 2007).

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

This research investigated two different pathways that special education teachers have taken in their quest to become certified special education teachers: the traditional route, or the alternative route to licensure. This chapter discusses the current literature describing these pathways and their impact on teachers.

Traditional Route Pathways

Traditional route pathways work with state and local education boards in order to prepare pre-service teachers to earn a teaching license and work within state and local school districts. More than 2,200 colleges or universities offer traditional route teacher licensure programs (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2022). Many of these schools (891) offer a special education degree program (either undergraduate or graduate) as well (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2022). Traditional route programs are 2 to 4 years in duration and are defined as programs given through an accredited university or college (public or private). These programs emphasize courses in child development, teaching methodology related to the grade level taught (e.g., elementary or secondary), and pedagogy, which are required by the state departments of education prior to the pre-service teacher being able to earn a teaching license in order to be hired for a teaching position within the state (Fraser, 2007; U.S. Department of Education, 2004; Van Overschelde, & Wiggins, 2020).

One essential component associated with traditional route certification is the inclusion of student teaching, where the pre-service teacher works in an actual classroom setting for one full semester (12–14 weeks). During this time, the pre-service teacher works with their mentor teacher in order to gain exposure to real-life classroom settings. The mentor teacher will use a gradual release model when working with the pre-service teacher, meaning that the pre-service

teacher will not take over the class the first day of their student teaching. They will take time to observe the class, observe what the teacher is doing in the classroom, lesson plan with the teacher, collect student data with the teacher, and then eventually take over as the teacher in the classroom. The student teaching process will last around one full semester and is traditionally the last semester of the degree program (West & Frey-Clark, 2019).

Teacher Retention

Teacher retention is a major issue facing the field of education. According to a report conducted by Brandman University (2020), 8% of teachers leave the field of education on an annual basis. Additionally, 8% of teachers change schools on an annual basis, meaning that on average 16% of the teachers in any school district need to be replaced annually. Individual school districts have conducted research about teacher retention in their own school districts. One large urban school district located in the northeastern portion of the United States reported that from 2010 through 2017, 8% of teachers left the district annually and 25% of teachers left their schools on an annual basis. Over the course of a study by the U.S. Department of Education (2020), 77% of teachers left the school they were originally teaching at, and 45% left the district altogether.

Another report conducted by a large urban school district located in the southwestern United States found that 12% of first-year teachers left the district after their first year of teaching (Clark County School District, 2021). There were currently 16,490 teachers in this large district and if 8% leave every year, that means 1,319 teachers are hired every single year (first-year teachers) and 12% of these teachers leave annually (158), meaning that every year this large urban school district must hire at least 1,477 teachers in order to have a teacher in every single classroom.

Many times, students with the highest needs are the ones who feel the biggest impact due to the lack of teachers. According to a report conducted by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), schools with a high level of poverty have the highest amount of teacher turnover rates (NCES, 2015). In their report, the NCES found that 12% of teachers in high poverty areas moved schools annually, and that 10% of teachers in high poverty areas would leave the teaching profession altogether every year (NCES, 2015). These numbers are higher than the 6% of teachers located in low poverty areas that move or leave annually. This means that students in schools in areas with low socioeconomic status (SES), have the most under-qualified teachers, resulting in lower test scores, higher incidents of behavioral issues, and a revolving door of teacher turnover. Many times, schools in lower SES areas have a high population of students from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds. The high poverty, low SES, and high teacher turnover rates continue to contribute to a disproportionate education model that impacts students from a CLD background at a higher rate than their high SES peers.

In more recent research, Sutcher et al. (2019) found that SES schools had higher rates of teacher attrition compared to their higher socioeconomic status peers. These schools thus had higher rates of teacher vacancies compared to their higher SES peers. Sutcher et al. (2019) went on to add that SES was one of the major factors that contributed to teacher attrition and teacher retention. Schools in higher SES areas held on to their teachers for a longer period than their lower SES peers, resulting in a more experienced staff, and students and families built stronger relationships when compared to lower SES schools (Sutcher et al., 2019).

Teacher Shortages

Research from 2015 revealed an increasing amount of teacher shortages across the country every year (Sutcher et al., 2019). Schools and districts located in urban areas are more likely to experience a shortage of teachers, and according to Youn (2018) this teacher shortage impacts schools in lower SES areas more than schools in higher SES areas. Students in schools in lower SES areas thus have a higher chance of not having a teacher in their classroom compared to their peers in higher SES schools. This lack of teachers is seen not just in the classroom for students, but in universities and teacher preparation programs as well.

Over the past 10 years, enrollment in traditional route teacher licensure programs has dropped by a third (Akhtar, 2020). This decrease in teacher preparation programs has impacted 40,000 potential teachers over the course of the past 10 years (Akhtar, 2020). According to a survey conducted by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 19% of undergraduate teacher preparation programs and 11% of graduate level programs saw a decrease in student enrollment over the last year (Goldberg, 2021). This decrease in students enrolled in teacher preparation programs is not a single-year occurrence, as enrollment within teacher preparation programs has been decreasing over the past 10 years (Akhtar, 2020).

According to a recent survey conducted by the National Education Association (NEA), more than 50% of current teachers are considering leaving the teaching profession early. At the start of the 2020-2021 school year, there was a reported shortage of 307,000 teachers (Akhtar, 2020). Couple this shortage with the reduction of students enrolled in teacher preparation programs and an increase of teachers wanting to leave the profession early, and states will experience many teacher vacancies in the upcoming school years. One solution to these vacancies is to hire daily substitute teachers to fill the vacant positions on a short-term basis.

Another solution would be to hire a long-term substitute in order to fill the vacant position for a longer period (e.g., months). Another solution administrators have is to hire alternatively certified teachers in order to fill the vacant position for the entire school year.

Alternative Route to Licensure

Alternative route to licensure (ARL) is a pathway to teaching where states offer a teaching license to individuals who did not earn an undergraduate degree in the area of education. Johnson et al. (2005) found that ARL programs are designed to recruit individuals who want to teach in order to help fill vacancies associated with teacher shortages in high-need areas, including English Language Arts (ELA), science, math, and special education. These programs are usually quicker compared to traditional route programs, which can take multiple years to complete (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Criteria associated with obtaining an alternative license may vary from state to state, but all states require ARL teachers to have earned a bachelor's degree (although not in education) and pass a state test (e.g., Praxis I), a content knowledge test (Praxis II), and a background check in order to earn their alternative license (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The National Center for Educational Statistics (2018) reported that during the 2015-2016 school year, 18% of teachers working (close to 676,000) had earned a license through an alternative route. More recent research shows that nearly one of every five teachers currently working (close to 20% of all teachers) earned their teaching license through an alternative route program (McFarland et al., 2018).

Additional research from the U.S. Department of education found that close to 20% of all special education teachers who were hired were considered ARL (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). This same report stated that high schools were more likely to hire ARL teachers when compared to middle and elementary school; 25% of teachers hired in high schools were from an

ARL program, compared to 20% which was the combined percentage of both middle and elementary schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Additionally, charter schools hired ARL teachers at a rate 8% higher compared to public schools (17% for public schools and 25% for charter schools; U.S. Department of Education, 2018).

Research involving ARL teachers has shown that these programs often increase the number of teachers who come from culturally diverse backgrounds (Villegas & Lucas, 2004). The National Center for Educational Statistics reported the same diversity within ARL teachers in their National Household Education Survey, conducted in 2015-2016. That report found higher rates of individuals who identify as African American (13%), Hispanic (15%), and male (32%) participating in ARL programs as compared to traditional route programs which consisted of mostly white individuals (Billingsley et al., 2017).

Another advantage of having ARL teachers is that they are considered experts in specific content areas (Bowen et al., 2019; Stoddart & Floden, 1995). Individuals in the ARL program have earned a degree in their respective content area (e.g., the individual earned an undergraduate degree in the area of math), however they do not have the same pedagogy and methods coursework that a traditional route teacher would have taken while earning their undergraduate degree. Boyd et al. (2008b) found that ARL teachers working in New York City public schools were more likely to work in the high-needs content areas of math and science, and they were more likely to work with students who were classified as marginalized (e.g., come from a lower socioeconomic status, are culturally and linguistically diverse, or who qualify for special education services).

Many times, the ARL teacher candidate had time to complete the requirements needed in order to earn a full teaching license. For example, in the state of Nevada, ARL teachers are given

3 years to complete the college coursework and additional state mandated tests needed to earn a full teaching license (Nevada Department of Education, 2022). During the 3 years, ARL teachers continued to work in classrooms and earned pay through their school district. ARL teachers must fulfill the requirements associated with their role and responsibilities as teachers and were given the same evaluation as their traditional route peers (e.g., lesson planning, holding IEP meetings, parent conferences). The basis of the ARL program is that individuals have experience working in a field other than education, so they can earn "on the job" training rather than having to participate in a pre-service teacher training program such as practicum and student teaching (Denton, 2022; Walsh & Jacobs, 2007). ARL teachers are given evaluations regarding their instructional practices from their school-based administrators as well as their district level mentor. ARL teachers often receive little to no training from the school district or university prior to starting in the classroom and may be considered less prepared for teaching compared to traditional route teachers (DeMonte, 2016).

Preparedness of ARL Teachers

Previous research had been conducted involving ARL teachers and their reported levels of preparedness prior to entering the classroom. According to multiple studies, ARL teachers did not feel prepared when entering their first day in the classroom (Redding & Smith, 2016; Zhang & Zeller, 2016). This lack of preparation was seen in academic areas, such as literacy (Lewis-Spector, 2016) and classroom management (Brenner et al., 2015). Flower et al. (2017) reported that only 58% of ARL teachers had some form of training in behavior management strategies (coursework and/or hands-on experience) prior to entering the classroom. This was fewer than the 89% of traditional route teachers who had reported some form of training in behavior strategies prior to starting their work in the classroom.

According to another research study conducted by Blazer and Miami-Dade County Public Schools (2012), only 50% of the participants who were from ARL programs reported that they were prepared to teach during their first year of teaching. This reported number was lower than the reported number for traditionally trained teachers (80%). The study went on to add that 74% of ARL teachers felt confident that their students were learning based on the instruction they provided to them. Again, this reported percentage was lower than the percentage of traditional trained teachers, of whom 94% stated that they were confident that their students were learning.

Although traditional route teachers had more prior experience working with students and learning how to support the learning needs of students in their classrooms, traditional route teachers still struggled with different instructional strategies during their first year of teaching. These instructional strategies range from the content (what to teach), the pace at which to teach, and provision of strategies to students for them to perform well on their high-stakes assessments (Kardos & Johnson, 2008; Moffett & Davis, 2014). Traditional route teachers did have an advantage over ARL teachers because they had more experience (through their pre-service training) and theoretical knowledge (from their coursework) than did ARL teachers (Hines, 2017).

Initial placement may also impact the overall feeling of preparation that ARL teachers have. According to the research ARL teachers were often placed in high-needs areas, meaning they are put into Title I schools in an area that would be considered lower socioeconomic status (Hohnstein, 2017; Zhang & Zeller, 2016). This placement was due to the higher number of teacher vacancies and teacher turnover rates in these schools (Podolsky et al., 2016). Based on the location in which the ARL teacher was placed, the lack of exposure the ARL teacher had in

the area of teaching strategies involving literacy prior to starting in the classroom, and the lack of exposure to behavior strategies that the ARL teacher had prior to entering the classroom, students who had an ARL teacher do not have the same level of achievement compared to their peers with a traditional route teacher (Lewis-Spector, 2016).

School-based Administration Perception of ARL Teacher Preparation

Lack of preparation was reported not only by ARL teachers, but by administrators who work with ARL teachers as well. In their study, Moffett & Davis (2014) reported that principals and administrators felt that traditionally trained teachers were more prepared to teach and had higher level of content area knowledge when compared to ARL teachers. This same study reported that the route taken to teaching (traditional over alternative) was one of the most important factors for principals when they were hiring new teachers (Moffett & Davis, 2014). Principals also reported that traditionally trained teachers had higher levels of proficiency when implementing classroom management strategies and dealing with behavior when compared to ARL teachers (Brenner et al., 2015; Brown et al., 2006; Moffett & Davis, 2014). Other administrators reported that the ARL program itself lacks the same rigor (high standards for induction into the program) associated with traditional routes (Oghenekohwo & Frank-Oputu, 2017).

Some administrators reported that the ARL program has low expectations for those whom they allow into the program, resulting in teachers with low expectations entering the workforce (Brenner et al., 2015). This lack of perceived preparation along with lower scores on high-stakes assessments from students who have an ARL teacher have made a negative impact on the perception that administrators have when working with and potentially hiring ARL teachers.

Preparation Programs

One study conducted by Boyd et al. (2008b) found that most of the information given out in ARL programs was similar, if not the same, as traditional routes. This means that traditional route and ARL teachers learned the exact same methods, pedagogy, and strategies in order to support the learning of all students. A similar study conducted by Walsh and Jacobs (2007) came to the same conclusion, however the study by Walsh and Jacobs was conducted over 50 states whereas the Boyd et al. (2008b) study was conducted only in New York. Ronfeldt et al. (2014) found that although ARL teachers had taken the same amount of coursework as traditional route teachers, ARL teachers still had a lack of experience in implementing that material in the classroom. This is one disadvantage involving ARL teachers compared to traditional route teachers. Traditional route teachers have multiple opportunities to implement the material they have learned during their coursework with a mentor teacher giving them feedback during their practicum and student teaching. ARL teachers have to implement the material they learn in their coursework with no mentor supporting them, or limited mentorship provided by the school or district. This lack of experience and effective mentoring has contributed to the administrators' perceived lack of preparation on the part of ARL teachers.

ARL Teachers and Student Achievement

Goldhaber & Walch (2014) reported that one of the main factors that impacts student performance was the quality of the teacher, meaning that high-quality teachers can help increase overall student performance at a higher rate compared to low-quality teachers. Libman (2012) also reported that teacher quality was the most important variable that impacts closing learning gaps and improving student achievement. Low-quality and under-prepared teachers have a

negative impact on student performance, meaning that an unprepared teacher negatively impacts student performance (Feistritzer & Haar, 2008).

In their study, Heilig et al. (2011) reported that teacher certification had an impact on overall student achievement (passing courses and performance on high-stakes assessments). Their study found that traditionally certified teachers had students with higher achievement compared to teachers who were in an ARL program. Qu and Becker (2003) reported that students who had an ARL teacher who was in their first year of teaching performed lower compared to students who had a traditional route teacher who was in their first year of teaching. Easton-Brooks and Davis (2009) reported that students who had a teacher with an alternative license made smaller learning gains compared to their peers with a traditional route teacher, no matter the years of experience that the teacher had. Darling-Hammond (2007) also reported that ARL teachers had a negative impact on overall student achievement. Curry et al. (2018) found that teachers who were traditionally trained had students with higher scores specifically in the area of reading.

ARL and Special Education Student Performance

Research was mixed regarding student achievement for students who qualify for special education services who work with ARL teachers. Tournaki et al. (2009) found that there was no difference in student achievement when comparing ARL teachers to traditional route teachers. Kane et al. (2008) also found that there was no difference in student achievement when looking at a specific ARL program located in the large urban setting of New York City (Teaching Fellows') when compared to traditional route teachers. Glazerman et al. (2006) conducted research investigating student achievement with teachers from Teach for America (TFA), a nationwide ARL program that targets teacher vacancies in large urban areas. They found that

TFA teachers had a positive impact on student achievement scores in the area of math, yet these same teachers had little to no impact on student reading scores. Xu et al. (2011) also found that TFA teachers had a positive impact (13% of a standard deviation) when looking at all subjects taught.

On the other hand, Laczko-Kerr and Berliner (2003) found that students who work with teachers who had no coursework in education scored lower on their standardized achievement test. The difference in scores translated to around 2 months of greater academic growth in students who worked with a traditionally certified teacher compared to an ARL teacher. ARL teachers had a more negative impact on student achievement in relation to the attrition rate of ARL teachers compared to traditionally certified teachers.

Darling-Hammond (2003) found that ARL teachers left the teaching profession at a higher rate than traditional route teachers in several states (California, Massachusetts, and Texas). Henke et al. (2000) also found that teacher attrition rates for ARL teachers was almost twice that of traditionally certified teachers (29% for ARL teachers compared to 15% for traditional route teachers). As stated previously, a high rate of teacher attrition has a negative impact on student achievement (Klakamp, 2004), meaning that the attrition of ARL teachers from urban schools has a greater negative impact on learners compared to their traditional route peers.

Student Achievement and Administration

Student achievement was an important factor to consider when talking about ARL teachers and the perceptions of school-based administration because performance on high-stakes tests impacts teacher evaluations and overall school ranking (Goldhaber & Walch, 2014). Laws such as No Child Left Behind (2002) and later Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) have stressed

the importance of high-stakes assessment in order to show student achievement as a means of teacher effectiveness. Teachers with lower student performance had lower evaluations and made a negative impact on the school ranking.

Doran (2020) reported that lack of student achievement contributed to higher rates of teacher attrition and teacher turnover, so that if students did not show they had achieved on their high-stakes assessment, teachers were more likely to leave. The administration then has to hire a new traditional teacher or another ARL teacher. The lack of preparation and content knowledge from ARL teachers impacted their ability to have students pass or make gains on the high-stakes assessment, resulting in lower evaluation scores and potentially impacting the likelihood of the ARL teacher staying in the teaching profession (Boyd et al., 2008b; Wolff et al., 2016). This constant turnover as a result of lack of student achievement negatively impacts school-based administrators' decisions to hire ARL teachers.

ARL Teacher Retention

Teacher retention was discussed in a previous section within this literature review. As mentioned, current trends have shown that 8% of teachers leave the teaching profession on an annual basis (Brandman University, 2020). According to García and Weiss (2019), teachers who are ARL leave the teaching profession at a higher rate compared to their traditional route peers. One reason to explain this discrepancy was that ARL teachers were usually placed in lower SES schools compared to their traditional route peers, and according to the same article from García and Weiss (2019), teachers who worked in lower SES schools left at a higher rate compared to their higher SES peers. Another reason was that their students did not have high achievement compared to their traditional route peers (Lewis-Spector, 2016). A final reason was that ARL teachers had lower levels of teacher efficacy compared to their traditional route peers which

resulted in them not implementing new teaching strategies to support the learning needs of all students (Muller et al., 2006).

These factors contributed to ARL teachers leaving the profession early and contributing further to the national teacher shortage, rather than being a solution. The higher rate of attrition led to school-based administration not wanting to hire an ARL teacher because they will have to replace them sooner compared to a traditional route teacher.

Current Research Involving ARL Special Education Teachers

Most of the research involving ARL teachers discusses the cost of the programs, gives an overview of the programs themselves, or deals with all ARL teachers. The findings from this research adds to the current literature regarding ARL teachers as well as expanding on the literature involving ARL special education teachers.

This research also specifically focused on ARL teachers working with students from a CLD population. As stated in previous sections, low SES–high poverty schools had the highest rates of teacher attrition and had the highest number of teacher vacancies. This means that these schools were more likely to have ARL teachers in their building. Many times, CLD students who qualify for special education were not considered when research was conducted, so it is important to look at the teachers who work with these students. This research helped to see what the experience of these teachers was, what training they received specifically involving supporting the learning of students from a CLD background, and how administrators viewed their work with students from a CLD background. Results f will help districts and schools develop ARL programs that specifically address the needs of students from a CLD background.

This research also adds to the current research regarding administrative perceptions of ARL special education teachers. This study was unique because both ARL teachers and

supervising school-based administrators were interviewed. Information from school-based administrators can be used to support the induction programs and training that ARL teachers are provided by the school district. The information given by the school-based administrators will help to support areas where ARL teachers do not have training when they are coming into school for their first day of teaching. This information will be helpful for all stakeholders (ARL teachers, ARL mentors, school district, and school-based administrators) based on current research involving school-based administrators' perceptions regarding the preparation of ARL special education teachers. If ARL preparation programs (e.g., district-run programs) have information based on the real-life experiences of school-based administrators regarding their perception of ARL special education teachers, the programs can adapt their instruction to meet the needs of schools in their district.

This research aimed to add more information regarding the current experience of ARL special education teachers and the current perception of ARL special education teachers from school-based administrators. Current research is available regarding the experience of ARL special education teachers as well as the perceptions of ARL teachers from school-based administrators, however limited research has included both groups as participants in a research study. This project included both groups in order to have a clear understanding of the experiences of ARL special education teachers who work in a large urban school district as well as the perceptions of these teachers from school-based administrators.

This area of research was needed because of the increased number of ARL teachers that have come into the field of education over the past years. Based on current teacher vacancies and teacher shortages, school-based administrators need to know how to support the needs of all first-year teachers, including ARL teachers, in order to ensure they remain in the field of

education. School-based administrators who do not understand and support first-year teachers, including ARL teachers, may continue to have vacant teaching positions.

Chapter 3: Method

A qualitative approach was used to collect data for this research, which means that a specific phenomenon (the alternative route to licensure special education teachers working in a Title I school and administrators who supervised an ARL special education teacher and work in a Title I school) was the subject of this study (Kaye, 2013; Lass, 1984; Smith, 2008). Participants fit into the phenomenon of either ARL special education teacher or a supervising school-based administrator in order to qualify for this study. Participants who did not fit into this phenomenon (non-ARL special education teachers, ARL special education teachers who are not at a Title 1 school, school-based administrators who are not the supervisor for an ARL special education teacher) were not included.

