

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ADOPTED CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION
AND EARLY CHILDHOOD OUTCOME INDICATOR PERFORMANCE

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DEDICATION

For my husband, Steve Gartrell, Sr, who has always supported my life-long love of learning at the sacrifice of the advancement of his own post-secondary education. Thank you for your unconditional love and for all the mornings that you were up with me before the crack of dawn and sat in supportive silence so that I could write. This accomplishment belongs as much to you as it does to me.

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ABSTRACT

LUCRETIA GARTRELL

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ADOPTED CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION AND EARLY CHILDHOOD OUTCOME INDICATOR PERFORMANCE

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The purpose of this study was to see if a correlation existed between the implementation of a state-adopted prekindergarten curricula and increased performance at the exit level on the Early Childhood Outcome Indicators. Information was also gathered to determine if the curricula selected included opportunities for young children with disabilities to participate in activities that support the four characteristics in early childhood that are associated with later self-determination. Those characteristics are (a) making-choices, (b) problem-solving, (c) self-regulation, and (d) engagement. Additionally, data were collected to determine the district's self-report on the type of training utilized to provide staff development on the adopted curricula and also the fidelity of implementation. This information was collected through a survey of the 1,043 school districts in the state of Texas that were identified as serving students with disabilities in early education, prekindergarten and kindergarten. Of those surveyed, 95 districts responded. Those districts were then provided a demographic ranking of (a) rural, (b) township, (c) suburban, or (d) urban through the use of the ProximityOne

database hosted by the United States Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics.

Data were then requested through a Public Information Act Request to the Texas Education Agency (TEA). Summary Statements of Performance from the 2012-2013 State Performance Plan (SPP) Indicator 7 were requested for each of the 95 responding districts. Data from the information received from TEA, the ProximityOne rankings, and the survey responses were analyzed using analysis of variance and Eta-Squared coefficients to determine the impact of the four curricular components identified with later self-determination and the final SPP 7 exit results. A Chi-Square and Phi coefficient were utilized to analyze the specific preschool adoptions across demographic rankings. Districts' self-report of types of training utilized for professional development and fidelity of implementation were analyzed using t-Tests.

Subsequently, implications of the data analyzed were discussed. A summary of findings was reviewed and limitations of the study were reported. Finally, implications for future research were reviewed.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood teachers have historically taught all young children in a sequence of developmental activities (Odom, Horner, Snell, & Blacher, 2007). This indicated a theory that young children with and without disabilities followed similar patterns of sequential development, often referred to as the “similar sequence hypothesis” (p. 183). However, a shift from this perspective began to emerge following the release of the 2005 National School Readiness Indicators Initiative. That initiative placed an emphasis on integrated early childhood experiences to better support the creation of a solid foundation for language, reasoning, social skills development, problem-solving abilities, self-control, and overall emotional health. Almost simultaneously, research studies reported identifying four strikingly similar skills necessary for young children with disabilities to develop foundational skills that would later support their increased self-determination. These four skills are making choices, problem-solving, self-regulating behavior, and active engagement with the environment (Palmer et al., 2012).

Curriculum for preschool should include the integration of academics, play, movement, choice, and active engagement throughout the daily routine (Brotherson, Cook, Erwin, & Weigel, 2008). While the academics of preschool are an important instructional component for quality preschool experiences for children with and without disabilities, the singular focus of the curriculum cannot be the acquisition of academics. It

is of targeted importance for young children with disabilities who do not routinely generalize skills across settings to practice and use new skills and information through specialized instruction and repeated opportunities to practice (National School Readiness Indicators Initiative, 2005).

In conjunction with the release of the findings from the 2005 National School Readiness Indicators, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) established an accountability system designed to provide evidence of the effectiveness of early childhood special education programs. This accountability system required that states receiving federal funds for the provision of preschool special education services focus on outcomes-based expectations for young children with disabilities which were reflective of the skills identified in the literature (Chandler et al., 2012; Greenwood, Walker, Hebbeler, & Spiker, 2007).

The accountability system implemented by OSEP introduced the Early Childhood Outcomes (ECO) Indicators for young children with disabilities. These ECO Indicators are a measure of growth for young children with disabilities once enrolled in a preschool program designed to support their individual needs. The introduction of the ECO Indicators formally shifted the focus from pure academics to overall growth and development. The ECO Indicators address the importance of not only academic growth but also growth in the areas of social-emotional and behavioral skills as well. Specifically, the three ECO Indicators upon which growth for early childhood students with disabilities are reported are (a) positive social-emotional skills, (b) acquisition and

use of knowledge and skills, and (c) use of appropriate behaviors to meet their needs. Data on these three indicators are reported at two points: (a) when a preschool student with a disability initially enters a program for preschool children with disabilities provided by the local education agency; and (b) when the student either exits the program or turns six, thus moving out from under the auspices of the local education agency's early childhood program.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to see if a correlation existed between the implementation of a state-adopted prekindergarten curricula and increased performance at the exit-level on the Early Childhood Outcome Indicators. Additionally, research studies and federal accountability programs have supported the incorporation of such activities into programs designed to provide services to early childhood students with disabilities (Brotherson et al., 2008; Chandler et al., 2012; Greenwood et al., 2007). However, there is limited research on the impact of specific adopted curricula on the growth experienced by early childhood students with disabilities across the three ECO reporting indicators. The focus of this study will be on the impact of curriculum to support increased performance on the ECO Indicators.

Research Questions

- What state-adopted curricula are rural, township, suburban, and urban districts in Texas reporting to use in their early childhood special education programs?

- Based on a district's self-report and State Performance Plan data, to what extent do the curricula utilized in rural, township, suburban, and urban districts in Texas impact preschool children with disabilities to make choices, problem-solve, self-regulate their behavior, and actively engage with their environment?
- What are the differences in rural, township, suburban, and urban districts in Texas, based on their self-report of opportunities for training staff, delivery method for training provided for identified curricula (online, blended, face-to-face), and fidelity of implementation?

Significance of the Study

Since there is limited existing research on the relationship between the utilization of specific curricula and the growth experienced by early childhood students with disabilities as indicated by the SPP reported exit-level ECO data, this study can contribute to the field of early childhood special education and future research in the following manner:

- The study will provide information regarding whether the components of specific curricula are correlated with increased exit results.
- The study will provide information regarding how training and fidelity of implementation on identified curricula impact exit results.
- Information provided by this study will provide a framework upon which future research can build regarding the specific differences in various curriculums and types of training and the individual impact on exit performance.

The information gathered from this study could assist future researchers and special education administrators in analyzing data to support the selection of curricula to be utilized in early childhood special education programs. Additionally, information gathered through this study could be utilized to support decisions regarding the type of professional development Local Education Agencies (LEA) provide as well as the curricula monitoring practices that are implemented.

Definition of Terms

To establish a common foundation of knowledge, the following operational definitions are provided for this study:

Early Childhood Outcome Indicators: A series of three outcomes-based indicators utilized to report growth for early childhood students with disabilities.

Early Childhood Students with Disabilities: Students ages three through five who are enrolled in a public school and meet the state requirements for eligibility and services through special education.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA): A law established to ensure that students with disabilities ages 3 to 21 receive specialized instruction that addresses their unique needs (Logsdon, 2013).

Office of Special Education Programs: The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) is a specialized division with the United States Department of Education. OSEP is dedicated to improving results for all children and young adults with disabilities ages

birth through 21 by providing leadership and financial support to assist states and local districts (United States Department of Education, 2013).

Prekindergarten Guidelines: Preschool curriculum standards for students ages three and four who are enrolled in a Texas Prekindergarten classroom (Texas Education Agency, 2008).

Shared Services Arrangement: Two or more local education agencies who enter into a written agreement to mutually operate their special education and other specialized service programs (Texas Education Agency, 2013).

State Performance Plan: The State Performance Plan (SPP) evaluates the state's efforts to implement the requirements and purposes of IDEIA and illustrates how the state will continuously improve upon this implementation (Darst, 2014).

Texas Education Agency: The administrative agency for the education of primary and secondary students in public education within the state of Texas (Texas Education Agency, 2015).

Texas Kindergarten Essential Knowledge and Skills: The curriculum requirements for students enrolled in a kindergarten classroom in a public school in the state of Texas (Texas Education Agency, 2014).

Assumptions of the Study

The following assumptions are made for this study:

- All existing data collected from the Texas Education Agency (TEA) is accurate.

- All existing data collected through the Texas Education Agency Login (TEAL) system is accurate.
- Administrators' or their designees' responses to the survey questions are accurate and represent their knowledge of district adopted curricula and practices.
- Administrators or their designees are free to respond without outside influence.

Summary of the Study

With the formative years of development being crucial to the development of foundational skills that support later learning and independence, growth during the early childhood years is especially crucial for early childhood students with disabilities (Odom et al., 2007; Palmer et al., 2012). Accountability for the growth of students with disabilities is increasing across all ages. As such, it is imperative that the relationship of curricula and growth reported on entry- and exit-level ECO Indicators be studied to support decisions made regarding curricula selection, staff training, and monitoring within programs designed to support early childhood students with disabilities.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review of literature related to this study addresses a variety of areas within the scope of early childhood special education. An initial overview of the legislative mandates that framed the current accountability and reporting system will be reviewed. In addition, an overview of the current Early Childhood Outcomes requirements will be addressed, along with literature that addresses the shift from a historical academic perspective to one that is inclusive of foundational skills identified as building blocks for success across the lifespan of an individual with a disability. This literature review will also address the current juxtaposition that exists within the field of early childhood special education. This field is cocooned in the premise that developmentally appropriate practices are best practices, intersecting each day within the actual landscape of academic accountability.

Legislative Overview

The right to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) for elementary and secondary students with disabilities was the initial hallmark of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (Hebbeler & Rooney, 2009; Odom, et al., 2007). Subsequent to this legislation, Public Law 99-457 was passed in 1986 and amended the previous law to extend a FAPE within the education environment to preschool students

with disabilities who are ages three to five (Greenwood, Carta, & McConnel, 2011; Hebbeler & Rooney, 2009). The years following these two pieces of legislation ushered in an era of data being reported to the United States Department of Education (DoE) that focused solely on the processes of disability determination and service delivery. The emphasis was strictly on compliant adherence to the letter of the law rather than the spirit of the law (Hebbeler & Rooney, 2009).

Over time, the focus has expanded to include the reporting of data that are reflective of the benefits of specialized services for young children with disabilities rather than just the number of students being served and the locations in which they are served (Freund, Oblson, Browne, & Kavulic, 2006; Hebbeler & Rooney, 2009). The initial move in the consideration of the benefits of specialized service provision developed as a result of a Congressional Act designed to hold agencies receiving federal funds fiscally responsible. This was accomplished by requiring the results to be reported as an accountability measure with clearly articulated annual goals and objectives that outlined measurable performance standards. This legislation was passed in 1993 as the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) (Freund et al., 2006; Hebbeler & Rooney, 2009). However, while other programs were moving forward with results accountability being the hallmark standard to prove program effectiveness, the DoE maintained a process and compliance reporting requirement for agencies receiving funds to provide specialized services to young children receiving early childhood special education. Even though GPRA had far-reaching authority, the controversy over exactly

what type of results data would be appropriate to collect on the provision of services for young children with disabilities was substantial (Freud et al., 2006; Greenwood et al., 2011; Hebbeler & Rooney, 2009). States had been hindered by a lack of models to replicate that incorporated the necessary facets of early childhood special education and a lack of consensus among stakeholders (i.e., practitioners as well as researchers) regarding the most appropriate resulting benefits to consider (Harbin, Rous, & McLean, 2004). As a result, none was required.

