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# Language Immersion Teachers' Perspectives of Foreign Language Learning for Students With Disabilities

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# Walden University

College of Education

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Chunling Zhang

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
and that any and all revisions required by  
the review committee have been made.

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The Office of the Provost

Walden University  
2019

Abstract

Language Immersion Teachers' Perspectives of Foreign Language Learning for Students  
With Disabilities

by

Chunling Zhang

MA, Winston Salem State University, 2015

BS, Heilongjiang University, 2003

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Education

Walden University

August 2019

## Abstract

Foreign language learning for students with disabilities can be different from that of their nondisabled peers because of their special needs. Understanding the perspectives of language immersion teachers regarding their challenges and the support needed while working with students with disabilities in language immersion programs is important because such programs are growing rapidly nationwide. In addition, there is little research on the perspectives of these teachers in elementary school settings. The purpose of this qualitative study was to develop a deeper understanding of foreign language learning needs of students with disabilities from language immersion teachers' perspectives. Ajzen's theory of planned behavior served as the theoretical framework for the study. The research questions focused on language immersion teachers' perspectives of behaviors, needed support, and academic performance of students with disabilities. Data collection included interviews that were coded and themes developed to answer the research questions. Findings through individual interviews with the 12 language immersion teachers who were employed in the district indicated that students with disabilities needed extra support in learning a foreign language, behaviors affected their academic performance, and language immersion teachers needed additional support to learn appropriate strategies to handle behaviors in order to effectively serve students with disabilities. This study might contribute to a positive social change in education by furthering the knowledge of issues and support needed in inclusive environments for students with disabilities. Results might help foreign language teachers enhance learning for those students with disabilities in elementary school language immersion programs.

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## Dedication

This study is dedicated to my beloved family and friends who have supported me, believed in me, and encouraged me throughout this challenging but rewarding journey.

This study is also dedicated to the many students I have been working with who have helped me to become the teacher, the researcher, and the person I wish to be. You all have motivated me to make my doctoral dream come true so that I am more confident to help more people who are in need.

## Acknowledgments

It is the greatest honor for me to acknowledge Dr. Jonah Eleweke, Dr. Peter Ross, and Dr. Karen Hunt for their patient guidance through this doctoral process. Thank you, Dr. Eleweke, for your supervision, your positive attitude, and your humor all the time; they gave me the power to believe in myself to win the challenge. Thank you, Dr. Ross, for your patience and your encouragement along this journey; they made me see hope and success drawing near. Thank you, Dr. Hunt, for your expertise and support; they motivated me to have the idea to be a life-long learner. It is the dedication, supervision, and professionalism from all of you that guided me to complete this milestone in my life.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Students with disabilities have the right to have access to general education settings as well as language immersion classrooms (Hayes & Bulat, 2017). The school's implementation of services and instruction in immersion programs have led language immersion teachers from different cultures to work with students with disabilities in their classrooms (Arnett, Mady, & Muilenburg, 2014; Ek, Sánchez, & Quijada Cerecer, 2013; Xu, Padilla, & Silva, 2015). Even though there is a growing number of students with disabilities who are now being exposed to the language immersion environment (Muhling & Mady, 2017; Wight, 2015), researchers have not focused on the perspectives of language immersion teachers who have students with disabilities or how the teachers can best meet the needs of the students with disabilities in the classrooms (Ferlis & Xu, 2016; Hickey & de Mejia, 2014). In this study, I investigated the perspectives of language immersion teachers who taught a foreign language to students in immersion settings in elementary schools, including students with disabilities.

Teachers' understanding of working with students with disabilities helps the students to do better in school (O'Connor, Yasik, & Horner, 2016). Part of language immersion teachers' understanding toward students with disabilities would involve increasing their knowledge of proven practices to improve their instructional strategies in the program (Bryant, Bryant, & Smith, 2015). Understanding the perspectives of the language immersion teachers in this study might help school administrators to better understand language immersion teachers' ideas and know the support that may enhance instruction for students with disabilities. In Chapter 1, I present the background

information on students with disabilities in language immersion programs, define the problem and purpose of the study, and describe its significance and the nature of the study. I also discuss the limitations and assumptions of the study and provide the key definitions that I used throughout the study along with the research questions that guided the study.

### **Background**

As foreign language learning has become more popular, an increasing number of language immersion programs related to the integrated learning of content, language, and culture have been developed in the education field (Balabukha, 2013; Zhou & Li, 2015). According to Consolidated State Performance Reports, 39 states and the District of Columbia received Federal Title III funding for at least one language immersion program in the 2012-2013 school year (Boyle, August, Tabaku, Cole, & Simpson-Baird, 2015). Up to the year 2016, there were approximately 700 language immersion programs that had been established in the United States (Ee, 2018). In addition, the number of immersion programs grew substantially from 1,000 to 2,000 nationally in elementary schools (Steele et al., 2017). Immersion programs are used to develop learners' bilingual abilities, increase their future employment opportunities, prepare them to participate in a global society, enhance their cognitive abilities, increase their cross-cultural understanding, and help them to access better academic opportunities (Ee, 2018). Learning a foreign language provides students with disabilities a chance to expose themselves to a different culture and language, which increases their academic success (O'Brien, 2017; Wight, 2015). According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education

Act of 2004, students with disabilities are supposed to participate and integrate into school settings or programs with students who are not disabled. Children with disabilities should have the same educational programs and services available to them as their nondisabled peers; these educational programs and services include foreign language programs and language immersion programs.

The perspectives of language immersion teachers regarding students with disabilities in the foreign language learning environment play an important role in those students' placement and academic success (Wight, 2015). Research on language teachers' perspectives of students with disabilities in language immersion programs may help to further the development of these immersion programs (Greer, 2015; Zhou & Li, 2015). However, cultural differences between the United States and the countries where the immersion teachers are recruited may affect the perspectives of language immersion teachers regarding students with disabilities. For example, language immersion teachers from China may not have worked with students with disabilities in their classrooms because students with disabilities in that country usually go to separate schools (Zhou & Li, 2015). These differences need to be addressed in the teachers' preparation programs as well as their continued professional development plan in the United States (Zhou & Li, 2015). Teaching in language immersion programs requires a unique set of skills for immersion teachers, which include an understanding of students' cultural backgrounds, target language development, and knowledge to work with students with disabilities (Boyle et al., 2015). Research also suggested that teachers in immersion programs face more challenges and difficulties with understanding students with disabilities regarding

their special needs, attitudes, motivation, and anxiety in the classrooms (Akcan, 2016; Kormos, 2017; Walkington, 2015; Zhou & Li, 2015). Based on a review of the State Education Agency for all 50 states and the District of Columbia websites and interviews with states officials, there was a gap in practice of language immersion teachers' perspectives not being understood sufficiently (US Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition, 2015). Meanwhile, there were not enough professional developments being implemented for language immersion teachers to effectively work with students with disabilities (Boyle et al., 2015; Ó Ceallaigh, Hourigan, & Leavy, 2018; Zhou & Li, 2015). This study was designed to specifically explore language immersion teachers' perspectives on their needs and challenges while providing services to students with disabilities in language immersion programs.

### **Problem Statement**

Immersion teachers' perspectives of students with disabilities in the foreign language learning environment are not well documented (Oberg De La Garza, Mackinney, & Lavigne, 2015; Wight, 2014). Language immersion teachers' lack of knowledge of special education, limited professional training, and little experience working with students with disabilities may challenge them in addressing the diverse needs of students with disabilities (Zhou & Li, 2015). Language immersion programs in elementary schools can be one option to close achievement gaps for learners. However, the programs' effectiveness depends on how the language immersion teachers implement their teaching (Li, Steele, Slater, Bacon, & Miller, 2016), especially with students with disabilities.



The problem is the lack of research on language immersion teachers' perspectives of foreign language learning for students with disabilities in language immersion programs in elementary school settings. There is a dearth in research on teacher development in language immersion programs internationally (Ó Ceallaigh et al., 2018; Tedick & Wesely, 2015), and research focusing on language immersion teachers working with students with disabilities is even more limited (Ó Ceallaigh et al., 2018). Language immersion teachers' perspectives of students with disabilities are important due to the challenges they face while supporting students with disabilities (Osipova, 2016). Research with insightful findings exploring language teachers with students with disabilities is needed (Jiang & Woodcock, 2018). Research focusing on language teachers working with students with disabilities could address more in depth the needs of students with disabilities (Berube, 2015; Betts, 2015; Greer, 2015; Mady & Muhling, 2017). Language teachers should apply innovative methods inside the classroom to reach all learners, including students with disabilities (Abdallah, 2015). Teachers' perspectives of students learning a foreign language are already known (Asaba, 2018; Pearson, 2018; Sundari, 2017); however, language teachers with students with disabilities need to be studied further (Li, 2018). The inclusion of students with disabilities in foreign language classrooms has been problematic due to individualized learning challenges, which include the learner's disability and behaviors (Tolbert, Lazarus, & Killu, 2017). This qualitative study expanded on the existing literature of foreign language learning for students with disabilities from language immersion teachers' perspectives in order to enhance the provision of quality instruction in language immersion settings.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore language immersion teachers' perspectives of working with students with disabilities in language immersion settings. This study might also contribute to filling a specific gap in the current literature of language immersion teachers' perspectives of students with disabilities in language immersion settings and help educators to gain a better understanding of it. Researchers stated that language immersion teachers' professional development is not implemented sufficiently to effectively help language immersion teachers, and it is challenging for them to work with both general students and students with disabilities for the development of language immersion programs (Boyle et al., 2015; Ó Ceallaigh et al., 2018; Zhou & Li, 2015). Language immersion teachers' perspectives are important. I provide recommendations based on the findings to close the gap.

### **Research Questions**

Because the problem was the lack of research on language immersion teachers' perspectives of foreign language learning for students with disabilities in language immersion programs in elementary school settings, this study focused on attempting to gain a better understanding of language immersion teachers' perspectives of students with disabilities learning a foreign language in elementary school immersion classrooms based on Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior. The research questions developed in response to the problem were as follows:

RQ1: What are language immersion teachers' perspectives of students with disabilities?

RQ2: What are language immersion teachers' perspectives of students with disabilities learning a foreign language in an immersion setting?

RQ3: How does the professional learning experience of the language immersion teachers impact their beliefs about students with disabilities?

### **Conceptual Framework for the Study**

The theoretical framework for this study was Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior. The theory of planned behavior suggests that behavior is determined by intentions, attitudes (beliefs about a behavior), and subjective norms (beliefs about others' attitudes toward a behavior; Ajzen, 1991). A person's attitude towards a behavior is influenced by factors such as individual experiences, previously acquired knowledge, and newly acquired knowledge. Ajzen's theory might reflect factors that impact language immersion teachers' perspectives toward students with disabilities in language immersion settings. This framework provided an enhanced understanding of language immersion teachers' perspectives of foreign language learning for students with disabilities in language immersion settings. Ajzen's theory of planned behavior also provides a deeper understanding of participants' attitudes and behaviors, beliefs, and intentions. Attitudes of language immersion teachers in language immersion programs largely impacted their behaviors, beliefs, and determinations toward students with disabilities learning a foreign language in elementary school language immersion settings.

### **Nature of the Study**

Because qualitative research focuses on interpreting, understanding, and explaining a phenomenon (Ravitch & Carl, 2016), a qualitative approach fit the needs of

this study about understanding language immersion teachers' perspectives of students with disabilities in language immersion programs in elementary schools. In the study, the use of individual interviews was appropriate for gaining language immersion teachers' perspectives of students with disabilities. The participants were 12 language immersion teachers who worked with students with disabilities in elementary school language immersion settings. Individual semistructured interviews were used for collecting data. The interviews were voice-recorded in order to ensure accurate transcriptions. Each interview included exactly the same interview questions to prevent researcher bias. I applied interview transcripts and open coding with thematic analysis in data analysis.

### **Definitions**

*Teachers' perspectives:* Thoughts or mental images that teachers have about their students, which are usually shaped by the teachers' background knowledge and life experiences, including their family history or tradition, education, work, culture, or community (Iris Center, 2015).

*Student with disabilities:* A student with a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a record of such an impairment or being regarded as having such an impairment, or a student with academic difficulties, autism, or other health impairments (Francis & Silvers, 2016).

*Language immersion program:* A particular language teaching type in which the target language is the content and also the medium of instruction, which is both the vehicle for learning and the package that is delivered (Gardner, 2017).

*Language immersion teachers:* Native speakers who complete their education in the country where the target language is spoken and who receive credentials and teaching licensures in bilingual education (Xu et al., 2015). For the purpose of this study, language immersion teachers refer to teachers recruited from different countries rather than from the United States and whose languages and cultures are distinct.

*Least restrictive environment:* Educational conditions determined in a step-by-step process that starts with the assumption that the student will attend a mainstream classroom in their neighborhood school (Disability Law Colorado, 2015).

*Foreign language learning:* Education in a foreign language that usually takes place in classroom settings. Learning a foreign language allows the individual to communicate effectively and creatively and to participate in real-life situations through the language of the authentic culture itself (Moeller & Catalano, 2015).

### **Assumptions**

The following assumptions were made in this study:

1. I assumed that the participants' responses to the interview questions were honest and reflected their perspectives of the academic and behavioral challenges they experienced with students with disabilities in language immersion classrooms.
2. I assumed participants were language immersion professionals who were familiar with academic and behavioral challenges of students with disabilities in language immersion classrooms in elementary schools.