Research Design

A phenomenology research design, along with narrative analysis, provided an effective method for the data needed because participants gave detailed answers regarding their experience as either an ARL special education teacher working in a Title I school or a school-based administrator who evaluates ARL special education teachers. School-based administrators provided their perspectives regarding ARL special education teachers through an in-depth interview as well. School-based administrators shared about the challenges that all special education teachers faced and how ARL teachers may experience different challenges compared to traditional route teachers. Participants provided rich details regarding their experience as either an ARL special education teacher or a supervising school-based administrator through the interview that was conducted by the researcher.

The information collected through the interview with the participant was more useful than giving participants a Likert-type scale survey regarding their experience as an ARL special

education teacher. Participants were able to offer more in-depth answers using an interview compared to answering questions on a Likert-type scale survey. The researcher was able to collect more useful in-depth information regarding the real-life experiences of ARL special education teachers and school-based administrators with an interview compared to getting information on a Likert-type scale survey. Participants were able to give more examples of their real-life experiences with the open-ended questions used in the interview. Phenomenology was an effective method to use because it established a clear criterion for who can qualify to participate.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) As a Method

Within this method, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was utilized in order to capture the feelings and emotions of the participants through their responses. The focus of using IPA was for participants to share their experiences and explain how they make meaning of their social world (Alase, 2017; Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). IPA had the participants focus on their personal account of the world through the answers they gave during the interview process. Additionally, the researcher wanted to understand and make sense of the social world that is presented to them via the answers given by the participants (Smith, 2017; Smith & Shinebourne, 2012).

Because each classroom and school location is different, and the social experiences of the participants can vary, the IPA process was effective for analyzing results. The researcher fully understood the feelings that the ARL special education teacher and school-based administrator experienced daily. The participants (specifically the ARL special education teachers) shared their experiences and made meaning of their social world (e.g., working in the classroom, interacting with parents and other staff members, relating teaching to their previous work experiences).

School-based administrators were also able to share their experiences with the researcher during their interviews.

The experiences of the school-based administrators were vastly different compared to the ARL special education teachers for many reasons. The school-based administrators in this study came from a traditional route background rather than the alternative route background. The demands and expectations placed on school-based administrators is very different compared to the classroom teacher. School-based administrators are responsible for all students in their school, whereas the ARL special education teacher was mainly responsible for the students in their classroom. School-based administrators had a different view of the field of education compared to the ARL special education teacher, so it was important to see their understanding of the role ARL special education teachers play within their school setting.

Bracketing Interview

Prior to the start of the data collection, a bracketing interview was conducted with the researcher. The researcher went through the ARL program in the school district where the research took place 9 years ago. This program was led by the school district mentors who provided professional development to the researcher. In the 9 years since the researcher went through the ARL program, the school district has changed the criteria for their ARL program and increased the requirements that are needed for an individual to earn an alternative license in that school district.

One example of the increased requirements that are needed from the school district includes an increase in the number of hours in the classroom that an individual in the ARL programs needs prior to earning their alternative license. When the researcher went through the program 9 years ago, individuals needed only 2 days (10 hours) of in-classroom observation

hours. These observation hours were done in a mentor teacher's classroom in different schools throughout the school district in the large urban school district (elementary, middle, and high schools). Now, individuals are required to spend 20 days observing mentor teachers in their classrooms prior to finishing the ARL on-board training and earning their alternative license.

The bracketing interview helped provide an insight into the experience that the researcher had throughout his time in the ARL program as well as eliminate any bias that may arise since the researcher is working in the district where the research was conducted and participated in the program. Members within the same ARL special education cohort as the researcher who are still currently working in the school district were not eligible for participation in order to eliminate any conflict of interest related to prior work relationships with the researcher. Members within the same ARL special education cohort as the researcher would have 10 years of experience as teachers, so they would not qualify as participants.

Results from the Bracketing Interview

A bracketing interview was conducted with the researcher on February 25, 2021. The bracketing interview took place over Zoom and was led by Dr. Sherry Markel of Northern Arizona University. Dr. Markel recorded and transcribed the responses given by the researcher and sent the transcription to the researcher at the end of the interview. The bracketing interview consisted of 12 questions that included information regarding the instructional design of the ARL special education program that was led by the school district, the timeframe in which the researcher held an alternative teaching license, the prior career path and degree earned by the researcher, and an overall reflection of the teaching experience of the researcher.

According to the results from the bracketing interview, the researcher had an overall positive experience with the ARL program that was led by the school district. The researcher

reported that they had a mentor during their first year of teaching that worked directly with them in order to help the researcher write Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), plan lessons, and provide additional support in the classroom in order to provide effective instruction to all students. The researcher also reported that the district-based training that was taken over the summer of 2013 was very informative and specifically mentioned instruction in the areas of assessment, data collection (e.g., progress monitoring), and using data to create lessons in the classroom. One of the biggest draws for the researcher was the fact that they did not have to do student teaching where they would not get paid. The researcher pointed out that they got a job right away (after completing the training in the summer of 2013) and that they got to continue working at their previous job while in the ARL special education training program.

One of the areas that was lacking for the researcher was that there was no training involving culturally responsive teaching during the district-based ARL special education program. The researcher noted that since the district does not know exactly what school the ARL special education teachers would be placed in, there is little focus on specific strategies involving students from CLD backgrounds, but rather there was more of a focus on giving members of the cohort general teaching practices to support "Day 1" instructional practices. This is one area where the researcher feels the district-based ARL program was lacking in the summer of 2013. However, the researcher reported that the district-based program did provide enough instruction and had an overall positive experience within the program.

Role of the Researcher

Based on the results from the bracketing interview, the researcher had experience with this ARL program as well as experience teaching in the district where the research took place. The researcher has spent 9 years working in special education classrooms in Title I schools

where the research took place. The main role of the researcher was to collect data in the form of an interview from the participants in this study. The researcher shared some of their experience with the ARL special education during the interview in order to build rapport with the participant, however the researcher did not influence the responses of the participants in any way. The researcher shared his experience with the participants and did not name the school where they taught in order to not influence the potential answers given by the participants. The researcher also shared experiences (e.g., working on a Ph.D., courses taken) that are not related to the questions that were asked during the interview.

The main goal of the researcher was to collect information from the participants for them to share their real-life experiences involving working in a special education setting with students from a culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) background. The researcher kept a digital journal (on Google Docs) in order to record their self-reflection after the interview had taken place. The digital journal entry recording took place right after the interview was conducted. The researcher recorded information such as the tone of the participant, how much the participant shared, and any other relevant information regarding the participant.

The researcher also recorded how they felt the questioning went. After reviewing the interview, the researcher added information regarding the tone of the researcher, how much they added to the answers, and any other important information. This self-reflection journal helped the researcher when conducting further interviews with participants in order to ensure the participants shared the most information possible during the interview process.

Teacher Participants Criterion

Teacher participants had to be ARL special education teachers working in a Title 1 school in order to qualify to participate. ARL special education teacher participants had no more

than 5 years of experience in order to qualify for this study. Classroom type (co-teacher in a general education setting, resource room, self-contained classroom) was not a criterion in order to participate. ARL special education teacher participants taught in any classroom type within the full range of services that are offered to students who qualify for special education services. Classroom type was not a factor to qualify as a participant in order to collect data from all ARL special education teachers regarding their experience when working with all students who qualify for special education services. The inclusion of all ARL special education teachers helped to provide information regarding the real-life experiences of these teachers, no matter where their instruction takes place within the continuum of services that are offered to all students who qualify for special education services.

The researcher got information (e.g., names of teachers and school where they were currently teaching) from the school district involving ARL special education teacher cohorts from the last 5 school years (2016-2017 school year) in order to recruit ARL special education participants. This length of time was selected based on research stating that ARL teachers and special education teachers leave the teaching profession within the first 5 years of teaching at a higher rate compared to traditional route teachers (Henke et al., 2000).

Administrator Participants Criterion

Administrator participants had to be the school-based direct supervisor of an ARL special education teacher in order to qualify for this project. School-based administrator participants worked in Title I schools with a student population where at least 50% of students identify as being from CLD backgrounds. Years of experience as a school-based administrator was not a qualifying factor in order to participate, however, the administrator must have given a formal evaluation to an ARL special education teacher. Administrators could be either the principal or

assistant principal of the school where an ARL special education teacher is working, but they must be the supervisor who gives the formal evaluation to an ARL special education teacher.

Formal evaluations are given out once per year, however, school-based administrators observe the teacher (traditional route and ARL) multiple times (both formally and informally) throughout the school year in order to fill out the formal observation. School-based administrators use a rubric created by the state department of education in order to report the effectiveness of the teacher. Scores on the formal evaluation range from 1 (not effective) to 4 (highly effective). Administrators who are not currently the supervisor of an ARL special education teacher were not included as participants.

Participants

The sample was made up of 10 participants. Five of the 10 participants were special education ARL teachers working in a Title 1 school with a high population of students from a CLD background. ARL special education teacher participants had up to 3 years of teaching in a Title 1 school, meaning that the range of ARL teacher participants was from on-boarding in spring of 2020 to fall of 2022. These teachers all worked in Title I schools located in a large urban school district in the southwestern portion of the United States.

Along with the five teachers, five supervising school-based administrators were selected as participants. These supervising school-based administrators also worked in Title I schools with a high population of students from CLD backgrounds located in a large urban school district and were currently the direct supervisor for a special education ARL teacher. Interviews from special education ARL teachers helped to find the challenges that these teachers faced and what contributed to them leaving the field of education, whereas the interviews from the

administrators helped to find out how these teachers were perceived by the individuals who give them their formal evaluations.

There was not an equal representation of grade levels taught, gender identifications, and classrooms taught (e.g., equal representation for resource, co-taught, and self-contained classrooms) within the sample. A majority of the ARL special education teachers were female (80%) whereas most of the school-based administrators were male (60%). Most of the participants came from the elementary setting (three teachers and four administrators or 70% of all participants). A majority of the ARL special education teacher participants were in the self-contained setting (60%), with only two participants (40%) being in a less restrictive resource setting.

Study Recruitment

Participants were selected using established criteria outlined in the previous section. Potential participants were selected based on information gathered from the large urban school district where the research took place. A recruitment email was sent to the retention and recruitment department within the large urban school district in order to support the recruitment of potential participants (ARL special education teachers who went through the district-based ARL training program starting with the 2016-2017 school year up through the current school year). See Appendix A for the recruitment email. Initial contact was made in the form of an email sent to the potential participants' school-based email address. See Appendix B for the recruitment email sent to ARL special education teachers.

Since the researcher is currently working for the large urban school district, emails, additional correspondence, and interviews were conducted after contracted hours. The researcher also used his own personal devices in order to conduct the interviews (no school-based

technology was used to give the interview). The researcher also conducted interviews off school property (in his own home) so there were no conflicts of interests. Interviews took place via a secure Zoom link and were recorded and transcribed using a Zoom transcription application. The researcher used virtual meetings due to the unknown Covid restriction protocols and for the convenience of both the researcher and the participants. The school district where the research took place was so large (in both land size and student population) that the researcher decided that conducting virtual interviews would increase the likelihood that participants would want to participate in the interview because they could participate at home rather than having to drive to meet in-person at another location outside of their workplace.

Recruitment emails to potential ARL special education teacher participants occurred with the support of information gathered from the recruitment and retention office of the large urban school district (See Appendix A and B). The researcher used information from the school district recruitment and retention office, including the previous five ARL cohorts that have completed the district-based ARL program. Collecting information from the previous five cohorts ensured that the minimum number of participants who meet the established criteria was met.

A recruitment email was sent to school-based administrators who currently employ an ARL special education teacher (see Appendix B). The researcher used a convenience sample in order to recruit the school-based administrators as participants. The researcher did not work for any of the school-based administrators in this sample. The researcher sent an email (Appendix B) to the school-based administrator and asked if they would be willing to participate in an interview. The email clearly stated that the school-based administrator needed to be the school-based administrator who observed the teaching practice of an ARL special education teacher and provided the formal evaluation for an ARL special education teacher. This criterion was

established because the administrator responsible for the evaluation of the ARL special education teacher would have more insight, experience, and knowledge related to the challenges ARL special education teachers have within the classroom. The school-based administrators selected as a participant had authentic experiences working with and evaluating the teaching performance of ARL special education teachers.

Interview Process and Location

Both sets of participants (ARL special education teachers and school-based administrators) were asked six open-ended questions (see Appendix C). Participants were asked to participate in a live virtual interview with the researcher conducted over Zoom. The researcher selected Zoom to conduct the interviews because it offered safe and secure video recording along with transcription services. The researcher made sure that the participants had an invitation to the interview that was on the personal digital calendar of the participant in order to increase the probability that they showed up to the interview at the correct time.

Interviews were also recorded by the researcher using Zoom. The researcher asked the participants if they consented to being recorded prior to starting the recording. The researcher informed the participants that they did not have to turn on their camera if they did not feel comfortable being recorded during the interview. Answers during the live interview were transcribed by the researcher using the Zoom transcription application. Recorded interviews and transcriptions of the interviews were kept by the researcher on an encrypted drive on a password-protected removable hard drive kept in a locked cabinet in the residence of the researcher. Only the researcher had access to the hard drive with the information on it. Participants were required to use a computer in order to participate in the interview. Interviews lasted approximately 20 minutes based on the response time of the participants.

Procedures

For this study, participants were generated using purposeful sampling. First, the researcher contacted via email the ARL department within the large urban school district where the research took place (Appendix A). The researcher asked for information regarding participants in the school district–based special education ARL program. Information included the name of the teacher and the school where they were currently teaching. The researcher asked the school district for information regarding ARL special education teachers from the last 5 school years (starting at 2016-2017 to the current school year). The ARL department gave the researcher the names of individuals from the spring 2020 cohort to the fall 2022 cohort.

After information was obtained from the school district by the researcher, members were selected based on the Title I status and the culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) makeup of the student population within the school. Title I status and CLD makeup of the student population was checked using the state's reporting website. Information on this website includes star ranking of the school (1 to 5), ELL population, Title I status (yes/no), student diversity population, and total students within the school. In order to be considered for this study, at least 51% of the student population needed to be from a CLD background (e.g., Hispanic/Latino, African American, Asian or Pacific Islander) and must be considered Title I. Teachers who were not in schools that meet these criteria were not included in this study.

The five supervising school-based administrators selected for this study all worked in Title I schools with a high population of students from CLD backgrounds located in a large urban school district. Supervising school-based administrators were selected for this study using the same criteria as the ARL special education teachers selected for this study (administrator at a Title I school with a high population of students from a CLD background). Supervising school-

based administrators for this study had to be the direct supervisor for an ARL special education teacher in order to participate (i.e., the administrator is the one who observed the ARL special education teacher and gave the formal evaluation to the ARL special education teacher).

Questions for the ARL special education teachers included having participants share their experiences working through their ARL program (school-based training, district-based training, and university courses). ARL special education teachers were also asked about their experiences when working in Title I schools with a high population of students from CLD backgrounds. School-based administrators were asked questions involving the challenges associated with first-year teachers (ARL and traditional route), challenges associated with working with students from CLD backgrounds, and the perceived differences associated with the route taken.

After the interviews, the researcher engaged in member checking by sending the transcriptions back to the participants for them to check for accuracy regarding their responses to the questions. Sending the transcription back to the participants acted as a form of member checking in order to ensure accuracy within their responses. After the participant ensured that the transcription was accurate, the researcher then began to code participants' narratives and analyzed the responses for similar themes and patterns.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

Prior to the start of the interview, the researcher built a rapport with each participant. Questions that ensure rapport included information regarding the work experience of the participant (how long they have been a teacher or administrator), the student makeup of the classroom or school (number of students in the classroom or school), and instructional practices or focus of instruction (what are they teaching that week or what was the focus area for

improvement of the school). The information given during these responses was used as anecdotal data when describing the participants in the results section.

Data were collected in the form of one six-question, semi-structured interview. Interviews were conducted in the fall of 2022 and spring of 2023. Individuals who agreed to participate in the interview after being sent the recruitment email were sent the interview questions and consent form via email prior to participating in their live virtual interview. Participants scheduled an interview with the researcher within a week of responding to the initial email.

Constant Comparison Method

Data were analyzed using the constant comparison method outlined by Glaser (1965), who stated that the constant comparison method is useful when studying a general phenomenon and therefore does not use all available data sources. This study collected data from ARL special education teachers working in a large urban school district who also teach in schools with a high population of CLD students and supervising school-based administrators who give formal observations to an ARL special education teacher and did not collect data from all available sources (all ARL special education teachers in the large urban school district and all supervising school-based administrators). Glaser (1965) also stated that the constant comparison method is useful when collecting qualitative data such as the interviews that were used for this research.

When using the constant comparison method outlined by Glaser (1965), data were categorized and analyzed after each interview. After the first interview, the researcher organized the data into different categories based on the response given. The first set of categories established by responses given during the interview was compared to the second set of categories established by the responses given during the second interview. This process was repeated with

all responses given by the participants for both ARL special education teachers and school-based supervising administrators.

In the second state of constant comparison, the researcher looked at the response categories from all same group participants (all ARL special education teachers) to look for an established theme based on the responses given. Although there were multiple responses for each question, the themes based on the responses were analyzed based on the constant comparison of the responses to each other. The themes helped to establish an answer to the research questions proposed by the researcher. Categories were compared within the same group only initially, meaning that responses from ARL special education teachers were only compared with responses from ARL special education teachers and not with the school-based administrators. Responses were then compared between each group to see what common themes participants gave in both groups.

Interview Question Organization

Questions in this semi-structured interview were organized with a particular theme in mind; however, participants provided a range of responses within the category. The themes for this semi-structured interview were based on the information collected in the literature review. Themes selected for ARL special education teachers included preparedness prior to starting their time in the classroom (Redding & Smith, 2016; Zhang & Zeller, 2016), preparedness for working with students from a CLD background (Zhang & Zeller, 2016), importance of the route taken (Moffett & Davis, 2014), and finally, a question where the ARL teacher suggested additions that could be made to the program in order to support instruction for students from a CLD background.

Questions for the school-based administrator included challenges associated with working with ARL special education teachers compared to traditional route teachers (Brenner et al., 2015), the importance of the route taken (Moffett & Davis, 2014), and finally, a question where the school-based administrator suggested additions that could be made to the program in order to support instruction for students from a CLD background.

Reporting the Data

Data were reported using the qualitative coding techniques discussed by Smith et al. (2009) that specifically discuss how to use IPA when coding data. After the researcher has collected interview data from one group (e.g., all ARL special education teachers), the researcher conducted an initial read through. During this initial read through, the researcher read through all the responses from the interview in order to identify common themes. In order to find common themes, the researcher searched for words or phrases that are repeated throughout the responses given by the participants in the specific group (e.g., all the responses from the ARL special education teacher).

Initial Reading. This initial read-through helped the researcher narrow down the words or sentences in a transcript that related to the specific theme of the question (Alase, 2017). Smith et al. (2009) also suggested that any researcher should read the transcript at least three times in order to become familiar with the information that is found in the responses as well as understanding the thinking, feelings, and actual lived experiences of the participants. The researcher therefore read each transcript three times prior to categorizing the theme of the response.

Additional Readings. During each read-through, the researcher continued to condense the responses given by the participants to make sure that the responses aligned with the theme of the question in the semi-structured interview.

Coding Techniques. During each additional read-through, the researcher used descriptive coding techniques where the transcript is read in-depth and line by line in order to ensure that the response given aligns with the question asked. During this in-depth review, the researcher noted the linguistic comments that are made by the participants. The researcher continued to make a deeper examination of the responses given by the participants and noted any frequently repeated words or phrases that were given within the response (Smith et al., 2009). The researcher also used conceptual comments during the coding process. When using conceptual comments, the researcher did not look at the explicit response given by the participants (the actual words the participant said during their response) but focused on the concepts and interpretation of the response given (Smith et al., 2009).

Finally, the researcher conducted a theme analysis. The theme analysis was conducted within each individual response (each individual participant response) as well as within the whole group response (across all responses from ARL special education teachers) in order to connect responses to the themes discussed above. The theme analysis revealed whether there was a common theme between all participants within the same group as well as if there is a common theme between all the responses given by all participants (a theme analysis was conducted with the responses from both the ARL special education teachers and the school-based administrators).

Discussion

Results and findings from the interviews were reported using the three qualitative coding methods discussed in the previous section. Results from the ARL special education teachers were reported first, based on the themes that emerged from the answers given. Results from the supervising school-based administrators were reported second, based on the themes that emerged from the answers given. Results and analysis of common themes between both sets of participants were reported as well. Results were reported and compared against current research regarding ARL special education teachers and their perceptions within their school building. The results from this research have enhanced the current literature in the field of ARL special education teachers.

Limitations

This study was limited because only ARL special education teachers who have worked in Title I schools were eligible to participate. ARL special education teachers working in a different setting (e.g., non-Title I) may have a different experience compared to those working in a Title I setting. Second, only ARL special education teachers were included in this study. ARL teachers working in general education classrooms were not included. Their experiences may be different compared to ARL special education teachers and would yield different results. Finally, this study is limited based on the small number of participants. Only five ARL special education teachers participated, along with five supervising school-based administrators. This is a relatively small sample compared to the larger population of ARL special education teachers and supervising school-based administrators working in schools across the nation.

