Building Resilience and Influencing Behavioral Outcomes Among Students With Emotional Disturbances: A Qualitative Case Study of Inclusive Teachers

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Abstract

Students with emotional disturbance often struggle with emotional regulation, adapting to adversity, and maintaining academic engagement, leading to behavioral disruptions and achievement gaps. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how middle school general education teachers in southern Mississippi perceive resilience, apply instructional strategies to foster it, and identify effective practices for supporting students with emotional disturbance in inclusive settings. Guided by resilience theory, which defines resilience as positive adaptation to adversity supported by protective and environmental factors, the study included 10 general education teachers teaching in inclusive classrooms. Data were collected through the University of Washington Resilience Scale, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations, and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's six-step thematic process. Triangulation across data sources enhanced the credibility and consistency of interpretation. Four themes emerged: (a) building trust and support systems, (b) developing emotional and academic resilience, (c) modeling and promoting resilient behaviors, and (d) collaborating with a foundational understanding of resilience. Teachers described resilience as persistence in the face of setbacks, emotional regulation, and re-engagement with learning. They emphasized that trust, consistent routines, and teacher modeling supported engagement, while collaboration among educators and support staff promoted continuity of care. These findings align with resilience theory, showing that adaptive systems, such as caring relationships and structured environments, support positive development despite adversity. The results suggest implications for educator preparation and policy, including professional development in resilience-based instruction, integration of social-emotional learning, and structured collaboration to strengthen inclusive practices.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The prevalence of mental health and behavioral challenges among adolescents in the United States has continued to rise, attracting attention from educators, policymakers, and researchers. In 2023, approximately 20% of adolescents ages 12–17 had a diagnosed mental, emotional, developmental, or behavioral condition (Health Resources and Services Administration [HRSA], 2023). The American Psychiatric Association (2024) reported continued disparities in mental-health outcomes among school-aged populations. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2023), nearly 7.6 million students ages 3–21 received services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part B. This represents approximately 15% of all public-school students, with about 4% classified as having an emotional disturbance (ED). Many of these learners receive instruction in general-education classrooms. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2023) reported that most middle school teachers instruct students who demonstrate significant behavioral or emotional challenges. Managing such behaviors remains one of the most demanding aspects of teaching (Caldarella et al., 2021). Despite these conditions, many educators report limited preparation for addressing complex emotional and behavioral needs (Chan et al., 2022).

Learners identified with ED exhibit behavioral and emotional characteristics that interfere with learning and adjustment. Externalizing behaviors may include aggression, defiance, or rule violations, whereas internalizing behaviors may involve withdrawal, anxiety, or depressive symptoms (Simonsen et al., 2021; Tyndall et al., 2022). Such difficulties increase the risk of academic failure, absenteeism, school dropout, hospitalization, and involvement with the juvenile justice system (Zetino et al., 2020). Middle-school learners are particularly vulnerable because of developmental transitions and intensifying academic and social demands (Tyndall et

al., 2022). These risks have also been influenced by community instability and global events, including the COVID-19 pandemic (Bruhn et al., 2022).

Resilience functions as a protective factor that mitigates the effects of adversity among youth (Zetino et al., 2020). In educational contexts, resilience refers to the capacity to maintain or regain adaptive functioning despite emotional, behavioral, or environmental stressors (Ewert & Tessneer, 2020). Foundational scholarship by Garmezy (1971, 1985), Werner (1995), and Masten (2014) established the theoretical basis for resilience, showing how individual and environmental protective factors support positive adaptation in the presence of risk. Garmezy (1985) identified three interrelated systems: personal competence, supportive relationships, and stable community contexts. Together, these systems promote adaptive development. Werner (1995) demonstrated that consistent support from caring adults offsets environmental stressors and improves long-term outcomes. Masten (2014) expanded the framework with the concept of ordinary magic, describing resilience as arising from standard adaptive systems such as secure relationships, problem-solving opportunities, and structured school environments.

Recent research has conceptualized resilience as a dynamic, teachable process rather than a fixed trait. Luthar et al. (2020) and Beltman (2023) described resilience as a multidimensional capacity developing through continual interaction between individuals and their environments. Studies have shown that interventions emphasizing self-regulation, emotional awareness, and coping skills improve adolescents' well-being and academic engagement (Fernández García et al., 2022; Luo et al., 2025). Espelage et al. (2021) found that schoolwide social-emotional learning (SEL) initiatives improved emotion regulation and reduced aggression among middle school learners. Jones et al. (2023) reported that SEL participation in Grades 6 through 8

enhanced academic persistence and peer connectedness. These findings indicate that resilience can be developed intentionally within inclusive educational environments.