3. I assumed participants were cooperative and willing to participate in the study and agreed to participate in individual interviews.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

Language immersion teachers' perspectives based on their personal experience and background knowledge circumscribed the scope of the study. Participants in this study were certified language immersion teachers who were from other countries with different languages and cultural backgrounds. The participants may or may not have worked with students with disabilities in their cultures and may not have had prior knowledge of special education in America. The study of the language immersion teachers' perspectives might provide a reference for relevant stakeholders regarding students with disabilities in language immersion programs in elementary school settings. In the study, I interviewed a purposeful sample of participants teaching in language immersion programs from four public elementary schools. I invited 53 language immersion teachers who were currently teaching in language immersion programs in the district to participate in the study. I continued to accept participants until the desired numbers (12 language immersion teachers) and data saturation was reached. I conducted the interviews in places that were comfortable and convenient for the selected participants.

### **Limitations**

The qualitative study had the following limitations. First, because the participants were language immersion teachers in language immersion programs with students with disabilities in elementary schools, perspectives of teachers in special education, general

education, and other programs were not studied. Therefore, the scope of data from educators' perspectives was narrow. Second, the study results of language immersion teachers' perspectives were limited to elementary school language immersion programs because the participants mainly worked with students from K-5. Consequently, these results might not be applicable to other grade levels such as 6-12. In addition, potential researcher bias might also be a limitation in this study because I was born and raised in a culture where special education services and supports are rendered to students using a totally different approach. Bias management is one of the major challenges for qualitative researchers employing interviewing as a data generation method in their studies (Chenail, 2011). Furthermore, limitations might also exist regarding the numbers of participants recruited. In the school district where the study was conducted, there were only four schools that implemented language immersion programs. Furthermore, there were a limited number of overall language immersion teachers who were teaching in language immersion programs. Consequently, the selection of participants was restricted by the limited number of language immersion teachers available.

### **Significance**

This study was significant in developing a deeper understanding of language immersion teachers' perspectives of students with disabilities in language immersion settings in elementary schools. This study was meaningful because it addressed the language immersion teachers' understanding of students with disabilities. It is vital for teachers to realize that the educational needs of students with disabilities might differ from those typically developed students, and instructional modifications and

accommodations might be needed (Ivančević-Otanjac, 2016). The results of this study could provide insights for school administrators with their decisions of implementing interventions or foster teacher professional development in language immersion programs. Insights from this study could provide language immersion teachers' perspectives of students with disabilities for the benefit of both student success and program growth (Topor & Rosenblum, 2013).

### **Summary**

Language immersion programs have become more commonplace in educational settings. Research suggests that language immersion programs can generate benefits for students in their academic achievement, language and literacy development, and cognitive skills (Fortune, 2012). Students with disabilities also have a right to participate in language immersion programs with their nondisabled peers (Virginia Department of Education, Office of Special Education Instructional Services and the Office of Humanities and Early Childhood, 2017). The current U.S. practice in special education involves language immersion teachers coming from different cultures working with students with disabilities in language immersion programs (Rodriguez, 2016). Often, language immersion teachers' background knowledge and previous experience with students with disabilities resulted in language immersion teachers having concerns and anxiety. Thus, there was a need to explore language immersion teachers' perspectives of students with disabilities in language immersion programs in elementary schools. In Chapter 1 of the study, I explored the problem statement, the purpose of the study, and the background along with presenting the nature of the study and its significance for



students with disabilities learning a foreign language in immersion programs. The research questions were listed followed by the assumptions, the scope and delimitations, and the limitations of the study. Chapter 2 of the study provides a review of the contemporary literature with an emphasis on the literature search strategy, the conceptual framework, and the literature review in detail, along with a summary and conclusions of the study. Chapter 3 of the study focuses on the methodology used in the study as well as explanations of the sample, population, data collection, and data analysis. I also discuss the research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, trustworthiness, and ethical procedures. Chapter 4 of the study is mainly focused on the study results, which include data collection settings, data collection, data analysis, and the interpretation of the results. In Chapter 5, I provide a further review of the study in regard to an interpretation of the research findings in relation to the problem statement and the research questions. I also discuss the limitations of the study, recommendations for further study, and the implications for social change.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter includes a review of current literature that is related to language immersion teachers' perspectives of foreign language learning for students with disabilities in language immersion programs. These perspectives are important because they help to explain the differences in teaching and factors that may influence the teachers' various thinking patterns (Stewart, 2016). Teachers teaching in immersion programs need to work with all student populations, including those with disabilities. This might be a challenge for language immersion teachers because they are from cultures with different educational systems. Thus, language immersion teachers' perspectives need to be studied in order to better serve students with disabilities in language immersion programs, where these perspectives may influence the students' academic achievement (Whittle, Telford, & Benson, 2018). Also, the study results could assist school administrators in making their decisions on implementing teacher professional development focused on students with disabilities in language immersion programs. In the literature review, I mainly focused on reviewing factors such as the challenges for language immersion teachers, the learning of foreign language for students with disabilities, and the perspectives of language immersion teachers of students with disabilities. Therefore, further research was needed in order to close the gap in both practice and literature regarding the perspectives of language immersion teachers for students with disabilities learning a foreign language in language immersion programs. In this chapter, I present the conceptual framework, literature search strategies, and a review

of the current literature. Finally, I provide a summary and conclusion regarding the major themes and researched information.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

In searching for the current literature, I used Google Scholar, ERIC (Education Resource Information Center), EBSCO (Elton B. Stephens Company), and CEC (Council for Exceptional Children) journals. I also used additional websites, such as the *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, *Exceptional Children*, the *Journal of Special Education*, and *Journal of Behavioral Education* to obtain information regarding students with disabilities, language immersion teacher perspectives, and foreign language learning.

The main information that I searched for in the literature included *students with disabilities*, *teaching students with disabilities*, *services for students with disabilities*, *instruction support for students with disabilities*, *foreign language acquisition*, *foreign language acquisition for students with disabilities*, *role of language immersion teachers*, *support needed by language immersion teachers*, and *language immersion teachers' perspectives of students with disabilities*. I filtered the search to focus on articles that were published in peer-reviewed journals dating from the year 2013 to 2019. During the literature search, I noticed that researchers focused more on general educators' perspectives of students with disabilities rather than language immersion teachers' perspectives of students with disabilities in language immersion programs in elementary schools. Due to a gap in the literature that is related to language immersion teachers' perspectives, there was a need for this study.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior is mainly focused on the antecedents of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. All of these factors determine human intentions and actions. Fundamentally, the theory assumes that behavior can be considered as a function of salient information or beliefs that were relevant to the behavior. These salient beliefs are normally considered to be the prevailing determinants of a person's intentions and actions (Ajzen, 1991). Specifically, the salient beliefs are categorized into three kinds: behavioral beliefs, a type of belief assumed to influence attitudes toward the behavior; normative beliefs, which contribute to the underlying determinants of subjective norms; and control beliefs, a kind of belief providing the basis for perspectives of behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991). Generally, the more favorable the attitude and subjective norm of behavior and the greater the perceived behavioral control, the stronger an individual's intention to perform the behavior is. Thus, the importance of attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control in the prediction of intention should be expected to vary across behaviors and situations (Ajzen, 1991).

In the current study focusing on language immersion teachers' perspectives of foreign language learning for students with disabilities in language immersion classrooms, I used the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991) as a framework to understand language immersion teachers' intentions in language immersion settings. The study results included language immersion teachers' perspectives of the challenges they faced and support that they needed. The results may contribute useful information to education

systems regarding language immersion teachers' perspectives of students with disabilities in language immersion classrooms.

The theory of planned behavior by Ajzen (1991) provided a framework for understanding insight from language immersion teachers with students with disabilities in learning a foreign language in language immersion settings. This insight could assist administrators in making their decisions regarding support for teachers when students with disabilities are placed in language immersion programs. Based on the theory of planned behavior, participants involved in the study give response to the interview questions, which lead to the study findings and conclusions.

### **Literature Review Related to Key Variables and Concepts**

#### **Students with Disabilities**

Assessing the performance of students with disabilities should focus on academic, social, and behavioral aspects. Blackorby and Wagner (2016) considered the performances of students with disabilities in three aspects. Academically, half of the students with disabilities at school are described by their teachers as highly engaged in their education even though they are often shown to be more than one to two years behind grade level in academics (Blackorby & Wagner, 2016). Socially, parents report that 90% of students with disabilities get along with other students, and teachers report that 50% of students with disabilities follow directions in class (Blackorby & Wagner, 2016). Behaviorally, students with disabilities show signs of emerging independence at home and in the community by demonstrating important self-determination skills (Blackorby & Wagner, 2016). However, students with different disabilities still have

various impacts across the outcome domains, which remain challenges to some degree (Blackorby & Wagner, 2016). Students with disabilities appear to be different from their typically developing peers due to their present delays or deficits (Evins, 2015).

Considering the delays and deficits of individuals with disabilities, the importance of these students' social, emotional, and behavioral development is better addressed in inclusion education (Evins, 2015). However, students with disabilities still face challenges in obtaining their right to education even though inclusive education allows them to attend the same age-appropriate classes at their local schools as nondisabled students (Bouillet & Kudek-Mirošević, 2015). In practice, students with disabilities usually have a need for additional support in educational settings, including the support to develop appropriate relationships with peers (Bouillet & Kudek-Mirošević, 2015).

Developing a social network for students with disabilities with their peers can be an important way to build social interactions and improve academic performance. Strategies such as training nondisabled peers about disabilities and encouraging them to interact with students with disabilities outside of the school environment can play a key role in establishing a peer-support network for students with disabilities (Browder, Wood, Thompson, & Ribuffo, 2014).

### **Teaching Students with Disabilities**

Schools need to be accountable for ensuring all students' adequate yearly progress, including students with disabilities, which requires teachers to apply the most effective instructional procedures available (Browder et al., 2014). By implementing effective instructional strategies, educators can meet the various needs of students with disabilities

(Kraglund-Gauthier, Young, & Kell, 2014). The evidence base for literacy-based behavioral interventions is an instructional strategy for students with disabilities, and additional novel and robust teaching approaches will also be effective for students with disabilities (Brady, Hall, & Bielskus-Barone, 2016). It is important to support students with disabilities by using differentiated instruction that includes rigorous content and application of higher-order thinking skills (Dixon & Zannu, 2014). In addition, adaptation or moderate changes to instructional methods or materials can enable students to learn or do something they would not otherwise be able to easily accomplish (Kraglund-Gauthier et al., 2014). However, there is a lack of research regarding the specific problems and issues that students with disabilities have in specific disciplines of study as well as the issues associated with teaching foreign languages to students with disabilities (Pimentel, 2018).

### **Services for Students with Disabilities**

Students in schools receive flexible screening and evaluations to determine if they are eligible for special education services. Generally, educational agencies are required to identify children with disabilities (Lipkin & Okamoto, 2015). Once students need special education services, necessary accommodations must be provided accordingly. School support services refer to the necessary resources provided by special education teams for the special needs of students with disabilities that help students with disabilities better adapt to school (Sun & Huang, 2016). The support services to students with disabilities also include assistive technology devices, assistive technology services, consulting services, rehabilitation counseling services, medical services, school health services,

orientation and mobility services, psychological services, and social work services (Sun & Huang, 2016). Students with disabilities require different services above and beyond those needed by their peers without disabilities. Thus, it is critical that additional support services for students with disabilities are provided in schools (Powers, 2016). Both general and special educators were suggested to focus on instructional strategies for students with disabilities. A number of mainstream instructional strategies were originally developed for students with disabilities, and the application of these instructional practices worked effectively for them (Vaughn, Danielson, Zumeta, & Holdheide, 2015). In addition, students with disabilities are competent in learning with technology tools, a practice that makes them feel valued and rewarded regardless of their disabilities (Jacobs & Fu, 2014).

### **Instruction Support for Students with Disabilities**

For students with disabilities, a key to success was that they received appropriate and effective instruction. It is important that both content teachers and special education teachers understand how to provide instructional support to students with disabilities (Snodgrass, Israel, & Reese, 2016). Students with disabilities often needed different learning trials embedded in a lesson or activity to ensure their learning and progress in the curriculum, which was also a challenge for teachers. Providing effective and systematic practices for students with disabilities in classrooms is one of the goals to make them succeed (Jimenez & Kamei, 2015). It is challenging for students with disabilities to make academic progress at a steady pace, they need various modifications and support in their academic tasks depending on their types of disabilities (Quick, 2014).



Thus, modifications and support provided to students with disabilities were necessary and significant. Instructional strategies available to students with disabilities in classrooms include co-teaching, differentiated instruction, and peer-mediated instruction and interventions (Ford, 2013). In addition, pullout programs for students with disabilities provide an opportunity for them to receive small group or individualized instruction, and the added amount of focused instruction largely benefits the general academic progress of students with disabilities (Fernandez & Hynes, 2016). More importantly, Response to intervention plays a positive role in teaching students with disabilities because it starts with high-quality instruction and universal screening of students in general education classrooms toward the goals of prevention, early identification and intervention, and intensive treatment of children with achievement and behavioral challenges (Reschly, 2014).