Factors for Assessing Merit of Qualitative Research

Validity and Reliability

Additional factors outside of reliability and validity are discussed later in this section because this research was qualitative in nature. Validity and reliability measures were still followed throughout this research, however more emphasis was placed on qualitative research factors such as those discussed in Yardly (2000). One way to obtain reliability was by having a member of the researcher's cohort (outside observer) review the interviews and transcripts to ensure that interview questions correctly measured what they were intended to measure. The member reviewed the recorded transcripts to make sure the researcher did not impact the answers (by leading the participants to a certain answer that was not the real-life experience of the participant). The researcher and outside observer agreed on all codes in the initial read through of the transcripts. The researcher conducted member checking by emailing the transcriptions back to the participants to check for accuracy within the answers. After receiving the transcription back via email, participants had 2 weeks to respond with any corrections that needed to be made to the answers provided in the transcription (see Appendix D). A reminder email was sent out after one week if participants had not responded to the first email (Appendix D). Nine of the ten participants (90% of the total sample) responded to the member checks.

Social Validity

The impact of social validity is determined based on the outcomes of the study. School districts can see how school-based administrators view ARL special education teachers, what deficits these teachers may have in relation to other first-year special education teachers, and what expectations administrators have for these teachers. School districts can also see what help ARL special education teachers may need in relation to working with students from a CLD

background. Answers given by the participants can help school districts, universities, and other higher education bodies format their ARL program to better support teachers in order to meet the needs of the students in their classroom. This could be beneficial for districts as there continues to be a need for ARL teachers in order to fill vacant teaching positions. Adding different supports to the program could potentially improve the retention of the ARL teachers and ensure that they stay rather than having a high rate of turnover.

Dependability

According to Tobin and Begley (2004), dependability is defined as ensuring that the process within the research is logical, there is clear documentation of the process, and the research is traceable as well. In order to ensure there was dependability within this study, the process itself was audited before and after the study. Auditing took place with an outside observer (a member of the researcher's cohort) and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the university, and the application process that occurred within the school district where the research took place. Dependability is important for a qualitative research study because readers can see the steps taken for the research and can judge the project for themselves (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Koch (1994) stated that an auditing process increases the dependability of a research. Three different groups of people (outside observer, university IRB, and school district) audited this research process during the study.

Credibility

Credibility is defined as the way in which the researcher represents the views that are reported by the respondent (Tobin & Begley, 2004). Credibility was established in this study by having the respondents review their answers to the questions presented to them during their interview (member checking) and having an external independent reviewer (member of the

researcher's cohort) look at the raw data collected as well as the researcher's interpretation of the data collected (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transcripts were sent to the participant and the external reviewer within 24 hours of the end of the interview. Participants had 2 weeks (14 days) to provide any corrections to the transcription. The external reviewer received any corrected transcriptions within 24 hours after the researcher had made the corrections.

Transferability

Transferability is defined as the degree to which the research project can be generalized into another location (Tobin & Begley, 2004). Since every school is different (ARL requirements may differ from state to state and district to district), one way to ensure transferability is to provide a thick description of the participants and the characteristics associated with the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This means that within the results section, the researcher described characteristics associated with the ARL special education teachers such as how long each participant has worked at their school location, what type of classroom the ARL special education teacher is working in (e.g., resource, co-taught, self-contained), and a description of the classroom makeup (e.g., total number of students, number of boys and girls in the classroom, and different disability categories within the classroom).

The researcher also provided information regarding the characteristics associated with the school-based administrator such as how long they have been an administrator, the total population of students at their school, and a description of the student population at their school. Within this study, the research provided clear criteria for the participants as well as the school-based administrators. Although states and districts may have different criteria associated with their ARL special education program, future researchers can mention the differences and make decisions based on their findings.

Confirmability

Confirmability is defined as ensuring that the researcher's interpretation of the data collected is derived from the data collected rather than from any form of researcher bias (Tobin & Begley, 2004). Guba and Lincoln (1989) stated that one way to ensure confirmability is to already establish credibility, transferability, and dependability. Previous sections have discussed the criteria for establishing credibility, transferability, and dependability within this study. Koch (1994) also stated that researchers should include their rationale for the decisions that were made throughout the research process in order to fully explain their thinking and justification for their interpretation of the data collected.

Sensitivity to Context

Yardley (2000) has discussed characteristics associated with sensitivity to context when conducting qualitative research. Issues within this area include relevant literature, sociocultural setting, ethical issues, and participant perspectives. The researcher conducted an extensive literature review in order to find information regarding ARL special education teachers, administrative perception of ARL special education teachers, and student achievement for students who work with ARL special education teachers. In order to ensure there is consistency within sociocultural settings from all participants (ARL special education teachers and school-based administrators), the researcher established a clear criterion in order to become a participant. The criterion included working in a Title I school where at least 51% of the student population is made up of individuals from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

In order to make sure this criterion was met the researcher used a website with information gathered by the state department of education. Information gathered on this website was from the previous school year (2021-2022), except for the star ranking of the school which

was from the 2020-2021 school year, so some of the information may not have been the most current, however all schools were reported using the same school year. There was consistency within the reports because the collection of information for this report all took place at the same time.

The only ethical issue associated with this research was the researcher's previous exposure to the district-based ARL program. The researcher went through the program more than 9 years ago, so the instructors have changed from when the researcher went through the program. The program itself has changed as well from when the researcher went through it (e.g., there is more time needed in the classroom as compared to when the researcher went through the program). The researcher did not include any ARL special education teachers who work at the same school location as the researcher in order to avoid any ethical issues as well.

Finally, this research was based on the perspective of the participants. The researcher reported in detail and described the perspective of the participants in the results section in order to provide a context for the research conducted.

Commitment and Rigor

One of the main components discussed by Yardley (2000) involved making sure there was in-depth engagement with the topic. The researcher was an ARL special education teacher currently working as a special education teacher in the district where the research took place. The researcher had in-depth engagement with the topic being researched through their own lived experience. The researcher also had done in-depth research involving ARL programs in areas outside of the home district.

Another component involves thorough data collection. The researcher collected data from five ARL special education teachers. The researcher made sure participants represented a wide

range of instructional settings (e.g., co-teaching, resource room, and self-contained settings) so that all perspectives and experiences were represented in this research. Not all ARL special education teachers who work in the large urban school district were included in this research, but a representative sample of five was used in order to collect a thorough amount of data on this subject.

Also, the researcher included school-based administrators in this research in order to see if their real-life experiences were like the current research being conducted. Having both perspectives supported the researcher when providing thorough information on this topic. Finally, this section is concerned with the analysis of the data. The researcher went in-depth to talk about the different ways in which the data were analyzed and reported in previous sections. Using direct quotes from the participants ensured that their real-life experiences were accurately represented in the reporting of the data collected.

Transparency and Coherence

Yardley (2000) discussed the importance of providing clarity when giving descriptions of the participants and the research methodology. The researcher provided in-depth information regarding the criterion associated with selecting participants for this research. The researcher also described how the interviews were conducted. Yardley (2000) mentioned the fit between research and methodology in this section as well. Based on the research questions and the current research in this area, the researcher selected an appropriate methodology in order to answer the research questions. Using qualitative methods is an appropriate choice in order to answer the research questions.

Impact and Importance

This research had more practical importance based on the responses given by the participants. The school district where the research was conducted is currently experiencing a large amount of teacher vacancies. Responses given by participants may help improve the current ARL program that is run by the school district. The district can also see what areas school-based administrators value and target training to support these areas. This research had some theoretical importance where the results can enrich the understanding of the real-life experiences of ARL special education teachers. Providing more information in this area could help not only the school district where the research took place, but in other school districts as well.

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter contains the results of the narrative analysis theoretical framework to answer the two research questions.

RQ1: What are the real-life experiences of special education teachers working in Title I schools with a high population of students from a culturally and linguistically diverse background who take an alternative route to licensure?

RQ2: What are the perceptions from school-based administrators of alternative route special education teachers working in Title I schools with a high population of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds?

This chapter includes information and results from the transcripts of 10 interviews that were conducted over Zoom. Transcripts from the interviews were read through by the researcher and coded using IPA coding techniques. Data were reported using theme analysis with open, axial, and in-vivo coding in order to provide responses to the theme given in the response. After each read-through of the responses, constant comparison was used by the researcher in order to ensure that the responses given aligned with the themes that came from the response. Results of the research questions are listed first, followed by information about the sample, and finally an in-depth analysis of each of the interview questions given to each set of participants.

Research Question 1

Information gathered from the five interviews from the ARL special education teachers working in a large urban school district in schools with a high population of students from CLD backgrounds was used to answer Research Question 1: What are the real-life experiences of special education teachers working in Title I schools with a high population of students from a culturally and linguistically diverse background who take an alternative route to licensure?

According to the responses given in the interviews, three of the five participants (2, 4, and 5), or 60%, stated that they thought the route they took made a positive impact on their ability to teach students from a CLD background who qualified for special education services. Scores on student progress on high-stakes assessments were not used during this research in order to show if the route taken made a difference in student achievement. This finding of route taken being a factor that impacts student achievement for students from a CLD background in special education goes against much of the research regarding ARL teachers and student achievement (Easton-Brooks & Davis, 2009; Heilig et al., 2011; Qu & Becker, 2003). One reason to account for this difference was that it was based on the perception of the individual and not on data such as test scores. Individuals may consider other factors, such as student behavior and growth on IEP goals, as more important factors for student achievement rather than performance on standards-based and high-stakes assessments. The ARL teachers were working with the students daily and saw their growth in relation to the IEP goals and progress monitoring assessments that are given on a weekly basis.

Lack of Preparation

Based on the responses given by the ARL special education teacher participants, ARL special education teachers working with students from a CLD population reported that they lacked some knowledge, preparation, and training when it came to providing special education services. This finding was consistent with the literature regarding ARL teachers. According to Redding & Smith (2016) and Zhang & Zeller (2016), ARL teachers do not feel prepared to teach on the first day of instruction when compared to their traditional route peers. In this study, three of the five participants (60%) stated that they did not feel prepared to start their career. Many of the issues associated with lack of preparation, such as lack of strategies to support academic

areas (Lewis-Spector, 2016) and lack of support for classroom management (Brenner et al., 2015), were discussed by participants in their responses to the questions asked of them. This is consistent with the literature regarding ARL special education teachers.

Lack of preparation in the area of behavior was also a common theme for the ARL special education teachers. Lack of preparation in the area of behavior was discussed in the literature review by Flower et al. (2017). Two of the teacher participants (3 and 4, pf 40% of the sample) worked in classrooms where behavior was a major factor. The other three teachers all had to deal with behavior as well, however it was not the biggest factor. Three of the ARL teacher participants (2, 3, and 4 or 60% of the sample) stated that behavior was a major factor and that they felt like they were not trained or had strategies to help with student behavior. This percentage of teachers (60% in this sample) is almost identical to the percentage of teachers in Flower et al.'s 2017 study (58% in their sample).

Challenges

A major portion of this research was to see what challenges ARL special education teachers had while working with CLD students to see what changes could be made to the ARL program. ARL teachers are placed in these schools based on the higher rates of teacher vacancies (García & Weiss, 2019) compared to schools in a higher SES area with fewer CLD students. The researcher wanted to see what challenges impacted the real-life experiences of ARL special education teachers in order to find an answer to Research Question 1.

One of the major responses associated with challenges faced by ARL teachers that came from this question was a lack of knowledge, which led to general classroom challenges. ARL special education teachers did not feel like they had the same knowledge regarding teaching strategies and understanding of the standards in comparison to their traditional route peers. This

lack of knowledge led to feelings of not being prepared to teach the students in their classroom, especially the students from a CLD background. Another participant mentioned that age was a challenge, and that the administration and other teachers thought they had more experience than they did (they had only 2 years of experience in the classroom) based on their age in relation to other teachers. This is a real-life experience that may be felt by other ARL teachers as well. Many times, being a teacher was a second career for ARL teachers. This was true for two of the participants in this study (40%).

ARL special education teacher participants in this study noted that there were not many challenges associated with working with students and families from CLD backgrounds. The challenges that were faced by these teacher participants (e.g., behavior, communication, modifying instruction) were not different compared to the challenges faced by a traditional route teacher when working with this same student population. Many of the challenges were faced by both types of teachers in their first year of teaching (behaviors, teaching strategies, data collection). ARL special education teachers mentioned that they work with the families of students in their room in order to communicate with them regarding the student's progress. ARL teachers also discussed some of the different strategies they used to support the needs of the students in their classrooms along with the needs of the parents of these students.

One of the major challenges that adds to the current research involving ARL special education teachers is the fact that this cohort went through the ARL on-boarding program during school closures associated with Covid-19. There is little information regarding teacher preparation during school closures related to Covid-19. This research paper adds to this area regarding ARL special education teacher preparation in a large urban school district during school closures related to Covid-19. ARL teachers were not allowed to go into classrooms to

observe because there was no direct instruction taking place in classrooms from March 2020 to the end of the school year. Schools assigned asynchronous work to students during this time. Some schools used Google Meet to provide distance learning to students, but it was not a requirement across all schools in the large urban school district where research took place. Many of the ARL participants talked about how they received instruction and training from the school district in the form of videos and that those videos were not helpful to them and did not translate into the classroom. The ARL teacher participants also said that they needed more hands-on experience in the classroom.

This cohort of ARL teachers was not given the same hands-on experience as other ARL teachers, so they wanted more time in the classroom to see different teaching strategies being implemented with students. This area has not been discussed in research as it is currently happening and teachers are experiencing the lack of hands-on experience, classroom observations, and debriefing after observation mentoring due to school closures.

Teachers and administrators in this sample all worked at schools that would be considered lower socioeconomic status (or Title I). During the school closures in spring of 2020, schools did provide access to computers (Chromebooks) to students, so they were able to participate in virtual learning. Parents needed to come to the school to pick up the device so the student had access to the virtual classroom. For the 2020-2021 school year, schools provided Chromebooks and internet access to families who requested it. Families were given a hotspot with an allotted amount of time on it, so the student was able to access synchronous classes as well as use the time for asynchronous learning. If they ran out of time/ data on the hotspot, they were not able to access the internet. Some of the families would use the hotspot as their own network, meaning they would run out of data halfway through the month and the student would

not be able to access the internet for the rest of the month. This made a negative impact on the students' ability to learn, the special education teacher was not able to collect data on the student, and the student was not in class with their peers. The school district did provide support, so students were able to access the internet and go to class online, but some students in lower SES settings were at a disadvantage because the hotspot was the only source of internet in the household.

Research Question 2

The five interviews from school-based administrators working in a large urban school district in schools with a high population of students from CLD backgrounds were used to answer Research Question 2: What are the perceptions from school-based administrators of alternative route special education teachers working in Title I schools with a high population of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds?

The themes in the responses from the six-question interview were used to answer this question and were compared to current research involving school-based administrators and their perceptions of ARL special education teachers.

Lack of Preparation and Pedagogy

According to Moffett & Davis (2014), lack of preparation was a factor for school-based administrators when hiring ARL special education teachers in comparison to their traditional route peers. In Question 1, the school-based administrators were asked who they would hire between a long-term substitute, a daily substitute teacher, or an ARL teacher. In this question a traditional route teacher was not an option, although some of the administrator participants still stated that they would first try to get a traditional route teacher before trying any of the options

stated. Even when a traditional route was not an option, school-based administrators still wanted a traditional route teacher before an ARL teacher or long-term substitute.

The school-based administrators also cared more about the individuals themselves rather than the route taken when they were making hiring decisions (three of five administrators or 60% of the sample). A common theme in some of the interviews was “experience” and “fit,” meaning that the school-based administrators wanted to hire someone with previous experience in the special education setting who would be a good fit for the school and the students. This supported their desire to hire a long-term substitute because they were able to place someone who had previously worked in their school and knew how the school was run rather than placing a new hire in the classroom and providing them with additional training and support(three of five administrators or 60% of the sample). However, for many of the administrators (four of five administrators or 80% of the sample), having someone in the classroom with a teaching license was a major determining factor when hiring. ARL teachers had an advantage over long-term substitute teachers because they do have a full alternative teaching license, so school-based administrators considered ARL teachers over long-term substitute teachers for that reason.

Lack of preparation was a theme stated by the school-based administrators in multiple questions throughout the interview. In Questions 3 and 4, which asked explicitly about the challenges associated with ARL special education teachers, lack of experience and not having the same pedagogical skills compared to traditional route teachers was mentioned by four of the five school-based administrator participants. This means that 80% of the school-based administrator participants in this study agreed with the results and findings from Moffett & Davis (2014). This research study continued to find the same results as that study.

Behavior

Lack of experience in the area of behavior management in the classroom for ARL special education teachers was a major theme that came from the response of school-based administrators (40% of the sample), who felt that ARL special education teachers needed more training and support in order to modify behavioral needs within their classroom. School-based administrators perceiving that ARL teachers have a lack of strategies in the area of behavior is consistent with the literature on this subject (Brenner et al., 2015; Brown et al., 2006; Moffett & Davis, 2014). This information given in the responses may focus more on behaviors as it is targeted for teachers working with students in a special education setting; however, behavior and classroom management was a concern for school-based administrators for all teachers no matter if they are in a general or special education setting. Information given in response by school-based administrators in this study confirmed the information given in previous studies, but this study adds to the research because it focused specifically on ARL special education teachers and not on all ARL teachers. This study also focused on students in special education in schools with a high CLD population, which again adds to further research to support all students in all settings specifically in the area of behavior.

Impact on Achievement

School-based administrators were asked in Question 5 if they thought the route the teacher took made an impact on the student achievement for students in special education. This question was based on the research done by Moffett and Davis (2014), which stated that school-based administrators thought that traditional route teachers had better strategies to support the learning of students. Three of the five school-based administrators (or 60%) stated that the route taken was not the most important factor in improving student achievement. Based on their

perceptions, the individual made the biggest impact on student achievement no matter which route they took to become a teacher.

Only one school-based administrator (20% of the population) stated that the route taken made an impact on student achievement. That administrator said that a traditional route teacher had more training, experience, and foundational knowledge compared to an ARL teacher, so they were able to support the learning of the students in special education more easily compared to an ARL teacher. For this administrator, having the foundational skills going into the classroom on Day 1 was an important indicator of ensuring student achievement.

One administrator (20%) did not consider the route taken at all when answering the question. This administrator thought that the support in the building was the most important factor in determining student achievement. Route taken was not considered for this administrator because the people and the structures that were in place in the building were considered the most important factors for student achievement.

Teacher Attitude

Teacher attitude was a theme that came up in some of the responses from the school-based administrators (60% of the sample). Phrases within the teacher attitude theme include items such as going to training, meeting with mentors, being there for the students, being positive, and doing research on different teaching strategies. This theme is included in the impact on achievement theme because it is tied in with the responses given by the school-based administrators regarding the biggest impact being the person rather than the route.

Sample

10 participants were included in the sample for this researcher. A convenience sample was used in order to select the 10 participants for this sample. Five of the participants were ARL

special education teachers working in schools with a high population of students from CLD backgrounds (at least 51% of the student population). An additional five participants were school-based administrators who work in schools with a high population of students from CLD backgrounds (at least 51% of the student population) and have ARL special education teachers currently working in their building. Demographic information of the participants is found in the next section along with Appendices E and F.

ARL Special Education Teacher Participant Demographics

Participant 1 (P1) was a 49-year-old Caucasian female working in a self-contained SLD (severely learning disabled) classroom in a high school setting with 18 students. Students in this self-contained classroom ranged from grades 9 to 12. Students in this classroom spent most of their day with P1 and were only in the general education setting for a few periods (electives) when they were not in the self-contained setting for their core academic areas (reading, writing, math). P1 was a teacher for 3 full years, however she noted that this was her second year in the classroom due to being fully online for the 2020-2021 school year. P1 was a member of the school district–based ARL program and is in the process of earning her full teacher license.

The school where P1 is currently a teacher is in a large urban school district. According to the state report card, this school earned three out of five stars for the 2020-2021 school year (school ratings were not released for the 2021-2022 school year due to the Covid-19 pandemic). This high school has around 2,500 students. Student demographics are as follows: 54% Hispanic, 21% black, 13% white, 6% two or more races, and 3% Asian. According to the state report, this school has a 93% graduation rate, a 25% English Language Arts (ELA) proficiency rate, and a 9% math proficiency rate. Around 18% of the students enrolled in this school are considered

English Language Learners (ELLs), around 15% are considered students with disabilities, and around 100% are considered economically disadvantaged.

Participant 2 (P2) was a 26-year-old Asian (Filipino) male working in an intermediate (grades 3–5) resource room. P2 had a caseload of up to 24 students. P2 has been a special education teacher for 2 full years. Previously, P2 was a paraprofessional working in a self-contained behavior classroom and decided to join the school district–based ARL program in order to become a special education teacher. P2 reported that he is currently taking classes at a local university in order to earn his master's degree in order to meet the requirements needed to earn a full teaching license.

The school where P2 is currently a teacher is in a large urban school district. According to the state report card, this school earned one out of five stars for the 2020-2021 school year (school ratings were not released for the 2021-2022 school year due to the Covid-19 pandemic). This elementary school has 536 students. Student demographics are as follows: 51% Hispanic, 24% black, 11% white, 8% two or more races, and 3% Asian. According to the state report, this school has a 32% ELA proficiency rate and a 20% math proficiency rate. Around 20% of the students enrolled in this school are considered ELLs, around 15% are considered students with disabilities, and around 100% are considered economically disadvantaged.

Participant 3 (P3) was a 53-year-old woman working in a primary (grades K–2) self-contained autism classroom. P3 had a caseload of up to eight students. P3 has been a special education teacher for 2 full years and is currently in the classroom. P3 reported that she participated in the school district–based ARL program (ALTA) in order to earn her provisional teaching license.