Process-reported data remained status quo in the field of early childhood special education until 2002 when the passage of the No Child Left Behind legislation increased the intensity for accountability reporting across the nation (Harbin et.al., 2004). In conjunction with this legislation, the United States Office of Management and Budget (OMB) carried the accountability requirements of GRPA one step further and instituted an accountability review based on performance results as a requirement for the continued receipt of federal funds (Freund et al., 2006; Harbin et al., 2004). The OMB applied this same standard to all educational programs receiving federal funds, including early intervention and early childhood special education programs (Freund et al., 2006; Hebbeler & Rooney, 2009). The first year that these two programs were included in the review, all states received a rating of “Results Not Demonstrated.” This rating was the direct result of data not existing to support the benefits young children with disabilities received as a result of these federal funds being utilized (Freund et al., 2006; Harbin et al., 2004; Hebbeler & Rooney, 2009; U.S. General Accounting Office, 2004). This

determination of states' ranking "added a sense of urgency to the need for large scale information from the states on the progress of young children with disabilities and their families" (Harbin et al., 2004, p. 5).

Early Childhood Outcomes

Prior to the OMB's rating of "Results Not Demonstrated," there had been reluctance among professionals in early childhood special education to utilize language that suggested that standards or outcomes were the focus of programming (Bodrova, Leong, & Shore, 2004). Rather, synonyms such as "building blocks, essential learning, desired results, developmental guidelines or learning goals" had previously been utilized (p. 1). This ranking served as a long overdue wake-up call for the need to officially align early childhood special education standards with those established for other areas of special education (Bodrova et al., 2004; Freud et al., 2006, Harbin et al., 2004).

In response to the distressing ratings issued by the OMB, the DoE funded the Early Childhood Outcomes (ECO) Center in 2003 and placed the oversight responsibility in the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) (Hebbler & Rooney, 2009). The initial task assigned to the ECO Center was to coordinate with federal and state governments and create an early childhood special education monitoring system designed to gather and track data on the benefits of specialized services provided to young children with disabilities ages birth through five. The result of this collaboration was a recommendation to the DoE for a set of three early childhood outcomes indicators as well as a set of family outcomes recommendations. The family outcomes serve as a best

practice guide, but did not have a reporting component recommendation. Once the stakeholder input was gathered and public comments were considered, the resulting three child outcome indicators were adopted in 2005 by OSEP. In September of 2006, the DoE completed the reporting requirements for states to enter their ECO data annually. These three indicators required states to collect and report the percentage of young children with disabilities who demonstrated improvement as a result of receiving specialized services (Bailey, Raspa, & Fox, 2011; Hebbler & Rooney, 2009). The initial ECO data reported was reflective of the 2007-2008 school year (Texas Education Agency, 2013).

According to the Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (ECTA), the three early childhood outcome indicators that were adopted are:

- Positive social-emotional skills (including positive social relationships)
- Acquisition and use of knowledge and skills (including early language/communication and early literacy)
- Use of appropriate behaviors to meet their needs

These three outcomes are the same for infants and toddlers served through Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) services and preschool students with disabilities served through the public school system, with the exception of the requirement for early literacy benefit. Growth in that skill area is only reported by the public school systems for students ages three through five (ECTA Center, 2014a; Hebbeler & Rooney, 2009).

In addition to academic, language and literacy growth through the acquisition of knowledge and skills, the remaining two outcomes were reflective of skills identified by

the National School Readiness Indicators Initiative in 2005. This initiative addressed the need to move beyond the historical practice of solely focusing on academic achievement (Odom et al., 2007). Rather, the emphasis now was on the integration of early childhood experiences designed to support expressive and receptive language, social and emotional health, increased problem-solving abilities, and independent behavioral regulation (Gartrell, 2014). These outcomes are reflective of the constellation of stakeholder input and encompass skills that were considered important across developmental domains. Hebbeler and Rooney (2009) stated that the three outcomes “are intentionally global to promote a view of the whole child — the child as a social being, as a learner, and as a person who is capable of getting his or her needs met in appropriate ways” (p. 448).

Early Childhood Foundational Skills

In conjunction with the development of the ECO Indicators and the release of the National School Readiness Indicators Initiative in 2005, additional research studies addressed the importance of young children with disabilities developing the skills necessary to support self-determination later in life. Prior to this, self-determination had always existed as a topic of conversation primarily encased in adolescent and post-secondary special education literature (Zheng et al. 2015). The skills identified as leading to later self-determination were identified as foundational skills within early childhood special education (Palmer et al., 2013; Shogren & Turnbull, 2006).

Self-determination is a term initially utilized in special education literature to refer to the skills necessary for an individual with a significant disability to more actively

engage in his or her own learning and life planning (Sands & Doll, 1996; Shogren & Turnbull, 2006; Wehmeyer & Schalock, 2001). From the historical literature regarding the frequency of a student with a significant disability acquiring learned helplessness as a result of consistent adult direction and decision-making arose the call for increased self-determination in this population of individuals. More recently in the literature, the skills identified as the cornerstones of self-determination have been referred to as encompassing the critical elements necessary for a successful transition to a post-secondary environment and essential for an increased quality of life (Shogren & Turnbull, 2006). The identified set of skills was designed to assist individuals with disabilities in increasing the control they could exercise over their learning, beliefs, and behaviors (Murawski & Wilshinsky, 2005). According to Sands and Doll (1996), the educational rationale for supporting the development of self-determination in students was to “enhance and support self-sufficiency” (p. 58).

During the infancy of this line of thought, Sands and Doll (1996) identified a series of skills as essential to the process of defining self-determination behavior in individuals with disabilities. These behaviors encompass such skills as choice-making, decision-making, problem-solving, and goal-setting. In addition, skills such as positive self-efficacy, self-awareness, self-advocacy, and self-evaluation were identified as target skills. Although these behaviors were not identified as an exhaustive list, they were referenced as cornerstones in the development of self-determination. (Erwin & Brown, 2003; Sands & Doll, 1996). According to Erwin and Brown (2003), the development of

self-determination is not considered a “static characteristic” in an individual’s life (p. 80). Rather, self-determination emerges in skills identified and practiced in early childhood and continues to grow and refine across an individual’s lifespan, being molded and shaped by an individual’s responses and experiences (Erwin & Brown, 2003; Sands & Doll, 1996; Shogren & Turnbull, 2006).

Given the premise that self-determination is a process that unfolds throughout an individual’s lifetime, the idea of beginning to address these skills in early childhood is substantial and likely to greatly impact the educational experiences of an individual with a disability (Brown & Cohen, 1996; Palmer & Wehmeyer, 2003; Shogren & Turnbull, 2006; Summers et al., 2014). This concept places particular importance on identifying the developmental behaviors appropriate to highlight during the early childhood phase. While young children, with or without disabilities, are not viewed as having the maturity to be fully self-determined, it is critical that the building blocks begin to be developed during this malleable phase in their development so future interactions can build upon a foundation already laid (Brotherson et al., 2008; Palmer & Wehmeyer, 2003; Summers et al., 2014; Wehmeyer & Palmer, 2000). According to Erwin and Brown (2003), “As young children make choices, indicate preferences, problem solve, plan and initiate, they are making sense of the world around them in a way that can ultimately produce feelings of competence, confidence and empowerment” (p. 78).

Palmer et al. (2013) compiled the self-determination data available across the past quarter of a century with regard to essential skills in early childhood that are necessary to

substantially impact an individual's quality of life as an adult with a disability. From that data, they developed what is referred to as *The Foundation for Self-Determination Model of Early Childhood*. Targeted skills were identified as (a) making choices, (b) problem-solving, (c) self-regulation, and (d) engagement. Palmer et al. (2013) operationally defined these events in relationships to early childhood activities and curriculum as follows:

- Making Choices – is the decision between alternatives based on individual preferences and is the foundation of independence (p. 40).
- Problem-Solving – is the ability to use available information and resources to generate a solution (p. 41).
- Self-Regulation – is the ability to respond to environmental stimuli and control one's own emotions and behavior in response (p. 41).
- Engagement – is the ability to maintain focus and persistence when engaging with the environment in a developmentally appropriate manner (p. 42).

According to Erwin et al. (2009), an individual does not acquire these skills simply by growing older but rather through purposeful instruction and planning on the part of adults in his or her life. As early as 1996, Brown and Cohen stated that “special educators of young children need to consider more seriously and intensively whether or not they are providing adequate attention to the development of behavioral characteristics that appear to be building blocks for the foundation of self-determination” (p. 28). Additionally, Brown and Cohen (1996) advocated for the

utilization of a preschool curriculum that allowed for student-led decision making, problem-solving, and independent choices. Blasco, Falco, and Munson (2006) reported “Professionals, who are not prepared to support effectively the development of early foundations for self-determinations in children, might inadvertently foster ‘learned helplessness’ and/or the use of challenging behavior as a means of environmental control” (p. 64). Given these impactful statements, the role of early childhood special education and the implementation of targeted curricula by trained professionals become critical in providing scaffold support for the development of foundation skills necessary to sustain self-determination across an individual’s lifespan (Palmer et al., 2013; Summers et al., 2014).

According to Sands and Doll (1996), young children with disabilities can learn the foundational skills for later self-determination if they are provided multiple opportunities for practice in supported environments. As such, repeated exposure to curricular activities that are developmentally appropriate and aligned to skills identified as supporting later self-determination are key to building the necessary foundational skills. Erwin et al. (2009) stated that “encouraging a supportive and physical environment in the early years is among the best ways to promote self-determination later in life” (p. 29).

Early Childhood Curriculum Alignment

With the shift that occurred in the focus of early childhood special education, the introduction of the ECO Indicators created an environment that was supportive of the

type of activities identified as foundational for the development of self-determination in young children with disabilities (Gartrell, 2013). An era of accountability was ushered in simultaneously with this change, and the field of early childhood special education was challenged to establish curricula that were both developmentally appropriate and met the demands of increased skills across both academic and foundational platforms (Brown, 2011; Freund et al., 2006; Hebbeler & Rooney, 2009). With the comparative nature of the ECO Indicator data reporting process, schools whose students do not show increased benefit from the services received “will have failed in achieving this foundational mission” (Bailey et al., 2011, p. 216).

Graves and Howes (2011) and Penso (2014) indicate that quality preschool instruction has moved beyond academic instruction and now encompasses social and emotional development. They both report this as one of the most important characteristics for school readiness, and these two areas align with the foundational skills identified for later self-determination in young children with disabilities. Given the overlap between school readiness and future self-determination, it is not surprising that two of the three ECO Indicators are reflective of social/emotional and behavioral characteristics.

Practitioners will be required to work within the established framework of the early childhood accountability system; however, they will also be able to utilize professional judgment in designing individualized instruction to meet the unique needs of their young students with disabilities. In doing so, practitioners will be able

to utilize data available through the standards-based accountability system and customize the curricula activities provided for each individual student. This approach allows for adherence to the established framework while still supporting the individualized instructional mandates of the IDEA (Brown, 2011; Freund et al., 2006; Goldstein, 2008; Whitted, 2011).

As early as 1902, John Dewey stated that learning was the result of the interactive relationship between the student and the curriculum (Dewey, 2011). He further emphasized that for learning to occur the interaction of the child and curriculum requires deliberate facilitation and mediation by a teacher (Dewey, 2011). The emphasis on the teacher as the catalyst who matches curricular expectations with students' needs places significant responsibilities on the teacher to orchestrate meaningful learning and growth for a variety of students (Goldstein, 2008). The teacher not only has to purposefully plan for each individual student's needs, but also has to adhere to the administration of the standards-based format of the adopted curriculum while maintaining a focus on the developmentally appropriate standards established for the education of young children with disabilities (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Gartrell, 2013; Goldstein, 2008). Because states were tasked with developing standards-based curriculums that supported the acquisition of skills necessary for young children to be successful, various resources have been developed to support this endeavor by teachers (Goldstein, 2008).