Despite advances in resilience research, teachers frequently report uncertainty about applying theoretical concepts in daily classroom practice (Day et al., 2021). Professional development often emphasizes compliance management over relationship-centered instruction (Katz et al., 2022). This gap between theoretical understanding and classroom implementation underscores the need to examine how teachers perceive and apply resilience-based practices. For learners with ED, resilience operates as both an individual capacity and a result of social interaction and contextual support (Luo et al., 2025). Garmezy (1985) and Masten (2014) noted that resilience develops when educators establish relational safety, predictable structures, and collaborative systems that buffer stress and promote adaptive functioning.

Research on inclusive education has demonstrated that teacher modeling, emotional scaffolding, and relational trust contribute to students' resilience development among those with behavioral and emotional challenges (Frazier et al., 2020; Pusvitasari et al., 2023). Teachers who demonstrate calm, reflective, and consistent responses help students internalize coping strategies that support persistence (Yeager & Dweck, 2020). In middle school contexts, where developmental pressures are pronounced, teacher empathy and consistency are critical (Brown & Dixon, 2020; Wang et al., 2021). When paired with collaboration among counselors, administrators, and families, these practices align with the ecological systems described in resilience theory.

Resilience theory served as the conceptual framework for the present study, which explored how middle school general education teachers understood and enacted resilience in inclusive classrooms. Garmezy’s ecological model (1985) and Masten’s theory of ordinary

adaptive systems (2014) guided the interpretation of teacher perceptions and practices. The study extended these frameworks by examining how teachers described, modeled, and reinforced resilience while working with learners identified with ED. This approach viewed resilience as an interactive process cultivated through relational and instructional strategies rather than a static trait.

Understanding how teachers conceptualize and apply resilience contributes to both theoretical and practical advancements in inclusive education. The study aligned with the literature describing resilience as a teachable process shaped by ongoing interactions between individuals and their environments (Beltman, 2023; Luthar et al., 2020). By situating the research within this theoretical orientation, the study provided insight into how instructional practices, relational trust, and collaboration operate as protective factors in inclusive classrooms. This foundation supported the study's problem, purpose, and research questions, which examined how general-education teachers perceived, supported, and fostered resilience among middle-school learners with ED.

Statement of the Problem

The problem addressed in this study was the limited understanding of how general education teachers perceived and fostered resilience in middle school learners identified with ED and how those perceptions influenced behavioral and academic outcomes in inclusive classrooms. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2023), approximately 4% of students ages 6 to 21 served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Part B were identified with ED, with many receiving instruction for at least part of the day in general education settings. Middle school teachers frequently reported difficulty managing behavioral challenges and addressing the emotional and instructional needs of learners with ED in inclusive

environments (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2024). Although school systems have increasingly emphasized SEL and inclusive practices, many educators continue to report inadequate preparation to support resilience-based development in learners with emotional and behavioral challenges (Caldarella et al., 2021; Chan et al., 2022).

Currently, a gap persists between the growing expectation that general education teachers meet the social-emotional and behavioral needs of learners with ED and the limited training and supports available to help them do so effectively. This gap contributes to inconsistent classroom practices, elevated disciplinary incidents, and reduced academic engagement. Learners identified with ED experience disproportionately low academic achievement, increased dropout rates, and greater exposure to disciplinary actions compared to their peers (Bruhn et al., 2022; Zetino et al., 2020). Postschool outcomes remain a concern, as this population often faces barriers to employment and postsecondary participation (Houck, 2020). Resilience has been identified as a critical protective factor that promotes adaptive coping and improves long-term functioning among adolescents with emotional and behavioral difficulties (Greco, 2021; Luthar et al., 2020). However, little is known about how general education teachers conceptualize their role in fostering resilience within inclusive classrooms or how their perceptions translate into daily practice. Addressing this gap is essential to strengthening teacher preparation and improving behavioral and academic outcomes for learners with ED, both within and beyond the study context.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore how middle school general education teachers understood and implemented strategies to build resilience in students with ED in inclusive settings. The study addressed the problem of limited knowledge and

preparation among teachers working with students with ED and aligned with the research questions that focused on teacher perceptions, instructional methods, and best practices related to resilience development.