### **Foreign Language Acquisition**

A foreign language refers to the language other than one's mother tongue being learned or studied (Mizza, 2014). In a general sense, foreign language acquisition aims to make distinctive contributions to fundamental understandings of cultures as well as learning the human mind or nature of the target language (Wang, 2015). Foreign language learning is considered a complex cognitive process, which is unique to human beings because it helps to reveal the working principles of human brains and characteristics of its intellectual activities (Wang, 2015). However, the cognitive difficulties children experience as they acquire a foreign language require great learning effort, as can be seen by the research done on brain science that addressed the complexity

of the foreign language learning process for children (Mizza, 2014). Many factors are related to foreign language learning, such as motivation, attitude, intelligence, cognitive style, and personality. Foreign language acquisition also depends on how the learners behave towards the target language, including their cognitive ability and their learning styles (Khasinah, 2014). More importantly, foreign language acquisition has been affected by learning frequencies; frequent intake promotes learning success (Kartal & Sarigul, 2017). The process of foreign language teaching is setting new habits in response to stimuli in a habitual environment, and language teachers need to develop students' learning habits of imitation and repetition of the target language (Mamelina, 2013). Cheatham and Hart Barnett (2017) mentioned implications and recommendations of misunderstandings in foreign language acquisition based on current debates and research literature regarding language diversity, disability status, and related policies for students with disabilities. Overall, more research in the fields of foreign language acquisition and applied linguistics was needed in order to help language learners achieve their maximum academic success in their target language (Pimentel, 2018).

### **Foreign Language Acquisition for Students with Disabilities**

There is a higher rate of foreign language learners receiving special education services (Thurlow & Kopriva, 2015). However, to date, little work has been accumulated on how to effectively work with students with disabilities in foreign language acquisition. Usually, in a foreign language setting, when language learners struggle to understand or process their learning, it is possible that teachers may wonder if the student is not understanding due to language acquisition or if the student is suffering from a kind of

disability (Logan, 2016). Thus, it is necessary to study foreign language acquisition for students with disabilities. It is important for schools to identify foreign language learners with disabilities, which promotes effective and appropriate services to them (Logan, 2016), even though Sparks and Luebbers (2018) claimed that there is not a special relationship between students' foreign language learning problems and their disabilities in learning a foreign language. Once students' special needs are identified, differentiated instructions and accommodations could be provided by foreign language teachers to students with disabilities, and then when students with disabilities have difficulty mastering specific skills, it is time for foreign language teachers to implement those instructional strategies or adjust instructional pace for them (Burr, Haas, & Ferriere, 2015).

### **Role of Language Immersion Teachers**

Appropriate guidance and supervision from teachers result in higher efficiency and effectiveness, even if the learners need to take responsibilities for their own learning (Bajrami, 2015). Teachers who teach in language immersion programs should also be lifelong learners in order to deal with various challenges. Language immersion teachers are constantly required to acquire new knowledge and skills in order to keep pace with possible changes in the program (Zhelezovskaia, 2016). The role of language immersion teachers in previous times was to provide students with readily prepared information. However, language immersion teachers now take a facilitator role to help and strategies to students (Zhelezovskaia, 2016). Tolbert et al. (2017) mentioned that students with disabilities possess the ability to succeed, thus multi-sensory strategies from language

immersion teachers are important to help students with disabilities to reach their full potentials. Graham, Harris, Bartlett, Popadopoulou, and Santoro (2016) stated that it is important for language immersion teachers to become aware of their strengths and limitations in working with students with disabilities. However, Rupp, Roberts, and Olson (2017) indicated that a lack of understanding of the unique roles of language immersion teachers working with students with disabilities could impact the education quality for students with disabilities as well as the preparation, development, and evaluation of language immersion teachers.

### **Support Needed for Language Immersion Teachers**

Murphy and Haller (2015) concluded that factors like time, support, and understanding at all levels, such as schools, districts, and communities, are critical for language immersion teachers to ensure learning success of students with special needs. Even though some language immersion teachers have received training on providing accommodations to students learning foreign languages, most teachers still feel inadequately equipped and unprepared to work with students with disabilities in language immersion classrooms (Pimentel, 2018). Thus, support from professional development is always important for language immersion teachers to work with students with disabilities. One factor impacting language immersion teachers to work effectively with students with disabilities is the need for available professional-development support (Moloney & Xu, 2015). Besides that, language immersion educators also need holistic support from administrations because they need resources available in their schools to work with

students with disabilities. All extra support and accommodations require teachers to put students at the center of educational planning (Ford, 2013).

### **Language Immersion Teachers' Perspectives of Students with Disabilities**

Language immersion teachers' perspectives of students with disabilities play a vital role in the success for students learning a foreign language, especially those with disabilities. Ruppard, Gaffney, and Dymond (2015) addressed that understanding language immersion teachers' perspectives is important because teachers' conceptualizations about disability result in different teaching practices, which impact students' future quality of life. Also, language immersion teachers' poor perspectives of literacy result in low self-efficacy and low participation in professional development. Faulkner, Crossland, and Stiff (2013) indicated that language immersion teachers' perspectives of students with disabilities play an important role in students' rates and placement of the program. Faulkner, Crossland, and Stiff stated that teacher evaluations of student performance play a greater role for students with disabilities because they reveal how students' performances are affected by their disabilities. Ruppard, Neeper, and Dalsen (2016) provided that teachers' perspectives of teaching students with disabilities varied among teachers with different types of teaching licenses, levels of education, and experiences. Language immersion teachers' experiences and their training for efficacy, as well as cross-cultural differences, largely impact their attitudes toward individuals with disabilities (Hauerwas & Mahon, 2018). Language immersion teachers' attitudes toward teaching are important since they are usually faced with challenges while working with and supporting struggling learners (Osipova, 2016). Language immersion teachers

believe that instantly addressing the errors students make can facilitate their foreign language learning (Kvist, 2014). Jameel (2018) commented that when educators have a lack of awareness or specific knowledge of students' disabilities and support available, they report adverse experiences. Further research is needed in determining whether language immersion teachers have a bias toward foreign language learning for students with disabilities (Arnett & Mady, 2017). Also, Gavish (2017) provided the view that it is the hope of language teachers that they know more about the range of students' disabilities, approaches to working with them, and how to assist students with disabilities. Based on these considerations, this study focused on language immersion teachers' perspectives of students with disabilities learning a foreign language in language immersion settings.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

A review of the literature revealed concepts regarding foreign language learning for students with disabilities from foreign language and immersion teachers' perspectives, as well as the challenges language teachers experienced while working with students with disabilities in language immersion settings. The key ideas that emerged from the current literature review were the importance of viewing students with disabilities learning a foreign language by the language immersion teachers who worked with them, which aligned with Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior, as well as the support that those teachers needed in assisting students with disabilities. In order to develop informative research on the topic of language immersion teachers' perspectives of students with disabilities learning a foreign language, an in-depth study was needed in language

immersion settings. In Chapter 3, both research design and rationale, and methodology were further described. Also, a detailed description of the role of the researcher, trustworthiness, and ethical procedures of the study was provided.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative study was to focus on developing a better understanding of language immersion teachers' perspectives of students with disabilities learning a foreign language in language immersion programs. I explored a collection of language immersion teachers' perspectives based on their various teaching experiences, the challenges they encountered, and the special support they needed in language immersion settings in elementary schools while working with students with disabilities. In Chapter 3, I restate the research questions, the information on the research design, and the rationale applied to develop a deeper understanding of language immersion teachers' perspectives of students with disabilities. In addition to identifying the methodology, I also describe the role of the researcher, the selection of the participants, the data collection, and the analysis plan in the study. I demonstrate trustworthiness and ethical procedures concerning both the study and the participants.

#### **Research Design and Rationale**

The nature of this study was qualitative because the purpose of the study as reflected in research questions concerned a group of language immersion teacher participants who taught a foreign language to all students, including students with disabilities in language immersion settings. A qualitative approach focused on interpreting, understanding, and explaining the phenomenon (Ravitch & Carl, 2016) helped to explain language immersion teachers' perspectives of foreign language learning for students with disabilities. Alvesson and Sköldberg (2017) stated that qualitative researchers attempt to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings that people bring to



them. Because in this study, I investigated language immersion teachers' perspectives of students with disabilities in language immersion programs in elementary schools, the participants were selected across all grade levels from K-5. I collected qualitative data through the use of semistructured individual interviews with the participating language immersion teachers. I used open coding and thematic analysis to analyze data in the study. The following research questions guided the entire study.

RQ1: What are language immersion teachers' perspectives of students with disabilities?

RQ2: What are language immersion teachers' perspectives of students with disabilities learning a foreign language in an immersion setting?

RQ3: How does the professional learning experience of the language immersion teachers impact their beliefs about students with disabilities?

Factors such as the language immersion teachers' knowledge of special education, their having limited professional training, and their having little experience working with students with disabilities might challenge these teachers to meet the diverse needs of students with disabilities. Because this study was focused on understanding language immersion teachers' perspectives of students with disabilities who are learning a foreign language in immersion classrooms, the results can be beneficial for both students with disabilities in language immersion programs and the programs themselves.

### **Role of the Researcher**

In conducting research, it is almost impossible to completely avoid bias, and a study that is free of bias can be considered to be a carefully developed study (Malone,

Nicholl, & Tracey, 2014). Often, researchers bring bias unintentionally into a study, which is difficult to recognize. As a result, it is always a sensitive issue to address bias openly and clearly (Althubaiti, 2016). Working as a fifth-grade Chinese language immersion classroom teacher for 6 years, I might have a bias towards students with disabilities learning Chinese as a foreign language in the language immersion program. In order to conduct an objective study, I applied various strategies to reduce bias in this study. Although I shared my job responsibilities with the participants, it was unlikely to produce bias or personal preferences to the study because my role as a Chinese language immersion teacher was unrelated to any of their job responsibilities. I did not serve in an administrative role. I strictly followed the interview protocols and avoided offering my perspectives and beliefs during the interviews by firmly sticking to the information that the participants shared. I took notes for later reflections during the interviews in case any unexpected situations were to occur so that I could see how I conducted the interviews in order to avoid any personal assumptions. I also focused on the participants' validation by inviting them to comment on the interview transcript to ensure the accuracy of their responses. I invited participants' agreement or disagreement with the resulting themes based on their responses and let them decide whether the identified themes accurately reflected their intended input (see Noble & Smith, 2015).

As the researcher, I interviewed the participants by providing each of them the same interview questions in exactly the same order, I led them to focus on the questions, and then I took notes on their responses while recording the interviews. Another important task for me was transcribing the interviews and analyzing the data collected

from the participants to identify the codes and themes that were indicated by their responses.

## **Methodology**

### **Participant Selection**

The population of this study was language immersion teachers who work with both general education students and students with disabilities in the language immersion classrooms. In order to answer the research questions, I selected 12 language immersion teachers teaching in the district language immersion programs at the elementary school level (K-5). Creswell (2012) mentioned that the use of smaller convenience samples in qualitative studies allowed the researcher to develop an in-depth understanding of the participants and the issues under investigation. In the participant selection period, I first contacted the school district's world language director and requested a list of language immersion teachers who could be participants of the study and met the criteria of teaching in language immersion programs. I then used purposive sampling to select language immersion teachers as participants of the study because purposive sampling relies on the judgment of the researcher in selecting the participants who are to be studied (Sharma, 2017). By using this method, I was able to target language immersion teachers teaching in language immersion programs as the population in my study.

### **Instrumentation**

The qualitative data from the study were collected through individual interviews with the participants that included open-ended questions to address the research questions. While open-ended questions are generally used to explore interview topics in depth and

to help people understand processes, they usually produce lists, short answers, or lengthy narratives (Weller et al., 2018) by encouraging the participants to state their ideas and full experience (Laureate Education, 2016). The interview questions in this study were designed based on Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior. Each element of the theory (behavior of interest and attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived and actual behavioral control) was represented by one or more interview questions. In order to uncover the elements of the behavior and attitudes of interest, language immersion teachers were encouraged to share their general understanding of students with disabilities and their feelings of working with students with disabilities in language immersion settings. Subjective norms such as the impacts of workshops or professional development on language immersion teachers, as well as the support they sought in order to serve students with disabilities better were identified by questions. I investigated perceived and actual behavioral control factors by asking various interview questions (Appendix A) that encouraged language immersion teachers to share their observations of students with disabilities in language immersion settings, the challenges that they experienced with the academic performance of students with disabilities, and the differences that they anticipated for students with disabilities being in settings that are different from the language immersion classrooms. Before revealing the interview questions to the participants, I explained the purpose of the study along with my role in the study to provide them with a clearer understanding about the study in the hope that this would holistically aid in obtaining each of their insights and perspectives. I was also responsible for gathering information and data from participants' consents and interviews. Each

interview lasted approximately 30-45 minutes. All interviews were audio recorded to ensure the accuracy of the participants' responses.

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

After I applied for conducting the research to the district Research and Evaluation Department, they issued me a letter of cooperation for approval. Upon the approvals of both the district and Walden University Institutional Review Board (Walden approval no.05-06-19-0737668, which expires May 5, 2020), I contacted the world language director in the district and requested a list of language immersion teachers who met the needed criteria for participation in the study. The district world language director immediately replied to me with a list containing 53 language immersion teachers' names and their contact information. I sent e-mail with greetings, a brief self-introduction, the purpose of the e-mail, and a letter of invitation to the study to all the 53 potential participants on the list that was provided by the district world language director. The participants had the options either to reply to me indicating their willingness to participate in the study and to share their perspectives or to disregard the e-mail. I chose 12 language immersion teachers to be the participants in the study based on the order in which I received their e-mails. After selecting the participants, I contacted them again to provide them with more detailed information, such as the interests of the study, the interview protocols, the participants' rights, an explanation of confidentiality, some questions or problems that might occur, the best means of contacting me, what the compensation for participating in the study would be, along with a consent form, which needed to be sent back to me. When a candidate quit the study, I invited the next

available participant in the e-mail list who indicated a willingness to participate and notified that participant by following the same procedures. In order to efficiently schedule interviews with the participants, I invited them to provide me with their preferred date and time as well as their preferred locations for the individual interviews. I considered it important to make the participants feel at ease during the interviews and to reduce their anxiety by providing a relaxed atmosphere regardless of it being a school setting or an off-site setting. As mentioned previously, each interview lasted 30-45 minutes based on the amount of information the participant wished to share. The total data collection period took approximately two weeks, which were ample time to allow for all interviews with the participants. I provided a gift card of \$15 to the participants at the end of each individual interview.