The school where P3 is currently a teacher is in a large urban school district. According to the state report card, this school earned one out of five stars for the 2020-2021 school year (school ratings were not released for the 2021-2022 school year due to the Covid-19 pandemic). This elementary school has 593 students. Student demographics are as follows: 45% Hispanic, 29% black, 13% white, 10% two or more races, and 2% Asian. According to the state report, this school has a 32% ELA proficiency rate and a 21% math proficiency rate. Around 20% of the students enrolled in this school are considered ELLs, around 15% are considered students with disabilities, and around 100% are considered economically disadvantaged.

Participant 4 (P4) was a 45-year-old African American woman working in an intermediate (grades 3–5) self-contained behavior classroom. P4 had a caseload of up to 16 students. P4 has been a special education teacher for 2 full years and is currently in the classroom. P4 reported that she participated in the school district–based ARL program (ALTA) in order to earn her provisional teaching license.

The school where P4 is currently a teacher is in a large urban school district. According to the state report card, this school earned four out of five stars for the 2020-2021 school year (school ratings were not released for the 2021-2022 school year due to the Covid-19 pandemic). This elementary school has 608 students. Student demographics are as follows: 31% white, 27% Hispanic, 26% black, 9% two or more races, and 5% Asian. According to the state report, this school has a 56% ELA proficiency rate and a 49% math proficiency rate. Around 10% of the students enrolled in this school are considered ELLs, around 15% of the students are considered to be students with disabilities, and around 100% of the students are considered economically disadvantaged.

Participant 5 (P5) was a 32-year-old African American woman working in a middle school (seventh grade English Language Arts) resource room. P5 had a caseload of up to 24 students. P5 has been a special education teacher for 1 full year and is currently in the classroom. P5 reported that she participated in the school district–based ARL program (ALTA) in order to earn her provisional teaching license.

The school where P5 is currently a teacher is in a large urban school district. According to the state report card, this school earned two out of five stars for the 2020-2021 school year (school ratings were not released for the 2021-2022 school year due to the Covid-19 pandemic). This middle school has 1,187 students. Student demographics are as follows: 46% Hispanic, 24% black, 12% white, 10% Asian, and 6% two or more races. According to the state report, this school has a 41% ELA proficiency rate and a 15% math proficiency rate. Around 20% of the students enrolled in this school are considered ELLs, around 15% are considered to be students with disabilities, and around 100% are considered to be economically disadvantaged.

School-based Administrator Participant Demographics

School-based administrator participants were chosen via convenience sample. The researcher did not work for any of the school-based administrators and the school-based administrators volunteered to be participants. School-based administrators agreed to participate in the interview process and were recorded via Zoom.

Administrator 1 was a 48-year-old Caucasian male who was a principal at a high school. They had been in education for 26 years and had been an administrator for 10 years. This was their first year serving as principal at this school. The school where Administrator 1 was a principal is in a large urban school district. The total student enrollment for this school was around 2800 students for the 2020-2021 school year. The school has an 86% graduation rate, a

26% proficiency rate in ELA, and a 6% proficiency rate in math. The student demographics of this school for the 2020-2021 school year were as follows: 64% Hispanic, 26% African American, 3% two or more races, and 3% white.

Administrator 2 was a 40-year-old Caucasian male who was principal of an elementary school. Administrator 2 had been in education for 10 years total with 4 years of experience as an assistant principal and 4 years of experience as a principal. Administrator 2 has been principal at his current school for four years. The school where they are currently a principal is in a large urban school district. This school had a total enrollment of 572 students for the 2020-2021 school year. This school had a 49% proficiency rate in ELA and a 32% proficiency rate in math. The student demographics of this school for the 2020-2021 school year were as follows: 58% Hispanic, 18% African American, 12% white, and 6% two or more races.

Administrator 3 was a 34-year-old Caucasian male assistant principal at an elementary school. Administrator 3 had been in education for 13 years total with four years in administration. The school where they are currently a principal is in a large urban school district. This school had a total enrollment of 388 students for the 2020-2021 school year. This school had a 24% proficiency rate in ELA and a 15% proficiency rate in math. The student demographics of this school for the 2020-2021 school year were as follows: 65% Hispanic, 21% African American, 9% white, and 4% two or more races.

Administrators 4 and 5 were both administrators at the same elementary school. Administrator 4 was a 51-year-old Hispanic female with 27 years of experience in education, 14 of which was in administration. Administrator 5 was a 33-year-old Caucasian female with 11 years of experience in education, one of which was in administration. The school where they were currently working is in a large urban school district. This school had a total enrollment of

655 students for the 2020-2021 school year. This school had a 36% proficiency rate in ELA and a 19% proficiency rate in math. The student demographics of this school for the 2020-2021 school year were as follows: 59% Hispanic, 15% African American, 12% white, and 8% two or more races.

Data and Analysis

Interviews were conducted through Zoom meetings. Participants were sent the questions prior to the interview in order to prepare their responses to the interview questions. During the interview, the researcher would ask additional follow-up questions for the participant to clarify their responses (e.g., participant would say "support" and the researcher would ask "Do you mean from the district or from the university" for the participant to define support). Interviews were recorded and transcribed using Zoom software.

Transcriptions were reviewed by the researcher in order to check for spelling errors that occurred during the transcription (e.g., ARL was transcribed as "ariel"). Errors were corrected by the researcher and all participants in the research (ARL special education teachers and school-based administrators) engaged in member checking by checking their responses to ensure that they were accurately transcribed. Participants were given 1 week to provide feedback to their responses if there were any additional corrections that needed to be made. The researcher made changes according to the responses given by the participants. Nine out of 10 participants (90%) responded to the member check.

Inter-rater reliability was conducted with an outsider observer. The outside observer was chosen because they were in the same graduate program as the researcher. The outside observer was CITI trained and took graduate level courses involving qualitative coding. Transcripts were sent to the outside observer and coded by the outside observer. Codes from the outsider observer

were compared to the codes created by the researcher. Codes were compared for each question with each set of participants. Codes for ARL special education teachers and school-based administrators matched with 100% accuracy. Codes from the secondary coder were more specific whereas the codes from the researcher were in more general terms. General term codes are operationally defined in the following sections.

The constant comparison method was used to analyze responses from participants in this study. The researcher read over each transcript three times in order to find the themes within the question asked to the participants. The researcher then read an additional transcript and compared the responses from Participant 2 to the responses given by Participant 1. The researcher used this same method for each of the five ARL special education teacher and school-based administrator responses. Results are reported by question asked and theme found in each response. Results start with questions given to ARL special education teachers and then proceed to school-based administrators.

ARL Special Education Teachers' Questions

Results for the interviews conducted by the researcher were reported by analyzing the response to each question asked of the sample. The question is listed first with the results and themes written under the question. Direct quotes were used from the participants in order to provide insight and information on the theme. Results and themes from these questions were used to answer Research Question 1: What are the real-life experiences of special education teachers working in Title I schools with a high population of students from a culturally and linguistically diverse background who take an alternative route to licensure?

Question 1: What made you want to become a special education teacher and go through the ARL process?

The three themes from this question were prior experience in the classroom (e.g., substitute teaching), family input, and need for a job. Question 1 was an introductory question that aimed to see what motivated the ARL special education teachers to go through the school district–based ARL process in order to work in the classroom setting. This background information laid the foundation for understanding their real-life experiences and helping to answer Research Question 1. Three distinct themes emerged from the answers given by the participants for this first question.

Prior Experience in the Classroom. Prior experience in the classroom was the first theme that came from the analysis of the answers given by all participants to Question 1. All the participants mentioned that they had some prior experience working with students in special education prior to starting their career as an ARL special education teacher. Three of the participants (60% of the sample) mentioned that they were substitute teachers prior to starting the school district–based ARL process.

In the interview Participant 1 stated that her prior experience in the classroom came in the form of being a substitute teacher. She stated that she was scared to substitute in a classroom initially because she had never worked in a classroom prior. “I started subbing here at (school), actually, and I was really scared to be a sub, because I mean I had just never done it.” Participant 5 had a similar answer with a different experience. She started out as a substitute but did not have the same fears as Participant 1. “Well, I worked as a substitute teacher when I was in college, and I loved it.” Participant 4 also mentioned her time as a substitute teacher was a factor for her to make the transition into becoming an ARL special education teacher: “I had already been doing substituting in [a major urban city located in the southwestern portion of the United States], so when I came out here I started substituting here and I knew that once I was going to

start working on my credentials, that I wanted to do special ed and not just general education." Substitute teaching therefore made an impact on the participants and their willingness to become full-time teachers. Participant 1, who previously mentioned that she had fears associated with substitute teaching, later stated that she "just kind of fell in love" throughout her time working with students during substitute teaching. Participant 5 also stated that substitute teaching "kind of drew me" into exploring more options associated with the field of education. After substitute teaching, Participant 5 decided to become a paraprofessional "because I wanted to be with the kids more often, like on a daily basis." Participant 5 also stated that being a paraprofessional was one of the motivating factors that helped her make the decision to become a full-time teacher and go through the ARL process.

Participant 2 did not have prior experience in the classroom in the form of substitute teaching as a factor when making the decision to become an ARL teacher. Participant 2 had experience within the field of special education through his parent: "My dad was in special education. He was in transportation services." Through his father working in transportation services, he was able to meet people who had gone through the ARL process. There is a large Filipino community in the field of education in the large urban school district where research took place. Participant 2 reported that he identified as Filipino and had a connection to education through his father and through the Filipino community. Individuals who went through the ARL process were able to share their experiences with Participant 2, which helped to prepare him to become a special education teacher.

Participant 3 had no prior experience in the classroom as a substitute teacher, nor did she have any family members who worked in special education. Participant 3 was seeking a job in the field of education as a second career (her previous career was as a hairdresser). Participant 3

stated that one of the major factors that impacted her decision to join the ARL program came from her experience as a student: “When I was in elementary school, I used to stand up for the students who were in special education.” Participant 3 also stated that “I continue to do that [stand up for students in special education] to this day for those in need” including the students in her classroom (self-contained classroom for students with autism).

Family Input. Family input was the second major theme that came from the responses given by the participants to Question 1. Three out of five participants, or 60% of the sample, mentioned family support in some way within their answer to this question. Participant 4 stated that her mother worked as the director of adult schools in a large urban school district so “I had been around special education pretty much my whole life.” Participant 4 went on to add that she used to volunteer for the Special Olympics in a large urban setting when she was younger, so she had prior experience working with individuals who were in special education. Having a mother who was involved in special education and a previous history working with students and individuals in special education made an impact on Participant 4’s choice to become an ARL special education teacher. As stated in the previous section, Participant 2 had a father who worked in the transportation department servicing students who were in the special education setting. He also had a community connection with people who had already completed the ARL process in the same school district he was going to apply to. Participant 1 did not have an immediate family member who supported them with her ARL process, however she did have a friend who went through the ARL process with them. Participant 1 stated “we just kind of clicked, and she needed help applying for the ARL program, because English wasn’t her first language, and I just kind of needed some handholding, so we just kind of helped each other. I probably wouldn’t have done it had she not been needing help with the language, and then it

seemed like it was good to do that. So, we applied together." This was not a direct familial connection to starting the ARL process, but Participant 1 stated that having a friend in the program with her helped her make the commitment to join and follow through with the ARL process and training. Participant 1 noted that the support and connection was one of the most important factors for them in completing the ARL process and continuing to teach to this day.

Need for a Job. Two participants (Participants 3 and 5, 40% of the sample) stated that the ARL process was a quick way to get a job in the field of teaching. Participant 5 stated that ARL made the most sense because she already had a degree in psychology and "didn't want to start from scratch" (i.e., go through student teaching and undergraduate classes). Participant 3 stated that she "wanted to start teaching as soon as I could, so I went for the I knew that I would be working with the special education population here in Las Vegas and wanted to work for the Clark County School District first right off the bat. I also wanted medical, dental, and retirement benefits." Ease of entry into teaching and access to benefits were a strong factor for these two participants regarding their willingness to participate in the ARL process.

Question 2 (part 1): How prepared were you to teach special education students when you started your career?

Themes that emerged from part 1 of question two included training, prior knowledge, prior experience with children, and attitude. Question 2 had two parts that addressed the same topic regarding preparation to teach students who qualified for special education services. Part 1 asked participants to think back on their time prior to starting in the classroom and part 2 asked them to think about how prepared they were to teach students who were in special education as well as being from a culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) background.

Training. Two of the participants (40% of the sample) explicitly stated that they had received training from the school district–based ARL program to help prepare them for working with students in a special education setting. Participant 2 stated that "I thought I was prepared after my training with ARL." Even though Participant 2 stated that he had training through the school district-based ARL program, he still reported that he did not feel prepared to teach students in special education on Day 1 in the classroom. In his response, Participant 2 said: "I felt like I was so unprepared. I didn't know what to do with a lot of the things in all the areas, instruction, behavior management, classroom management."

The ARL training itself was an issue for two of the participants (40% of the sample) as well. These two participants enrolled in the ARL program during the spring of 2020. During this time, schools in the large urban school district were shut down due to the spread of Covid-19. Training for these ARL teachers had to be done virtually as well, and participants in the ARL program were not able to go into classrooms in order to observe veteran teachers and see how they applied the instructional and behavioral methods that were being taught to them. Instead, participants were given online instruction using videos and simulations. Participant 3 stated that "I had to finish with an ineffective online simulation that looked like South Park in a classroom, and it was pretty ineffective to prepare me for the actual classroom." Participant 3 was very frustrated with the training she received during her ARL training due to school closures. The tone of her responses showed her frustration with the process and how the training was conducted during this time. Participant 2 also stated that "I also did not receive a full training because of Covid closures … I did not receive the student teaching part." While Participant 2 was upset about not being able to receive the full training due to school closures, his tone showed was more understanding and accepting of the training he did receive.

Prior Knowledge. Only one participant (20% of the sample Participant 5) stated that her prior knowledge was a useful factor regarding her preparation for working with students in special education classrooms. Participant 5 was a paraprofessional in a special education classroom prior to starting her career as an ARL special education teacher. Participant 5 reported that "I feel very comfortable because I've worked as an SPTA (special education teaching assistant), so I understand … the IEP process … I understand the process of how things go, and my responsibilities as a case manager." Participant 5 was the only participant that stated her time prior to starting the ARL program made an impact on her preparation to teach students who qualified for special education services. As stated in the previous section, three of the participants mentioned that they had been substitute teachers prior to joining the school district–based ARL program, however only one of three participants noted that this was a factor regarding preparation prior to starting their ARL training.

Prior Experience with Children. Participants 1 and 3 (40% of the sample) both mentioned that their prior experience working with children (not in a school setting) made an impact on their preparation for working with students in a special education setting. Participant 1 mentioned that her time as a mom made an impact on her ability to work with students. She stated that "I was prepared to be with children because I'm a mom…. So, I felt like I'm comfortable around kids." Participant 3 who had prior work experience as a hairdresser was helpful because "when it came to dealing with people and children, I've always had a gift." The prior experience working with children outside of the classroom was an important theme for these two participants. They felt it made a positive impact on their ability to work with students in their classroom.

Attitude. One participant, Participant 4 (20% of the sample) stated that her enthusiasm made the biggest impact on her preparation for working with students in a special education setting. “I would say that I was enthusiastic, so I think that you know an important characteristic that I had was my enthusiasm to get started…So I would say that at the start my preparation was just being enthusiastic and excited about this new adventure in my life. “During her response, Participant 4’s tone showed her excitement and enthusiasm to teach and work with students in the classroom. She also stated that she was not prepared to teach due to her background. “I would say that I wasn’t that prepared because my background is business administration.”

Lack of Preparation. This question aimed to see what factors impacted the ARL special education teachers’ feelings of being prepared to teach prior to entering the classroom; however, lack of preparation was also a common theme for multiple participants. Four of the five participants (80%) mentioned that they were unprepared in some way, shape, or form when transitioning into the classroom. Participant 1 stated that “I was not prepared to teach like kids with learning disabilities.” Participant 2 echoed this statement, saying that “when I came in, I had like zero knowledge [and] I felt like I was so unprepared.” Participant 3 stated specific parts of the job that she was not prepared for prior to starting her time in the classroom: “I wasn’t prepared to teach online, hybrid or in the classroom. I was not prepared to change diapers.” Finally Participant 4 stated she did not feel prepared to teach in the special education setting due to her lack of experience in her previous profession. While lack of preparation was a theme that came from the responses, participants were still able to work with, teach, and support students once they entered the classroom.

Question 2 (part 2): How prepared were you to teach special education students from a culturally and linguistically diverse background?

The main theme that came from this portion of the question involved the teachers prior experience and prior knowledge interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds. A secondary theme that came from this question involved experience while working with families from CLD backgrounds. This question, which specifically targets the ARL special education teacher's preparation regarding working with students from CLD backgrounds, was asked because many ARL teachers are placed in schools with vacant teaching positions. Many times, the schools with the highest number of teacher vacancies also have the highest number of students from CLD backgrounds. This part of the question aimed to see if any specific training was given to the ARL teachers prior to their time working in classrooms with a high percentage of students from CLD backgrounds.

Prior Experience. Three of the five participants (60% of the sample) stated that they had prior experience working with CLD individuals, which helped prepare them for working in classrooms with a high population of students from CLD backgrounds. Participant 1 stated that her prior life experience was a major factor in her ability to teach students from a CLD background. Participant 1, who was a white female, spent much of her life overseas and was able to interact with people from different cultures. "I do feel comfortable teaching, you know, uh, culturally and linguistically diverse kids, because most of my adult life I haven't been in America." She went on to add some of the strategies she used when working with English Language Learners (ELL students), such as "knowing to speak slowly, to put space in between my words, to say words two or three different, you know, to use two or three different synonyms, just in case they don't know that English word, that they might know two or three other English words." Participant 1 stated that this prior experience working with CLD individuals made a

positive impact on her ability to work with students and helped her feel more comfortable when working in the classroom.

Participant 2, who was born in the Philippines, stated that his experience as an immigrant made an impact on his ability to relate to and work with CLD students. Participant 2 stated that his school is made up of "50% Latinos, and then 35% black, and then the rest are a mix of Asians and um white" and that being an immigrant made it easier to relate to these students. Participant 2 stated that being an immigrant made him feel like more of a resource in order to build culturally relevant lessons to support the learning of his students. "I was able to make lessons that are culturally relevant to them. I feel like being a resource too … I'm very culturally aware of other people's culture." Participant 2 also stated that he had a college course that helped him understand other cultures as well, however his experience as an immigrant made the biggest impact on his ability to work with students from CLD backgrounds.

Participant 3, who was a white female, also stated that she was aware of other cultures because of her prior experience with individuals from other cultures. "The area that I lived in was highly saturated with both English and Spanish speakers. My best friends were all different nationalities, religion, socioeconomic classes, and races. I've traveled around the world and have a culturally sensitive disposition." Participant 3 added that she did have some basic training involving different teaching strategies to use with CLD students in her ARL training. "They had like a 4-hour segment, where someone came in, and we went over a bunch of questions and did a couple of back-and-forth dialogue." Participant 3 went on to say that her prior experience made more of a difference when working with families and students from a CLD background compared to the training she received from the ARL program. Participant 3 mentioned the different tools that she uses to communicate with parents and families from CLD backgrounds.

"Google translate and ClassDojo are currently my go-to applications to ensure communications with parents." Participant 3 stated that using these programs made sure that effective communication is had from both the teacher and the families because it was in their native language. According to Participant 3, the translation may be a "bit spotty" but the message was understood for both parties.

While two of the participants (40% of the sample Participants 1 and 3) identified as white, they still used prior life experiences working with and interacting with individuals from CLD backgrounds to support the learning of CLD students in their classroom. Prior experience outside of the classroom was used to support the learning of students inside the classroom for these two participants.

Working with Families. Two of the participants (40% of the sample) stated that their experience working with CLD families while in the classroom made the biggest impact on their understanding of different cultures. Participant 4, who is an African American female, stated that "working with people and students and everything you have to try to get to know them and get to know who they are." Participant 4, who had a parent who worked in special education, stated that getting to know her students through questioning, finding out information about them, and having an open dialogue with the families and students helped her understand the diversity in the classroom. Participant 4 reported that prior to starting her time in the classroom, she did not have any specific training that was targeted to support the learning needs of CLD students. For Participant 4, her daily interactions with CLD students and families made the biggest impact when supporting the learning needs of CLD students.

Participant 5, who was an African American female, mirrored these feelings as well, stating that experience in the classroom made the biggest impact on her ability to work with CLD

students. Participant 5 did state that she received some training involving working with families and students from a CLD background in the ARL training, however this did not make as big of an impact compared to the daily experience working with these students and families. “You do learn a bit in the ARL program, but there’s so much to cover that they can’t really go into anyone’s subject … I feel like it’s been the best thing for me learning how to work with those students.”

Prior knowledge and experience in the classroom were the two main themes that came from this question. Some of the participants mentioned that they had received training through their ARL program, but the training did not make an impact on their ability to work with students and families from CLD backgrounds. Participants shared that the training was short (3 to 4 hours), and it did not go in depth regarding teaching CLD students.

Question 3 (part 1): How prepared are you now to teach special education students?

Themes that emerged from this question include courses taken, mentors, and experience, all making an impact on the preparation for ARL special education teachers. Question 3 was worded the same as Question 2, however it asked the ARL teachers to reflect and think about the progress they had made working with students who qualify for special education services. Participants were asked to see if they had made any progress or learned any new skills (through professional development, courses taken during their master’s program, or daily experience) that helped them meet the needs of their students.