This study was conducted in a public school district located in southern Mississippi. A purposive sample of 10 middle school general education teachers participated based on their experience teaching students with ED in inclusive classrooms. Participants varied in age, certification, teaching experience, and demographic characteristics. Recruitment was facilitated by school principals who distributed an invitation email to staff using their official school communication channels. The sample size was adequate to achieve data saturation, consistent with qualitative research standards (Hennink et al., 2021).

Data were collected through three sources: the University of Washington Resilience Scale (UWRS), semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations. The UWRS was used to establish each participant's perception of resilience and to inform subsequent interview questions. Semi-structured interviews were conducted via video conferencing and transcribed for analysis. Classroom observations were conducted using a checklist designed to identify resilience-related instructional behaviors and environmental supports. Thematic analysis, following the process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2021), was employed to identify and code recurring patterns and themes. Triangulation across the three data sources enhanced the credibility and dependability of the findings.

This study provided a research-based response to the limited understanding of how general education teachers foster resilience in students with ED. Insights gained from this research contributed to a broader understanding of how teachers defined resilience, applied instructional strategies, and recognized practices that promoted positive behavioral and academic

outcomes for students with ED in inclusive classrooms. Ultimately, these findings highlighted the importance of supporting teachers in developing resilience-focused practices within inclusive settings.

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professional development efforts aimed at equipping teachers with effective resilience-building techniques.

Introduction to Framework

Resilience theory, initially introduced by Garmezy (1971), served as the guiding framework for this study. The theory focuses on how individuals adapt positively in the face of adversity. Garmezy's foundational work emphasized competence in children exposed to risk factors such as poverty, family instability, or mental illness (Garmezy, 1985). Subsequent research expanded the concept of resilience to a dynamic process shaped by interactions between internal assets and external supports (Luthar et al., 2020; Masten, 2001; Ungar, 2011, 2022). Central concepts include protective factors, risk exposure, adaptive functioning, and recovery, which collectively buffer risk and promote positive outcomes (Masten & Reed, 2002; Panter-Brick & Leckman, 2021; Vanderbilt-Adriance & Shaw, 2008).

In educational settings, resilience theory has been applied to understand how teacher–student relationships, structured learning environments, and social-emotional supports contribute to positive adaptation among students experiencing adversity (Beltman, 2023; Doll et al., 2011; Lipscomb et al., 2019; Taylor et al., 2023). The framework continues to inform current research on SEL and inclusive education, emphasizing how classroom climate and teacher relationships foster resilience development (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2022; Jones et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2024). It is particularly relevant for students with ED, who often experience challenges with self-regulation, stress tolerance, and academic engagement (Bruhn et al., 2022; Cummings et al., 2020; Simonsen et al., 2021). The theory posits that resilience can be intentionally cultivated through supportive relationships and environmental conditions, rather than viewed as a fixed trait (Masten, 2014, 2021; Rutter, 2012).

Teachers, therefore, play an essential role in creating learning environments that strengthen protective factors and promote adaptive outcomes for students with ED (Collie & Martin, 2023; Gu & Day, 2023; Yonezawa et al., 2009).

Resilience theory guided this study by framing the inquiry into how general education teachers perceived and implemented resilience-building practices in inclusive classrooms serving students with ED. It informed the development of the problem statement by emphasizing the role of protective systems in supporting students with emotional and behavioral challenges (Masten, 2001). The purpose and research questions were structured to explore teacher strategies consistent with the framework's key tenets, including promoting autonomy, fostering positive relationships, and supporting emotional regulation. Grounding this study in resilience theory provided a conceptual foundation for understanding how resilience develops in context and how teacher practices cultivate it among students with ED.

Introduction to Research Methodology and Design

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how middle school general education teachers understood and implemented strategies to build students' resilience in inclusive classroom settings. Qualitative research was selected as the methodology because it aligns with the context-dependent, interpretive nature of resilience, which requires an in-depth exploration of participants' perceptions, experiences, and instructional practices (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Dolejšiová & Nevídal, 2021). This methodology allowed for the collection of descriptive data from multiple sources, including the UWRS, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations. Together, these data sources provided a comprehensive understanding of how teachers foster resilience in the classroom.