Brown (2011) reports that Texas policymakers adopted both the Prekindergarten Guidelines and the Kindergarten Essential Knowledge and Skills to support the acquisition of necessary learning across developmental domains. He stated that this provided the opportunity for students to “gain the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in the state’s high-stakes standards-based education system” (p. 155). Once the state standards were established, the National Early Childhood Center and the individual state agencies worked collaboratively to establish early childhood crosswalks that aligned the individual state standards with one or more of the ECO Indicators (ECTA Center, 2014b; TEA, 2013).

While the Prekindergarten Guidelines are the official standards for preschool curriculum, Texas also adopted a series of seven preschool curricula that were designed to support the implementation of the guidelines and the ECO Indicator crosswalk (TEA, 2013). In addition, work completed by Gartrell (2013) added a third component to this crosswalk, which was to imbed the four skills indentified by Palmer et al., (2013) as the foundational skills in early childhood special education for later self-determination. According to Goldstein (2008), “because standards-based education is an explicit feature of the sociopolitical landscape of U.S. public education, teaching the standards is developmentally appropriate practice” (p. 253). Utilizing the available state-approved resources, early childhood special education teachers can orchestrate instruction designed to facilitate the acquisition of skills

across the ECO Indicators and the foundational skills for later self-determination while maintaining a developmentally appropriate early childhood environment.

Summary

Utilizing developmentally appropriate teaching strategies to sustain meaningful engagement in the educational environment is a key responsibility that early childhood educators have in supporting the initiation of skills associated with self-determination (Brotherson et al., 2008). Developmentally appropriate instructional strategies can be employed to support existing self-determination targets in state-adopted curriculum (Voss and Bufkin, 2011). By combining state approved early childhood curriculum and ECO targets with the four identified developmentally appropriate instructional strategies that support future self-determination, early childhood special educators have the necessary tools readily available to them to begin substantially impacting their students' future quality of life. Palmer et al., (2013) referred to this type of activity as the next logical step in the evolution of early childhood special education. The shift is on how the existing curriculum is utilized rather than on the creation of a new tool (Bruder, Morgro-Wilson, Stayton, and Dietrich, 2009).

To support this shift in application, professional development will need to be provided to both professional and paraprofessional staff. Wen, Elicker, and McMuller (2011) address the repeated identification of ongoing early childhood professional development as paramount in increasing the quality of instructional support provided

in the classroom. The ongoing professional development of early childhood educators strongly correlates with positive developmental outcomes for their students (Chandler et al., 2012; Saracho, 2013). According to Odom et al., (2007) “...probably nothing affects the quality of the intervention they (young children with disabilities) receive more than the level of training that adults who care for them receive” (p. 193).

This chapter reviewed the historical data that led to the development of the ECO Indicators as well as the identification of the foundational skills in early childhood associated with later self-determination for individuals with disabilities. Additionally, this chapter addressed the creation of developmentally appropriate standards-based state criteria for preschool curriculum and reviewed supporting resources available for early childhood special education teachers to utilize. And, finally, a review was provided of current literature that suggests that, regardless of the curriculum or resources available, the training provided to staff is key to the successful implementation and eventual impact on student performance. Learning is reflective of the interaction between the student and the curriculum, which is facilitated by the adult in the environment (Dewey, 2011). Therefore, the literature cited in this chapter provides a rationale for the present study.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between specific adopted preschool curricula in the state of Texas and the impact on exit-level ECO Indicator performance as reported through Indicator 7 of the State Performance Plan. To answer the research questions, the researcher conducted a correlational research study. Data for the study was collected utilizing archival documents and a cross-sectional, sample survey. This design was selected based on the availability of archived exit-level ECO summary data from the TEA and the ability to compare this archival data with empirical data gathered through a survey.

Research Questions

The following research questions provided the framework for this study:

- What state-adopted curricula are rural, township, suburban, and urban districts in Texas reporting to use in their early childhood special education programs?
- Based on a district's self-report and State Performance Plan data, to what extent do the curricula utilized in rural, township, suburban, and urban districts in Texas impact preschool children with disabilities to make choices, problem-solve, self-regulate their behavior, and actively engage with their environment?

- What are the differences in rural, township, suburban, and urban districts in Texas based on their self-report of opportunities for training staff, delivery method for training provided for indentified curricula (online, blended, face-to-face), and fidelity of implementation?

Research Design

Data utilized were gathered from two sources: survey data and Summary Statements of Performance from Indicator 7 of the 2013-2014 State Performance Plan (SPP). The initial data was collected through a survey. The survey was designed by the researcher and consisted of four questions. The survey was emailed to five current special education directors in the state of Texas, and the questions were adjusted based on input from those five pilot participants. The survey was then emailed to each of the special education directors for 1,043 local education agencies (LEA) in the state that are identified by the TEA as serving early education, pre-kindergarten, and kindergarten students with disabilities. This information was accessed online using the AskTED database through the TEA. Of the 1,043 special education directors surveyed, 95 responded.

Once the survey results were received, an open records request was submitted to the TEA. The request sought data on the Summary Statements for the Three Early Childhood Outcomes reported on Indicator 7 of the SPP for the 2013-2014 school year. Data was only requested on districts from which a completed survey was received. The

Summary Statements for the Three Early Childhood Outcomes provides data on the exit-level performance of each of the ECO Indicators through percentages of progress reported on two summary statements. Those statements are:

- Summary Statement 1: Of those preschool children who entered the preschool program below age expectation in each Outcome, the percent who substantially increased their rate of growth by the time they turned 6 years of age or exited the program.
- Summary Statement 2: The percentage of preschool children who were functioning within age expectation in each Outcome by the time they turned 6 years of age or exited the program.

Once all data was obtained, the researcher compiled the information from each responding LEAs and compared students' exit-level performance on either Summary Statement 1 or 2 with the district's self-reported adoption, training, and implementation of a preschool curriculum.

Finally, responding districts were classified as either rural, township, suburban, or city. Each LEA has a unique locale code and those codes are ranked in one of the four classification areas. These rankings are assigned by the United States Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). They were accessed using the NCES' ProximityOne database. The researcher applied and received a graduate-student-level membership to be able to access this information. The classifications of

rural, township, suburban, and city are subdivided into three levels for each distinction.

According to NCES, the subdivisions are as follows:

- Rural
 - Rural Fringe (41) – Census-defined rural territory that is less than or equal to 5 miles from an urbanized areas, as well as rural territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an urban cluster
 - Rural Distant (42) – Census-defined rural territory that is more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an urban cluster
 - Rural Remote (43) – Census-defined rural territory that is more than 25 miles from an urbanized area and is also more than 10 miles from an urban cluster
- Township
 - Town Fringe (31) – Inside an urban cluster that is less than or equal to 10 miles from an urbanized area
 - Town Distant Territory (32) – Inside an urban cluster that is more than 10 miles and less than or equal to 35 miles from an urbanized area
 - Town Remote Territory (33) – Inside an urban cluster that is more than 35 miles from an urbanized area

- Suburban
 - Suburb Large Territory (21) – Outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with population of 250,000 or more
 - Suburb Mid-size Territory (22) – Outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with a population less than 250,00 and greater than or equal to 100,000
 - Suburb Small Territory (21) – Outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with a population less than 100,000
- City
 - City Large Territory (11) – Inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with population of 250,000 or more
 - City Mid-sized Territory (12) – Inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with a population less than 250,000 and greater than or equal to 100,000
 - City Small Territory (13) – Inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with a population less than 100,000

For the purposes of this study, all of the subsets within a classification were combined and reported by the primary classification. The term “Urban” was utilized in the research to represent the “City” classification since the definition of all three subcategories of “City” is within the scope of an urbanized area.

Research Questions

The following research questions provided the framework for this study:

- What state-adopted curricula are rural, township, suburban, and urban districts in Texas reporting to use in their early childhood special education programs?
- Based on a district's self-report and State Performance Plan data, to what extent do the curricula utilized in rural, township, suburban, and urban districts in Texas impact preschool children with disabilities to make choices, problem-solve, self-regulate their behavior, and actively engage with their environment?
- What are the differences in rural, township, suburban, and urban districts in Texas based on their self-report of opportunities for training staff, delivery method for training provided for identified curricula (online, blended, face-to-face), and fidelity of implementation?

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using five methods:

- Analysis of variance (ANOVA) and an Eta-Squared coefficient (η^2) were used to determine the impact of the four curricula components identified for later self-determination and the final exit results on SPP Indicator 7 data.
- A Chi-Square and Phi coefficient were utilized to analyze the preschool curricula adoption across NCES Classifications due to the nominal nature of the data. The data provided were easily converted into frequencies and the data sets were categorical dichotomies.

- Districts' self-report on the types of training utilized and fidelity of implementation of state-adopted curricula with regard to exit-level performance results on SPP Indicator 7 data was analyzed using t-Tests.

Limitations

Limitations of this study are inherent in the design selected. A correlational study with a cross-sectional survey component yields a product that is non-experimental in nature. The data collected are obtained from pre-selected groups and does not have a controlled component. As a result, the data collected cannot be utilized to establish a cause and effect relationship due to the fact that the researcher cannot manipulate the relationship between dependent and independent variables. In addition, cross-sectional surveys are limited to a specific set of data at a single point in time. The data collected are not reliable enough to inform decision making and effect systemic change (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2012).

The focus of this study was also on the utilization of an adopted curriculum in an early childhood special education setting. This is just one aspect of an overall program that impacts the exit-level ECO results of young children with disabilities. Additionally, data were only collected for a single state.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between specific adopted preschool curricula in the state of Texas and the impact on exit level ECO Indicator performance as reported through Indicator 7 of the State Performance Plan. Research has been reviewed that supports the incorporation of activities designed to foster active engagement in existing preschool curricula. Additionally, research studies and federal accountability programs support the incorporation of such activities into programs designed to provide services to early childhood students with disabilities (Brotherson et al., 2008; Chandler et al., 2012; Greenwood et al., 2007). However, there is limited research on the impact of specific adopted curricula on the growth experienced by early childhood students with disabilities across the three ECO reporting indicators. The focus of this study was on the impact of curriculum to support increased performance on the ECO Indicators.

To answer the research questions, the researcher conducted a correlational research study. Data for the study were collected utilizing archival documents and a cross-sectional, sample survey designed by the researcher. This design was selected based on the availability of archived exit-level ECO summary data from the TEA and the ability to compare this archival data with empirical data gathered through a survey.

Research Questions

The following research questions were used to guide this study:

- What state-adopted curricula are rural, township, suburban, and urban districts in Texas reporting to use in their early childhood special education programs?
- Based on a district's self-report and State Performance Plan data, to what extent do the curricula utilized in rural, township, suburban, and urban districts in Texas impact preschool children with disabilities to make choices, problem-solve, self-regulate their behavior, and actively engage with their environment?
- What are the differences in rural, township, suburban, and urban districts in Texas based on their self-report of opportunities for training staff, delivery method for training provided for identified curricula (online, blended, face-to-face), and fidelity of implementation?

Additionally, data were also reviewed with regard to several areas of significance as related to the field of early childhood special education. Those suspected areas of significance are as follows:

- Information regarding whether the components of specific curricula are correlated with increased exit results.
- Information regarding how training and fidelity of implementation on identified curricula impact exit results.