At the beginning of each interview, I shared the interview procedures and protocols with the participant and addressed their importance as well (see Table 1). Participants were again notified of their rights of being in the study. To ensure transcription accuracy, all conversations were audio recorded during the interview by using a laptop voice recorder. I made sure that the participants were aware of the recording as well as the purpose of the recording. At the end of each interview, I expressed my appreciation to the participant both verbally and with the gift card.

I promised the participants that I would share the findings of the study with them. In research, participants have the right to know the results of the studies in which they participate, and participants may address the desire and importance of receiving the results for different purposes (Long, Stewart, & McElfish, 2017). Thus, participants were

notified that they would be provided with a disclosure of the study findings through an email along with a thank you note for their participation in the study. As the researcher, I also took the responsibility to hold the participants' identities confidential, to maintain the anonymity of the data, and to keep all the data in a password-protected file on my personal computer for at least 5 years after the completion of the study. I would be the only person who could get access to the data in order to follow the ethical requirements of the study as well as to maintain the confidentiality of the participants.

Table 1

*Interview Procedures and Protocols*

Steps	Procedures and protocols	Due time
1	Greetings	Beginning of the interview
2	Introductions of the researcher and the participant	Beginning of the interview
3	Addressing expectations and purpose of the study	Before the interview questions
4	Review of the participant's rights	Before the interview questions
5	Review of confidentiality	Before the interview questions
6	Review of recording policies	Before the interview questions
7	Clarification of any questions from the participant	Before the interview questions
8	Asking interview questions	Conducting the interview
9	Additional information from the participant	Conducting the interview
10	Clarifications and Compensation	After the interview
11	Partings	Ending the interview

### **Data Analysis Plan**

Data analysis refers to assembling or reconstructing the data in a meaningful or comprehensible fashion, which needs to be transparent, rigorous, and true from the participants' perspectives (Noble & Smith, 2014). I transcribed the audio recordings collected during each individual interview within the same day to prevent information from being missed. Before performing the data analysis, I tried to ensure its accuracy by implementing a transcript review. In order to avoid any misrepresentation or misunderstanding of the data that I collected from the participants, I also conducted member checking. I provided the checklist for member checking (Appendix B) to the participants so that they could understand what to work on. Once I obtained all the confirmed interview data, I immediately started the data analysis process. I gathered in the margins the participants' ideas and opinions that were based on the data collected. In order to further establish the descriptions and broad themes, I thoroughly reviewed the data again. After the data revision, I established the codes and developed similar codes into groups for common themes. Then, I also grouped the themes to identify the participants' key ideas that were based on the data developed. Noble and Smith (2014) mentioned that the process of analyzing data includes developing a data coding system, linking the codes or units of data to form overarching themes, and identifying the recurring and significant themes, which lead to various patterns of the data. When analyzing the data, I used thematic analysis to identify their patterns. The first stage of the thematic analysis involved initial coding, whereby each line of the data was read over repeatedly to identify key words or phrases. The next stage of the analysis involved



bringing similar categories together into broader themes (Noble & Smith, 2014). I focused on the early development of the codes and categories and wanted to know how they formed broad initial themes. After that, I worked on the category development, which led to the final themes that could answer the research questions.

In the overall process of data analysis, Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior (which includes attitudes toward behavior, subjective norms, behavioral intention, normative belief, and perceived behavioral control leading to intention to perform a behavior) was operationalized in the study. An attitude toward students with disabilities might influence the actual behavior and perspectives of language immersion teachers. A better understanding of the participants' attitudes and perspectives toward students with disabilities and the theory of planned behavior helped with the data analysis. The responses to the interview questions from the participants that were based on each element of Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior were gathered. Patterns from the data were identified based on the data coding system and the data thematic analysis.

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is considered to be the quality and rigor of a study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). It also refers to the quality criteria that need to be followed in a qualitative study (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Qualitative criteria for research include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Credibility refers to the degree of the actual meanings and true values of the research participants (Moon, Brewer, Januchowski-Hartley, Adams, & Blackman, 2016). Research credibility is directly related to the research design and the data collection instruments (Ravitch &

Carl, 2016). In the study, the interview questions were designed carefully and directly to understand the participating language immersion teachers' real experience and perspectives of working with students with disabilities in language immersion settings. Member checking, one of the validation techniques for exploring the credibility of results (Birt et al., 2016), was applied in the data analysis to enhance the validity of the study. I performed member checking for clarification during the interviews by constantly restating, paraphrasing, and summarizing the information provided by participants. After the interviews, I shared the interpretation of the responses with the participants that were involved. This allowed the participants to critically analyze both the findings and the comments on what they shared. The participants were provided the opportunity to reflect their views, feelings, and experiences.

Transferability is related to the applicability of the research, and it indicates that a study involves a description of the settings, data and results, and that the readers are able to transfer the findings into their settings (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Dependability refers to the consistency and reliability of the research findings, and how well the methodology procedures are documented for others to refer to (Moon et al., 2016). The research procedures in this study were documented step by step starting from the selection of the participants to the interpretation of findings, which could be a valuable source for other researchers. Confirmability concerns the aspect of neutrality. In fulfilling confirmability, researchers need to present the authenticity and reliability of the data. The interpretation is not based on one's preferences or perspectives but is grounded in the data (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The results of the study were the authentic and

transparent views from the participating language immersion teachers who teach a foreign language to students with disabilities in language immersion classrooms. The study results were interpreted in an objective manner.

### **Ethical Procedures**

Ethical considerations are an ongoing process that spans the entire research journey in a qualitative study (Reid, Brown, Smith, Cope, & Jamieson, 2018). Some aspects of qualitative research required additional ethical attention and awareness, which included protecting privacy, minimizing harm, and respecting the shared experience of others. In order to protect the confidentiality of the participants, it is important for the researcher to inform the participants that some of their responses may be presented verbatim in the published results (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I again reassured the participants that all the information that was shared by them would remain anonymous. A number of safeguards for vulnerable participants or sensitive topics should be applied for the sake of minimizing any harm (Peter, 2015). Luckily, this study was mainly focused on language immersion teachers' perspectives of students with disabilities in learning a foreign language in language immersion settings, which was not considered to be vulnerable or sensitive. When trying to understand the participants' experiences, researchers carry the obligation of showing trust, equality, and respect toward the participants' experience in the research procedure (Dennis, 2014). To meet these ethical aspects, the participants in the study were fully informed of the purpose of the study, the importance of their insights, the making of the audio recording, and their rights as participants. The participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time and to

do so without any question or word from the researcher. In order to protect the participants' privacy and minimizing any possible harm, their identities were kept confidential. I was the only person who had access to the electronic files with their shared ideas and personal perspectives of working with students with disabilities. As the researcher, I was also obliged to keep all of the data in a password-protected file on my personal computer for at least five years after the completion of the study.

### **Summary**

The focus of Chapter 3 was on elements, such as the research design and rationale, the research questions, the role of the researcher, the methodology, the data collection, the data analysis, the study's trustworthiness, and the ethical procedures regarding the study of language immersion teachers' perspectives of students with disabilities learning a foreign language in language immersion classrooms. Purposive sampling was used to select the 12 participants from grade levels K-5 who teach in language immersion programs with students with disabilities. Strict confidential and ethical procedures were applied in both the participants' selection and the interviews with them. I coded and categorized the collected data into themes. The whole process was conducted and developed based on the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability in a study. The information presented in Chapter 3 led to the results of the data in Chapter 4, which addresses the setting, the data collection and analysis, the interpretation of the results, and the evidence of trustworthiness.

## Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore language immersion teachers' perspectives of working with students with disabilities in language immersion settings. I aimed to reach this purpose through the data I gathered from the 12 language immersion teachers through their individual interviews. The interview questions were about language immersion teachers' perspectives regarding the behaviors and academic performance of students with disabilities, the support that they needed, and any other information that they wished to share. The responses from the participants sufficiently addressed the three study questions that were presented in Chapter 1.

RQ1: What are language immersion teachers' perspectives of students with disabilities?

RQ2: What are language immersion teachers' perspectives of students with disabilities learning a foreign language in an immersion setting?

RQ3: How does the professional learning experience of the language immersion teachers impact their beliefs about students with disabilities?

This chapter focused on the data analysis with respect to the three research questions in order to gain a better understanding of language immersion teachers' perspectives of students with disabilities in language immersion settings. I provided explanations of the study setting and the data collection, and then I identified and analyzed the emerging codes and themes from the interview responses. In this chapter, I presented the findings of the study and a conclusion with an overview of the answers to the research questions that the results section outlined.

### **Setting**

The participants in this study were from four elementary schools in a public school district that is located in Southeast United States. This school district had over 80 schools in its system with four elementary schools that provided language immersion programs, and it served over 50,000 students annually. The participants were language immersion teachers who were employed in this district for the 2018 to 2019 school year as foreign languages teachers in language immersion programs in different schools. The 12 participants included 11 female and one male language immersion teachers. Each participant chose the comfortable setting where I conducted the interviews. The settings varied from schools to personal residence. I conducted the majority of the interviews in the participants' classrooms after school; one occurred in the participant's residence. I scheduled the individual interviews during convenient times for the participants depending upon their availability either after work or on weekends.

### **Data Collection**

Upon Institutional Review Board approval from Walden University, I began the data collection process. First, I contacted the world language director in the district to obtain a list of language immersion teachers who met the criteria to participate in the study. Then, I sent e-mail with a greeting, a brief self-introduction, the purpose of the e-mail, and a letter of invitation to all the potential participants on the list. Thirteen out of 53 language immersion teachers replied to me and indicated that they were willing to participate in the study. I replied to all of them expressing my appreciation. However, I chose only 12 language immersion teachers according to the order of their replies to my

invitation. After the selection of participants, I sent each individual a consent form that included more detailed information regarding the study, such as the focus of the study, the participants' responsibilities regarding their participation in the study, the participants' rights, and how much compensation participants would receive for participation in the study. All 12 of the language immersion teachers replied to me with "I consent" after they read the information in the consent form, and some of them included their preferred date and time for the interview in the e-mails. We confirmed the time and date for the interviews directly through e-mails.

Before starting each interview, I again informed the participant of his or her rights to participate in the study. I also addressed the ethical concerns for protecting the participants, and I also made the participant aware that the interviews would be audio recorded and notes would be taken during the interviews. All interviews were conducted following the interview questions (Appendix A) that were previously designed to target the research questions. The interview questions involved the participants' perspectives of behaviors, academic performance, and other aspects of students with disabilities as well as the participants' perspectives of any additional support they may have needed. All interviews lasted between 30 to 60 minutes. At the end of each interview, I provided a gift card of \$15 to the participant as a token of appreciation. I transcribed all of the interviews within the same day of them being recorded for accuracy, and I kept the data in a password-protected file on my personal computer. In order to ensure the accuracy of the data, I sent a copy of the transcriptions to each of the participants for an initial transcript review. The total data collection period lasted two weeks.

### **Data Analysis**

After confirming the interview transcriptions by manually transcribing the interviews word-for-word and collecting the initial transcript reviews from the participants, I started the data analysis procedure. In order to identify patterns and themes, I conducted an analysis of the interview responses that were based on the confirmed transcriptions. Both the data analysis and a correct interpretation of the data served as important aspects of a study for achieving an authentic meaning of the data (Legewie, 2013). The data analysis in this study was closely based on the language immersion teachers' attitudes, their beliefs, and their perspectives of students with disabilities in language immersion classrooms, which aligned with Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior. Ajzen suggested that the factors that may direct people's behaviors are intentions, attitudes, and subjective norms (beliefs about others' attitudes toward a behavior). I placed the participants' responses to the same interview question next to each other for more efficient comparison and coding. I thoroughly read the data to compare and contrast any themes. The coding process involved highlighting the 12 language immersion teachers' comments and writing notes in the margins of the transcripts. After all of the codes were identified, the next analytical step would be to abstract the related codes into identified themes (Rosenthal, 2016). While placing the codes in the margins, I tried to identify the overlapping codes at the same time. Then, I created a list of all of the codes that I had written in the margins and established a code family. Next, I carefully reviewed the codes on the list and grouped the similar codes together to establish common themes. This coding process focused on narrowing the data into specific themes,



which were the representation of the language immersion teachers' perspectives of students with disabilities in language immersion settings. I tried to minimize any personal bias and attitudes by taking my time in this step to ensure that the generated themes from the participants were objective and authentic. The final step of data analysis was to group the themes together in a list to identify any key ideas from the data. I identified three to five themes for each of the research questions that focused on the perspectives of language immersion teachers regarding students with disabilities in language immersion settings. After identifying the themes, I conducted the member checks. I sent the identified themes to the participants so that they could evaluate the interpretation based on their responses and make revisions if they thought that they had been misinterpreted (see Anney, 2014). Member checks can serve as an effective strategy for improving the quality of qualitative data (Anney).

### **Results**

In this section, I highlight the results of the responses that I collected during the interviews with the 12 language immersion teachers. In the data analysis phase, I applied a thematic coding analysis for the information that I collected. The open-coding strategies for broad themes helped me to identify any common themes and key ideas from the interview data that I collected from the participants. In order to answer each research question, I listed the interview questions relating to the research questions along with the corresponding participant's response. Then I picked the most frequent words that were mentioned by the participants and placed them into tables, which only partially presented the attitudes and beliefs of the participants. I developed the initial thematic codes by

mostly using single words that were based on the high frequency words and main ideas from the participants' responses, and later I grouped them into the final themes that were demonstrated by the phrases that the participants' responses generated.