Case study research served as the design for this study. As described by Yin (2018), case study design is appropriate for examining complex social phenomena in real-world contexts, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly defined. Stake (1995) further explained that case study design allows for an in-depth investigation of a bounded system, enabling researchers to generate contextualized understanding. The bounded system for this study consisted of middle school inclusive classrooms within a public school district in southern Mississippi. Case study design was appropriate because it supported an exploration of teachers' practices and perceptions without inferring causation between teacher actions and student outcomes (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

The qualitative case study approach aligned with the problem, purpose, and research questions of this study, which focused on understanding how teachers perceived resilience, the instructional strategies they used, and the best practices they identified. Data were collected through multiple sources, interviews, classroom observations, and the UWRS, to enable triangulation and enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Guetterman, 2022; Yin, 2018). Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach to thematic analysis, which provided a structured and systematic process for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns across the data.

Together, the qualitative methodology, case study design, and use of multiple data sources provided a coherent and rigorous framework for examining how middle school teachers supported resilience in inclusive classrooms. This approach provided a detailed understanding of the relationships among teacher perceptions, classroom practices, and the development of resilience in students with ED. As a result, it illustrated how these dynamics were grounded in the lived context of Mississippi public schools.

Research Questions

RQ1

How do middle school general education teachers in southern Mississippi perceive resilience among students with ED in the inclusive setting?

RQ2

How do middle school general education teachers in southern Mississippi describe the instructional methods they use to build resilience among students with ED in inclusive settings?

RQ3

How do middle school general education teachers in southern Mississippi describe the best practices they have experienced for building resilience among students with ED in inclusive settings?

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its examination of how middle school general education teachers in inclusive classrooms supported students with ED's resilience. The research addressed a gap in understanding how resilience is fostered in inclusive middle school environments, where emotional and behavioral challenges frequently influence both academic and social outcomes. Addressing this gap contributed to the field by offering evidence-based insight into instructional and relational strategies that aligned with the conceptual framework of resilience theory (Garmezy, 1985; Masten, 2014).

The findings provided a deeper understanding of the instructional methods, communication strategies, and classroom supports that promoted positive student outcomes in inclusive settings. These results informed educators and educational leaders about approaches that strengthened classroom climates for students with ED and improved inclusive practices. The

study further contributed to the literature by illustrating how teacher behaviors, classroom structures, and individualized supports influenced resilience development and engagement among middle school students with ED (Carter et al., 2020; Fernández García et al., 2022).

This study also advanced the guiding framework by applying resilience theory to a practical educational context. The results broadened understanding of how internal and external protective factors shaped the experiences of students with ED in inclusive classrooms and reinforced the importance of teacher-student relationships, consistent expectations, and supportive environments (Luthar et al., 2020; Masten & Tellegen, 2012; Ungar, 2022). By situating these findings in real-world classroom contexts, the research offered implications for teacher preparation and professional development for fostering resilience in students with emotional and behavioral challenges.

By addressing the study problem, achieving the purpose, and answering the research questions, this study provided valuable insight into the role of general education teachers in promoting resilience among students with ED. The knowledge gained may inform professional development initiatives, instructional decision-making, and policy efforts to improve inclusive education practices. Consequently, the study contributed to both the scholarly understanding and practical application of resilience theory in inclusive middle school settings.

Definitions of Key Terms

Educator Collaboration

Educator collaboration is the process by which educators share information, knowledge, and instructional practices. This collaborative sharing is intended to provide mentoring and consistent support to enhance student learning and improve academic outcomes. This approach

represents a collective effort to refine teacher effectiveness through shared practice (Phoenix et al., 2021).

Emotional Disturbance

An emotional disturbance is defined as an emotional and behavioral deficit that manifests as an inability to acquire and maintain appropriate relationships with others. It includes significant academic deficiencies that cannot be attributed to intellectual, sensory, or health-related conditions. Furthermore, it is often characterized by persistent behaviors or emotions that, under normal circumstances, are considered inappropriate; a mood of unhappiness or depression, pervasive in nature; and a tendency to display or develop physical issues, including pain or unreasonable fears associated with personal life or school (de Carvalho & Skipper, 2020).

Inclusive Setting

An inclusive setting for students with disabilities in education is an educational approach that aims to provide all students, regardless of ability or disability, with equitable opportunities to learn together in the same classroom or school environment. The key principle of inclusive services is equal access to educational resources with individualized support. Inclusive settings emphasize collaboration among educators to adapt instruction and ensure that every student can meaningfully participate (Blazer, 2022; Norwich, 2022).