Demographic and Curricula Representation of Survey Respondents

The initial data were collected through a cross-sectional, sample survey. The survey was designed by the researcher and consisted of four questions. Responses were received from 95 of the 1,043 districts included in the survey distribution. Once the survey results were received, the researcher utilized the NCES' ProximityOne database to assign the classifications of rural, township, suburban, and urban to the responding districts. The demographic and job classification of the 95 respondents are reflected in Table 1 and Figure 1.

Table 1

Survey Respondents by Job Classification

| Job Classification | Number Responding |
|---|--------------------------|
| Special Education Director | 69 |
| Special Education Coordinator | 11 |
| Special Education Supervisor | 2 |
| Special Education Teacher | 2 |
| Principal | 2 |
| Senior Manager | 1 |
| PPCD Program Coordinator | 1 |
| Diagnostician | 1 |
| Executive Director of Academic Intervention | 1 |
| Executive Director of Special Programs | 1 |
| Assistant Superintendent | 1 |
| General Education Teacher | 1 |
| Superintendent | 1 |
| Early Learning Director | 1 |
| Total Respondents | 95 |

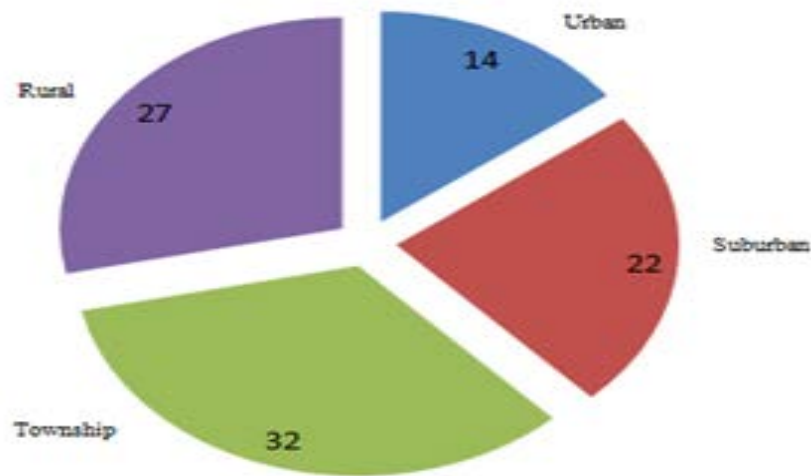


Figure 1. NCES classifications of responding districts

Each of the responding districts provided information regarding which state-adopted preschool curricula were utilized to support students in their early childhood special education programs. The majority of districts responding indicated the utilization of more than one curriculum within their early childhood special education programs. Frog Street Texas Pre-K System was the curriculum available for purchase that was reported to be utilized by the greatest number of users. Thirty-six of the 95 responding districts reported using Frog Street Texas Pre-K System within their early childhood special education programs. The Prekindergarten Guidelines and The Kindergarten Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills are the expected standards for curriculum content established by the Texas Education Agency, provided as curriculum documents, available on the TEA website, and available without cost to public schools. The Prekindergarten Guidelines are the standards for three and four year old children within the public school

system of Texas and The Kindergarten Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills are the established standards for students who are five by September 1 of a given school year. Based on the responses received, a third of the responding districts indicated that they did not utilize The Prekindergarten Guidelines within their preschool special education classes while 43% of responding districts indicated they did not utilize The Kindergarten Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills in their classrooms that serve five year old students with disabilities. Figure 2 represents the total responses per curriculum for reported district use.

Table 2

State-adopted Curricula Distribution

| Adopted Curricula | Districts Utilizing | Districts Not Utilizing |
|---|----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| The Texas DLM Early Childhood Express | 3 | 92 |
| Opening the World of Learning Texas Comprehensive Pre-K | 6 | 89 |
| Scholastic Big Day for Texas Pre-K Programs | 17 | 78 |
| Highscope Preschool Curriculum and Assessment | 7 | 88 |
| Frog Street Texas Pre-K System | 36 | 59 |
| Teaching Strategies for Pre-K Texas System | 13 | 82 |
| We Can! Texas Classroom System | 2 | 93 |
| The Prekindergarten Guidelines | 62 | 33 |
| The Kindergarten Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills | 54 | 41 |

A distribution of the available preschool curricula is also reflected across the four demographic classifications of rural, township, suburban, and urban in Figure 4. These data are utilized to answer the first research question of this study.

1. What state-adopted curricula are rural, township, suburban, and urban districts in Texas reporting to use in their early childhood special education programs?

Table 3

Preschool Curricula Adoption across NCES Classifications

| Adopted Curricula | Rural | Suburban | Township | Urban | Total |
|---|--------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------|--------------|
| The Texas DLM Early Childhood Express | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| Opening the World of Learning Texas Comprehensive Pre-K | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 6 |
| Scholastic Big Day for Texas Pre-K Programs | 5 | 6 | 3 | 3 | 17 |
| Highscope Preschool Curriculum and Assessment | 3 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 7 |
| Frog Street Texas Pre-K System | 7 | 6 | 16 | 7 | 36 |
| Teaching Strategies for Pre-K Texas System | 2 | 5 | 5 | 1 | 11 |
| We Can! Texas Classroom System | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| The Prekindergarten Guidelines | 23 | 11 | 20 | 8 | 62 |
| The Kindergarten Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills | 15 | 13 | 16 | 10 | 54 |

The data utilized to address this research question were analyzed using Chi-Square and a phi coefficient due to the nominal nature of the data. According to Gay et al. (2012), Chi-Square is appropriate to utilize when the data available can be converted into frequencies and, as in this case, is representative of true categories into which data naturally fall. Based upon survey responses, districts responded to either utilizing or not utilizing each of the specific state-adopted curricula available. This data set was also appropriate for analysis utilizing a Phi coefficient because the data sets are categorical dichotomies in that districts reported either using or not using each specific curriculum (Gay et al., 2012).

The analysis of data for the first research question did not yield significant results for any specific curricula associated with the classification of district by size. Thirty-six of the 95 responding districts reported utilizing the Frog Street PreK Texas System curriculum, which was indicative of 38% of the respondents. Of those 36 districts, 16 were townships. We Can Texas Classrooms Systems was only reported to be used by rural districts, resulting in a p value of .164. The remaining curricula available for purchase had fairly consistent ratios of use across district classification. The PreKindergarten Guidelines and the Kindergarten Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills were utilized most frequently by rural districts, with 23 of the 59 reporting to utilize the PreKindergarten Guidelines and 15 of the 59 reporting to utilize the Kindergarten Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills.

Support for the Four Criteria Associated with Future Self-Determination

The second research question was designed to elicit a response from the participants with regard to their self-report of how the curricula utilized by their district addressed four specific skills. These skills were identified by Palmer et. al. (2012) as being reflective of skills necessary for later self-determination as an individual with a disability. The specific question was:

- Based on a district's self-report, to what extent do the curricula utilized in rural, township, suburban, and urban districts in Texas incorporate support for preschool children with disabilities to make choices, problem-solve, self-regulate their behavior, and actively engage with their environment?

A semantic differential scale was utilized to capture respondents' beliefs about the degree to which the adopted curricula reported across a three-point scale which was reflective of a choice of completely, adequately, or limited. According to Gay et al., (2012), a semantic differential scale is appropriate for use when a self-report is required and a continuum of varying adjectives or adverbs is available for selection. The data for the second research question were also analyzed using a Chi-Square, again because of the nominal set of data. Figures 2-10 represent the respondents' rating across demographic classifications, and a brief discussion of findings follows each.

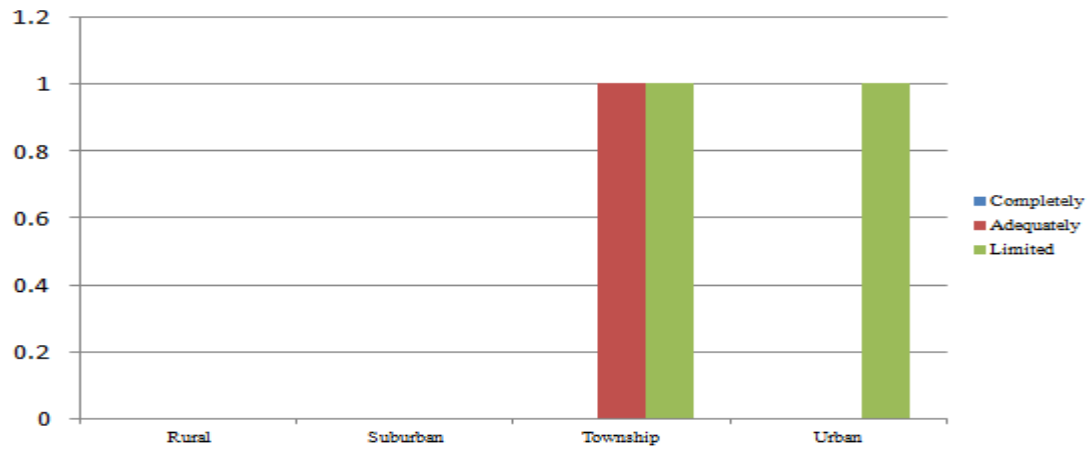


Figure 2. The Texas DLM Early Childhood Express Semantic Rating

The rankings for the Texas DLM Early Childhood Express were not statistically significant with regard to their Chi-Square ranking, which was .703 for township respondents and .260 for urban respondents.

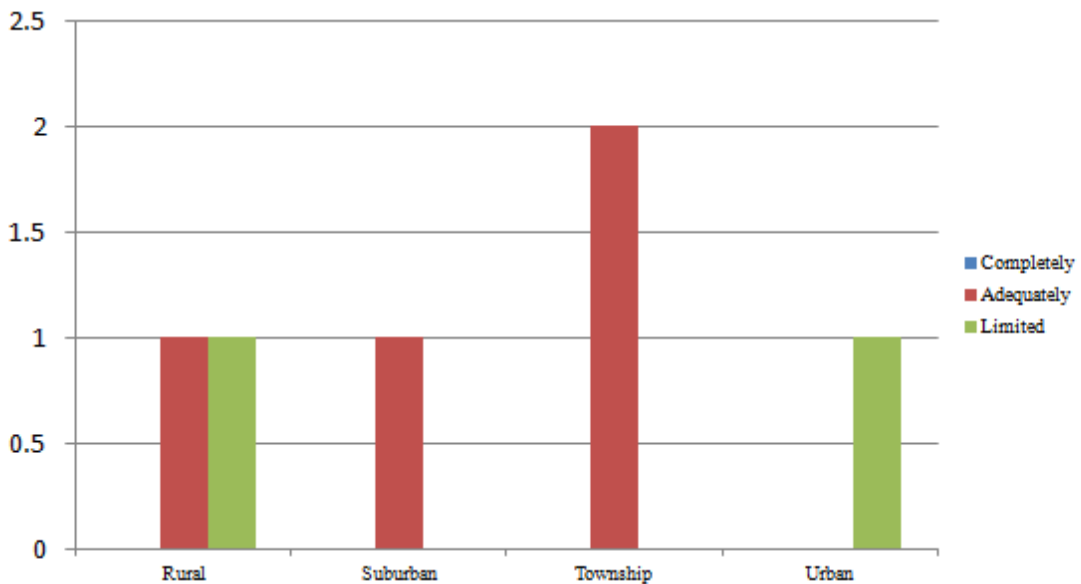


Figure 3. Opening the World of Learning Texas Comprehensive PreK

The semantic rankings provided by the six responding districts were not significant for an alignment between the four identified skills for later self-determination in individuals with disabilities and the Opening the World of Learning Texas Comprehensive PreK. Two-thirds of the responding districts reported an adequate alignment, while one-third reported limited alignment across the identified skill set.