Courses Taken. Individuals who become ARL teachers must meet certain state criteria in order to earn a full teaching license. These teachers must take certain state-mandated courses in order to fully earn a teaching license. This often means that these teachers earn a master’s degree in the area of special education by the time they can earn their traditional teaching

license. Participants 1 and 2 (40% of the sample) both stated that the coursework they had taken over the past 2 years made an impact on their ability to teach students who qualify for special education services. Participant 1 stated that "Well, each class (at the university level) I take helps, and so I'm feeling better about some things." According to Participant 1, "I feel a little more prepared" to teach the students in a self-contained setting who qualify for special education services with each university level course that she takes. Participant 2 also stated that "I just feel very prepared. I'm also taking master's classes on special education." These university level courses helped him when working with students in his resource classroom who qualify for special education services.

Mentors. Participants in the school district–based ARL program are assigned mentors from the school district. These mentors help ARL teachers understand the different components associated with teaching in a special education setting. One participant, Participant 3 (20% of the sample), mentioned that their mentor had made an impact on her preparation regarding working with students who qualify for special education services. "I had a lot of help from [school district–based] mentors during the [Covid-19] shutdown. They helped me with the expected language for writing IEPs and understanding the purpose of an IEP, and how to effectively read an IEP." Participant 3 stated that the information given by her mentor helped her to connect the information from the IEP into instructional practices within the classroom.

Experience. Daily experience was a major factor regarding the preparation of ARL teachers who work with students who qualify for special education services for Participants 4 and 5 (40% of the sample). Participant 4 stated that "I'm continuously learning every day. You know that I go into work, you know I'm learning something new, something new that I got to turn into something new that I have to follow, certain protocols that I have to follow. So, being

actually in the trenches of teaching now my second year, I am more prepared than I was when I hadn't had any experience at all." The daily exposure and practice of teaching made the biggest difference for Participant 4 regarding her ability to work with students who qualify for special education services. Participant 4 had prior experience as a substitute teacher, however the daily experience as a teacher made more of an impact on her ability to teach students in the special education setting.

Participant 5 also drew from her time as a paraprofessional and discussed how she now felt more prepared to work with students who qualify for special education services. "But really for me I'm coming from being a special education paraprofessional (SPTA), I'm actually used to working with the students [who] have more specialized needs." Participant 5's time as a paraprofessional helped prepare her for the work she is currently doing, which is working with students who qualify for special education services; however, she reported that she was in a less restrictive environment (she was a paraprofessional in a self-contained setting and was now in a resource setting), so she had different teaching practices that needed to be followed. Participant 5 stated that her student population was "closer to the general education (Gen Ed) population" regarding academics and behavior, however the students in her classroom still had academic, behavioral, and social needs in order to be successful in the general education setting.

Question 3 (part 2): How prepared are you to teach special education students from a culturally and linguistically diverse background?

Some of the themes that came from this question include courses taken and attitude. Part 2 of this question asks participants to look at their current teaching practices and see what has changed since they began teaching regarding working with CLD students.

Courses Taken. Participants 1, 2, and 3 (60% of the sample) all stated that the university level courses they took made an impact on their ability to work with special education students from a CLD background. Participant 2, who was still currently earning his degree, stated that "the multicultural perspective class really helped me … make sure that I am teaching [using] culturally responsive pedagogy." Participant 1, who was also still earning her degree, noted that the more university level courses that she took, the more her eyes were opened and the more she felt like she needed to learn. Participant 1 previously stated that she experienced other cultures by living abroad for most of her life as well. "When you learn a little bit about something, you learn how ignorant you are about it. It's like you don't know how ignorant you are. It's still … you start learning, and then it all comes crashing down." Participant 3, who was currently earning their degree, also discussed the importance of the university level courses she was taking and some of the strategies that she learned in relation to supporting students in special education from CLD backgrounds: "I think the most important thing to remember is that making the effort to successfully talk to the students using pictures like PECS (picture exchange communication system) boards and the English words at the same time to convey what I'm trying to teach them … but mainly it's showing them physically. And I use Spanish words and English words and a picture if I have it. Just for the basic things, like "wash your hands to go to the bathroom" and things like that. Reading diverse books to them, and usually using diverse media." Participant 3 reported that she can implement the different strategies taught to her in her university classes in her classroom to support the learning needs of her students from CLD backgrounds. In her response, Participant 3 named teaching strategies that she was currently using to support the needs of the students in her classrooms as well.

Attitude. Attitude was a theme for two of the participants (40% of the sample). Participant 4 stated that she did not have additional training throughout her time as a teacher but "just me being open-minded and being as accepting as I can be with people and with my students" made the biggest impact on her ability to teach students from a CLD background. Participant 4 also stated that building a rapport with her students and the parents made an impact on her ability to teach CLD students. This rapport helped Participant 4 "get to know who they are and where they come from, and get to know their background, too" and that this information helped her when building culturally responsive lesson plans. Participant 5 talked about how "I'm being inclusive of different backgrounds" within the classroom daily. Participant 5 discussed that the cultural backgrounds of the students in the classroom was a factor when she plans her lessons. Attitudes of being inclusive and being open-minded made the biggest impact on these two participants when working with students from a CLD background.

Question 4 (part 1): What was the most difficult challenge you faced from students being an ARL teacher?

The three themes that emerged from Part 1 of this question were general classroom challenges, age, and experience. Part 1 of this question aimed to ask the participants what specific challenges they faced as ARL special education teachers. Many of the ARL teacher participants stated in previous questions that they were not able to observe classrooms due to the shutdown of schools associated with Covid-19. These ARL teachers were not given exposure to special education classrooms within the district where they would eventually work.

General Classroom Challenges. Three of the five participants (60% of the sample) gave examples of challenges from students in their classroom that were considered general classroom challenges. Responses in this category included behavior, student makeup, and

teaching delivery model. Participant 2 discussed the challenges he faced with the teaching delivery model that he first used in the classroom. Participant 2 stated that he started his teaching career having to give instruction online via live (synchronous) lessons and assigning student work (asynchronous). “The first year was just doing online stuff which no one knew anything about.” Participant 2 stated that he felt he had two first years since he started the school year off online and then moved to an in-person model halfway through the school year. “I had like two first years. I felt like I had two first years.” Upon entering the classroom, Participant 2 discussed another general classroom challenge associated with instruction of students in special education—seeing student behavior.

Student behavior was another theme discussed by multiple participants under the umbrella category of general classroom challenges. Participant 2 stated that when he went back into the classroom, “I see behavior, I see non-defiance or non-compliance from students” which he was not able to see when he was delivering instruction via an online platform. Participant 4 also stated that “the other most difficult challenge was just the behaviors, just knowing how to navigate through the behaviors. Knowing what triggers the kids, and just knowing how to help them with their difficulties in their behaviors, and trying to, you know, be patient.” Challenges associated with student behavior was a theme explicitly stated by two of the participants, however one participant went in-depth with the challenge they faced based on the classroom makeup.

Participant 3 stated that she was “not prepared to have half of my students in diapers and half of my students be non or barely verbal.” She also went on to add that since she is in a self-contained classroom, she had multiple different people come into the classroom to observe and provide support to the students. “I had no idea what any of them were doing, walking into my

room, who they were … and then I've got like 15 people and brand-new names to try to remember what they did, and it was just overwhelming." This is considered within the general classroom challenges section because many teachers in a self-contained classroom have the same experience of interacting with different professionals (e.g., related service providers, district mentors, behavior specialists) when they are in these settings.

Age. One participant (Participant 1, 20% of the sample) stated that their age was a challenge when working with students in the special education classroom. "It was my age, you know, just like I'm not young. I try to learn all this with my old brain, and it is hard." Participant 1, who was 49, stated that it is hard for her to learn new things and adapt her teaching based on her age. Also, she stated that she feels trapped sometimes due to her age and she feels she cannot start another career at an advanced age. During her response, Participant 1 had a tone that was very frustrated when she was giving her responses. Her age (49) was a major factor for her in relation to being an ARL teacher.

Experience. One participant (Participant 5, 20% of the sample) mentioned that her experience, or lack thereof, was a challenge that she had when working with students in the special education setting. "Just lack of experience, really just you know, not just being a new teacher and just not knowing it. Just not knowing what to do right away, like having to figure things out for myself."

Question 4 (part 2): What was the most difficult challenge you faced from other staff being an ARL teacher?

Two other themes that came from responses to this question were general challenges and no challenges. Part 2 of this question asked ARL special education teachers to think about interactions with other staff members in their building. This part of Question 4 aimed to see if

other traditional route teachers had a negative feeling about working with ARL teachers. One common theme that came from the answers to this question was lack of knowledge.

Lack of Knowledge. Participants 1, 2, and 5 (60% of the sample) all commented on their lack of knowledge as being a challenge when working with other staff members in their building. Participant 5, who was in the middle school resource setting, commented on her lack of knowledge when it came to the content area (middle school English) when working with general education teachers in the building. "The other teachers that I work with are all English teachers, and they went to school, for they know how to break down the standards." Participant 5 went on to discuss how there was a disconnect between the state standards that were taught in the general education setting and the IEP goals that were taught in her self-contained classroom. "What I'm seeing is that we don't really get into the standards as much, you don't break it down … we touch on the standards like to understand where the peers are, but we're not really going into the standards ourselves, or breaking down the standards." Participant 5 was working in a resource room setting so she discussed how she needed to improve her ability to break down the standards in order to support the learning of students in both IEP progress and their Tier 1 instruction.

Participant 2, who was in the elementary resource setting, echoed Participant 5's statements when he stated that "I feel like I didn't know what state [standard], what grade, what general education looks like at the same time, and what I should be teaching?" He also stated that "I just felt like sometimes I didn't know what I was doing." Not understanding the breakdown of standards or how to address the instructional needs of the students was a concern for two of the participants in this study (40% of the sample). Both were relatively new teachers, each having 2 full years of teaching experience, so these teachers may have needed more experience in this area in order to gain confidence in their ability to teach their students.

Participant 1 stated that she did not feel like she could answer questions when asked by her fellow teachers due to her perceived lack of knowledge. “Like other teachers will be like, ‘How do you do this?’ I’m like, ‘I don’t. I don’t do that.’” Participant 1 stated that her age (49) was an issue when working with teachers. Since she looks older, other teachers assumed she had been teaching for a while, when she had only been teaching for 2 years. “People think that because I’m older, that I know what I’m doing, and so they come to me for it [answers, solutions].”

General Challenges. Participant 3 (20% of the sample) discussed general challenges associated with working in a school as their main challenge. General challenges included working with different personality types within the school building and lack of support from members of the special education staff. Participant 3 talked about one teacher who was a challenge to work with. “There was one lady who made me cry twice on the first day.” Participant 3 went on to add that she was able to work through the issue with this teacher and eventually move past it in order to support the learning of the students. She went on to discuss the issues working with a paraprofessional in her classroom as well. “So, another was an aide that really likes to stir the pot.” Participant 3 later stated that the paraprofessional she mentioned no longer worked at the school. She also noted that she does not have support from her special education facilitator. “I also had a completely useless SEIF [special education instructional facilitator], he literally would poke his head in and go ‘You alright. You’re doing great.’ And he and I set meetings with him, and he wouldn’t show up, for I’d ask for help, and he’d show up after I already had all the kids on the bus.”

No Challenges. Participant 4 (20% of the sample) had the best experience working with teachers and other staff members during her ARL teaching career. “I could say that the last 2

years and I've been in two totally different schools in two totally different neighborhoods and areas, and everything [about] my experience with the teachers has been awesome." Participant 4 had almost the opposite experience compared to Participant 3 when working with members of the special education staff in her building. "I haven't had any complications. I would say that the special education teams that I've had at both the schools that I was at…. They have been very supportive, have helped me with whatever questions that I have, paperwork that I need, you know, to fill out, or that I need to do." Participant 4 added that all the members of the special education team have been "awesome" when working with her.

Question 4 (part 3): What was the most difficult challenge you faced from administration being an ARL teacher?

The main theme for this question was support; and another theme was a lack of knowledge. Part 3 of this question aimed to provide answers that support Research Question 2. Here ARL special education teachers are asked about their interactions with school-based administrators. Administrators and their perceptions of ARL teachers have been discussed throughout the literature review. This portion of Question 4 helps to support the current literature.

Support. Participants, 2, 4, and 5 (60% of the sample) discussed different ways in which their school-based administrators provided support to them in their classrooms. Participant 2 stated that he was "very grateful for the admin always validating me" and providing support to him. Participant 4 reported that the school-based administrator was very supportive and helpful with students in the classroom. "He's very hands-on when it comes to my students, because, you know, quite often I might need administrative help in my classroom … So sometimes I might have to get someone, and he's been very supportive at making sure that when he's called on his

walkie-talkie, he's been there." Participant 4 added that the school-based administrator at her first school was also very supportive and would answer any questions that she had and help in any way that they could. Participant 4 had two school-based administrators that provided support to her as a new ARL special education teacher.

Participant 5 answered, "I know that they're there, and they support me, and I, you know, whenever I need them, they're right there." However, Participant 5 also shared that the school-based administrators are "busy with, I don't know putting out fires around the school though." Participant 5 knows that her school-based administrators support her, however she may need additional support which cannot be offered due to the role that school-based administrators have within the school building.

Lack of Knowledge. Much like in part 2 of Question 4, lack of knowledge was a theme for two (40% of the sample) of the participants. Participant 1 continued to state that her age was a hindrance, even when working with school-based administrators. Participant 1 stated that school-based administrators assumed she was more experienced than she was due to her age and that this was a negative because school-based administrators assumed that she knew more than she did. Participant 3 also discussed the assumptions that her school-based administrators would make: "Administrators assume that I knew what to do with everything at least a little bit." This assumption hurt the ARL teachers because they were not as knowledgeable compared to more experienced seasoned teachers within the school building**.**

Question 5: Do you think the route taken made an impact on your ability to teach students in special education? Why or why not?

Question 5 seeks to answer Research Question 1 by getting direct input from ARL special education teachers regarding their perception of the route taken and if that made an impact on

their ability to teach students in the special education setting. The responses did not yield a theme, as each response was personal to each participant. Some participants thought that being an ARL teacher made a difference on their ability to teach students in special education, some did not think it made an impact, and one was not sure.

Participant 3 was the only one who was not sure if the route taken had made an impact on her ability to teach students in the special education setting. Participant 3 also included in her answer an aspect of teacher training that was not thought about prior to conducting research with these participants. "I am not sure. It's the only route that I've had experience with. I don't know any other way. So, with COVID-19, [it] impacted all aspects of the work and now I'm expected to know how things regularly run in the school."

During their ARL teacher training program, participants had to go from an in-person more hands-on model to a computer-based model, so they were not able to interact with students in the same way as previous ARL cohorts were able to. These ARL teachers were given even less experience in the classroom compared to other cohorts of ARL teachers. Participant 3 also compared her experience to the experience of traditional route teachers: "I'm sure that a person [who] went the traditional license route would have a better grip on the acronyms, legal expectations, classroom management strategies … I'm sure that they would have a better understanding of all that than someone who was like 'Oh, look! You're in class you know, one night a week for a month, and then you're gone [because of] Covid.'"

Participants 2, 4, and 5 (60% of the sample) all stated that being a special education teacher who went through the school district–based ARL program had impacted their ability to teach students in special education. Participant 2 stated that his background experience (a family member had worked in special education) allowed him to think outside the box and approach

issues in the classroom with a different perspective as compared to traditional route teachers. “I feel like I am able to think outside the box, [unlike] some people, probably, who went through the process not in an ARL.” Participant 2 added that his background helps him in all aspects of his teaching career. “Because of the different background that I have, I do feel like I contribute a lot of perspective whenever we have IEPs, or whenever we ever have, like staff meetings, or whatever. I think for instruction, I feel like [I have a] very, very different perspective.” The different background perspective that Participant 2 had prior to coming into the ARL program made an impact on his ability to see teaching differently and work with students from CLD backgrounds. The ARL program gave Participant 2 the tools he needed to teach, while Participant 2 had the background experience he needed to become a good teacher.

Pace of Instruction. Participant 4 stated that the route taken made a positive impact on her ability to teach students in special education. They started out by mentioning the pace of instruction that occurred during the district-based ARL training program. “First with the ARL program, it’s such a very fast program. You do learn a lot, but it’s so much information that you know you, you need that hands-on experience to be able to say you know what I did learn in class, now that I’m applying it in this situation it makes a lot more sense.” Participant 4 stated that the ARL program included a lot of information multiple times in her response to this question. Participant 4 stated that she was not able to interact with students during her ARL training and that when she came into the classroom, the lessons she had learned made more sense. Most of her training happened via computer-based lessons because training for her ARL program took place during the Covid-19 shutdown. “I would say that during my ARL time it was during Covid, so it kind of made it a little challenging, as far as not being able to be around students at that point, and we would have to do our simulations on a computer,” adding that she

would suggest the ARL program to anyone who wanted to start their career in education. “I still would recommend the ARL program, especially for those people that you know, are very interested in teaching and very enthusiastic, and are willing to deal with the strains and stress of, you know, becoming a full-time teacher. It’s not easy but it is rewarding.”

Gaps in Information. Participant 5 stated that the route taken made an impact on her ability to teach students who qualified for special education services. For Participant 5, the gaps between information learned in her training and the real-life instruction that occurred in the classroom was a major theme in her answer. “I feel like if anything, it’s a longer route to have to figure everything out. But it’s, you know, more valuable in the sense that it’ll stick with me.” Participant 5 went on to add the different areas where she learned information regarding the teaching practices for students in special education. She mentioned that she learned from her experience, from other experienced teachers in the building, and from the ARL program itself.

No Impact. Participant 1 was the only participant who stated that the route taken did not make an impact on her ability to teach students in special education. She thought it was helpful that she was not traditionally trained because she viewed veteran teachers as “entrenched, and they’re a little dogmatic.” Participant 1 reported that being an ARL teacher gave her an outside perspective to education. “I think in some ways it’s been helpful, just like I haven’t lived my whole life in an educational environment.”

Analysis. Although each participant had a different view regarding the ARL program itself, one of the common themes between some of the participants was their ability to think differently compared to traditional route teachers. ARL special education teachers thought that this was an asset that they brought to their classroom and a strength for them in their teaching career. Some of the participants commented that because they were not trained in the same way

as traditional route teachers were, they had a different approach and different perspective regarding the education of students in special education setting**s.** This asset could be used by school districts and universities when planning programming for ARL teacher candidates in order to maximize their abilities to support special education students in the classroom.

Question 6: Do you have any suggestions for the ARL program that can help future ARL special education teachers who work with students from a CLD background?

Some of the themes that emerged from the responses included the need for more hands-on experience, different pacing, and finally more information regarding being a special education teacher. Question 6, the final question of the interview, was meant to see what holes ARL special education teachers see in their training now that they are working in special education classrooms.

Hands-on Experience. One of the possible improvements to the ARL program that was discussed by some of the participants was an increased amount of time with students using hands-on teaching experience. The lack of hands-on teaching experience for these participants was due to the impact of Covid-19 and school closures related to the spread of the virus. Participant 4 stated, regarding her experience in the ARL program, that "there will be more, you know, in class and hands-on type situations. I know for myself and others that were in the program during the same time, I'm sure they probably felt the same way that it was a little difficult, just because everything was done online, and we didn't get the experience of being in the classroom and dealing with real people." Participant 3 also stated that "I think that if Covid-

19 hadn't hit, my experience making a career shift by entering the ALTA program would have been better."

With school closures, and the school district having to switch to an online-only format, participants in the school district–based ARL program were not able to get the same hands-on experience with students compared to previous ARL cohorts. The school district did move to an online format to provide the ARL special education teachers with models, examples, and instruction regarding how to support the learning needs of students in special education. However, a common theme throughout the interviews with the participants was the fact that these online models were not as helpful compared to an in-person experience.

Different Pacing. Different pacing was another theme that was discussed from two (40% of the sample) of the participants. Pacing refers to the sequence in which the additional instruction occurred for the ARL special education teachers. As part of their provisional license, ARL teachers must complete college courses in their teaching field (in this case special education) within 3 years in order to earn a full teaching license. Two of the participants discussed the importance of pacing and how future ARL programs can work with universities to provide ARL teachers with the most useful courses so they can implement instructional practices right away. Participant 5 stated that "maybe if I would have made a different choice about like, because we have coursework that goes along with it, maybe I would have made a different choice about the course work that I decided to take, starting off." Participant 1 also stated that "I think maybe if they had like … if I had been given advice on 'Take these classes because these are going to be more valuable' than like maybe some of the other classes, because that's your everyday like in the trenches, you know, and like that would have helped." The school district has no control over which courses are offered at the university level, but the school district can

work with the ARL teachers to find the courses that best fit their needs based on when they are offered.

Additional Information. Three participants (60% of the sample) talked about having the ARL program provide additional information regarding the duties and responsibilities associated with being a special education teacher. Although the ARL program does discuss some of the paperwork associated with being a special education teacher, the participants felt like more information could have been provided throughout the ARL training program. Participant 1 stated that "I think, letting them know how much paperwork is involved like there's a lot of paperwork in special education. I don't think I've realized how much and like, if you like teaching, that is just a tiny part of … not a tiny part, but it's a lesser part." Participant 2 also added to this by saying, "ARL teachers just don't know exactly what they're going to get into. Like me, for example, like I didn't know the full extent of being a special education teacher. Um, we learn those like parts of it, but we don't know what day to day looks like for them."