Inclusive Strategies

Inclusive strategies are approaches and practices designed to create a supportive learning environment in which all students, including those with diverse abilities and needs, can fully participate and thrive. These strategies aim to remove barriers to learning, promote equal opportunities, and address the diverse needs of all students. These strategies support an inclusive

classroom culture aimed at meeting the diverse educational needs of all students (Blazer, 2022; Norwich, 2022).

Instructional Methods

The principles and strategies teachers use to facilitate instruction are referred to as instructional methods. These methods encompass several approaches that can be adapted to varied educational contexts and student populations. Instructional methods form the core framework through which teaching is structured (Boyette et al., 2023).

Resilience

Resilience is often referred to as hardiness, mindfulness, well-being, self-determination, self-advocacy, and mindset (Houchins et al., 2020). Resilience is understood as a personality trait or process that involves positive adaptations in the face of adversity. It encompasses developmental capacity, which is dynamic and evolves. Resilience is also recognized as a competence utilized to manage considerable fluctuations in life and to assume responsibility by rebounding from adversity, uncertainty, and negativity (Konaszewski et al., 2021).

Student Resilience

Student resilience refers to the ability to self-regulate emotions, face adversity effectively, be aware of one's strengths and weaknesses, believe in self-efficacy, have positive perceptions of the future, and establish a network of academic and social support. Student resilience also involves having a network of academic and social support. This multifaceted resilience framework enables students to navigate challenges more effectively and thrive in educational settings (Bujorean, 2023).

Summary

The problem addressed in this study was that middle school general education teachers in inclusive classrooms demonstrated limited understanding and skills for fostering resilience among students with ED, contributing to increased behavioral challenges (Brown & Dixon, 2020; Houchins et al., 2020). The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how teachers understood and implemented strategies to promote resilience in students with ED within inclusive middle school environments.

The study was grounded in resilience theory, which describes resilience as the capacity to adapt and recover in the face of adversity (Ewert & Tessneer, 2020). The research employed a qualitative case study design to allow for an in-depth exploration of teacher perspectives and practices within their authentic classroom contexts. Data were collected from 10 middle school teachers in a public school district in southern Mississippi using three instruments: semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and the UWRS (University of Washington, 2022). The data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes related to teacher perceptions and instructional methods that supported resilience.

Findings from this study provided insight into teachers' perceptions, classroom strategies, and professional practices that influenced students' resilience-building. The results contributed to a deeper understanding of how inclusive environments can promote adaptive behaviors and improve student outcomes (Carlson et al., 2020). Chapter 2 presents a review of the theoretical framework and relevant literature that further contextualizes resilience, inclusive education, and teacher practices supporting students with ED.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The problem addressed in this study was that middle school general education teachers who implement inclusive strategies often demonstrate limited understanding and skills for building resilience in students with emotional disturbance (ED), which may lead to escalated classroom disruptions (Brown & Dixon, 2020; Houchins et al., 2020; Zolkoski, 2019). The purpose of this study was to explore middle school general education teachers' knowledge and skills related to fostering resilience among students with ED. The theoretical framework guiding this study is resilience theory, which emphasizes how emotional and behavioral disruptions can be mitigated when students are taught to adapt and regulate emotions effectively (Pusvitasari et al., 2023; Zhan et al., 2024). This framework serves as the foundation for understanding teachers' perceptions of resilience, the instructional methods they employ to cultivate resilience in their classrooms, and the best practices that support inclusive learning environments for students with ED.

This chapter provides a synthesis of current research on ED, resilience, resilience theory, and inclusive instructional practices. The literature reviewed spans publications from 1979 to 2025. The discussion centers on inclusive strategies for students with ED, teachers' understanding and skills related to resilience-building, professional development and teacher training, and implications for inclusive educational practices and policies. The chapter is organized as follows: first, it introduces the theoretical framework; second, it reviews the empirical literature on the key variables and concepts; and third, it concludes with a summary that connects these findings to the study's purpose.

The literature review was used to incorporate both contemporary and foundational sources to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the topic. Most of the literature was published within the past 5 years, while a limited number of seminal works have been retained to provide essential theoretical and historical context. These foundational studies establish the conceptual underpinnings of resilience and inclusive education, while more recent research provides evidence of evolving practices and perspectives.