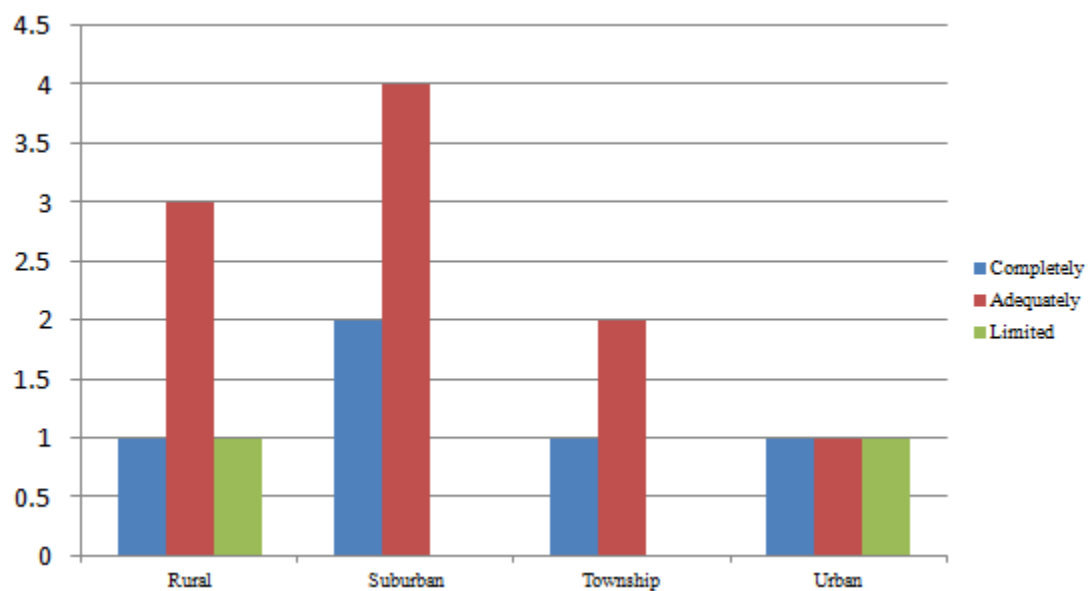


Figure 4. Scholastic Big Day for Texas PreK Programs

The alignment between the Scholastic Big Day for Texas PreK Programs and the identified skills set in the second research question was statistically insignificant. However, this is the first of the adopted curricula that received any rankings of “completely” for alignment purposes, with 29% of the responding districts selecting this semantic ranking. Furthermore, 58% of districts responding provided a ranking of “adequately” for alignment, with only 11% identifying a limited alignment.

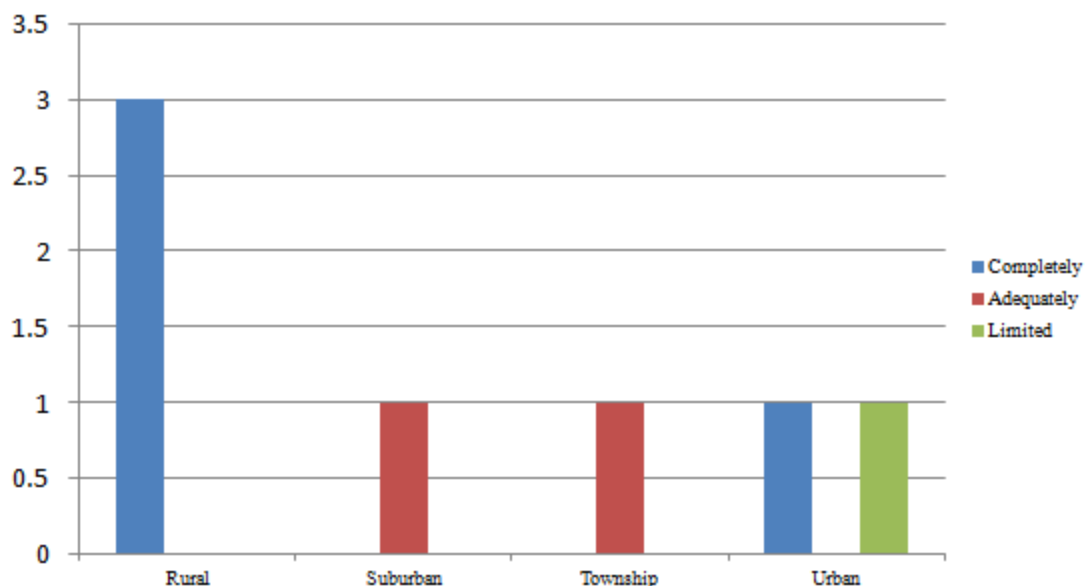


Figure 5. Highscope Preschool Curriculum and Assessment

Highscope Preschool Curriculum and Assessment received a p value of .158 within the township demographic grouping, even though the one responding district provided a ranking of “adequately.” While not considered statistically significant with regard to the considered p value of .05, it is closer to alignment than many of the other curricula being reviewed. Among other respondents, the Highscope Preschool Curriculum and Assessment received a ranking of “completely” from 50% of those responding for alignment with the four identified skills which support later self-determination in individuals with disabilities. Only one responding district provided a rating of “limited” for this particular curriculum.

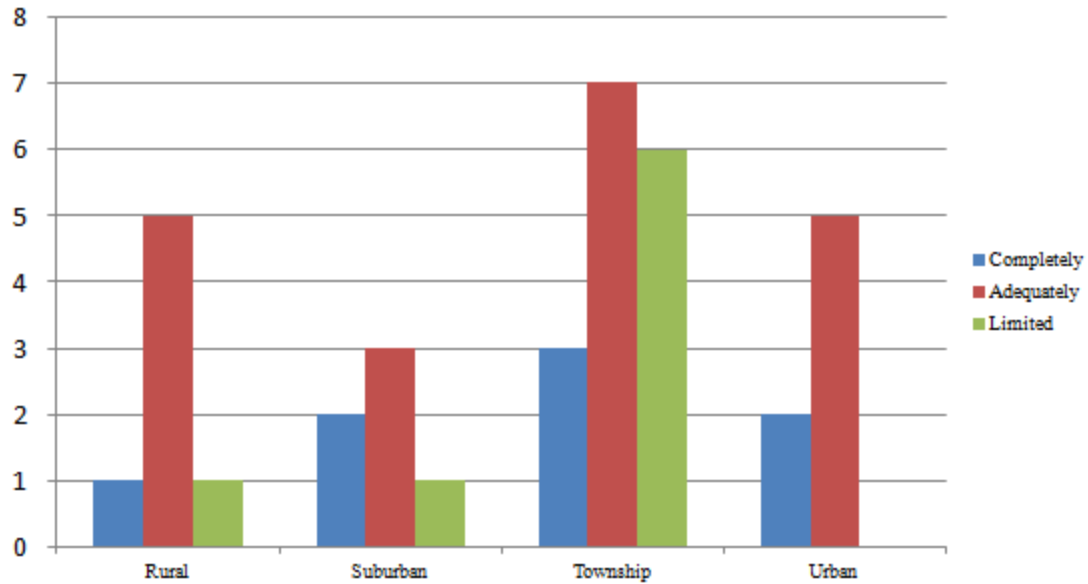


Figure 6. Frog Street PreK Texas System

The Frog Street PreK Texas System received a p value of .60 within urban respondents and their reported alignment of the four identified skills. All seven of the urban respondents either ranked the alignment as “adequately” or “completely.” A ranking of “adequately” was predominate in all of the other three demographic groups. However, a rating of “limited” alignment was a close second within the township group. Overall, this curriculum received a ranking of “adequately” or “completely” from 77% of districts responding . The Frog Street PreK Texas System is the curriculum most widely utilized by those districts responding.

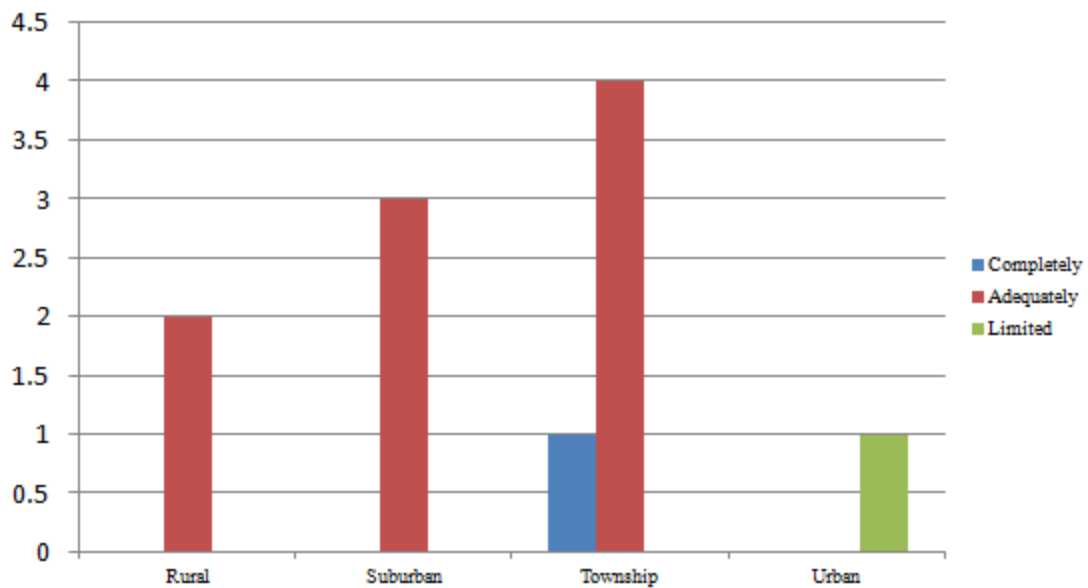


Figure 7. Teaching Strategies for PreK Texas Edition

Statistical analysis of the responses received for the Teaching Strategies for PreK Texas Edition curriculum was insignificant. The closest alignment was in the township demographic, with a p value of .197. This is also the only demographic group that provided a ranking of “completely” with regard to alignment. The only responding urban district ranked the alignment as “limited,” and all of the other 15 respondents provided an “adequately” ranking.

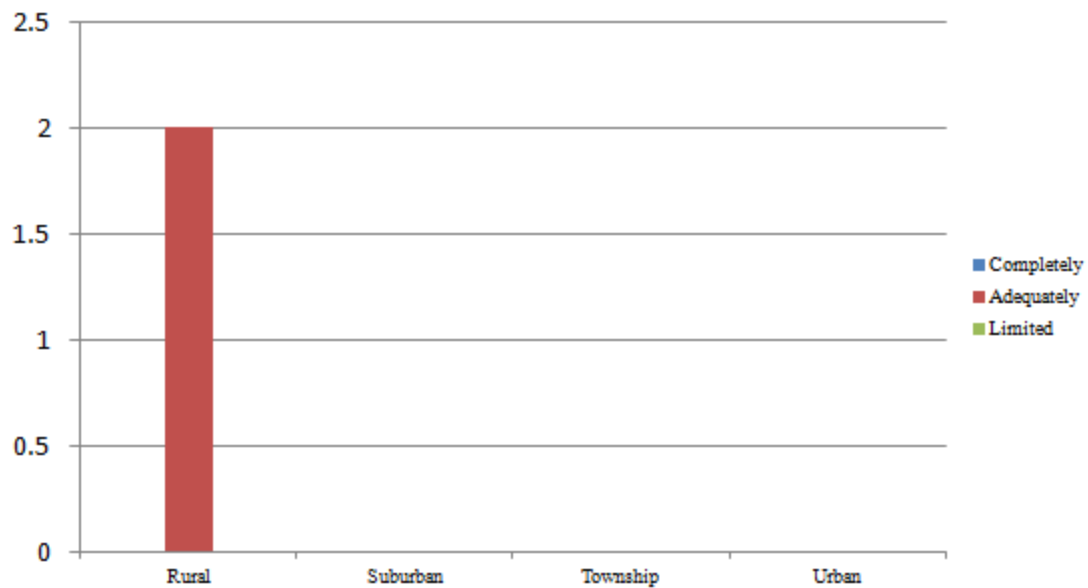


Figure 8. We Can Texas Classroom System

The We Can Texas Classroom System is only reported to be utilized by two districts. Both of those responding provided a ranking of “adequately,” but the results were statistically insignificant for alignment.