Participant 3 also added on the need for culturally diverse materials that can be used in the classroom. "More than anything culturally diverse materials being supplied and studied, would likely make classrooms more culturally, culturally diversified and comfortable for everyone involved." Participant 2 also added on the importance of cultural diversity for the next ARL cohort. "You just have to be very open-minded, sensitive to other people's culture. So, you have to understand the entire person, like their family background." Because most of the ARL teachers go to a school with vacant teaching positions, and many schools' vacant positions have a higher number of students from CLD backgrounds, Participant 3 discussed the importance of having more materials centered around instruction of students from CLD backgrounds.

Questions for School-Based Administrators

Results for the interviews conducted by the researcher were reported by analyzing the response to each question asked of the sample. The question was listed first with the results and themes written under the question. Direct quotes were used from the participants to provide insight and information on the theme. Themes and results from these interview questions were used to answer Research Question 2: What are the perceptions from school-based administrators of alternative route special education teachers working in Title I schools with a high population of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds?

Question 1: When you have a vacant special education position, whom do you consider first? Daily substitute, long-term substitute, or ARL Teacher? Why?

None of the five administrators selected a daily substitute to fill the vacant special education teaching position to start out the school year. Only Administrator 1 mentioned a daily substitute. Administrator 1 stated that a daily substitute is a "very, very short term" solution to the problem of a vacancy. All administrators stated that they would want an ARL special education teacher in order to fill the vacancy as well, and four out of the five also stated that a long-term substitute would be acceptable to fill the vacancy. Four of the participants stated that it was a "toss-up" between a long-term substitute and an ARL teacher and gave different reasons for why they wanted each.

Question 1 seeks to add to the current literature involving ARL special education teachers. Many times, ARL special education teachers are placed in vacant positions to start off the school year. This question asked school-based administrators about their preference for filling vacant special education positions to start the school year.

Reasons for Hiring ARL Special Education Teachers. There were four major reasons given by the administrator participants as to why they would want an ARL special education

teacher to fill a vacant special education position to start the school year. Administrator 1, who had been working as a school-based administrator for 10 years, stated that he would reach out to the ARL office in order to see if there were any good ARL candidates when he needed to fill a vacant teaching position. “But what I’ve done in the past is I’ve actually reached out to our ARL office here in town actually…. I would ask, do you have any great ARL candidates? And that’s all I did in the past. I would always and then always have one or two that I’ve picked up, and I’ve been very, very lucky.” Since Administrator 1 had 10 years of experience as an administrator in the school district where research took place, he knew about the district-based ARL program, and he knew he could reach out to see if there were any teacher candidates who he could hire based on his previous experience with this department.

For three of the administrator participants (1, 4, and 5 or 60% of the sample), having a license was the most important factor between the three choices given to them. Administrator 1 said, “Typically, I almost always want to find a licensed teacher.” Administrator 4 stated that “of course we always want a licensed teacher.” Administrator 5 also added, “Obviously ARL is great, because hopefully, that means that eventually they can be hired and licensed and all of that stuff.” Administrators 4 and 5 both worked in the same school, which was considered lower SES, high CLD, and a high-needs school as well. Although having a license was mentioned and noted as a factor for hiring an ARL teacher compared to a long-term substitute, it was not the only factor. Responses regarding hiring long-term substitute teachers by these administrator participants are discussed later in this section. However, having a license gave ARL special education teachers a leg up compared to long-term substitute teachers when these administrators were trying to fill vacant teaching positions to start off the school year.

Administrator 2, who had eight years of administrator experience (four in the school district where research took place and four in another state), stated that he would want an ARL special education teacher to fill the vacant teaching position because they were coachable. “The ARL teachers that we have here are amazing and super coachable. I don’t know if it’s necessarily the program itself, or just the type of people they draw, and I’ve only been here for 4 years, so I don’t really have much insight of the program, but they are some of my strongest teachers here, so I would definitely say, an ARL teacher.” Administrator 2 valued the ability of their ARL special education teachers to take feedback from the administration in order to become better teachers. This was the biggest factor for hiring ARL teachers in Administrator 2’s response to this question.

The biggest factor for hiring ARL special education teachers for Administrator 3, who had four years of administrative experience total, was having a consistent teacher for the students. “They [the students] need that consistency throughout the school year … so, it has to be a consistent person who’s going to be passionate, who’s going to be here for the kids, who’s going to be here to do the job. So, I definitely would want to have somebody that’s here every day as opposed to a daily [substitute].” Administrator 3 worked in a school with a relatively small student population, so having a consistent person in the classroom was important to him in order to have a stable classroom (e.g., not having to combine classes or split up students due to not having a teacher). Having a consistent person in the classroom for the students in the special education classroom was most important for Administrator 3. A rotation of daily substitute teachers, with different experiences, expectations, and management styles, was ruled out for this reason in favor of the consistency of either a long-term substitute or an ARL teacher. Reasons why they wanted long-term substitute teachers are discussed in the next section.

Reasons for Hiring Long-Term Substitute Teachers. Administrators also gave reasons as to why they would consider hiring a long-term substitute teacher to fill special education vacancies. One of the reasons stated by some of the participants came down to finding the best fit for the job (40% of the sample). It did not matter to the administrators if they were a long-term substitute or an ARL teacher; if they best fit the role, that is who they would hire. Administrator 3 stated that "I would obviously do interviews and just see who's the best fit for the position." Administrator 4 also stated that "I found myself interviewing sometimes and that's [ARL teachers] not the best candidate." These administrators wanted to make sure that the teacher they were interviewing was a good fit for their school and that was one of the most important factors for them. If a long-term substitute was a better fit, the administrator would hire that teacher over an ARL teacher.

Prior experience was another factor for administrators (40% of the sample) when they were considering hiring a long-term substitute over an ARL teacher. Administrator 2 mentioned that they would hire a long-term substitute to fill any position in their school based on their prior experience and ability. "But again, that would only be if I knew [the substitute teacher]. Like my long-term sub that we have here, I would put her anywhere, almost over a veteran teacher, because she's that good." Administrator 4 mentioned that the biggest factor for them was prior experience in special education settings. "Well, we definitely like to look for people that have had previous experience in special education programs, because they have a sort of foundation of what to expect and the responsibilities."

The last two themes came from Administrators 2 and 5 (40% of the sample). These themes were budget concerns and having strong long-term substitute teachers. Administrator 2 stated that hiring a long-term substitute teacher was an advantage because they did get some of

the money allotted by the vacant teaching position back into the school budget. “The only real reason I would consider a long-term sub first is, if I knew somebody, because we get the money back in our budget, the attrition dollars at the end of the year.” Having extra money in the budget was important to Administrator 2 because he said he could hire another tutor, paraprofessional, or support staff with the extra money in the budget. Administrator 5 also stated that their school has connections with strong long-term substitute teachers so that is one reason why they could consider hiring a long-term substitute teacher first over an ARL teacher.

Administrator 1 discussed how they personally have recruited long-term substitute teachers into the ARL program in order to become fully licensed special education teachers. “Also, if I ever had full-time subs that come to my building and they have a degree, I've always encouraged them to pursue the ARL option, for in particular special education. I personally have had three special education teachers in my principal career that started out as substitutes that I’ve encouraged to like, hey, you might want to consider this and have gone through the ARL route, and I’ve hired them. So, they turned out to be great.” This is a situation in which Administrator 1 can give the long-term substitute a foundation to build their teaching abilities prior to entering the ARL program. Again, Administrator 1 had 10 years of administrative experience working in the school district where research took place, so he had prior knowledge of all the programs offered within this school district.

Question 2: What are some challenges associated with hiring first-year special education teachers who are working with students from a culturally and linguistically diverse background?

Themes that emerged from the responses to this question include general school functions and experience. Question 2 was targeted to see what school-based administrators see as

challenges facing all first-year special education teachers who work with students from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds. This question is not limited to only ARL special education teachers but includes all special education teachers. This question and the following question were given to school-based administrators to see if there was a different set of challenges between traditional route first-year teachers and ARL first-year teachers when working with students from a CLD background. This question was posed because many first year and ARL special education teachers are placed in schools with high vacancy rates, and schools with a high population of students from CLD backgrounds have high vacancy rates.

General School Functions. One major theme that came from the responses from administrators within this question involved first-year teachers understanding general school functions, which include lesson planning, creating a behavior management system for their students, collaboration with other staff members, knowing what supports are offered to them, and understanding the legality associated with special education. Four administrators (1, 2, 3, and 5 or 80% of the sample0) gave responses that included the theme of general school functions.

Administrator 1's response included many components of general school functions as one of the challenges that first-year special education teachers face when working with CLD students. "For special education [teachers] in particular, they have two, I believe two huge challenges that are different from a traditional classroom teacher … They don't know what to do from the management, the planning, the lesson planning, the collaboration, like essentially how the school functions." Administrator 1 had spent time in both high school and elementary school as an administrator, so he saw these challenges in different educational settings.

The other issue associated with general school function for Administrator 1 was the legality aspect associated with being a special education teacher. Administrator 1 stated that

“The second piece to this is that a special education teacher has this overwhelming amount of legality, the compliance aspect that goes along with it. And a first-year special education teacher, even if they were trained through an ARL or classically trained teacher, the legality of special education is so overwhelming, and it’s so huge for a well-trained special education teacher, but it is overwhelming for a first-year teacher.” Understanding the legal components associated with special education was a major challenge that Administrator 1 saw when working with first year special education teachers.

Behavior. Administrators 3 and 5 (40% of the sample) explicitly mentioned managing behaviors as the biggest challenge for first-year teachers who are working with CLD students. Behavior management is under the umbrella theme of general school functions because a teacher who does not have a good behavior management system is not able to provide academic and instructional support in the classroom. Administrator 3 stated that "Our special education programs do have some more challenging behaviors. So that's something that they would need support with, especially a first-year teacher, and just understanding the background of our students, where they come from, what kind of barriers they have in their home life before they even come to school, because we have to kind of break those challenges down by understanding them before they even get to that desk in front of a teacher. So, I think they need to understand a lot of that stuff. But before they even go into the teaching process." For Administrator 3, first-year teachers needed to know the background of their students to address the challenging behaviors that the teacher may see in the classroom. Administrator 3 stated that the first-year teacher also needed to find support to address these issues and to support the learning needs of students.

Administrator 5 also discussed the challenge of behavior management of students in special education from a trauma perspective. "The biggest thing is always behavior. I mean, that's the biggest learning curve for any new teacher, no matter who they are, what their experience is including traditional programs or ARL. And it's really learning that careful balance of understanding the trauma that they're coming from, but also holding them to high expectations and giving them appropriate rewards." Administrator 5 also noted that all first-year teachers need to continue to implement behavior management strategies and systems in their classroom even if they do not work for a few days. Ensuring that behavior strategies and systems

are implemented with fidelity was a challenge for first-year teachers in the eyes of Administrator 5. “Then not giving up on something like, if something works for 3 days, and then doesn’t work for 2 days. That doesn’t mean you throw it out and start all over again.”

Knowing Support. Having first-year special education teachers know, understand, and find support was a challenge stated by Administrators 2 and 3 (40% of the sample). The theme of support included support for the first-year teacher themselves that the school provided and the support that the students needed from the teacher. Administrator 2 stated that “I mean, I would just say that the biggest challenge itself is knowing the support that the kids need, and when to utilize the supports.” Administrator 2 stated that traditional route teachers may have had some prior experience and prior knowledge in providing support for students because they may have learned the strategy in a class. “If you’re a traditional route teacher it’s a topic they’ve been brought up [with]. You might have done a presentation on it in class before, but ultimately, when it’s your crew of kids a lot of that just goes out the window because you kind of forgot … you have to, you know, practice makes perfect.” Support was a consistent theme throughout all answers provided by Administrator 2.

Administrator 3 also stated that the first-year teacher needs support from other teachers within the school in order to effectively do their job. “From my experience it requires a lot of ongoing support, and what I feel like is the support usually comes from our special education facilitator or administration.” Administrator 3 added that the teacher needs the support to perform tasks associated with their job such as writing compliant IEPs.

Experience. Administrator 4 (20% of the sample) noted that the biggest challenge faced by all first-year special education teachers is their lack of experience. “But the challenge is that they have not had a well-rounded experience, and we know that the well-rounded experience

only comes with time. So, time is the best teacher, like, they say." Administrator 4 noted that if the teacher had a high-quality pre-service program, then they would have academic and behavioral strategies to support all students, including CLD students. Administrator 4 noted that first-year teachers have the strategies, but they do not have the experience to effectively implement the strategies.

Question 3: What are some challenges associated with hiring first-year ARL special education teachers who are working with students from a culturally and linguistically diverse background?

Two major themes came from the responses to this question: lack of experience, and having the teachers access information needed for their job. This question seeks to find an answer to Research Question 2. This question asked administrators to look specifically at first-year ARL special education teachers to see what challenges they face when working with students from CLD backgrounds. This question adds on to the previous question to see what additional challenges ARL teachers have when working with CLD students.

Lack of Experience. Administrators 2, 3, and 4 (60% of the sample) mentioned lack of experience as a challenge for ARL special education teachers working with CLD students. For this theme, experience is defined as time in the classroom and also support systems that can provide the ARL teacher with on-the-job training. Administrator 2 did not see this as a major challenge, but rather as an advantage: "ARL route [teachers] as well they've never really been in the classroom. My team here knows what you need to do. So, we're coaching you, and there's no bad habits to break, and there's nothing that you might have thought you loved in college when you heard about it. And then you're going to try it here, and it's not even a best practice to begin with."

Lack of experience was seen as a negative for Administrators 3 and 4 (40% of the sample) when comparing first-year ARL special education teachers to their traditional route peers. Administrator 3 continued to discuss the need for additional support, either from people in the building or from the school district, for the ARL special education teacher to perform their job well. Administrator 4, who had 14 years of administrator experience in the school district where research took place, discussed the importance of support systems to provide the ARL special education teachers with on-the-job training: "I don't believe that we have a strong support system in place, like sometimes, you know we want to match them up with the teacher here on campus. That would be the most win-win situation, but also, I don't see that there's a lot of support…. But I don't see that there's any support or programming classes, professional learning that I know of when she does become fully licensed. Yet even now I wish there was more support, because then they might be more successful." This lack of support and experience was the biggest challenge for ARL special education teachers, according to Administrator 4.

Accessing Information Needed for the Job. Accessing information needed for the job of being a special education teacher was a concern for two of the administrators when discussing first-year ARL special education teachers. This is an umbrella term with many different components within the theme, such as accessing information on the case manager handbook, collecting information for IEPs, and other information that a special education teacher would need to service their students. Administrator 1 stated that "it goes back to, you know, just them accessing the information that is necessary for them to function their job. Not just in a building from a district standpoint, and it's a lot of … there's a lot of reading to do. There's a lot of research to do." Administrator 1 added that "the challenges are accessing that information, knowing how to prioritize what's important, making sure when those IEPS are legally sufficient

for them to be status and to be locked, who is going through and doing that and like, how does that process work? I think that's a challenge with any first-year teacher, let alone an ARL teacher."

Administrator 5 added information regarding the IEP process and how first-year special education teachers struggle with this process. "It really just comes down to understanding the IEP process, like how to collect data, how to write the present levels, how to write a goal and objective that's specific and measurable." Administrator 5 went on to discuss their time as an undergraduate where they took a course involving the IEP process and data collection associated with that process. ARL special education teachers do not get this prior experience before entering the classroom so they must work with a school-based or district-based mentor to collect the right information needed to write an IEP. Administrator 5 said that "it's that, like understanding the parts [of the IEP] and understanding the data that needs to be collected" was a major challenge when working with first-year ARL special education teachers. Administrator 5 was in her first year as an administrator, so she was in the classroom the previous year. This may be one reason that the IEP process was so important to her. In her previous role as a classroom teacher, she would have had more experience with the IEP process since she would have had experience with this process as a co-teacher.

Question 4: What are the most difficult challenges when working with ARL special education teachers compared to traditional route teachers (all years not just limited to first year)?

Two themes emerged from the responses given by the administrators: pedagogy and workload. Question 4 seeks to add information regarding the needs of ARL special education teachers in comparison to their traditional route peers and continues to add to the comparison between the two teachers by not limiting the amount of time in the classroom to 1 year, but

including all years for all teachers (e.g., comparing a third-year ARL teacher to a third-year traditional route teacher). This question seeks to answer Research Question 2 and understand the perception of ARL special education teachers in comparison to their traditional route peers by school-based administrators.

Pedagogy. Pedagogy is defined as the methods or practices of teaching used to deliver academic instruction. Three of the administrators (1, 3, and 4 or 60% of the sample) stated that ARL special education teachers, no matter how many years of experience they had in the classroom, lacked pedagogy when compared to their traditional route teachers. Administrator 1 stated that "it's the pedagogy of how to teach, how to follow … the sequence of actual instruction so like we think of components of an effective lesson, understanding the standard, knowing how to unwrap the standard, what like the skill and knowledge for the kids how to like scaffold and support that particular standard."

Administrator 3 said that ARL special education teachers need to have continued support to develop the skills and strategies needed to provide high-quality instruction to their students. "I feel like some of them just don't have that pedagogy and it takes many, many years to get that, and just rushing somebody through a program, I feel like they don't get that. And then they don't have that support you know, throughout that program that's ongoing throughout the year. And not only just one year, but I also feel like that just needs to be an ongoing support thing that comes from those schools that are giving that alternative route to licenses for those special education teachers."

Administrator 4 added a comparison between traditional route teachers and ARL teachers in relation to their pedagogy and experience within the program. "Well, definitely, I think that traditional route teachers, they've had the pedagogy. They've had the intro classes. They've gone

through the observation route. You know where you do your 20 hours, or whatever, and then you go to your practicum. It's time, and time is experience versus [in ARL] you're just put in there. And okay, now you're in there, you're in that class, and now you have to take all this course work and complete these papers. And so, it's rushed you know, because we don't have time." For these three administrators, lack of pedagogy due to a rushed program was one of the major challenges associated with working with ARL special education teachers, no matter their work experience.

This result is consistent with current research involving school-based administrators and their perceptions of ARL special education teachers. According to Moffett and Davis (2014), school-based administrators believe that ARL teachers lack content knowledge when compared to their traditional route peers. Three of the administrator participants (60%) stated that the ARL teachers with whom they work lack the same pedagogy and teaching skills when compared to their traditional route peers. These administrators also had a wide range of experience as administrators, so lack of content knowledge being a challenge in the eyes of the administrator was not limited to first-year administrators. It should be noted that all three of these administrators came from a traditional route background as well for both their teaching and administrative licensure. This same challenge was seen across different school settings as well (high school and elementary school) and in different school locations (e.g., the administrators were not at the same school), so it is not limited to a specific site or grade level, but rather it is a common challenge for many of the administrators in this study.

Workload. Two of the administrators (2 and 5 or 40% of the sample) stated that managing workload was a major challenge for all ARL special education teachers no matter their experience level. Regarding workload, Administrator 2 stated that "making sure that they're

[ARL special education teachers] able to do their job and do the workload that they have to do outside of school as well, because it's already a lot that they're having to do in the classroom, which we all know that it does require some work outside of school in order to make it happen." Administrator 2 mentioned not only the workload associated with teaching, but the workload that ARL special education teachers have outside of the classroom based on their program. This workload includes taking college courses and taking district-level training for them to earn their full teaching license within the 3 years allotted to them. "It's kind of a lot so really just making sure that they're not overwhelmed, and we are supporting them just like I would do to any other teacher. But I give them as much support and help as possible to make sure that they just don't feel overwhelmed." Administrator 2 also mentioned the role of the administrator as a support, as a leader in the building, meaning that the administration needs to support the ARL special education teacher for them to not feel overwhelmed by the job. The school where Administrator 2 worked had a close connection with the local university, so he was used to having ARL, student, and first-year teachers in his building. Administrator 2 was familiar with all the different workloads that teachers have to deal with outside of the normal school-based workload due to their connection to the university.

Administrator 5 also discussed the challenge of workload that ARL special education teachers have in comparison to their traditional route peers. "I mean, the biggest one is the workload, right? So, during traditional programs you have real student teaching, you get your feet wet, even though you are not the licensed teacher you can see everything the licensed teacher has to do. Our poor ARL teachers have 5, 10, maybe 15 days they spend with the licensed teacher, and that's not real life." Administrator 5 went on to add that ARL special education teachers are not exposed to all the additional duties and responsibilities associated with

teaching in comparison to their traditional route peers. “And so, I feel like a lot of times ARL teachers get super overwhelmed by the amount of work that there is because they sign up, and they’re like I’m going to teach kids.” Administrator 5 added that ARL teachers are not exposed to data collection in the same way that traditional route teachers are, and this can lead to them being overwhelmed by their job and stressed out by the workload associated with being an ARL special education teacher, no matter their teaching experience.

Question 5: Do you think the route taken makes an impact on a teacher’s ability to improve student achievement for students in special education? Why or why not?

For this question, one administrator (20% of the sample) stated that route taken did make a difference (yes), three administrators (60% of the sample) stated that route taken did not make a difference (no), and one administrator (20% of the sample) stated that route taken did not matter which route because support systems were the most important factor. Question 5 was the main query to answer Research Question 2. Student achievement was a major factor in school rank for school-based administration, and ARL teachers did not have the same experience and pedagogy compared to their traditional route peers. This may impact a school-based administrator’s perception of the ARL special education teacher’s ability to positively impact the achievement of special education students. Administrators stated in previous questions that ARL teachers do not have the same pedagogy, strategies, or experience compared to their traditional route peers.