Documentation

The literature for this review was identified through systematic searches using academic databases and electronic repositories available through the National University Library, the Northcentral University Library, the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), EBSCOhost, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, SAGE Journals, Taylor & Francis Online, SpringerLink, Wiley Online Library, and Google Scholar. Searches were conducted using combinations of key terms and Boolean operators. The primary keywords included *emotional disturbance (ED)*, *emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD)*, *resilience*, *resilience theory*, *teacher resilience*, *student resilience*, *inclusive education*, *inclusive instructional strategies*, *social-emotional learning (SEL)*, *trauma-informed practices*, *adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)*, *positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS)*, *restorative practices*, *growth mindset*, *professional development*, and *teacher perceptions*.

Searches were limited to peer-reviewed articles and scholarly works published within the last 5 years (2020 to 2025) to ensure that findings reflected current trends and practices in education. However, several foundational studies published more than 5 years ago were intentionally included because of their historical significance and enduring relevance to

resilience theory and special education. Inclusion criteria required that studies directly address emotional disturbance, resilience, or inclusive educational practices within K–12 settings. Excluded materials included non-scholarly works, studies outside the target time frame (unless foundational), and sources unrelated to academic contexts. The search yielded approximately 120 sources, of which 90 were deemed relevant and included in this review. A detailed record of search terms, combinations, and filters is provided in Appendix A.

Theoretical Framework

Resilience theory originated from developmental research seeking to understand why some children adapted successfully despite adversity (Garmezy, 1971; Masten, 2014). Garmezy (1971, 1985) conducted longitudinal studies with children exposed to poverty and family stress and identified that stable caregiving, consistent adult mentorship, and effective problem-solving predicted adaptive outcomes. These investigations established the notion of protective factors: conditions that buffer individuals against risk. Garmezy's findings shaped later research by reframing vulnerability as a dynamic interaction between individual competence and environmental support, a premise that remains central to resilience theory in education.

Werner and Smith (1989, 2001) expanded Garmezy's (1971) work through the Kauai Longitudinal Study, which originated in 1955 and followed a birth cohort for four decades. The researchers examined how biological, familial, and community variables influenced developmental trajectories. The results demonstrated that approximately one-third of children exposed to multiple risk factors, such as poverty, perinatal stress, or family discord, developed into competent, caring adults when at least one supportive relationship was present. The study confirmed that resilience is not an innate trait but an evolving process influenced by consistent protective systems such as family cohesion and school connectedness. Contemporary analyses of

the same dataset show that educational engagement and teacher mentoring remain decisive predictors of adaptive functioning (Masten & Motti-Stefanidi, 2020; Price-Mitchell, 2023).

Rutter (1970, 1985, 1999) refined resilience theory through population-based research on the Isle of Wight in London, comparing children raised under high-risk circumstances with those in stable conditions. He introduced the concept of cumulative risk, observing that multiple stressors amplify vulnerability unless offset by compensatory supports. Rutter's (1970) results demonstrated that moderate exposure to manageable stress, combined with adult guidance, promotes coping efficacy, a principle that informs preventive and restorative practices in schools. His later writings emphasized that resilience is the outcome of interactions among genetic, psychological, and contextual variables rather than a fixed characteristic.

Building on these empirical foundations, Masten (1975, 2001, 2014) proposed a developmental-systems model describing resilience as ordinary magic. She describes ordinary magic as the result of normative adaptive systems operating effectively. Beginning in 1975, her longitudinal Minnesota Study of Risk and Adaptation (1975) traced children from infancy through adulthood, revealing that competence in early caregiving relationships predicted later success in academics, work, and relationships. Masten's model established that resilience arises from everyday mechanisms such as problem-solving, self-regulation, and supportive social networks. Neurobiological studies have since confirmed that these mechanisms correspond to strengthened neural pathways for emotion regulation and executive functioning (Feder et al., 2022; Kalisch et al., 2023). These findings align with educational perspectives that emphasize predictable routines, positive teacher interactions, and opportunities for mastery, which reinforce the same adaptive processes identified in developmental research.

Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1999) situated resilience within an ecological framework, explaining that development results from the reciprocal influence of the nested systems of family, school, community, and culture. His ecological-systems theory contributed to resilience research by clarifying how contextual alignment strengthens adaptive outcomes. Educational scholars have since demonstrated that microsystem interactions, such as supportive teacher–student relationships and cooperative peer climates, promote resilience among students facing emotional or behavioral difficulties (Cavioni et al., 2021; Zhan et al., 2024). The ecological perspective indicates that resilience cannot be isolated from environmental structure; it depends on interconnected supports across settings.