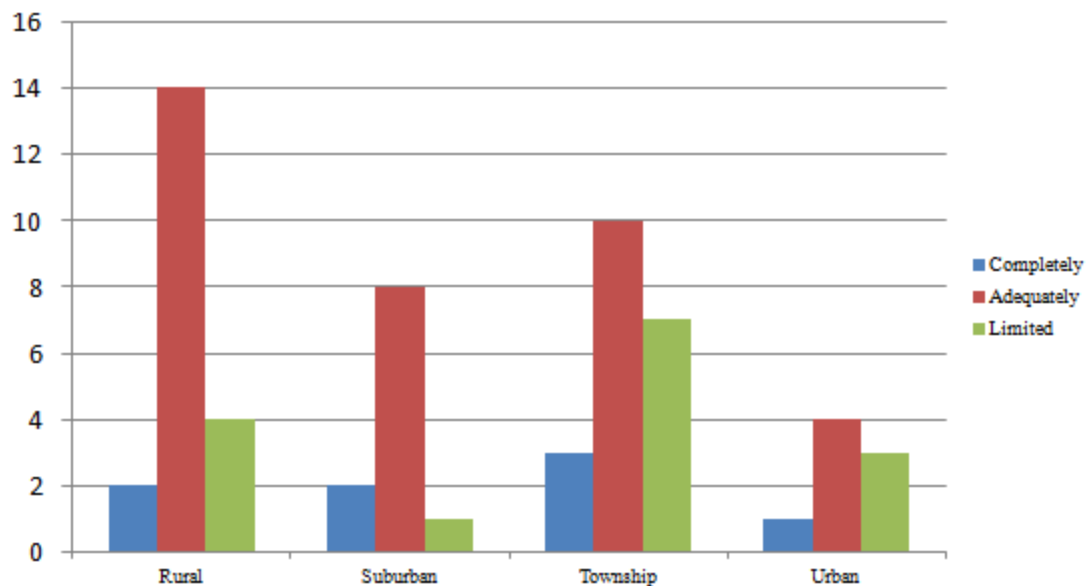


Figure 9. The PreKindergarten Guidelines

Of the 62 districts responding, the majority of districts 34 (or 55%), provided an “adequately” aligned rating to the four identified skills contributing to later self-determination in individuals with disabilities. Fifteen of the reporting districts ranked the alignment as “limited,” which is reflective of 24% of those responding. Although 42 (or 76%) of the districts responding ranked the alignment as “adequately” or “completely,” there was not a statistical implication for alignment with the Chi-Square analysis across a single demographic. The total ranking yielded a p value of .174.

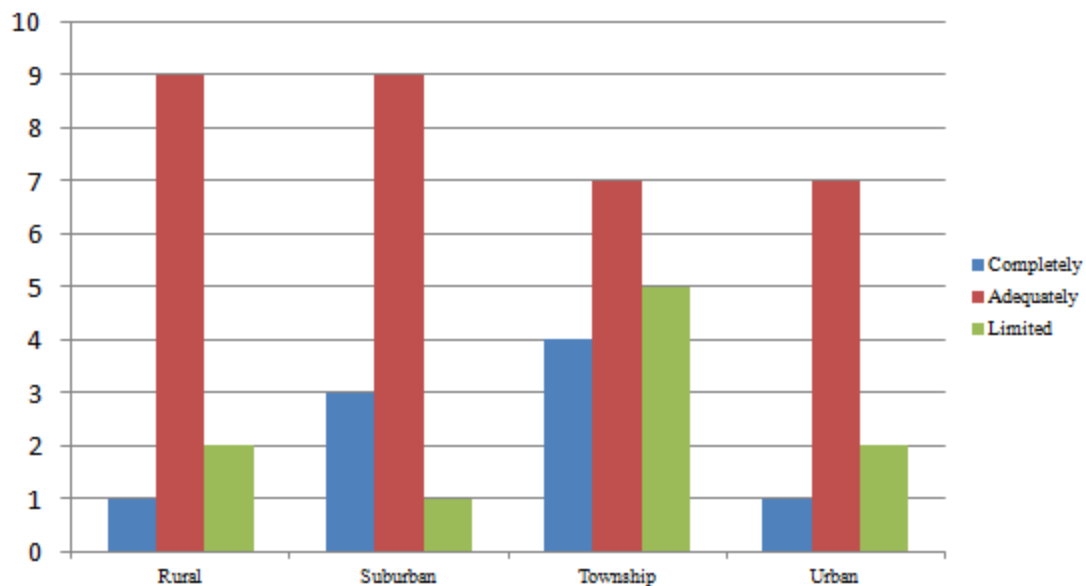


Figure 10. The Kindergarten Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills

Within the urban respondents, a p value of .054 was achieved for statistical significance between the alignment of The Kindergarten Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills and the four skills identified by Palmer et al. (2012) as leading to later self-determination skills in individuals with disabilities. The majority of districts across all four demographics reported alignment as “adequately,” while all four groups also had individual members who indicated “completely” as well as “limited.”

Staff Training Methods and Fidelity of Implementation

The third research question was designed to address the various types of training provided across the four district demographics and the corresponding semantic ranking of the individual districts with regard to fidelity of implementation. The districts were asked to identify staff training practices as Face-to-Face, Online or Blended (online and face-to-

face). The choices for semantic ranking for fidelity of implementation were strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. Statistical comparisons were made using Chi-Square due to the nominal nature of the data collected. Figures 11-14 provides an overview of the responses received.

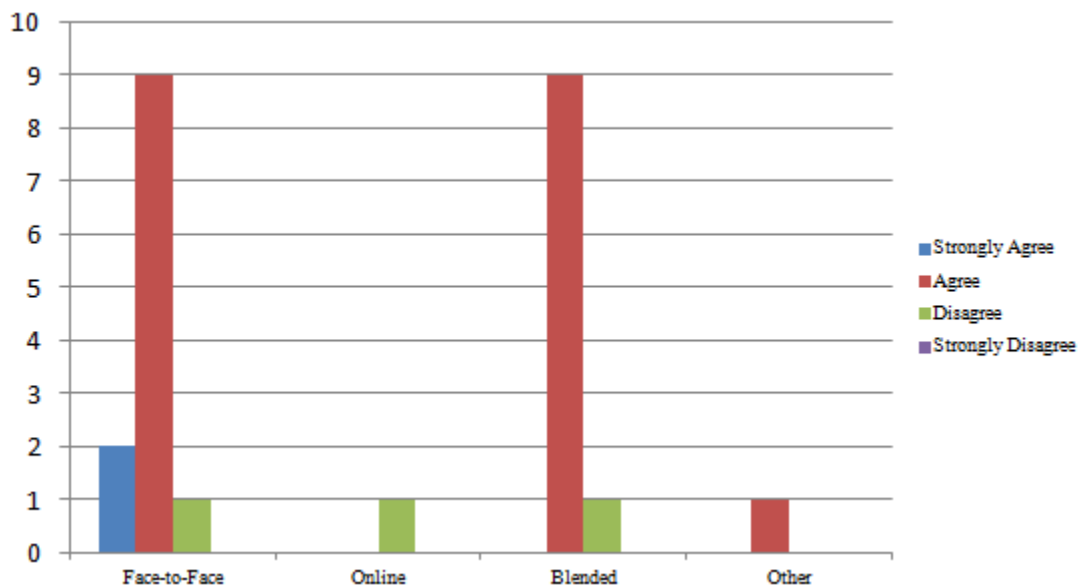


Figure 11. Rural training and fidelity of implementation

The findings within the rural demographic area were not statistically significant. The primary modes of training provided that yielded favorable semantic rankings of “strongly agree” or “agree” were Face-to-Face and Blended. The only area which received a “strongly agree” ranking for fidelity of implementation was in the area of Face-to-Face staff development, whereas online training received only a “disagree” ranking with regard to fidelity of implementation. One district representative responded in the area of “other” and indicated that training in the district was a campus-based decision. However, the

respondent did provide a ranking of “agree” with regard to the fidelity of implementation in the district.

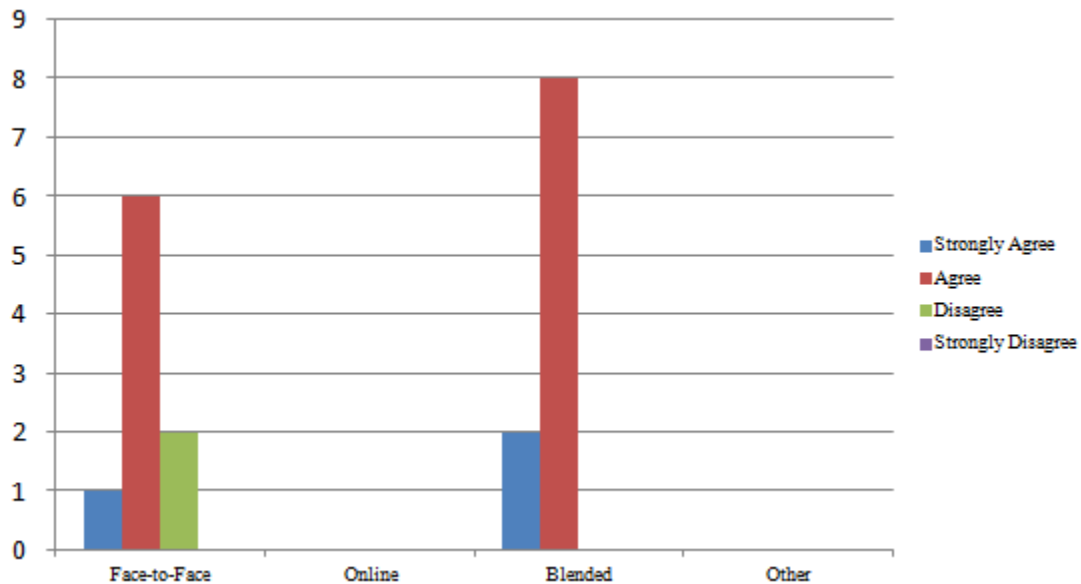


Figure 12. Suburban training and fidelity of implementation

The ratings received from the suburban demographic districts were statistically insignificant. Again, Face-To-Face and Blended received predominantly “agree” ratings for fidelity of implementation. It is worthy to note that none of the suburban districts reported utilizing online training as a stand-alone format for staff development.