Yes. Administrator 4 was the only one who stated that the route taken made an impact on a teacher’s ability to improve student achievement for students in special education. “I would say yes because they’ve [traditional route teachers] been down that road. They’ve had the research, the pedagogy, the experience of practicing, the visitors that come into your class and talk about

what it is to be a resource room teacher or a special education teacher." Administrator 4 added that "you have a traditional route [teacher], and they already have something for you and then you mold them for your school. You know they've done the research papers. They've done the practicum." The experience that traditional route teachers had through their coursework and working in the classroom made the biggest difference when comparing the ability of traditional route and ARL teachers to improve achievement of students in special education. Administrator 4 had experience in many lower SES schools (one star) and helped to turn them around (up to three stars) so this could have been a factor in her answer to this question. Administrator 4 also had 14 years of experience as an administrator so she could have seen a variety of ARL teachers which made an impact on her answer to this question.

No. Three of the administrators (60% of the sample) stated that the route taken did not make a difference in a teachers' ability to improve achievement for students in special education. These three administrators (1, 3, and 5) stated that it depended more on the person and their characteristics than the route through which they became a teacher. Administrator 1 stated that there are structures and supports in place to help ARL special education teachers during their first 3 years of teaching, and that there were other characteristics that they look for when hiring a new special education teacher. "So, I think now … I think what I look for people in education [who] will be like, do you love kids? Do you have a short-term memory, like if a kid had a bad day yesterday. Did you know the next day is a new day?" He went on to add "I mean it's one of those things where, if you have that passion, that compassion for kids and a thirst for growing yourself professionally learning, then we can work. Those are the types of candidates that I've always found in ARL." It was not the program itself that was a defining characteristic for Administrator 1. It was the person's own characteristics that made the biggest impact on student

achievement. “What you get a lot of times [with ARL teachers] is like the people that care so much about kids, and are willing to give kids like five, six, seven chances, and have a never-give-up attitude.” Administrator 1 stated previously that he encouraged individuals to join in the school-district based ARL program, so this prior experience could have made an impact on his answer to his question.

Administrator 3 agreed that it was more about the person rather than the route taken. “I really think it’s about the actual human who picks up the position. I feel like if they’re passionate about the role and they go out, and they seek that support to ensure that they’re successful, to ensure that their data looks good, and to make sure that they have all those scaffolds and differentiation in place to support each of their kids in their IEP goals. So, I really don’t think it has anything to do with the ARL.” Administrator 3 went on to add that they have seen success stories and struggles from both ARL and traditional route teachers and that the person makes the biggest difference in relation to achievement of students in special education. In closing, Administrator 3 stated, “So I feel like personally, it’s about the actual person in the position, and who they are as a person, and how they want to see those students succeed.” Administrator 3 had four years of experience as an administrator so he would have seen an ARL teacher work their way through the program in his time as an administrator.

Administrator 5 agreed with Administrators 1 and 3, that it depends on the person more than the program. Administrator 5 started out by saying that it is not a “cut and dry” answer when choosing between traditional route and alternative route. “I think it’s much more about natural ability and natural calling, with certain aspects of it that have a bigger impact than their program itself.” Administrator 5 stated that natural calling and natural skills involved things like “classroom management” and that “is something natural in some people.” This was

Administrator 5's first year in this role, so she just came from the classroom. This experience could have made an impact on her answer.

These three administrators (60% of the administrators) stated that the route taken did not make an impact on the ARL teachers' ability to support the learning needs of the special education students in their classrooms. This result is consistent with the finding from Beare et al. (2012), who reported that the route taken is not a factor when hiring ARL teachers. These three administrators support the finding from that study and provide updated information regarding its findings.

Support. For Administrator 2, support that the teacher gets from administration within the building was more important than the route taken in ensuring achievement for special education students. "I believe that the support that they get after they're in the classroom determines the impact that they make on any kid." Administrator 2 went on to add, "But at the same time, if you have the drive from admin and the drive from the teacher, then you can move mountains." Administrator 2 thought that support was the major factor in ensuring achievement for students in special education. For Administrator 2, support came from the administration, the special education facilitator, and other staff members who work with the special education teacher.

Question 6: Do you have any suggestions for the ARL program that can help future ARL special education teachers who work with students from a CLD background?

Question 6 was asked to see what additional support administrators think ARL special education teachers need to effectively work with CLD students in a special education setting. Four of the administrators (80% of the sample) stated that they would like to see additional mentoring, coaching, and support from the school district to help the ARL special education

teachers. Two administrators stated that they would like the ARL program to work directly with the school to make sure the ARL teacher is supported.

Mentoring, Coaching, and Support. Four of the administrators (1, 2, 4, and 5 or 80% of the sample) stated that they would like additional mentoring, coaching, and support from the school district in order to help the ARL teachers in their building. Administrator 1 stated, "I think you could never underestimate enough coaching and mentoring [during] their first few years of teaching," adding that "having a plan like a well thought out plan on how coaching and mentoring looks, how we assign mentors, and also how we identify those individuals to work in certain areas … I think that way you don't get burned out." Administrator 1 thought it was important to have a plan for mentoring and support for the ARL teachers to help them not only in their first year, but in their first 5 years of being a teacher.

Administrator 2 noted that there should be a mentor who can provide strategies to the ARL teacher to support the learning needs of students who are English Language Learners (ELL) as well. "But there definitely needs to be an ELL mentor, because those strategies that they [ARL special education teachers] really need to be made aware of, and that really help drive that, you know, culturally sensitive and linguistic approach to learning." Administrator 2 also thought that there needed to be more classroom visits from district-based mentors to provide feedback and support to the ARL teacher. The mentors could also work with the school-based administrators to ensure that there is consistent communication when providing support to the ARL special education teacher.

Administrator 4 echoed the need for increased mentoring to ARL special education teachers, noting that they have some mentoring systems set up in their building. However, Administrator 4 wanted "a systematic plan of support where it is a routine plan" from the district

in order to support new ARL special education teachers. Administrator 4 wanted this support because “we’re [schools] still reactive” when it comes to helping ARL special education teachers. Administrator 4 mentioned things like out of compliance IEPs being an issue when working with ARL special education teachers and that ARL special education teachers needed support in order to make sure their paperwork was done correctly.

Administrator 5 also saw a need for additional mentoring support for ARL special education teachers. “I just give them more time with some sort of mentor teacher, whether it’s in the school where they’re working.” Administrator 5 went on to add that ARL special education teachers need exposure to different special education settings in order to make sure they understand the job they have, “so that they can see really those differences in there [special education setting] to find where their niche is because not everyone’s meant to be an autism teacher, not everyone’s meant to be a STAR teacher [self-contained behavior classroom], but maybe they don’t know, because they’ve never had that experience.” Administrator 5 wanted additional mentoring support and had ARL special education teachers work with teachers in different settings to ensure they were placed in the right classroom and could perform the job to the best of their ability.

Working With School. Two administrators (40% of the sample) wanted the ARL program itself (either university based or district based) to communicate and work with the school when placing an ARL special education teacher at the school. Administrator 3 stated that “I feel like they [the ARL programs] need to connect with the school a little bit more,” adding that “I have no relationship with that program or any mentors from that program, so they’re just pretty much placed here.” This was a negative for Administrator 3 because they did not know what skills the ARL teachers came in with and what support the ARL teacher needed to be

successful. For the ARL teacher to be successful, Administrator 3 stated that "I feel like the collaboration really needs to be there between the school and whatever program it is that they're taking."

Common Themes Between Participants

After analyzing all 10 interviews from all participants, both ARL special education teachers and school-based administrators, the researcher then analyzed common themes between both sets of participants to see if the experience of ARL special education teachers matched the perception of school-based administrators and to find any gaps within the ARL program that may help future ARL special education teachers. Five common themes emerged when analyzing the responses from both sets of participants. Further information is provided in the following section.

Prior Experience

Prior experience in the classroom, and more importantly prior experience with students in special education, was a common theme from both the ARL special education teachers and the school-based administrators. In Question 1, two of the administrators (2 and 4 or 40% of the sample) stated that prior experience in a special education classroom was a determining factor when filling a vacant special education teaching experience. Three of the teacher participants (1, 4, and 5 or 60% of the sample) also stated that they had prior experience in the classroom as a substitute teacher before entering the ARL program. Administrator 1 even mentioned in his response to Question 1 that he encouraged some of the long-term substitute teachers that they work with to pursue the ARL option in order to become a fully licensed teacher. Prior experience was a theme in the responses of 50% of the participants in the total sample.

Prior experience was important from an administration standpoint. Administrators 1, 3, and 4 stated that lack of pedagogy was one of the major challenges associated with hiring first-

year teachers. ARL special education teachers can gain some pedagogical skills through substituting; however, it would not be the same set of skills compared to their traditional route peers. Prior experience in the classroom was one of the main factors that impacted the ARL special education teacher participants' desire to become a teacher and it was one of the main factors for school-based administrators when they needed to fill a vacant special education teaching position. Based on the school-based administrators' responses to Question 3, ARL special education teachers need more experience in the classroom prior to starting the school year. Two ARL special education teacher participants (3 and 4) also stated that having more hands-on experiences in classrooms would be helpful for future ARL special education programs. Having these hands-on experiences would give ARL special education teachers prior experience and exposure to different pedagogical strategies in order to make them more hirable to school-based administrators so they can fill vacant special education positions.

Support from Administration

Support for teachers within the building and having support structures in place for the ARL special education teachers was another common theme from the two sets of participants. Four of the administrators (1, 2, 3, and 4 or 80% of the sample) discussed the support systems that they have in place within their school building. They specifically mentioned people within their building (e.g., special education facilitator) that the ARL teacher could reach out to if they needed help. The theme of school-based administrators providing additional support to ARL teachers is consistent with current research involving ARL teachers (Casey et al. 2011; Brenner et al., 2005). Support was a common theme for Administrator 2 in all of his responses to all questions asked during the interview. Administrator 2 talked about building a supportive environment in order to provide ARL special education teachers with all the tools they need to be

effective teachers. In response to Question 5, Administrator 2 thought that support, not the route taken, was the most important factor to making sure special education students achieve.

Three of the ARL special education teacher participants (2, 4, and 5 or 60% of the sample) stated that their administration was very supportive of them throughout their time teaching. When the ARL teachers had issues, the administration would help them solve their problem. The administration would also provide feedback to the ARL teacher so they could make improvements as needed in order to support the learning of their students. Having a supportive administration that has built-in systems of support, including school-based mentors for all teachers, including ARL special education teachers, was important to the ARL participants and the school-based administrators. Support was a theme stated by 70% of the total sample of respondents.

Mentors

Support provided by district-based mentors was another theme for both sets of participants. ARL teacher participants mentioned the support they received from their district-based mentor, and some of the school-based administrators mentioned the increased need for mentoring, or the fact that they had no connection or relationship to the mentor. Participant 3 explicitly discussed the support that they received from their district-based mentor throughout her first year in the classroom. Many of the other ARL teacher participants mentioned their district-based training, which is run by different district-based mentors. These supports were helpful to the ARL special education teachers when they were starting in the classroom.

In contrast to the ARL special education teachers, some of the administrators mentioned that the ARL teachers needed additional support and mentoring from the district while they were in the classroom. Administrator 3 had no connection or relationship with the ARL special

education mentor that was provided to the teacher from the district. Administrator 2 outlined different ways in which the mentor can collaborate and communicate with the administration in order to provide better support to the ARL teacher. This collaboration included having a running document with different areas of support that needed to be addressed when observing the ARL teacher in the classroom (e.g., lesson planning, providing different behavior strategies, or providing differentiated instruction to students). Administrator 5 wanted the ARL teachers to have more time with the school-based mentor teacher to prepare them for instruction in the classroom. Administrator 4 stated that there needed to be more "systematic supports" throughout the mentoring process from the school district to help ARL special education teachers.

The difference in perception for mentors between the ARL special education teachers and the school-based administrators was one of the more interesting results from the interviews. ARL special education teachers mentioned their mentors and the support that was provided to them (e.g., lesson planning, IEP process, and data collection) and school-based administrators did not think the ARL teachers had enough mentor support. One reason was that the mentor does not work directly with the school-based administrator, so the administrator does not know when they come in to see the ARL teacher nor do they know what support the mentor is providing to the ARL teacher. Two administrators (1 and 4) talked about the need for ongoing training from the school district in order to support the ARL special education teachers. This training would be supplemental to the mentoring that the ARL teacher gets from the school and district-based mentor and the training they get through attending their college courses. Mentoring, or lack thereof, was a major disconnect between the responses given by both sets of participants. Mentoring was a theme discussed by 50% of the total population.

Lack of Preparation

Lack of preparation was a common theme for both ARL special education teacher participants and school-based administrators. Lack of experience was a theme in Question 3 for three of the school-based administrators (2, 3, and 4 or 60% of the sample) regarding the challenges associated with hiring ARL special education teachers. Although some ARL special education teachers have limited classroom experience, through observations during the ARL program or through substitute teaching, the school-based administrators still noted that ARL teachers lacked the same amount of experience compared to their traditional route peers. ARL special education teacher participants also recognized that they had a lack of experience compared to their traditional route peers. Four ARL teacher participants (1, 2, 4, and 5 or 80% of the sample) stated that they had a lack of experience or lack of preparation in one of their responses to the interview questions. This lack of experience and preparation caused issues with other teachers and with students in their classrooms. However, the ARL teachers did not state that it caused any issues with their school-based administrators. Both ARL special education teachers and school-based administrators noted that lack of experience was an issue for ARL teachers. Lack of experience was a theme for 70% of the total population.

One reason why these ARL special education teachers were at a disadvantage in experience was a result of school closures associated with Covid-19. Schools were closed in March of 2020 in the large urban school district from which these participants were selected. Schools were also fully distance learning during most of the 2020-2021 school year, with schools returning to hybrid instruction during the spring of 2021 and full in-person (optional based on the parent) after spring break of 2021. Schools in this large urban school district did not go back to full in-person instruction (5 days a week for all students) until the 2021-2022 school year.

Participants in the school district–based ARL program are given exposure to different special education classrooms (around 15 days of in-person, hands-on experience), but the ARL teacher participants in this study were not given that opportunity due to school closures. This cohort of ARL special education teachers had even less experience compared to traditional route or previous ARL teachers. This is one factor that impacted the school-based administrators' response that ARL teachers need more hands-on experience prior to being hired.

Discussion

After analyzing responses from all participants, the researcher coded the responses into different themes. Themes were then used to answer the two research questions in this research project. Each set of interviews (ARL special education teachers and school-based administrators) were used to answer the corresponding research question (ARL special education teachers were used for Research Question 1 and school-based administrators were used for Research Question 2). Questions in this semi-structured interview were organized based on findings from literature and research involving ARL special education teachers and perceptions from school-based administrators of these teachers. The two sets of interviews (10 interviews in total) were then compared within each other to see if there were any common themes between the two sets of participants. Common themes were also discussed in the previous section. Common themes were not used to answer the two research questions; however, they were used to see if the responses were consistent with current research in the area of ARL special education teachers and their perception from school-based administrators.

Conclusion

Real-Life Experiences of ARL Special Education Teachers

Conclusions were drawn to answer the research questions based on the results of the interviews. For Research Question 1, ARL special education teachers have a variety of experiences when working with students in special education who come from a CLD background. One of the experiences that these ARL teachers have is a lack of preparation prior to starting their time in the classroom. This cohort had a different experience compared to other cohorts of ARL teachers because they were in the ARL program during school closures associated with Covid-19. This group of teachers had to learn through distance-learning models (e.g., videos) rather than seeing different teaching practices in real life with students. This cohort of ARL special education teachers were therefore at a disadvantage compared to other ARL teachers and traditional route teachers because they had limited to no experience working with students prior to starting in the classroom.

These teachers also had to learn how to deliver instruction in a distance model for the first half of the 2021-2022 school year. Not only were they learning how to teach, but they also needed to learn how to deliver instruction in a distance model and use different learning management systems (e.g., Google classroom and Canvas) within their first year of teaching. These ARL teachers were not in person, so they had to work with their mentor teachers online (via Google Meet) to get any of the support they needed during their first year of teaching. Their mentors were also learning the new system, so most ARL teachers and mentors were at a disadvantage when it came to understanding the correct technology needed to support the learning needs of students in the special education setting. This finding was not considered by the researcher as there is limited research on the topic of teacher training related to school closures because of Covid-19.

Another real-life experience that ARL special education teachers had was a supportive environment. ARL special education teachers discussed how their administration and other members in their school community were supportive of them during their time in the classroom. This was done by teachers within their building collaborating with them and giving them resources in order to provide instruction to students in their classroom. The administrators gave them good feedback and supported them during their first year. Administrators did this by providing words of encouragement, validation, and a mentor to the ARL teachers. Other members in the school community provided support as well. Finally, the ARL teachers talked about how their school district–based mentor provided support to them as well. All the ARL teachers talked about how they had a supportive environment that was positive for them.

The final real-life experience that was most important to this research was working with students and families from CLD backgrounds. Many of the ARL teachers discussed how they received some training from their ARL program and additional training from the courses they took during their master's program, but some of the biggest impacts involved their own attitude and their previous experiences.

Previous experience of ARL teachers is not currently discussed in the literature so this was a different finding that could add to the current literature regarding the experiences of ARL special education teachers. Additional information could be collected on ARL special education teachers regarding their previous experiences working with students in special education and students from a CLD background. This information could be used to provide school-based administrators and ARL programs with information regarding the previous experiences of those teachers and help the stakeholders build professional development targeted to support the learning needs of the ARL teachers to better support the students from CLD backgrounds.

Perceptions from Administrators

One of the major findings from the results of the interviews with the administrators was the positive feelings most of them had towards ARL special education teachers. Based on the literature (Moffett & Davis, 2014), school-based administrators were apprehensive about hiring ARL teachers, however many of the administrators in this study welcomed the ARL teachers into their building. The school-based administrators stated that in their experience, ARL special education teachers were coachable, had a good attitude, were there for the students, and were able to perform the job given to them. This goes against current research regarding the perception of ARL teachers for school-based administrators. One reason why this group of school-based administrators may welcome ARL special education teachers compared to the research is that there are so many vacancies in the large urban school district where the research took place. Currently there are around 1400 teacher vacancies going into the 2023-2024 school year, so if an administrator can hire an ARL teacher to fill the vacancy, they know they have someone in that special education classroom for the whole school year. The other alternative would be hiring a daily or long-term substitute if they cannot find an ARL or traditional route teacher to fill that vacant position. These administrators would rather have someone who is in the classroom and providing instruction daily than rely on a substitute teacher to provide inconsistent instruction. The school-based administrators' first choice would be to have a traditionally trained teacher, but the second-best option would be the ARL teacher. The only reason that some of the administrators selected a long-term substitute teacher was because of their prior experience working in the school building.

Results from the school-based administrators were consistent with the findings of Moffett and Davis (2014) regarding preparation of ARL special education teachers. School-based

administrators stated that ARL special education teachers were lacking the same pedagogical skills as their traditional route peers. The school-based administrators were consistent in their answers regarding providing behavioral support to students in special education from a CLD background. This is one area where all administrators stated that ARL teachers needed additional support either from within the building, from the school-district program, or from their university program. This finding supported current research in the area of school-based administrator perceptions of ARL special education teachers.

One result that went against current research involved the quality of ARL special education teacher candidates. According to Brenner et al. (2015), school administrators perceive that ARL programs have a lower quality of participants compared to traditional routes. This was not true of the school-based administrators in this research. One of the school-based administrators even stated that they recruit long-term substitutes into the ARL program if they know the long-term substitute already has a degree.

Many of the school-based administrators talked about how the ARL special education teachers were coachable, how they had a good attitude, and how well they provided instruction for the students in special education. One reason this result is different compared to the literature is because of the school district itself. There was an entire ARL department within this large urban school district that provided mentors and training to ARL special education teachers. This means that the ARL teachers coming into schools had additional training, experience, and mentorship compared to other school districts. Another reason could be because many of the ARL special education teachers had previous experience in education in the form of long-term substituting or as a paraprofessional in a special education setting. Rather than having zero classroom experience prior to starting their time as an ARL teacher, the ARL teachers have some

exposure to the classroom as a long-term substitute. This means that these ARL teachers can adapt instruction and provide support to their students starting on the first day. This finding is a result of the ARL program itself being located within the large urban school district.

Limitations

One limitation associated with the ARL special education teachers was that they all had fewer than 3 years of experience. Typically, the alternative license is for 3 years, meaning that the ARL teacher has completed a master's degree within that time in order to get the required criteria of their alternative license. All participants in this study were still in the process of earning their master's degree and had not completed the required coursework needed to earn their full teaching license. Experience in the classroom was a limitation for ARL special education teacher participants.

The number of ARL teacher participants was also a limitation. Efforts were made to recruit multiple participants from different educational settings (e.g., self-contained, resource, special schools) but only five participants responded to the recruitment emails. Multiple recruitment emails were sent out during the recruitment period, and there was no response from eligible participants. This is a limitation because not every grade level was accounted for, nor was every educational setting accounted for. Additional participants could have included pre-kindergarten teachers, self-contained middle and high school classes, and alternative schools.

Limitations for school-based administrators included the fact that there were no middle school administrators in this study. This study included elementary administration, with one high school administrator. Additional participants in the middle school setting could be included in another research project.