### **Research Question 1**

RQ 1: What are language immersion teachers' perspectives of students with disabilities?

This research question was aimed to investigate language immersion teachers' general perspectives of students with disabilities in their classrooms. Interview Questions 1, 2, 3, and 4 addressed this research question (see Tables 2 and 4). Based on the responses given, the language immersion teachers' perspectives of students with disabilities appeared to present the following themes (see Table 7). (a) Language immersion teachers were able to understand students with disabilities. (b) Language immersion teachers showed different feelings toward students with disabilities. (c) Language immersion teachers wished to set high expectations for students with disabilities. (d) Students with disabilities needed more support in language immersion programs.

Table 2

*Summary of Participant Interview Response to Interview Questions 1 and 2*

Participant	Question 1: What is your general understanding of students with disabilities?	Question 2: Please describe your feelings about working with students with disabilities.
1	This group is very special. Each individual with special needs has his or her different situation. Working with them is challenging in both teaching and communication.	The feelings and emotions of working with them in the language immersion classroom are very complicated. The first feeling is frustration; the second feeling is challenge; the third feeling is I feel the empathy for their families.
2	These children need more special help when they learn.	I like to help students with disabilities. I like to know what they need, and I try to give them the support they need to learn. I like to work with parents together to make the kids successful in all areas.
3	There are two types of disabilities in the classroom: Physical disabilities due to either illness, situations from birth, and genetical or congenital issues that a child is born with; the disabilities that are not necessarily related to cognition, but they interfere with the learning process of a student.	It is really a wonderful and beautiful experience working with students with different disabilities. I've been fortunate to work with very diverse students with special needs. I enjoy them in my language immersion classroom.
4	There are different types of disabilities: Cognitive, physical, and mental disabilities. It is any type of mental or physical disorder that challenges the students to learn or perform based on the standards in school.	It depends on disabilities. I would not feel confident enough or trained enough to help students with severe cognitive disabilities. If it is a regular disability like behaviors, I feel that I have learned a lot of skills to work with them during the years.

*(table continues)*

Participant	Question 1: What is your general understanding of students with disabilities?	Question 2: Please describe your feelings about working with students with disabilities.
5	Students with disabilities are students that have more difficulty than normal to be able to achieve the goals that we have for them at their age.	I don't have any negative feelings toward them, but I do wish teachers would be trained a little bit better. I feel very frustrated sometimes because I want to do what's best for them, and I don't know what that is.
6	It can be a physical disability or cognitive disability. It would be the limitations for students, either physical or cognitive limitations for them to learn something.	I feel afraid because sometimes I wonder if I am prepared to approach students' specific needs. I am not sure if I am prepared or if I have the tools to help students with disabilities. It is very difficult.
7	There are kids with physical and mental disabilities. When I think of physical disabilities, hearing loss, visual impairment, and some physical movement disabilities come into my mind. When I think about mental disabilities, I think about learning disabilities like dyslexia that prevent students from learning at the same pace as their regular peers.	Language immersion classrooms are helpful for students with disabilities. The classroom setting is good for them; the class size is smaller; they get more one on one help.
8	Students' disabilities are problems existing in the immersion program. Teachers need to be clear about the types of disabilities students have. Some kids need to be medicated.	It is challenging. I not only teach students with disabilities but also I do the whole things like creating PEPs and so on. I lack real support for working with these students.

*(table continues)*

Participant	Question 1: What is your general understanding of students with disabilities?	Question 2: Please describe your feelings about working with students with disabilities.
9	Teachers have to make sure if a kid really has a disability. We need to screen them. Students with disabilities need a whole bunch of accommodations. Parents, teachers, psychologists, and the principal have to meet on a regular basis in order to see what is happening to them, or what the best accommodations are for them.	It is difficult. I sometimes feel frustrated because I try to do my best, but I don't get the results I want from them. Sometimes, I feel alone. I need more support from a team that I can work with. I also need enough time to help these kids in a proper way.
10	There is an especially wide umbrella of what we consider students with disabilities. There are different types of disabilities: Emotional disabilities, cognitive disabilities, physical disabilities, and other disabilities in different areas.	Students with disabilities represent different challenges that I need to try to meet. They have very different learning styles. I try to make an impact and welcome them.
11	The needs of students with disabilities have to be met differently through different approaches. First, teachers need to assess to see the best ways for them to learn. They may be a visual learner or a tactile learner. Teachers then need to be able to modify and tweak the lessons accordingly in order to find ways for students with disabilities to learn and to reach their goals.	I don't think I ever feel frustrated. I feel that the teacher has the responsibility to meet their needs in the classroom. What helps me is to not take it personally if a student does not have success for the first time.
12	A kid with a disability is that the student does need some type of accommodations, which take a long time to get.	I feel frustrated. I try my best to get these students into regular academic subjects, but they are not retaining the information. It is difficult when they are in different moods; they can be angry, they can be sleepy, and they can be aggressive.

Table 3

*Text Analysis Summary—Interview Questions 1 and 2*

High-frequency words	Number of responses from participants
need	18
learn	13
different	10
physical	8
help	7
type	6
cognitive	5
frustrated	5
mental	4
work with	4
special	3
challenging	3
difficult	3
support	3
limitations	2
accommodations	2
success	2

Table 4

*Summary of Participant Interview Response to Interview Questions 3 and 4*

Participant	Question 3: How might you expect students with disabilities to behave in immersion settings?	Question 4: Describe your feelings toward achievement or failure of students with disabilities?
1	They have to have the capacity to deal with frustration because the language environment is complicated. To follow rules, focus, do their best, communicate with peers, have good working habits, and try their best to open their minds to accept other culture and language.	Students with disabilities have the capacity to be successful in an immersion setting. Sometimes they may be off task, they may disruptive, but as long as I can engage them effectively, they can develop as their regular peers; for students with intellectual disabilities, it takes longer time for them to process information and get to the level where their peers are; for students with ADHD, it's hard for them to focus, which takes them a longer time to be successful.
2	I expect they try to do their best. Being like other kids to learn to behave, to respect others, and to socialize among all the kids in the class.	I feel good when they reach their annual goals by giving them the support they need, but mostly it is frustrating because I don't have any support from specialists in school or parents from home, which affects students' achievement. I feel sad and frustrated.

*(table continues)*

Participant	Question 3: How might you expect students with disabilities to behave in immersion settings?	Question 4: Describe your feelings toward achievement or failure of students with disabilities?
3	Good behavior is expected. If students with disabilities want success in an immersion program, there has to be a lot of self-control from themselves because they have to use more of their capabilities in order to understand the meaning.	If we hold students with learning difficulties to those standards without giving them the support and the intervention they need, we are being extremely unfair with those students because learning is happening. In my personal opinion, as long as there is learning, as long as there is growth, as long as the child is trying, there is no failure. It doesn't matter how much they learn; they are achieving.
4	I would love them to come to my class with a sense of respect. I expect them to be attentive for at least 10 minutes in each class period. Thus, in one school year, I could have more time to help the students with disabilities.	If they fail, I fail. If they achieve, we achieve. Sometimes it is hard for those students with ADHD to focus, and they lose part of the instruction. I feel like maybe I could do more and do better. I feel that if the students fail, it is not the students' fault; it is more of my responsibility. If the students achieve, I feel it is the efforts from both of us.
5	I have noticed that the more difficulty the student has with academics, the more behavior issues it causes because that is their coping mechanism. I feel like you can only blame them to a point where you know the reason for it.	I have learned to make their successes based on growth. I let them know that they are growing by sharing with them every tiny bit of their growth weekly. I encourage their failures by sharing data or the strategies they use.

*(table continues)*



Participant	Question 3: How might you expect students with disabilities to behave in immersion settings?	Question 4: Describe your feelings toward achievement or failure of students with disabilities?
6	Learning is more difficult for students with disabilities because if they are not engaged, they cannot understand or grasp a concept. They would be completely disconnected from what the teacher is doing in the classroom.	When I think of a student with a disability, I wish they had the tools to be successful-the necessary tools to perform in this society. Some of them need more scaffolding and need more help.
7	They need to go extra miles and try to understand what is going on. I do not expect them to shut down, disconnect, and spend the day playing with shoelaces, like what they usually do.	With students with disabilities, it is harder to see better results, but even they struggle. They should be given the chance. I don't think that because we are in an immersion setting, those kids should be prevented from trying it. I don't think learning a language is too hard of a skill that we should close the doors to the students with disabilities. That is not fair.
8	I hope the kids can be evaluated before being enrolled in the dual language immersion program. If we evaluated them and their disabilities, we would have qualified kids, and the immersion program is going to be amazing.	We learn from mistakes. We celebrate each other's success. We are a team. We try our best. I want them to make mistakes so that we can learn from mistakes. Failure is normally the best time to find out that something is not working for the students. Or it is a good chance to find out what kind of disability the kid has.

*(table continues)*

Participant	Question 3: How might you expect students with disabilities to behave in immersion settings?	Question 4: Describe your feelings toward achievement or failure of students with disabilities?
9	I expect my students with disabilities to enjoy school, to learn, to follow instructions, and to behave like a kid; I don't want them to behave like grownups. However, the reality is that many of them don't like school.	It is frustrating when you have a goal for the students, and they cannot reach it because they are easily distracted by things. I feel really happy and think I do my job well if students with disabilities get good grades; however, I feel frustrated when I plan different things for them, and they do not seem to work well.
10	The expectation is that you don't want to make them feel different. The expectations should be the same for all children. It is important to have high expectations for them. The teacher should let them know that they are not going to be treated less than or given excuses for anything.	You have failures, which are so crushing. When a student has a disability, you are hard on yourself as a teacher, and you feel it is a failure sometimes. When you have the success on the student, it is like "oh, my gosh. This is what makes things happen". I can't help feeling excited about their achievement.
11	A lot of times, the behaviors of students with disabilities are just ways for them to show their frustration. They get upset or off task whenever their needs are not met. When they feel they understand an assignment or are comfortable with it, they are completely different. They are focused, and they are well behaved.	I do not take it personally. Maybe they didn't meet the goal, but they grew. I think not comparing the students is equally important. They do not start all at the same starting line. You have to look at each child individually instead of comparing them.

*(table continues)*

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Participant	Question 3: How might you expect students with disabilities to behave in immersion settings?	Question 4: Describe your feelings toward achievement or failure of students with disabilities?
12	In order to expect students with disabilities to behave better, we teachers cannot limit or put a barrier for them because we know that it is difficult for them to learn a different language. My expectation is that students can learn the target language in a very natural way in the immersion setting.	We celebrate every single improvement they make even if it is a little one. Sometimes all of a sudden, the kid came out with a word or identifies a letter. While failure is very concerning because it is not a good thing at school, as a teacher, I need to find different strategies and ways to teach the students in order to make them understand the concept. I need to provide some special accommodations for that kid and try to keep him or her learning.

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Table 5

*Text Analysis Summary—Interview Questions 3 and 4*

High-frequency words	Number of responses from participants
expect	10
learn (ing)	10
need	8
success(ful)	7
behave	5
understand	5
hard	5
achieve (ment)	5
frustration	4
focus	4
goal	3
support	3
difficult	3
different	3
respect	2
disconnect	2
follow	2
longer	2
time	2

Table 6

*Text Analysis Summary of High Frequently Words in Research Question 1: What are language immersion teachers' perspectives of students with disabilities?*

High-frequency words	Number of responses from participants
need	26
learn(ing)	23
different	13
expect	10
success(ful)	9
physical	8
help	7
difficult	6
support	6
type	6
frustrated	5
behave	5
understand	5
hard	5
achieve (ment)	5
cognitive	5
mental	4
work with	4
frustration	4
focus	4
goal	3
challenging	3
special	3
limitations	2
accommodations	2
respect	2
disconnect	2
follow	2
longer	2
time	2

Table 7

*Interview Analysis—RQ1: What are language immersion teachers' perspectives of students with disabilities?*

Thematic codes	Number of responses	Interview questions
Cognitive, physical, and mental disabilities	17	IQ 1
Needing extra help	26	IQ 1
Frustration	9	IQ 2
Positive attitudes	2	IQ 2
Focus/On task	5	IQ 3
Understanding students' needs	4	IQ 3
Celebrating students' achievement	10	IQ 4
Encouragement	8	IQ 4

Table 8

*Interview Analysis—RQ1: What are language immersion teachers' perspectives of students with disabilities?*

Themes	Number of Responses
Understanding students with disabilities	43
Language immersion teachers' feelings	7
Setting high expectations	9
Supporting students with disabilities	18

**Theme 1: Language immersion teachers were able to understand students with disabilities.** The types of disabilities consistently emerged from the language immersion teachers' interviews. As shown in Table 3, the high-frequency words from the participants' responses, which reflected the participants' understanding of disabilities, appeared to be *need, learn, different, physical, cognitive, and mental*. Regarding the definitions of the disabilities, five out of the 12 participants (3, 4, 6, 7, and 10) were able to clearly define the kinds of disabilities that the students might have had. However, among the other participants who did not give clear definitions of any disabilities, five of them (participants 1, 2, 9, 11, and 12) indicated in their responses that their students with disabilities did need special support or accommodations from the teacher or the school. Participants 8, 9, and 11 proposed that language immersion teachers should either have the knowledge or be provided with the knowledge to work with students with disabilities. Participants 1 and 5 expressed their concerns regarding students with disabilities as *challenging* or *difficult*. Participant 8 expressed, "Students' disabilities are problems existing in the immersion program. Teachers need to be clear about the types of disabilities students have. Some kids need to be medicated." When analyzing the interview data, I was able to generalize a common theme based on the participants' responses, which was that *language immersion teachers were able to understand students with disabilities*.