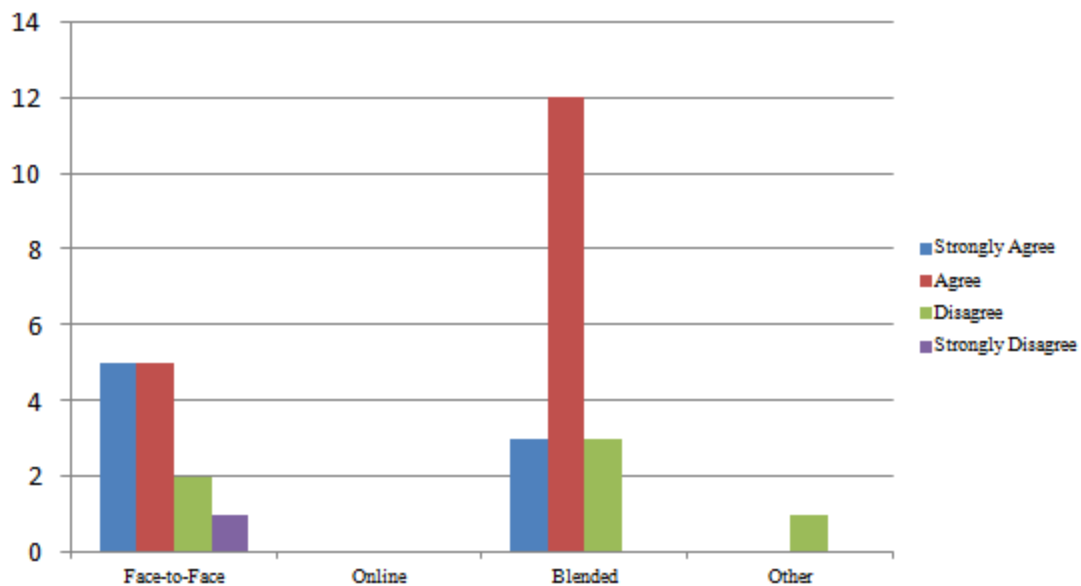


Figure 13. Township training and fidelity of implementation

The ratings received from the township districts were statistically insignificant with regard to the type of training provided and the fidelity of implementation on the state-adopted preschool curricula. What is interesting in the findings from this demographic is that one district reported that staff development was provided through an independent study format and the ranking given for fidelity of implementation was “disagree.” Again, Face-to-Face and Blended were the two primary means by which staff development was provided, and online training was not reported to have been utilized.

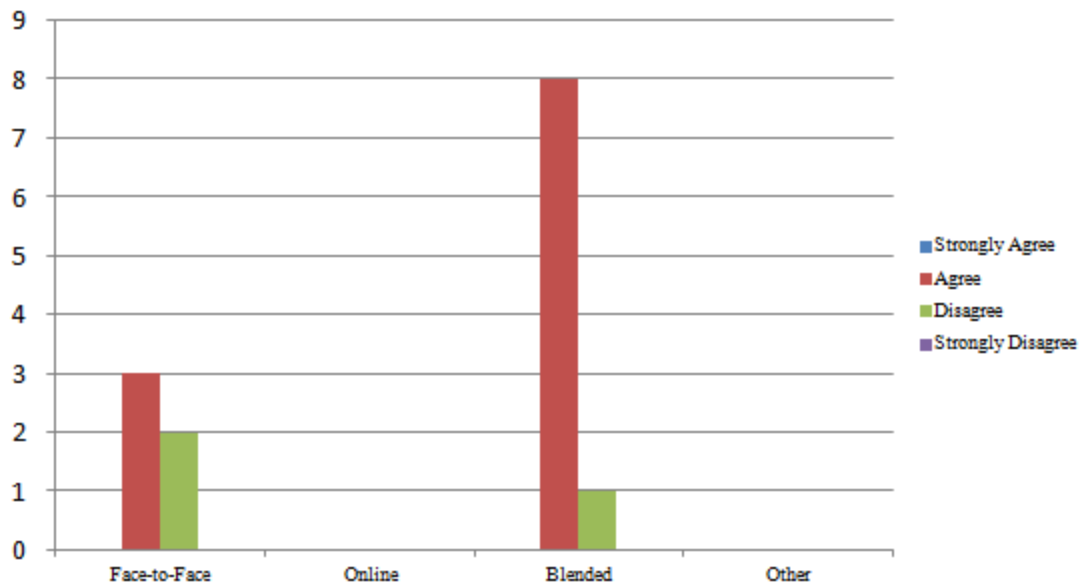


Figure 14. Urban training and fidelity of implementation

Information provided by districts within the urban demographic was statistically insignificant with regard to the type of training provided and the self-report on fidelity of implementation. Again, it is interesting to note that online training was not reported as a solitary means by which staff development was provided on the adopted preschool curricula.

Correlation Between Components of Specific Curricula and Exit Results

Data were analyzed with regard to the curricula ranking based upon the opportunity for preschool children with disabilities to make choices, problem-solve, self-regulate their behavior, and actively engage with their environment, and upon the final exit results on the SPP Indicator 7 data. The results were analyzed using an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and an Eta-Squared coefficient. The Eta-Squared coefficient is a measure of an effect or the

strength of relationship between two variables (Gay et.al., 2012). The significance or correlation based on an Eta-Squared coefficient is determined based on the following effect size, where $0.0 \leq 0.12$ is considered to be small, $0.12 \leq 0.25$ is considered medium, and ≥ 0.26 is considered large. The Eta-Squared Coefficient for each of the following SPP Indicator 7 Summary Statement areas is outlined in Figures 17 - 18.

- Summary Statement 1: Of those preschool children who entered the preschool program below age expectation in each Outcome, the percent who substantially increased their rate of growth by the time they turned 6 years of age or exited the program

Table 4

Summary Statement 1 Eta-Squared Coefficient

| ECO Summary Statements | Eta-Squared Coefficient |
|--|--------------------------------|
| 7A. Positive Social and Emotional Skills | $\eta^2 = .023$ |
| 7B. Acquisition of Knowledge and Skills | $\eta^2 = .050$ |
| 7C. Use of Appropriate Behaviors | $\eta^2 = .024$ |

- Summary Statement 2: The percentage of preschool children who were functioning within age expectation in each Outcome by the time they turned 6 years or age or exited the program.

Table 5

Summary Statement 2 Eta-Squared Coefficient

| ECO Summary Statements | Eta-Squared Coefficient |
|--|--------------------------------|
| 7A. Positive Social and Emotional Skills | $\eta^2 = .015$ |
| 7B. Acquisition of Knowledge and Skills | $\eta^2 = .010$ |
| 7C. Use of Appropriate Behaviors | $\eta^2 = .030$ |

When the adopted curriculum encompasses the four skills identified with later self-determination in preschool children with disabilities, the Eta-squared coefficient indicates a medium effect size in the area of Positive Social and Emotional Skills across Summary Statement 1 and 2. There is a medium effect size in the area of Use of Appropriate Behaviors in Summary Statement 1 and a large effect size in this area in Summary Statement 2. This suggests that curricula that incorporate the ability for young children with disabilities to make choices, problem-solve, self-regulate their behavior, and actively engage with their environment yield a significant relationship in their ability to appropriately demonstrate age-appropriate behaviors at the time of exit from the preschool special education program. There is a large effect size indicated within this relationship in the area of the Acquisition of Knowledge and Skills in Summary Statement 1. The same is not true for this indicator in Summary Statement 2. The relationship in this outcome area in Summary Statement 2 is weak. This is an indication of an increased likelihood for young children with disabilities to increase their Acquisition of Knowledge and Skills

when they are the most significantly delayed in this area upon entry into the preschool special education program.

Training and Fidelity of Implementation Impact on Exit Results

Data was analyzed in this area utilizing t-Tests on independent samples of data derived from the exit-level indicators on SPP 7 data and the districts' self-report on types of training utilized and fidelity of implementation of state-adopted curricula. The t-Test significance, mean, and standard deviation for each of the following SPP Indicator 7 Summary Statement areas are outlined in Tables 6 -7. It is important to note that the preselected level of effect size significance is $P=.05$.

- Summary Statement 1: Of those preschool children who entered the preschool program below age expectation in each Outcome, the percent who substantially increased their rate of growth by the time they turned 6 years of age or exited the program.

Table 6

Summary Statement 1 t-Test Significance

| Early Childhood Outcome | Significance | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|--|---------------------|-------------|---------------------------|
| 7A. Positive Social and Emotional Skills | $P=.042$ | $M= -.123$ | $SD=.345$ |
| 7B. Acquisition of Knowledge and Skills | $P=.360$ | $M= -.057$ | $SD=.297$ |
| 7C. Use of Appropriate Behaviors | $P=.045$ | $M= -.116$ | $SD=.328$ |

- Summary Statement 2: The percentage of preschool children who were functioning within age expectation in each Outcome by the time they turned 6 years of age or exited the program

Table 7

Summary Statement 2 t-Test Significance

| Early Childhood Outcome | Significance | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|--|---------------------|-------------|---------------------------|
| 7A. Positive Social and Emotional Skills | P=.051 | M= -.122 | SD=.293 |
| 7B. Acquisition of Knowledge and Skills | P=.082 | M= -.104 | SD=.275 |
| 7C. Use of Appropriate Behaviors | P=.197 | M= -.076 | SD=.271 |

Given the significance in Summary Statement 1 of the substantial increase in skills in the areas of Positive Social and Emotional Skills, with a $p=.042$, and Use of Appropriate Behaviors, with a $p=.047$, the null hypothesis is rejected. There is a statistically significant difference in the acquisition of skills associated with the reported increased fidelity of implementation of the adopted curriculum. While not below the significance level of $p=.05$, the area of Positive Social and Emotional Skills growth was also at $p=.051$, which reflects a minimal difference in the selected significance level. This rating in the Summary Statement 2 indicated statistically significant age-appropriate functioning at the time the students exited the preschool special education program. All three of these areas had a slightly higher mean consistent with a $-.12$ difference.

The area of the Acquisition of Knowledge and Skills in both Summary Statement 1 and 2 and the area of Use of Appropriate Behaviors in Summary Statement 2 all had

significance ratings well above $p=.05$. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted for these ratings, indicating that the fidelity of implementation did not increase skill acquisition in these areas.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of specific adopted curricula on the growth experienced by early childhood students with disabilities, ages three through five, across the three ECO reporting indicators. The focus of this study was on the impact of curriculum to support increased performance on the ECO Indicators. Specific areas addressed were the characteristics of the curricula to support a student's ability to make choices, problem-solve, self-regulate behavior, and actively engage with their environment, as well as self-reported staff development methodology and fidelity of implementation of the curricula adopted by the reporting district.

One item noted by the researcher was that the term "practitioner" is common in early childhood literature rather than the sole focus on the educator alone as is often seen in curriculum discussions with older students. This language is seen throughout the literature reviewed, including writings from the ECO Center and OSEP.

The focus is on collaboration and support for young children with disabilities ages birth through five. This is true whether it is the family outcomes focus of the birth through two program or the early childhood outcome indicators associated with ages three through five. Support for young children with disabilities is widespread and crosses personal and professional groups of individuals. Parents, siblings, grandparents and family friends are often tremendous support during the infant and toddler years. Medical professionals in

hospital, clinical therapy and home health settings as well as early childhood instructional specialists, also provide support during this phase. As young children with disabilities move into the preschool phase, the focus shifts more to one of educational responsibility, with a special education teacher often taking a primary role. However, this is not true of all three to five year old settings for students with disabilities. Family members and friends remain important during this time, as do school-based therapists and nurses. The phrase “it takes a village to raise a child” should be the overarching motto of programs designed to support young children with disabilities.

Summary of the Research Study

A correlational research design was utilized with data for the study collected from archival documents and a cross-sectional, sample survey. The survey data were requested from each of the 1,043 independent school districts in the state that are indentified by the Texas Education Agency as serving early education, pre-kindergarten, and kindergarten students with disabilities.

The archival documents were obtained through an open records request to the Texas Education Agency (TEA). The request was specific to the collection of the 2013-2014 Summary Statements for the Three Early Childhood Outcomes from Indicator 7 of the State Performance Plan (SPP). Indicator 7 of the SPP is specifically designed to gather data on the improvement that young children with disabilities demonstrate on (a) positive social-emotional skills, (b) acquisition and use of knowledge and skills, and (c) use of appropriate behaviors to meet their needs. Data specific to each of the three

outcome indicators are reported on the SPP Indicator 7 once a young child with a disability enters an early childhood special education program and then again once the young child exits the program either through dismissal from special education or because the child has reached his or her sixth birthday during the current school year (TEA, 2013).