Recruitment of all participants was a difficult challenge for this study. Multiple emails were sent to eligible participants with limited response. Administrators and ARL special education teachers did not respond to multiple emails sent out by the researcher.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

ARL special education teachers working with CLD students in a large urban school district face many different challenges. Some of the challenges discussed by participants during the interviews were general classroom challenges such as lesson planning, paperwork, and behavior systems. Other challenges included working with different teachers in their building, working with administrators, and working with families from CLD backgrounds. ARL special education teachers approached the challenges they faced in various ways.

Teacher Support Challenges

Many of the ARL special education teachers in this study used their prior experience as a means of support in order to work with families from CLD backgrounds. Many of them had prior experience working with CLD students and families. Prior experience came in the form of previous employment (working as a paraprofessional in a special education setting), previous life experiences (working with the Special Olympics) or being from a CLD background themselves (some of the participants were African American and one was Filipino). These prior experiences made a positive impact in the ability of the ARL special education teachers to work with and support the learning needs of the students in their classrooms.

ARL teachers in this study also benefited from support provided by their school, district, and university in order to help students in their classroom. Support provided by the school included working with mentor teachers in their school building that helped them understand the different structures that were in place. Support provided by the school district included working with mentors that helped them collect data for IEPs, set up their IEPs, and help with general classroom skills such as lesson planning and behavior management systems. Finally, support from the university came in the form of classes that the ARL teacher took during their first years

of teaching. ARL special education teachers in this study used a variety of support resources to meet the learning needs of students in their classrooms.

Unknown Challenges

ARL special education teachers in this study did have some challenges that were not accounted for prior to starting research. One of the major challenges came as a result of their on-boarding training. The ARL special education teacher participants went through their on-boarding during school closures associated with Covid-19 and as a result they were not given the same hands-on experiences as other ARL special education cohorts. These ARL special education teachers had to finish their school district–based training using videos provided by the school district. Many of the participants in this study did not find these videos helpful, and they reported that they did not feel like a real-life classroom. This group of ARL special education teachers were thus at a greater disadvantage compared to other ARL cohorts who were given hands-on classroom experience throughout their district-based onboarding programming.

One other challenge involved teachers who were working during the 2021-2022 school year. These teachers had to navigate providing instruction via a distance learning model. These ARL teachers also talked about the difficulty they had working with students when they came back into the classroom from the distance model. ARL teachers discussed how they did not see the behaviors of their students in a distance model, but when they came into the classroom the behaviors increased. The ARL teachers needed to provide more behavior support to their students after they returned to in-person learning. Not only were these ARL teachers providing behavior support to students in person, but they continued to provide distance education support to students who stayed home (the school district provided hybrid instruction, so parents had the option to send their student in person for 2 days a week and then online for 3 days a week). This

cohort of ARL special education teachers were under different stressors that had not been thought of by the researcher due to the nature of instruction provided throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.

Administrators

Administrators working with ARL special education teachers who service students from CLD backgrounds had a variety of different experiences. Many of the school-based administrators talked about how the ARL special education teachers were perhaps more coachable than traditional teachers. This was seen as a positive in their eyes because they were willing to learn and wanted to improve themselves to better service their students. Administrators also talked about the different support structures that needed to be in place for the ARL teacher to be successful. Some of the support structures included partnering them with a mentor teacher in the building, working with the school district–based mentor, and ensuring that they had help with their workload.

One of the main reasons why school-based administrators wanted to hire ARL special education teachers to fill vacant teaching positions was because they were licensed professionals who would be there every day to service and support students in the special education setting. ARL teachers were preferred over daily substitute teachers for this reason. ARL teachers were sometimes chosen before long-term substitutes as well because they had a full teaching license.

However, some of the administrators chose long-term substitute teachers over ARL teachers for a few reasons. One of the advantages of long-term substitutes over ARL teachers was that they usually were more familiar with the school (policies inside the building, different teachers in the building, and administration). Many of the long-term substitute teachers work with the same school for an extended period (months and even years), so they build a

relationship with the administrators in the building. Because the long-term substitute had experience working in the school and working with the administration, administrators were more likely to hire them to fill vacant teaching positions, even over an ARL teacher. This in-building experience was one of the major factors considered by school-based administrators when they were filling vacant special education teaching positions.

Another factor was classroom experience in general. School-based administrators reported that ARL special education teachers lacked experience and pedagogy when compared to their traditional route peers. Not only did ARL teachers lack experience in teaching, but administrators reported that they lacked experience with behavior management, collecting data for IEPs, writing IEPs, and providing differentiated instruction to their students. These were all seen as challenges to school-based administrators and negatives when hiring ARL special education teachers.

One interesting finding was that many of the school-based administrators did not think that the route taken made an impact on a teacher's ability to improve the learning of students in a special education setting. The administrators considered the person themselves as the main factor when it came to ensuring achievement for students in special education. This goes against some of the research involving ARL special education teachers because the school-based administrators in this study thought that the ARL teachers were high quality. Some of the research involving ARL special education teachers has found that school-based administrators did not think these teachers were high quality. School-based administrators in this study seemed to be excited to have ARL teachers in their building because they could mold them, support them, and work with them to make sure they became the best teachers possible for students they worked with.

Implications

Results from school-based administrators are consistent in some areas with previous research studies done involving ARL special education teachers. One of the major issues that school-based administrators had when hiring and working with ARL special education teachers was that they were not as prepared as their traditional route peers. School-based administrators stated that the ARL special education teachers lacked pedagogical knowledge compared to their traditional route peers when it came to supporting the learning needs of students in special education. Behavior management systems, supporting the behavior needs of students in their classrooms, and providing appropriate behavior interventions were also a struggle for ARL special education teachers according to school-based administrators. This information is consistent with current information involving ARL special education teachers and their lack of behavior support prior to entering the classroom.

One interesting finding was that school-based administrators welcomed ARL special education teachers into their buildings. The school-based administrators talked about the support systems they have in place, how ARL special education teachers are coachable, and how the teachers are there for the students. This is somewhat inconsistent with other research involving ARL special education teachers and the perceptions for school-based administrators because in current research school-based administrators did not want ARL special education teachers. Limited positives were associated with ARL teachers in the research, so the findings can add to current research involving school-based administrators' perceptions of ARL teachers.

This study adds to the information involving ARL special education teachers and the perceptions of these teachers from school-based administrators. This topic is important to the field of education because many school districts around the country are experiencing a large

amount of vacant teaching positions, specifically in the area of special education. These school districts may need to rely on ARL programs to fill these vacant teaching positions, meaning that the experience of current ARL special education teachers can shape the training of future ARL special education teachers. Information gathered in these responses from participants regarding the challenges and strengths within the training program can help universities and school districts build better on-boarding programs to support the learning needs of the ARL teachers so they can have the skills needed to support the learning of students from a CLD background.

Information gathered during the interviews can also be shared with universities in order to shape the programming experience of ARL teachers who are going through the ARL special education program. Universities can create a degree path that targets the needs of the participants, so they are given the research-based tools needed to support the students in their classrooms. Some participants stated that the order of the courses they took did not seem to support them at the time. Participants in this study wanted more behavior-based classes earlier in their degree path so they would be able to implement the research-based tools in their classroom earlier in the school year. Universities with ARL programs could build their degree path to include classes that meet the needs of ARL special education teachers when they need them, and build on their foundational skills so they can continue to support the learning needs of students in their classroom.

Implications are not limited to just responses from ARL special education teachers, but include the school-based administrators as well. One major theme was the need for support and structures within the school building to help the ARL special education teachers. Newer administrators can work with experienced administrators to see what systems they have in place to support new teachers, specifically the ARL teachers that may be working in their building.

School-based administration can work with the school district as well in order to create a communication tool to support the on-boarding of ARL special education teachers. This communication tool could be used to provide updates on whatever professional development (PD) is being offered by the school district. Some of the administrators in this project were not sure if any PD was offered by the district specifically for ARL special education teachers. Results from this study can be used to increase communication and collaboration with schools, school districts, and universities and other organizations that provide on-boarding and teacher training for ARL special education teachers.

Significance

Another important finding from this study was that school-based administrators do not shy away from hiring ARL teachers to fill their vacant special education positions. Although ARL teachers may not be the first choice, they are highly considered when it comes to filling vacant special education teaching positions. This study helps to show that ARL teachers have the skills that school-based administrators are looking for when filling a vacant special education teaching position. The ARL teacher still lacks experience, but many of the school-based administrators were able to overlook this gap in experience and give the ARL teacher the support structure they needed to make sure the ARL teacher was successful. Administrators in this study may use the ARL teachers' previous experience as a foundation to ensure their success in the classroom. This study contributes to the research by showing that school-based administrators are willing to have ARL special education teachers come into their buildings and support the learning needs of students from CLD backgrounds.

Another significant finding was direct information regarding the experience of ARL special education teachers working in a large urban school district who went through their on-

boarding process during the Covid-19 pandemic. There is limited information regarding how school districts handled on-boarding and training for teachers during school closures because it is so recent (March of 2020, only 2 years before research was done for this project), so the impact of school closures is still being felt by ARL special education teachers. There is also limited research regarding the experience of administrators who work with teachers who's on-boarding occurred during Covid-19. Giving ARL special education teachers more hands-on experience was a theme for many of the administrators in this study; this could be a direct result of ARL teachers not getting experience due to school closures related to Covid-19.

With school districts across the country experiencing teacher vacancies, this study can offer solutions to better support school districts when recruiting ARL special education teachers. School districts can see what structures administrators use to provide support to ARL special education teachers during their first years of teaching. They can also see what ARL special education teachers reported as their greatest area of need prior to entering the classroom. School districts and universities can build their on-boarding programs to target the needs of ARL special education teachers. In targeting the needs of the ARL special education teachers, universities and school districts can give these teachers the tools they need in order to be more successful when supporting the learning needs of students from CLD backgrounds.

Recommendations

Based on the results from data collected, the main recommendation that is needed for ARL special education programs was that more time is needed in the classroom. ARL special education teachers and administrators wanted more hands-on experience so the ARL special education teacher could have more exposure to different teaching practices and behavior supports. This hands-on experience could be in the form of classroom observations or having the

ARL teacher teach a lesson in a model classroom. ARL teachers would be given exposure to students in special education and could practice some of the material they learned in their on-boarding classes. This hands-on experience should take place in a school with a high population of CLD students because many of the ARL special education teachers will work in these school settings. Hands-on experience can also happen in different classroom settings (resource rooms, co-taught classrooms, and self-contained classrooms) so ARL teachers gain exposure to all classroom types so they can be better prepared to work in all special education settings.

Another recommendation based on the results of the data collected is that schools, districts, and universities could work together to better provide mentoring support to the ARL special education teachers. The mentor should work directly with the school-based administrator as well so that the ARL teacher has the correct information to support the learning needs of the students to whom they are providing support. The mentor can also work with the university to see what courses the ARL teacher is taking and ensure that they are implementing the research-based material from the course into their teaching practices. Having improved communication between all stakeholders would benefit the ARL teachers as well as the students in the classroom

One final recommendation would be for the district and university to look at the pacing and programming of the ARL program. Having courses in a different order could provide the ARL special education teacher with different classroom management skills so they could support the learning of students in their classroom earlier. Programs should focus on the essentials that the ARL teacher will need during the first semester, such as behavior courses and modifying lessons. In their second semester, ARL teachers can learn more strategies to improve their teaching practices after they better understand the learning needs of their students. In modifying what the ARL teacher learns and when they learn it, they can better support the learning needs of

students in their classrooms. This work must be done with the ARL teacher training program at the university and school-district level.

Future Research

Future research in the area of ARL special education teachers can be done involving different teaching practices that the ARL teachers implement in their classrooms. For example, a study could investigate new reading comprehension strategies that specifically target how well ARL teachers implement these strategies into their classrooms. A control group of traditional route teachers could be included to see what difference, if any, may be associated with the teaching practices of ARL and traditional route teachers. Furthermore, a longitudinal study can be done involving first year ARL special education teachers. Current data show that ARL teachers leave the teaching profession at a higher rate within the first 5 years of teaching; therefore, a longitudinal study that can last 5 years would show which factors influence the ARL teacher leaving the profession within this amount of time.

Along with future research for ARL special education teachers, future research can be done with school-based administrators as well. The previously mentioned longitudinal study can include interviews with the school-based administrators to see if their perceptions of the ARL special education teachers change over time. Additionally, there can be studies that include mentor training for school-based administrators so they can see what skills the ARL special education teacher needs to support the learning of students in their classrooms and how the mentor can facilitate the acquisition of these skills.

Final Thoughts

One of the major themes that came from both sets of participants involved the attitude of the individual. ARL special education teachers stated that they had a good attitude when entering

the classroom, and school-based administrators talked about having teachers that were coachable. Having a positive and coachable attitude made a difference in the perception of the administrators about the ARL teachers. This seems to go against the current research, which states that ARL teachers are lower quality compared to traditional route teachers. School-based administrators in this study seemed to welcome ARL teachers into their building. This could be partly because of the total amount of vacancies within the large urban school district where this study took place. School-based administrators in this study could value having a licensed teacher in the building versus having a long-term substitute fill a vacant teaching position. If this study were done in another school district, there could be very different results.

ARL teachers seem to be a short-term solution to the long-term problem of filling vacant teaching positions. School-based administrators in this study did not address the issue of teacher attrition specifically involving ARL special education teachers; however, none of the questions asked of them directly addressed that issue. School-based administrators did discuss many of the issues that lead to teachers leaving the professions (e.g., workload, stress, demands placed on them) so they were aware of the issues that lead to teacher attrition. Having this awareness can be helpful to school-based administrators because they can support all teachers, including ARL special education teachers, in order to ensure that they stay in the profession longer.

Results from this study can be the foundation for building new ARL on-boarding programs that target the needs of students in special education in schools where there is a high percentage of students from CLD backgrounds. Schools, school districts, and universities can work together to build new on-boarding programs that provide ARL teachers with the tools they need to provide behavioral and academic support to this population of students. ARL special education teachers may be more successful with the appropriate tools and support in place.

Continued research must be done in the area of ARL special education teacher preparation to ensure that schools and school districts are filling vacant teaching positions with professionals who stay in the profession and continue to support the students who have the highest needs. This was just one study that can further support this population of teachers.

Only five teachers and five administrators were included in this study. The large urban school district where the research took place has thousands of teachers and thousands of administrators, all with different experiences and different stories to tell. It would be impossible to collect information from all members in this school district, but a small percentage of teachers working in one of the nation's largest school districts discussed their real-life experience. These experiences and perceptions may be experienced by other ARL special education teachers and administrators in school districts across the country. These feelings may also be seen in school districts of all sizes in all settings, urban and rural.

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Appendix A

First email sent to the district-based ARL department

Hello,

My name is William P A Terrill, and I am currently a doctoral candidate at Northern Arizona University. I am currently conducting research involving the real-life experiences of alternative route to licensure (ARL) special education teachers. I am reaching out to you to see if I can get the names of participants from the last five cohorts of the district-based ARL program. This would include members of cohorts starting from the 2016-2017 school year and including the names of the current cohort of ARL special education teachers. I need six to ten ARL special education teachers who work in Title I schools with a high population of students from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds to participate in my research project. Any information that you could share with me would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you so much for all your help and support!

William P A Terrill

Second email sent to the district-based ARL department

Hello,

My name is William P A Terrill, and I am currently a doctoral candidate at Northern Arizona University. I am currently conducting research involving the real-life experiences of alternative route to licensure (ARL) special education teachers. I was not able to find the six to ten participants needed in this project from the first list of names that you sent to me (participants from 2016-2017 cohort to current). I am reaching out to you to see if I can get the names of participants from cohorts prior to the year 2016-2017. Participants in these cohorts would be

from the 2013-2014 school year. I need six to ten ARL special education teachers who work in Title I schools with a high population of students from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds to participate in my research project. Any information that you could share with me would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you so much for all your help and support!

William P A Terrill

Email to the university-based ARL program (if needed)

Hello,

My name is William P A Terrill, and I am currently a doctoral candidate at Northern Arizona University. I am currently conducting research involving the real-life experiences of alternative route to licensure (ARL) special education teachers. I am reaching out to you to see if I can get the names of participants from the last five cohorts of the university-based ARL program. This would include members of cohorts starting from the 2016-2017 school year and including the names of the current cohort of ARL special education teachers. I need six to ten ARL special education teachers who work in Title I schools with a high population of students from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds to participate in my research project. Any information that you could share with me would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you so much for all your help and support!

William P A Terrill

Appendix B

Recruitment email for ARL special education teachers

Hello!

My name is William P A Terrill, and I am a doctoral candidate at Northern Arizona University. I am currently collecting data for my dissertation involving the real-life experiences of alternative route to licensure (ARL) special education teachers who work in Title I schools with a high population of students from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds. This means that at least 51% of the student population in your school is considered an English language learner or identifies as a race other than white. I would like to conduct a six-question interview with you to understand your experiences working with this student population, the challenges you face~~d~~ as an ARL special education teacher, and your overall experience as a teacher. The interview should last no more than 60 minutes. Interviews will be conducted over Google Meet so we can meet any time you would like. If you are interested, please email me back as soon as possible so we can schedule the interview. I will also send you the interview questions so you can think of your responses beforehand.

Thank you so much for considering participating in this research project!

William P A Terrill

Recruitment email for school-based administrators

Hello!

My name is William P A Terrill, and I am a doctoral candidate at Northern Arizona University. I am currently collecting data for my dissertation involving the perceptions from school-based administrators of alternative route to licensure (ARL) special education teachers who work in Title I schools with a high population of students from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds. This means that at least 51% of the student population in your school is considered an English language learner or identifies as a race other than white. I would like to conduct a six-question interview with you in order to understand your experiences working with and evaluating the teaching practices of ARL special education teachers, first year special education teachers, and your overall experiences as an administrator. In order to qualify for this interview, you must be a school-based administrator who formally observes ARL special education teachers and gives them their evaluations. If you are not the school-based administrator who formally observed the ARL special education teacher, please disregard this email. The interview should last no more than 60 minutes. Interviews will be conducted over Google Meet so we can meet any time you would like. If you are interested, please email me back as soon as possible so we can schedule the interview. I will also send you the interview questions so you can think of your responses beforehand.

Thank you so much for considering participating in this research project!

William P A Terrill

Appendix C

Interview questions for the ARL teachers

1. What made you want to become a special education teacher and go through the ARL process?
2. How prepared were you to teach special education students when starting your career? How prepared were you to teach special education students from a culturally and linguistically diverse background (e.g., did you get any specific training to support the needs of students from a CLD background prior to starting your time in the classroom)?
3. How prepared are you now to teach special education students? How prepared are you to teach special education students from a culturally and linguistically diverse background?
4. What was the most difficult challenge you faced from students being an ARL teacher? What was the most difficult challenge you faced from other staff being an ARL teacher? What was the most difficult challenge you faced from administration being an ARL teacher?
5. Do you think the route taken made an impact on your ability to teach students in special education? Why or why not?
6. Do you have any suggestions for the ARL program that can help future ARL special education teachers who work with students from a CLD background?

Interview questions for school-based administrators

1. When you have a vacant special education position, whom do you consider first? Daily substitute, long-term substitute, or ARL teacher? Why?
2. What are some challenges associated with hiring first-year special education teachers who are working with students from a culturally and linguistically diverse background?

3. What are some challenges associated with hiring first-year ARL special education teachers who are working with students from a culturally and linguistically diverse background?
4. What are the most difficult challenges when working with ARL special education teachers compared to traditional route teachers (all years not just limited to first year)?
5. Do you think the route taken makes an impact on a teacher's ability to improve student achievement for students in special education? Why or why not?
6. Do you have any suggestions for the ARL program that can help future ARL special education teachers who work with students from a CLD background?

Appendix D

First email

Hello!

Thank you for participating in the interview over Google Meet on [DATE]. I appreciate the thoughtful answers you provided during our interview. Please take a few minutes to review the transcription of the answers you provided. If you have any questions, corrections, or concerns please email me as soon as possible. Please email any corrections you have within the next 2 weeks. Thank you once again for participating in this research project!

William P A Terrill

Second email

Hello!

Thank you for participating in the interview over Google Meet on [DATE]. I appreciate the thoughtful answers you provided during our interview. Please take a few minutes to review the transcription of the answers you provided. If you have any questions, corrections, or concerns please email me as soon as possible. Please email any corrections you have within the next week. Thank you once again for participating in this research project!

William P A Terrill

Appendix E

ARL Special Education Teacher Participants

Participant	Age/ Gender	Race	School setting	Star ranking	Student demographics	Socioeconomic status
P1	49/ Female	Caucasian	High school self-contained learning disability	3	54% Hispanic, 21% black, 13% white, 6% two or more races, 3% Asian	Title I
P2	26/ Male	Asian	Elementary resource	1	51% Hispanic, 24% black, 11% white, 8% two or more races, 3% Asian	Title I
P3	53/ Female	White	Elementary self-contained autism	1	45% Hispanic, 29% black, 13% white, 10% two or more races, 2% Asian	Title I
P4	45/ Female	African American	Elementary self-contained behavior	4	31% white, 27% Hispanic, 26% black, 9% two or more races, 5% Asian	Title I
P5	32/ Female	African American	Middle school resource	2	46% Hispanic, 24% black, 12% white, 10% Asian, 6% two or more races	Title I

Appendix F

School-based Administrator Participants

Participant	Age/ Gender	Race	School	Experience (years in administration)
Administrator 1	48/ Male	Caucasian	High school	10
Administrator 2	40/ Male	Caucasian	Elementary	8
Administrator 3	34/ Male	Caucasian	Elementary	4
Administrator 4	51/ Female	Hispanic	Elementary	14
Administrator 5	33/ Female	Caucasian	Elementary	1