**Theme 2: Language immersion teachers showed different feelings toward students with disabilities.** The common code *frustration* frequently appeared in the margins of the interview data (see Tables 3, 5, and 6). The majority of the participants (1,

5, 6, 8, 9, 10, and 12) indicated that working with students with disabilities in language immersion settings is both frustrating and challenging. Participant 6, in particular, thought it was difficult to work with students with disabilities because she was afraid that she was not prepared well or did not have the tools to help them in her language immersion classroom. Participant 4 expressed having confidence with only certain disabilities. One participant that did not have negative feelings toward students with disabilities was participant 11, who felt it was one's responsibility to meet the needs of students with disabilities in the language immersion classroom. Similarly, participants 2 and 3 expressed their comfort as well as the good moments that they had while working with students with disabilities in the language immersion classrooms. Overall, seven out of the 12 participants expressed their frustrations regarding their serving students with disabilities along with other feelings and emotions toward students with disabilities. Thus, the theme that *language immersion teachers showed different feelings toward students with disabilities* emerged (see Table 7).

**Theme 3: Language immersion teachers wished to set high expectations toward students with disabilities.** In response to the interview question regarding language immersion teachers' expectations for the behavior of students with disabilities in language immersion settings, half (six out of 12) of the participants (1, 2, 3, 4, 6, and 9) agreed that students needed to follow the rules and to be focused in class (see Table 4). Participants 5 and 7 stated the opinion that both the teacher and the students needed to try harder and to improve academically so that the behavior of students with disabilities in the language immersion classrooms would be largely reduced. Participant 8 expressed a



concern that students should be evaluated before being enrolled in a language immersion program. In such a case, language immersion classrooms might not experience many behavioral issues. On the other hand, three participants (10, 11, and 12) would have liked to set even higher expectations for the behavior of students with disabilities. The general consensus of 11 out of the 12 participants was that they expected students with disabilities to behave better, and they showed beliefs in their behaviors in language immersion classrooms. Thus, the theme that *language immersion teachers wished to set high expectations toward students with disabilities* was identified (see Table 7).

**Theme 4: Students with disabilities needed more support in language immersion programs.** In working with students with disabilities in the language immersion settings, participants shared different opinions regarding students' achievement or failure, which was addressed by Interview Question 4 (see Table 4). Participants 2, 4, 9, 10, and 12 expressed their mixed feelings of being either happy, frustrated, or both whenever they witnessed students with disabilities experiencing achievement or failure in the immersion classrooms. Participant 11 was the only one who did not wish to take students' achievement or failure personally and stated, "I do not take it personally. Maybe they didn't meet the goal, but they grew." She also expressed the importance of applying strategies to these students. Overall, the participants agreed that students with disabilities needed more support in language immersion programs, which could be seen from the words that frequently appeared in their interview responses, such as *need*, *help*, *achievement*, and *encourage* (see Tables 3, 5, and 6). Based on them, I

developed another theme, *students with disabilities needed more support in language immersion programs*.

## **Research Question 2**

RQ 2: What are language immersion teachers' perspectives of students with disabilities learning a foreign language in an immersion setting?

This research question was designed to investigate language immersion teachers' perspectives regarding students with disabilities learning a foreign language in language immersion classrooms. The codes included the teachers' instructional challenges, the students' academic challenges, the students' observed behaviors while learning a foreign language, and the teachers' general observations of students in a foreign language environment. Responses provided to Interview Questions 5, 6, 7, and 8 (see Tables 8 and 9) addressed this research question. In their responses, the language immersion teachers presented their perspectives of students with disabilities learning a foreign language in language immersion programs with the following themes (see Table 11). (a) Language immersion teachers' perspectives of the academic performance of students with disabilities. (b) Students with disabilities needed extra support for their academic performance. (c) The behavior of students with disabilities affected their learning. (d) The learning barriers that students with disabilities had in language immersion programs.

Table 9

*Summary of Participant Interview Response to Interview Questions 5 and 6*

Participant	Question 5: While working with students with disabilities in the class, what challenges have you experienced?	Question 6: What challenges have you experienced in the academic performance of students with disabilities learning a foreign language through immersion?
1	Interruptions from these students. Accommodations. Collaboration with other teachers who provide special service.	Taking longer for them to understand the process and the content; the teaching schedule. I have to make overtime schedule to reteach them.
2	Lack of support from parents. Also, if students did not understand the content, they would start behaving badly. They are trying to be defiant to avoid work.	Lack of support in the target language. However, this year is the first time that I see disability is not the main issue in students' learning.
3	Support from staff. I do not have an assistant, so I am not able to provide help to students with disabilities consistently; the lack of time and resources.	Lack of support from parents is the challenge for students who struggle academically; the learning challenge in the immersion setting.
4	Lack of parents' support; dealing with anger management issues; lack of attention from students with disabilities in class.	They are poor at reading and writing, but better in math; lack of help from parents after school.
5	Their participation in any subject matter. Their nonparticipation affects both their verbal skills and my judgment, and I can't assess how they're doing in the lesson.	Making transition to be bi-literate; connecting the two languages; immersing English and the target language together; connecting vocabularies and grammar; computation skills going down. <i>(table continues)</i>

Participant	Question 5: While working with students with disabilities in the class, what challenges have you experienced?	Question 6: What challenges have you experienced in the academic performance of students with disabilities learning a foreign language through immersion?
6	It is hard for them to retain information in language acquisition; the large numbers of testing; being not attentive and losing attention easily; lack of parental support.	Reading is difficult because they need to comprehend in another language; doing better in math.
7	The behaviors of students with disabilities paired up with attention deficit disorder. Mostly, it depends on the kinds of disabilities students have.	Reading comprehension, but math is better because it is something they can think of in their mother tongue. And numbers have patterns.
8	Parental support; lack of professional knowledge; and professional support from experts such as doctors.	Students are not challenged in learning the language. My concern is these students are not tested in the target language.
9	Keeping them engaged. Besides, I need more resources and professional support.	They are bilingual and biliterate at this stage (fifth grade). Math is easy to learn for them because math vocabularies in the two languages are similar, and they share a lot of cognates.
10	Lack of academic resources, such as staff and class size. They need accommodations in both their mother language and the target language; I need to give interventions to students that have PEPs or IEPS in my limited time slots.	They have issues in language processing because of the limited language skills they have in their native language. For students with autism, I have to work on their communication skills and socializing abilities.

*(table continues)*

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Participant	Question 5: While working with students with disabilities in the class, what challenges have you experienced?	Question 6: What challenges have you experienced in the academic performance of students with disabilities learning a foreign language through immersion?
11	Designing lessons that are visual and tactile with manipulative and repetitions; differentiate the lessons, I have to always modify and change the plans; friendly classroom design.	Teaching reading. It is hard for them to retain and differentiate sounds between the two languages. Math is not a real challenge since it is universal.
12	They get distracted easily; hard communication with parents; providing extra help to students.	Academic challenges. They have to learn both the language and content in the target language, which is even harder.

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Table 10

*Summary of Participant Interview Response to Interview Questions 7 and 8*

Participant	Question 7: What differences have you seen for students with disabilities as compared to regular education students in learning a foreign language through language immersion?	Question 8: What are your general observations of students with disabilities in the foreign language setting?
1	Students with ADHD process information pretty fast, so they don't have difficulty in the language or content; students with learning disabilities need intensive support; students with intellectual disabilities find learning challenging; students with autism need accommodations on social skills.	They are not actively engaged in learning activities. They are off task and interruptive. They need professional support in a foreign language setting.
2	They have behavior problems once they do not understand what they learn. They get bored or hyper. Thus, they are not able to finish their tasks.	They rarely share their thoughts. Some of them behave better in an immersion class than in regular class.
3	They tend to hide their deficiencies by compensating areas in learning. Students struggling with language acquisition are strong in math.	A strong correlation between learning challenges and students' behaviors. When the frustration is unmanageable, behaviors kick in.

*(table continues)*

Participant	Question 7: What differences have you seen for students with disabilities as compared to regular education students in learning a foreign language through language immersion?	Question 8: What are your general observations of students with disabilities in the foreign language setting?
4	It takes longer for the ones with disabilities to learn, read, decode, and spell in the target language compared to their regular peers.	It depends on the kind of disability. For most of them, if they felt the teacher paid attention to their concerns, to their limitations, to their needs, they would give you the best from themselves.
5	Students with disabilities struggle to make connections between languages. They do not retain information easily as their peers.	I don't see a lot of differences. They're able to communicate in their social settings. They might be a little bit more immature, but they're able to do the same activities.
6	The differences are students' behaviors and learning. Students with disabilities usually act up and need a longer time to process information.	The ways they interact with their peers or follow instructions are different. They need repeated instructions.
7	One group has no difference in language acquisition regardless of disabilities. The other group shows differences in the process of reading.	I don't see much difference. I don't think disabilities make them different. They are the same socially.

*(table continues)*

Participant	Question 7: What differences have you seen for students with disabilities as compared to regular education students in learning a foreign language through language immersion?	Question 8: What are your general observations of students with disabilities in the foreign language setting?
8	It is hard to compare because many kids with disabilities like learning the target language, but some regular students don't.	Most of the time they do not speak the target language. It is not the disability that affects the students' learning, but it is the environment.
9	It is difficult for me to answer this question because the experience of each kid is different. I have regular kids who don't perform as well as students with disabilities.	It depends on the type of disability. It is difficult for most of them to focus on the learning process, so they are frustrated and off task.
10	The huge difference or gap comes from the difficulty of language acquisition based on their disabilities	Immersion setting provides more interests, more engagement, and more opportunities for students with disabilities. For the small percentage of students who have difficulties, they're either not up for the challenges or for the additional work.
11	They need more repetition and differentiation, whereas regular students may acquire the lesson quickly. I need more assessments to make sure students with disabilities truly comprehend.	They are as social as everybody else. They don't like to feel different. They want to be included. They pick up on how the teacher talks to them and works with them.

*(table continues)*



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Participant	Question 7: What differences have you seen for students with disabilities as compared to regular education students in learning a foreign language through language immersion?	Question 8: What are your general observations of students with disabilities in the foreign language setting?
12	Participation. Students with disabilities tend to be quiet and passive. Behavior-wise, they isolate themselves and not wide open to everybody.	Some perform well in math, but they don't participate in reading much. They perform better in hands-on activities. They don't like changes.

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Table 11

*Interview Analysis—RQ 2: What are language immersion teachers' perspectives of students with disabilities learning a foreign language in an immersion setting?*

Thematic codes	Number of responses	Interview questions
Academic challenges	18	IQ 5, 6, 7, & 8
Behaviors and interruptions	13	IQ 5, 7, & 8
Parental support	8	IQ 5 & 6
Time and resources	6	IQ 5 & 6
Professional knowledge and support	6	IQ 5 & 8
Participation	4	IQ 5, 7, & 8
Providing accommodations	4	IQ 5, 6, 7, & 8
Testing	3	IQ 5, 6, & 7
Communication	3	IQ 6, 7, & 8
Lack of motivation	1	IQ 7

Table 12

*Interview Analysis—Research Question 2: What Are Language Immersion Teachers’ Perspectives of Students With Disabilities Foreign Language in an Immersion Setting?*

Thematic codes	Number of responses
Academic performance of students with disabilities	18
Supporting academic performance	24
Behaviors affecting learning	13
Learning barriers	8

**Theme 1: Language immersion teachers’ perspectives of the academic performance of students with disabilities.** The data that I collected from the four interview questions appeared to have a close relationship with the academic performance of students with disabilities, which corresponded with Research Question 2 in the study. The 12 participants’ responses to Interview Questions 5, 6, 7, and 8 referred to the academic challenges of students with disabilities for 18 times (see Table 11). The participants mentioned various kinds of learning challenges for students with disabilities. These challenges were mainly issues with learning a foreign language, such as a slow speed when processing information, being able to retain information, learning two languages at the same time, and connecting and differentiating sounds in two languages. Almost all of the participants thought that learning a foreign language was a challenge for students with disabilities; the exceptions were participants 8 and 9. Participant 8 considered his students as not being challenged in learning the language, and participant 9 mentioned that her students with disabilities were already bilingual and biliterate in her

fifth grade class because they had accumulated much knowledge in the target language. Participants 1, 6, 7, 10, and 11 addressed the challenge of students with disabilities processing information; participants 5, 6, and 11 considered the retaining of information as being hard for students with disabilities; and participants 5, 6, 10, and 12 admitted that the challenges for those students were learning both content and the target language. Only participants 5 and 11 mentioned the students' difficulties in connecting languages and sounds. Meanwhile, seven out of the 12 participants (3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 11, and 12) agreed that, based upon their daily performance, math was relatively easier for students with disabilities despite their having challenges in reading.

**Theme 2: Students with disabilities needed extra support on their academic performance.** Based on the academic challenges that students encountered in Theme 1, the participants also presumed what possible factors might serve as remedies for the challenges to those students with disabilities. Thus, another theme, *students with disabilities needed extra support on their academic performance*, was developed based on the participants' intentions in their responses (see Table 12). Possible factors that the participants mentioned which could assist students to overcome these challenges were parental support, time and resources, professional knowledge and support, and accommodations to students with disabilities. Each of these factors occurred several times in the participants' responses (see Table 11). Among all of these factors, participants 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, and 12 made special mention that they needed parental support, which could make a huge positive impact on the students with disabilities. Participants 1, 3, 4, 9, 10, and 11 stated the significance of and the expectations for them being provided

with more time and resources. Meanwhile, the code *professional knowledge and support* appeared six times, and the code *accommodations* appeared four times.