Data for the study were also collected using a cross-sectional, sample survey. Respondents to the survey provided the county-district number for their individual districts, which allowed survey data to be compared to the performance ratings received from TEA regarding districts' SPP 7 Summary Performance. The provision of the county-district code also allowed districts to be categorized as rural, township, suburban, or urban based on the criteria developed by the U. S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Information obtained through results of the survey also provided the adopted curricula utilized by the responding districts, the respondent's self-report on the fidelity of implementation and also the ranking of how well the adopted curricula allowed young children with disabilities to make choices, problem-solve, self-regulate their behavior, and actively engage with their environment.

Discussion of Results

The first research question was designed to address the adopted curricula across rural, townships, suburban, and urban districts.

- What state-adopted curricula are rural, townships, suburban, and urban districts in Texas reporting to use in their early childhood special education programs?

Based upon the information provided through the survey responses, the districts were classified into the demographic ranking of rural, township, suburban, and urban based upon the data available through the NCES. Additionally, respondents identified one or more of the available state-adopted preschool curricula being utilized within their district with preschool students with disabilities. The analysis of data for the first research question did not yield significant results for any specific curricula associated with the classification of district by size. The curriculum available for purchase that was reported to be utilized by the most districts was Frog Street Texas Pre-K System, which was identified as an adopted curriculum by 36 districts. Of those 36 districts reporting, 16 were townships, 7 were rural, 7 were urban and 6 were suburban. The majority of rural districts reported using The Prekindergarten Guidelines and The Kindergarten Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, which are provided by TEA at no charge to the district. Additionally, We Can! Texas Classroom System was reported to be utilized the least, with only two districts identifying this as an adopted curriculum. Both of those districts were rural. In contrast, only three districts reported adopting The Texas DLM Early Childhood Express, with two of those being township districts and one being an urban district. Rural and suburban districts did not report utilizing this curriculum. Additional research would be necessary to determine the rationale behind selection of adopted curricula, but it would be interesting to determine whether cost was a contributing factor for rural districts.

The second research question focused on the incorporation of the four skills identified as leading to later self-determination in preschool students with disabilities.

- Based on a district's self-report and State Performance Plan data, to what extent do the curricula utilized in rural, township, suburban, and urban districts in Texas impact preschool children with disabilities to make choices, problem-solve, self-regulate their behavior, and actively engage with their environment?

Six of the nine curricula received a ranking of “completely” from at least one of the districts reporting to utilize the specific curricula identified. None of the rankings yielded a statistically significant comparison for the incorporation of the four identified skills within the adopted curricula. Even though the results were statistically insignificant, there were rankings that were of interest. Since Frog Street PreK Texas System is the most widely utilized purchased curriculum, it was of interest that all four demographic areas responded with a ranking of “completely,” “adequately,” and “limited.” The majority of districts reporting indicated an “adequately” alignment, but the results were inconsistent across all four demographics. The Highscope Preschool Curriculum and Assessment was ranked as “completely” by all of the rural districts that reported utilizing it. However, none of the suburban or township districts provided a ranking of “completely,” and only one of the urban districts provided a ranking of “completely.” The other urban district reporting to utilize the Highscope Curriculum and Assessment provided a ranking of “limited” for the incorporation of the four identified skills. The Texas DLM Early Childhood Express was only reported to be utilized by 3 of the 95 districts. Two of those were townships and one was urban. Only one township district reported that there was an adequate relationship between the four identified skills and this curriculum, while the other two districts reported

that alignment was limited. The Prekindergarten Guidelines was the curriculum most frequently reported to be utilized by districts, with 62 of the 95 districts indicating the utilization of this curriculum. However, only 8 of those 62 provided a “completely” ranking for alignment of the four identified skills. The variance in the rankings across the adopted curricula indicated very subjective responses to this survey question.

The third research question was designed to gather information regarding the type of training utilized by districts across demographic groupings and the self-reported fidelity of implementation.

- What are the differences in rural, township, suburban, and urban districts in Texas, based on their self-report of opportunities for training staff, delivery method for training provided for identified curricula (online, blended, face-to-face), and fidelity of implementation?

The results of the data collected from this question were fairly consistent across all demographics. The majority of districts in each category reported using blended (online and face-to-face) as the primary means of staff development for the adopted curricula. The second most frequent training method was face-to-face, and only one rural district reported using online as the primary training format. One rural district also indicated that training methodology was a campus-based decision, and one township district reported utilizing an independent study method of staff development. It was surprising to the researcher that only one rural district indicated the use of online training as a primary methodology of staff development. Township, suburban, and urban districts did not report the independent use of

online training to support staff development. With the increase in online training modules available to support staff development and required staff training, it would be of interest to seek further clarification from the 95 responding districts as to the specific use of face-to-face and online training in their districts. This would provide a better understanding of exactly how often and for what identified purposes online training as a single source of staff development is utilized. It would also be of interest to determine the districts' response to whether online or face-to-face is perceived to support the best fidelity of implementation.

Within the review of the significance of the study, the curricula reported to incorporate the four skills identified with later self determination for individuals with disabilities yielded medium and large size effects in the area of Use of Appropriate Behaviors on the two summary statements reflecting exit data from the SPP Indicator 7. A large effect size was also noted in the area of Use of Appropriate Behaviors in both reporting summary statements, and a large effect size was indicated in the area of the Acquisition of Knowledge and Skills. This is the only outcome area that did not reflect a medium to large effect size across both exit summary statements. The indication in this area is that the incorporation of the four identified skills has the greatest impact on preschool students with disabilities who are the most significantly delayed upon entry into the program.

The results of the fidelity of implementation were included in a discussion of the significance of the study. The curricula reported with increased fidelity yielded a statistically significant improvement in the areas of Positive Social and Emotional Skills and Use of Appropriate Behavior on the exit results in Summary Statement 1 and also a

statistically significant improvement in the area of Positive Social and Emotional Skills at the time of exit on the Summary Statement 2.

Conclusion

The curricula adopted, the staff development methodology, and the fidelity of curricula implementation all appear to have an impact on the SPP Indicator 7 exit-level performance of preschool students with disabilities. Based upon the findings of the data that have been analyzed, there is initial evidence that the adoption of a preschool curricula which incorporates the ability for preschool students with disabilities to make choices, problem-solve, self-regulate their behavior, and actively engage with their environment serves to increase their performance across five of the six exit-level performance indicators at the time of their exit from the program. Likewise, the reported fidelity of implementation of the adopted curricula appears to have an impact across the use of Positive Social and Emotional Skills in both Summary Statements. There is also a significant effect size in the Appropriate Use of Behaviors in students with the most significant delays at the time of entry into the preschool special education program.

Limitations

Limitations of this study include typical limitations associated with non-experimental design studies. Non-experimental design studies do not allow for the identification of a cause-effect relationship and are intended for comparison purposes. However, the purpose of this study was not to determine a cause-effect relationship but rather to address the comparison of the self-report of specific skills embedded in adopted preschool curricula

along with the staff development methodology and fidelity of implementation with the exit-level performance of preschool students with disabilities as identified on the reporting districts' TEA SPP Indicator 7 data. A second limitation of this study is the single year reporting period on the SPP Indicator 7 exit-level summary statements that was utilized for data analysis purposes. A final limitation was the limited survey size. While 1,043 districts were surveyed, only 95 districts responded.

Future Research

While these results are promising, additional research is needed to specifically address individual curricula against these results. Sixty-one of the 95 responding districts indicated two or more curricula that were utilized to support their preschool programs for students with disabilities. The incorporation of the four skills identified to support later self-determination and the fidelity of implementation were rated on the total curricula reported rather than individually by curricula. It would be beneficial to further rate individual curricula against the four identified skills to determine if there is an increased impact on SPP Indicator 7 exit-level results. Additionally, a blended methodology of staff development was the most widely reported method for training staff members. Future research should address the ratio of face-to-face and online training that individual districts consider a blended method of training to see if there is an increased impact on the reported fidelity of implementation of the adopted curricula. Another area that should be addressed within this same line of research is the manner in which data is collected and staff are trained for the completion of the Early Childhood Outcome rating scales used to establish

baseline performance and exit-level proficiency for a preschool student with a disability.

This line of questioning was not addressed by this specific research study, but this is an area that has the potential to significantly impact the performance results reported for individual students.

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APPENDIX A

International Review Board Approval Letter



Institutional Review Board
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
P.O. Box 425619, Denton, TX 76204-5619
940-898-3378
email: IRB@twu.edu
<http://www.twu.edu/irb.html>

DATE: May 12, 2015

TO: Ms. Lucretia Gartrell
Teacher Education

FROM: Institutional Review Board - Denton

Re: *Approval for The Relationship Between Adopted Curriculum Implementation and Early Childhood Outcome Indicator Performance (Protocol #: 18096)*

The above referenced study has been reviewed and approved by the Denton Institutional Review Board (IRB) on 5/7/2015 using an expedited review procedure. This approval is valid for one year and expires on 5/6/2016. The IRB will send an email notification 45 days prior to the expiration date with instructions to extend or close the study. It is your responsibility to request an extension for the study if it is not yet complete, to close the protocol file when the study is complete, and to make certain that the study is not conducted beyond the expiration date.

If applicable, agency approval letters must be submitted to the IRB upon receipt prior to any data collection at that agency. A request to close this study must be filed with the Institutional Review Board at the completion of the study. Because you do not utilize a signed consent form for your study, the filing of signatures of subjects with the IRB is not required.

Any modifications to this study must be submitted for review to the IRB using the Modification Request Form. Additionally, the IRB must be notified immediately of any adverse events or unanticipated problems. All forms are located on the IRB website. If you have any questions, please contact the TWU IRB.

cc. Dr. Jane Pemberton, Teacher Education
Graduate School

APPENDIX B

Survey Form

The Relationship Between Adopted Curriculum Implementation and Early Childhood Outcome Indicator Performance

* Required

District Name: *

County District Number: *

What is your role in this district? *

- ☐ Special Education Director
☐ Special Education Coordinator
☐ Other:

1. Which of the following state adopted curricula is utilized in the district's programs that support 3-5 year old students with disabilities? *

Check all that apply:

- ☐ The Texas DLM Early Childhood Express
☐ Opening the World of Learning: Texas Comprehensive Pre-K
☐ Scholastic Big Day for Texas Pre-K Programs
☐ Highscope Preschool Curriculum and Assessment
☐ Frog Street Pre-K Texas System
☐ Teaching Strategies for Pre-K, Texas Edition
☐ We Can! Texas Classroom System
☐ The Pre-Kindergarten Guidelines
☐ The Kindergarten Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills

If you would like to expand on your answer above, please provide comments here:

2. As a whole, how do the identified adopted curricula support students in making choices,

problem-solving, self-regulating behavior and actively engaging with their environment? *

- ☐ Completely
- ☐ Adequately
- ☐ Limited
- ☐ Not at All

If you would like to expand on your answer above, please provide comments here:

3. Which of the following delivery methods are utilized to train staff members on the adopted curricula? *

- ☐ Online
- ☐ Face-to-Face
- ☐ Blended (online & face-to-face)
- ☐ Other:

If you would like to expand on your answer above, please provide comments here:

4. The adopted curricula is implemented with fidelity across the district. *

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

If you would like to expand on your answer above, please provide comments here:

Submit

Never submit passwords through Google Forms.