**Theme 3: Behaviors of students with disabilities affected their learning.** A large number of participants, including 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, and 12, addressed their experiences and observations of the behavior of students with disabilities while learning a foreign language. They noticed “a strong correlation between learning challenges and students’ behaviors. When the frustration is unmanageable, behaviors kick in,” as stated by participant 3. These participants admitted that the students’ inattentiveness had a negative impact on their learning and their receiving of information. However, participant 4 was the only one in the interview group that declared a positive correlation between the students’ behavior and the teacher’s display of care for them and the effort that they put forth toward assisting them. She said, “For most of them, if they felt the teacher paid attention to their concerns, to their limitations, and to their needs, they would give you the best from themselves.” Meanwhile, participant 10 supported language immersion classrooms for students with disabilities by saying that “immersion setting provides more interests, more engagement, and more opportunities to students with disabilities.” Furthermore, participant 2 declared that the language immersion setting resulted in improved student behavior. She said that some students behaved better in an immersion class than in a regular class (see Table 10).

**Theme 4: Learning barriers students with disabilities had in language immersion programs.** Based on the information that I collected from participants, deficiencies in class participation, ways of communication, and lack of motivation for

students with disabilities in language immersion settings became one of the biggest barriers for students to be successful. Altogether, these deficiencies were mentioned eight times and I classified them under the theme *learning barriers students with disabilities had in language immersion programs* as indicated in Table 12. Four out of the 12 participants (1, 5, 9, and 12) longed for more participation from students with disabilities in language immersion classrooms; three out of the 12 participants (1, 2, and 10) mentioned that either communication with these students was a challenge or that they needed to develop communication skills with students with certain disabilities. Participant 12 pointed out that one learning barrier was a *lack of motivation* since she said, “students with disabilities tend to be passive.” However, participant 2 claimed that disabilities, to some extent, might not be a contributing factor to the *learning barriers* for students by saying, “this year is the first time that I saw that disability is not the main issue in students’ learning.” When asked to compare the learning difficulties of students with disabilities to their regular peers, both participants 8 and 9 thought that it was difficult to compare. Participant 8 stated, “many kids with disabilities like learning the target language, but some regular students do not,” and “it is difficult for me to answer this question because the experience of each kid is different. I have regular kids who don’t perform as well as students with disabilities,” said participant 9.

### **Research Question 3**

RQ3: How does the professional learning experience of language immersion teachers impact their beliefs about students with disabilities?

I aimed this research question to evaluate the values of professional development and the workshops for language immersion teachers and to find out the most valuable types of professional training and kinds of support that were in great demands by language immersion teachers from their perspectives. Interview Questions 9 and 10 helped in accomplishing that purpose (see Table 13). Interview Question 9 attempted to collect data regarding the participants' views on the values of workshops or professional development when helping language immersion teachers to work with students with disabilities. Interview Question 10 was based on, but not limited to, professional workshops. This question enabled me to collect the participants' overall calls for support when serving students with disabilities in language immersion programs. In an attempt to answer Research Question 3 based on the participants' responses to the interview questions (see Table 15), I gathered and analyzed the following themes: (a) Language immersion teachers needed support from professionals. (b) Language immersion teachers needed workshops focused on disabilities. (c) Team effort promoted success of students with disabilities.

Table 13

*Summary of Participant Interview Response to Interview Questions 9 and 10*

Participant	Question 9: What are your perspectives of the value of workshops or professional development in helping you serve students with disabilities in your immersion classroom?	Question 10: What support might you specifically look for in order to serve students with disabilities better?
1	They are important, essential, and helpful. They can be more realistic and practical, not just theories. I've been to workshops; they used terms in special education that I didn't understand.	I hope to have personnel support in target language since students with special needs need more time, more effort, and more input from the teacher; collaboration with specialists needs to be closer. We need to have teachers work together to gather information so the kid can be identified effectively.
2	They help a lot. However, I haven't received any on students with disabilities in my six years of teaching. I would like to know the strategies to make these kids achieve.	Support from administrators, they help us make quicker decisions; the process referring a kid into special education is too long; parents need to support learning at home for students with disabilities.
3	They should be relevant, realistic, and meaningful for our situation. I wish there were more and different training provided.	Human support, more people with proper training working with students with disabilities, such as teaching assistants and reading or math interventionist. These kids need more human input.
4	I love the realistic and practical workshops that take our situation into account, and experts give us strategies in teaching students with disabilities.	We need more bilingual or bicultural support personnel, such as social workers, speech therapists, and school psychologists; co-teachers in the immersion team need to understand they are part of the program, which enables them to adapt immersion classrooms more effectively.

*(table continues)*



Participant	Question 9: What are your perspectives of the value of workshops or professional development in helping you serve students with disabilities in your immersion classroom?	Question 10: What support might you specifically look for in order to serve students with disabilities better?
5	There is a huge lack of professional development related to the science of students with disabilities. Workshops could help create better pathways to deal with students' disabilities.	We need trained bilingual EC teachers in the program. The process students go through in order to be classified having disabilities is flawed. By the time we are done, they have lost three years of their schooling.
6	I have a poor feeling of the workshops provided by the school district. They merely present theories. I need something that can be applied and useful. Please give me the tools I need.	I think there should be teams who can provide relevant help so that we will not serve as the physiologist, the counselor, the teacher, and the provider. We are in short of support due to the lack of funding.
7	We are definitely undertrained. There is no training whatsoever for students with disabilities. Everything I do in teaching is what I think work. I hope training could be completely zoomed in immersion programs.	I feel that services to students with disabilities by special education group are done in silence. And I don't get the whole picture. We should be able to work with the specialists more closely. I would like to share the experience with them.
8	The workshops need to focus on the things we need in our program. I expect more knowledge about students with disabilities. We need real support from knowledgeable people in the workshops.	We need resources in the target language to work with students with disabilities such as apps. My concern is we need to hire teachers with proper training. Also, we need more professional people from the district to help us.

*(table continues)*

Participant	Question 9: What are your perspectives of the value of workshops or professional development in helping you serve students with disabilities in your immersion classroom?	Question 10: What support might you specifically look for in order to serve students with disabilities better?
9	I have not been provided with the chance of professional development regarding students with disabilities so far. Everything I know is from my past experience. We need more support from workshops in order to understand kids with disabilities.	District support. Someone tells me specific strategies on working with students with certain disabilities; I need more parents' involvement; we need a school psychologist on the plant, not the one who comes once or twice a week.
10	There is not much training for disabilities for immersion teachers. Everything I do has been out of learning. I need training on learning disabilities and emotional disabilities in the immersion setting.	Students with disabilities need human support; parental support. We teachers are expected to do a lot with almost nothing and to perform miracles with little resources. We're the ones that have to have their IEPs and testing done.
11	I feel we don't get enough. Workshops and instructional facilitators could help us more in the differentiation piece so that we can meet the needs of students with disabilities.	We need more teacher assistants, parental support, more resources, more leveled books, and more money to purchase hand-ons; and administrations should allow us more time teaching and less time on paperwork.
12	I have never been offered a workshop for dealing with students with disabilities. I think every teacher needs to have some basic knowledge on dealing with students with disabilities, not only EC teachers. I lack full knowledge to serve students with disabilities.	Workshops that can train us in different areas serving kids with disabilities. It could be great to observe EC teachers because when we go and visit these classrooms, we see how the teachers are dealing with the students with disabilities, and what kind of strategies they use.

Table 14

*Interview Analysis—Research Question 3: How does the professional learning experience of the language immersion teachers impact their beliefs about students with disabilities?*

Codes	Number of responses	Interview questions
professionals	10	IQ 9 & 10
undertrained	8	IQ 9 & 10
practical	7	IQ 9
parental support	3	IQ 10
resources	2	IQ 10
administrative support	2	IQ 10

Table 15

*Interview Analysis—Research Question 3: How does the professional learning experience of the language immersion teachers impact their beliefs about students with disabilities?*

Thematic Codes	Number of Responses
Support from professionals	10
Workshops focused on disabilities	15
Team effort	7

**Theme 1: Language immersion teachers needed support from professionals.**

Participants shared thoughts regarding the importance of workshops and professional development. One of the common themes that developed based on the information provided was *language immersion teachers needed support from professionals*. For example, in order to better work with students with disabilities, ten out of the 12 participants (1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11) shared that they needed more professional support from knowledgeable people, such as reading or math interventionists, social workers, speech therapists, school psychologists, trained bilingual special education teachers, bilingual or bicultural support personnel, and counselors in order to work with students with disabilities better (see Table 14). In contrast, the remaining two participants (2 and 12) both agreed that they needed knowledge of disabilities. Participant 2 stated, “I would like to know the strategies to make these kids achieve,” which was consistent with participant 12’s statement, “I think every teacher needs to have some basic knowledge on dealing with students with disabilities, not only special education teachers. I lack full knowledge to serve students with disabilities” (see Table 13). Participant 7 expected to know more about the students’ services that were facilitated by the special education group so they could collaborate closely and share effective experiences.

**Theme 2: Language immersion teachers needed workshops focused on disabilities.** Based on the data in Table 13, four out of the 12 participants (2, 7, 9, and 12) claimed that they were never provided with workshops on dealing with students with disabilities. Similarly, participants 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 thought that they were either undertrained or in need of more training. Ultimately, each individual participant

proposed that workshops were important; language immersion teachers should be provided with more practical and realistic training, especially the ones who are focused on students with disabilities. For example, participant 5 said, “there is a huge lack of professional development related to the science of students with disabilities,” and participant 9 proposed that all language immersion teachers needed knowledge of disabilities by saying, “we need more support from workshops in order to understand kids with disabilities” (see Table 13). Words like *undertrained*, *realistic* and *practical* were mentioned a number of times by the participants during interviews (see Table 14). Thus, the theme that *language immersion teachers needed workshops focused on disabilities* was identified.

**Theme 3: Team effort promoted success of students with disabilities.** Besides workshops and support from professionals, participants also identified other types of support that they needed, such as parental support, resources, and administrative support that could assist them to better serve students with disabilities in the immersion program (see Table 14). In terms of parental support, participants 2, 10, and 11 claimed its importance and thought that if students were able to get more support at home, they would achieve more. Both participants 2 and 11 wanted resources as well as administrative support that are designed to assist and improve students’ academic performance. All of these high-frequency words were combined to identify a new theme called *team effort promoted success of students with disabilities*.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

In qualitative research, data analysis should focus on achieving rigor and credibility in order to make the results as trustworthy as possible (Bengtsson, 2016). This study employed various strategies for evidence of trustworthiness in qualitative research, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The strategies that I applied to reinforce the credibility of the results included a methodical transcribing process and a thematic analysis, transcript reviews and member checks, and a description of the results.

#### **Credibility**

Credibility refers to the accurate representation of the data, including illustrations on how the data collection and the analysis procedures are carried out to ensure that no relevant data have been excluded (Bengtsson, 2016). To support the credibility of the study, I illustrated the detailed procedures of the individual interviews, the data collection, and the data analysis. In conjunction, I applied transcript reviews and member checks in order to ensure credibility and internal validity of the study. The participants' transcript reviews and member checks promoted a higher accuracy of the data in the study findings.

#### **Transferability**

Transferability refers to the degree to which the study results are applicable to other settings or groups (Bengtsson, 2016). This study was transferable in that the application of the findings could be extended to language immersion teachers and language immersion programs in all languages as well as in different school districts since the broad data were not specifically focused on the participating school district.

With the description of each step that I tried to develop in the study, the findings are transferable by the reader to language immersion teachers who work with students with disabilities in other school districts.

### **Dependability**

Dependability indicates the stability of the data, which refers to the extent to which data change over time and the alterations that are made in the researcher's decisions during the analyzing procedure (Bengtsson, 2016). To support the dependability of this study, I described the research method in detail so that other researchers could have the chance to refer to. I also conducted each interview with the same procedure by asking the same interview questions to participants for consistency.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability helps to ensure that the findings are based on the participants' responses, but not the researchers' preconceptions or biases. In addition to the applications of transcript reviews and member checks, I listed the participants' responses in direct quotes in the tables. These tables make it easier to identify that the findings were based on the participants' narratives and that I collected and analyzed the data in a transparent manner.

### **Summary**

The main purpose of this chapter was to present both the study results and the data analysis that was based on the three research questions regarding language immersion teachers' perspectives of students with disabilities in language immersion programs. The information supporting this purpose included participant information, the

setting, the data collection procedures, the data analysis, the results, and the evidence of trustworthiness.

The responses given by the participants during their individual interviews revealed a range of language immersion teachers' perspectives of students with disabilities. Based on the results, participants expressed their perceptions of students with disabilities from several aspects, including supporting students with disabilities, setting higher expectations, behavior that affects learning, academic performance and learning barriers regarding students with disabilities, and the kinds of support (from professionals, workshops focused on disabilities, and team effort) that language immersion teachers needed in order to better serve students with disabilities in language immersion programs. In Chapter 5, I presented the overall discussion, the conclusions, and the recommendations of the study. Information, such as the interpretation of the findings, the limitations of the study, and the implications that this study may have for students with disabilities in language immersion programs is also included.



## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to explore language immersion teachers' perspectives regarding working with students with disabilities in language immersion settings. This study might also contribute to filling a gap in the current literature regarding language immersion teachers' perspectives of students with disabilities in language immersion settings and help people gain a better understanding of it.

A qualitative approach was appropriate for this study because qualitative research focuses on interpreting, understanding, and explaining phenomena (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). By applying the qualitative method, language immersion teachers' perspectives could be understood, and the use of individual interviews in the study was appropriate for gaining the language immersion teachers' perspectives of students with disabilities.

The language immersion teachers in this study indicated a number of their perspectives regarding students with disabilities who were learning a foreign language in immersion settings. They were a better understanding of students' disabilities, their learning barriers, and accommodations for their academics and behaviors. These language immersion teachers identified a great need for a more practical approach to professional development in working with students with disabilities as well as support from other team members and special education professionals.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

The interpretation of the findings that I made from the study was formulated through the language immersion teachers' perspectives of students with disabilities in language immersion programs and from the individual interviews, the emerging themes,

the theoretical framework, and the current literature. The language immersion teachers in the study addressed the types of disabilities that they knew about, the academic and behavioral support that they could provide to their students, the setting of higher expectations for students with disabilities, and the types of support that they were looking for. They expressed that these aspects could assist them to serve students with disabilities through higher quality instruction and classroom management.

From the data that I collected, the language immersion teachers indicated that they were faced with different challenges when working with students with disabilities, some of which included the behavioral and academic performances of these students, the extra accommodations that they needed, the support from professionals, and the opportunities for training and workshops, which aligned with the teachers' concerns that they had to struggle with the students' diverse educational needs in classrooms. Insufficient professional development opportunities usually go along with insufficient team support (Galaterou & Antoniou, 2017), and in actuality, the lack of training and support for the teachers have been shown to be a problem in the literature review. Gavish (2017) indicated that teachers needed to understand the range of students' disabilities, the approaches to working with them, and how to more effectively and efficiently assist students with disabilities. Murphy and Haller (2015) stated that various support for teachers from schools, districts, and communities are important to promote the learning success for students with disabilities. A majority of teachers felt inadequately trained and unprepared to instruct students with disabilities in language classrooms with their existing knowledge (Pimentel, 2018).

The first research question in this study I explored was to investigate language immersion teachers' general perspectives of students with disabilities in their classrooms. The interpretations of the data that I collected from the interviews when answering this research question indicated that the language immersion teachers in the study generally had mixed feelings toward students with disabilities; however, they believed that better knowledge of disabilities would help teachers more effectively accommodate students with disabilities. The language immersion teachers also believed in the significance of setting higher expectations for students with disabilities, which could support them for achieving success in language immersion programs. This finding was confirmed by Ruppert et al. (2015) who stated that language immersion teachers' positive attitudes toward conceptualizations about disabilities and the nature of learning expanded students' quality of life. Meanwhile, Bouillet and Kudek-Mirošević (2015) indicated that students with disabilities usually had a need for additional support in educational settings, such as developing an appropriate relationship with peers. Indeed, supportive faculty members responsively set higher expectations, provide comprehensive accommodations, and work collaboratively to support the success of students with disabilities (Austin & Peña, 2017). I noticed that language immersion teachers who had a better understanding of students with disabilities expressed fewer negative feelings and more satisfaction and expectations when supporting these students for their success.

The second research question that I explored focused on language immersion teachers' perspectives of students with disabilities in learning a foreign language in language immersion classrooms, including the teachers' instructional challenges, the

students' academic challenges, the students' observed behaviors while learning a foreign language, and the teachers' general observations of students in a foreign language environment. The data that I obtained from the interviews when the participants answered this research question revealed that students with disabilities needed various academic support in language immersion classrooms, and their behavior and other learning barriers affected them when learning a foreign language. It is important for teachers to work on learning the barriers of students with disabilities (Black, Weinberg, & Brodwin, 2015). This finding is confirmed by Quick's (2014) work, students with disabilities have a hard time making academic progress at a steady pace, and that they need various modifications and support in academics. I found that the language immersion teachers expressed big concerns regarding behavior and other barriers affecting the academic performance of students with disabilities despite the effort that they made toward student instruction.

The third research question that I explored evaluated the values of professional development and workshops for language immersion teachers and investigated the most valuable types of professional training and the kinds of support that were in great demand by language immersion teachers according to their perspectives. From the data that I analyzed, one conclusion that I could derive was that additional support was always important for language immersion teachers when teaching students with disabilities. Sun and Huang (2016) confirmed the point that professional support services to teachers help to facilitate students with disabilities better adapt to school and gain more academic success. Another school support that language immersion teachers looked for was administrators allowing them more time for instructing students instead of spending

endless time on the paperwork for students with disabilities. Logan (2016) indicated that schools ought to identify learners with disabilities who are learning a foreign language so that correct and appropriate services could be provided to them accordingly.

Based on the findings, language immersion teachers' perspectives regarding working with students with disabilities varied among the participants. The majority of the participants expressed having challenges when working with students with disabilities. The participants who had more experience and staff support reported different attitudes while working with students with disabilities in language immersion programs. This finding aligned with the theoretical framework of this study, Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior, which suggests that behavior is determined by intentions, attitudes, and subjective norms. A person's attitude towards a behavior is influenced by factors, such as individual experiences, previously acquired knowledge, and newly acquired knowledge.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Even though I have made a great effort in this study as a researcher, there were still limitations that were hard to avoid. First of all, the nature of this study has some limitations. Qualitative research is considered by some to be merely storytelling, the narratives from the participants could easily be turned into anecdotes and personal impressions by the researcher (Sarma, 2015). Other limitations of the qualitative approach include time consumption, ethical liabilities, and nongeneralizability (Weil, 2017). Also, qualitative research methodology is often considered to lack rigor and transparency (Hadi & Closs, 2016). However, I tried to include all of the information from the participants' narratives. The interpretation of the data was objective through

conducting transcript reviews and member checks, careful data analysis, adhering to the interview protocol, and eliminating any of my own thoughts as a researcher. Another possible limitation was the transferability of this study. The participants who were involved in the study were elementary school teachers from kindergarten to fifth grade, so the findings might lack rigor for students with disabilities who are at other grade levels in language immersion programs. Demonstrating rigor in qualitative studies is important because the integrity of the research findings could make an impact on different groups in practice (Hadi & Closs, 2016). In addition, I conducted this study with only 12 language immersion teachers, which was considered a small sample size when compared to the entire population of language immersion teachers in the country. Therefore, the findings in this study may not be able to represent the points of view of the entire population of language immersion teachers.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the individual interviews, the data analysis, and the data findings, some recommendations have been made to improve the performance of students with disabilities in language immersion programs, which include enhancing language immersion teachers' knowledge of disabilities, developing teamwork, providing professional development, and sharing resources.

#### **Enhancing Language Immersion Teachers' Knowledge of Disabilities**

The study findings indicated that language immersion teachers were able to identify students with disabilities as well as their limitations and needs. Some of the language immersion teachers expressed their frustrations regarding working with students

with disabilities, and they indicated that it was challenging for them to meet the needs of these students in their language immersion classrooms. It is recommended that language immersion teachers receive more training about disabilities through which they could be able to gain more information and strategies to work with students with disabilities. They are also encouraged to co-plan and co-teach with special education teachers so that more practical instructional methods toward students with disabilities could be implemented in teaching. Co-teaching provides opportunities for general education teachers to obtain more information and strategies regarding accommodations and modifications for students with disabilities (Shin, Lee, & McKenna, 2016). Through these practices, language immersion teachers could expect to enhance their general knowledge of students' disabilities, and thus, quality instruction and services could be implemented to serve students with disabilities in language immersion programs.

### **Developing Teamwork**

The results of the study indicated that language immersion teachers also needed support from other team members, such as reading or math interventionists, social workers, speech therapists, school psychologists, trained bilingual special education teachers, counselors, and bilingual or bicultural support personnel in order to more effectively work with students with disabilities. Teamwork and collaboration between teachers and special education staff are two of the most important factors for student achievement (Gebhardt, Schwab, Krammer, & Gegenfurtner, 2015). It is recommended that language immersion teachers actively reach out to relevant professionals for help. In addition, schools could hold regular meetings that are attended by language immersion

teachers and staff who are involved in special education so that in-depth communication and collaboration between them could take place.

### **Providing Professional Development**

The findings of the study demonstrated that language immersion teachers needed more workshops or training that were focused on disabilities. These district-level or school-level professional development activities could provide language immersion teachers with the necessary strategies to work with students with disabilities. Workshops for educators provide effective teaching strategies for students with disabilities (Villegas, 2019). Lacking adequate knowledge of students with disabilities leads to teachers' unawareness of students' disabilities and their inaccessibility, whereas teachers who studied about disabilities in their training programs are able to build a positive relationship between knowledge and attitude regarding students with disabilities (Thomas & Uthaman, 2019). In order to serve students with disabilities in the language immersion program more effectively, it is recommended that school districts offer practical workshops regarding disabilities to language immersion teachers on a regular basis.

### **Sharing Resources**

During the interviews, some participants expressed their concerns about the insufficient resources in their language immersion programs. They mentioned that they had to design their own curriculums or teaching materials to instruct students with disabilities due to the uniqueness of the program, which took much effort and time away from their limited and valuable planning periods. Language immersion programs' effectiveness depends on the quality of their implementation (Li et al., 2016). In order to



improve its effectiveness and quality, it is recommended that language immersion teachers plan together and share ideas and resources for instructing students with disabilities in an effective approach.

### **Implications**

With the evolution of contemporary education, language immersion programs have been developing rapidly. The capabilities of being bilingual and proficient in languages emerged as an important goal for people from different levels, and thus, foreign language educators started to rely on language immersion models (Cervantes-Soon et al., 2017). Immersion programs could result in positive outcomes for any student to become a proficient bilingual, biliterate, and bicultural speaker (Hernández, 2015; McIvor & Parker, 2016). Many educators and policymakers look at language immersion programs as a promising option to close achievement gaps for students with disabilities (Li, Steele, Slater, Bacon, & Miller, 2016). Thus, no student should be deprived of the right to study in language immersion settings, including students with disabilities. In this study, I attempted to investigate from language immersion teachers' perspectives of how students with disabilities perform in language immersion programs. The results of this study pointed out the challenges that language immersion teachers encountered and the kinds of support that they needed. The positive social change could start from arranging additional workshops and professional development for language immersion teachers in order to assist them to work with students with disabilities. With abundant support for language immersion teachers, students with disabilities may be able to receive more effective differentiation and accommodations in language immersion programs.

In this study, I attempted to gain a better understanding of language immersion teachers' perspectives of students with disabilities in language immersion settings. It is my hope that the findings of this study along with the language immersion teachers' needs could allow practical training and additional support from school districts so that more language immersion teachers and students with disabilities are attracted by the glamor of language immersion programs, which might lead to a positive change in education. This practice aligns with Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior that one's attitude towards a behavior is influenced by factors, such as individual experiences, previously acquired knowledge, and newly acquired knowledge. Language immersion teachers' experience and knowledge can largely impact how they work with students with disabilities. However, the participants in this study were language immersion teachers in elementary schools (k-5), the findings may lack rigor for students with disabilities in other grade levels in language immersion programs. The suggestion for future research is that scholars may work on in-depth studies regarding students with disabilities learning a foreign language in language immersion programs at different grade levels, such as 6-12. Thus, the perspectives of students with disabilities from language immersion teachers teaching at different grade levels may be revealed and presented.

### **Conclusion**

In this study, I examined language immersion teachers' perspectives of the performance of students with disabilities in language immersion programs. I utilized individual interviews to determine language immersion teachers' understanding of disabilities, their challenges and concerns in teaching, and the support that they needed

while working with students with disabilities. Language immersion teachers indicated their challenges and their needs for professional development in the areas of disabilities, which were important factors for them to better meet the needs of students with disabilities in language immersion settings.

The results of the study revealed that language immersion teachers understood students with disabilities to some extent. In the collected and analyzed data, they indicated that additional training and workshops focused on disabilities and strategies dealing with students with disabilities may benefit language immersion teachers' classroom management and instruction. Thus, students with disabilities could have more opportunities to be successful in language immersion settings.

Through the results of this study, I expect that positive social change could take place through addressing the needs of students with disabilities and implementing additional support for language immersion teachers in assisting them to better meet the needs of students with disabilities in their classrooms. My role as a researcher may have not discovered all the aspects related to students with disabilities in language immersion programs, but it is my hope that this study would at least make a small contribution to both educators and students with disabilities in language immersion settings since each child has the right to learn and succeed in various education settings.

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## Appendix A: Individual Interview Questions

RQ1: What are language immersion teachers' perspectives of students with disabilities?

1. What is your general understanding of students with disabilities?
2. Please describe your feelings about working with students with disabilities.
3. How might you expect students with disabilities to behave in immersion settings?
4. Describe your feelings toward achievement or failure of students with disabilities?

RQ2: What are language immersion teachers' perspectives of students with disabilities learning a foreign language in an immersion setting?

5. While working with students with disabilities in the class, what challenges have you experienced?
6. What challenges have you experienced in the academic performance of students with disabilities learning a foreign language through immersion?
7. What differences have you seen for students with disabilities as compared to regular education students in learning a foreign language through language immersion?
8. What are your general observations of students with disabilities in the foreign language setting?

RQ3: How does the professional learning experience of the language immersion teachers impact their beliefs about students with disabilities?



9. What are your perspectives of the value of workshops or professional development in helping you serve students with disabilities in your immersion classroom?
10. What support might you specifically look for in order to serve students with disabilities better?

Additional questions for closing:

11. Is there anything you would like to add for any of the answers provided?
12. Are there any questions or concerns regarding any of the questions asked?

### Appendix B: Member Checking Checklist

The tasks for review of the draft findings for this study include:

- Participants are to review their own data included in the findings to be sure that the researcher's interpretation of their data is correct.
- Participants are to provide additional information if they wish to do so.
- Participants are to check the overall adequacy of the data in the setting in addition to the individual data they have provided.
- Participants are to request a discussion of findings with the researcher if they deem it necessary to clarify their own responses.