Positive-psychology research extended these foundations by identifying internal attributes that facilitate recovery and growth. Seligman (2002, 2011) explored learned optimism and purposeful engagement as mechanisms fostering persistence under stress. Empirical interventions derived from this work, including gratitude exercises and cognitive-reframing strategies, have been shown to improve self-efficacy and emotional regulation in adolescent populations (Duckworth et al., 2024). These principles integrate naturally into educational contexts, where adaptive thinking and meaning-making strengthen students' problem-solving and perseverance.

Benard (1991, 2004) synthesized decades of resilience research for application in schools, identifying four promotive strengths, like problem-solving, autonomy, sense of purpose, and high expectations, that educators can cultivate through intentional design of classroom relationships and routines. Her analyses demonstrated that students thrive when school environments communicate a belief in their competence and provide meaningful opportunities for participation. Recent replications confirm that teacher support and equitable climate predict

sustained motivation and behavioral self-control among adolescents (Brunzell & Stokes, 2022; Newton et al., 2024; Wassink-de Stigter et al., 2022).

Current theoretical syntheses continue to emphasize resilience as a multidimensional construct integrating biological, psychological, and social systems. Pearson (2025) analyzed large-scale educational studies and concluded that resilience functions simultaneously at individual, relational, and institutional levels. Borazon and Chuang (2023) reviewed over 7,000 empirical investigations and observed that ecological alignment, particularly collaboration between teachers and families, predicts the most significant adaptive outcomes. Farchi et al. (2025) proposed the acknowledgment-reframe-tailoring model, conceptualizing resilience as a cyclical process of recognizing stressors, reinterpreting meaning, and adapting response strategies. Collectively, these studies affirm the continuing relevance of resilience theory as a framework for understanding adaptation within complex educational environments.

Resilience theory expanded from developmental psychology into education, mental-health research, and social systems analysis as scholars began exploring how adaptive processes function in applied contexts (Masten, 2014). The theoretical foundation established by Garmezy (1971), Werner (1982), Rutter (1970), and Masten (2001) provided a structure for examining how resilience develops in response to cumulative risk and contextual support. Subsequent work emphasized that resilience is not an exceptional phenomenon but an expected human capacity when social and environmental resources are available. Masten (2014) described this capacity as a system property that operates through interaction among neurobiological, cognitive, and relational mechanisms. Empirical analyses confirmed that exposure to manageable stress combined with opportunities for mastery produces durable adaptive responses (Feder et al., 2022; Kalisch et al., 2023).

As resilience theory was applied to schools, researchers identified direct parallels between developmental protective systems and educational supports. Bronfenbrenner's ecological model positioned the school as a microsystem where teacher expectations, peer norms, and classroom routines collectively influence adaptation. Benard (2004) proposed that teachers function as protective agents by communicating belief in student competence and by establishing predictable environments that model self-regulation. Empirical data show that students who perceive teachers as fair and supportive exhibit lower disciplinary referral rates and higher engagement (Cavioni et al., 2021; Newton et al., 2024). These findings illustrate that educational contexts can replicate the secure-base dynamics identified in developmental research.

Seligman's investigations into learned optimism and cognitive reframing provided additional insight into the role of perception and meaning in resilience. Interventions designed to cultivate gratitude, agency, and purposeful goal setting were shown to improve persistence among adolescents exposed to stress (Duckworth et al., 2024). Educational researchers incorporated these constructs into social-emotional-learning frameworks, demonstrating that positive attributional styles mediate the relationship between adversity and academic performance (Espelage et al., 2021; Jones et al., 2023). This evidence aligns with the theoretical view that resilience involves both cognitive interpretation and behavioral adaptation.

Benard's synthesis of resilience and schooling identified autonomy, problem-solving, sense of purpose, and high expectations as mechanisms through which students internalize competence. These elements have been validated in multiple cultural and socioeconomic contexts. Brunzell and Stokes (2022) observed that trauma-informed teaching strategies incorporating predictable structure and relational consistency strengthen students' ability to

manage stress responses. Wassink-de Stigter et al. (2022) found similar outcomes in European schools emphasizing participatory learning and restorative practice. The consistency of results across systems supports the theoretical assertion that resilience operates through accessible, teachable processes rather than rare personality traits.

Researchers examining inclusive education environments further extended resilience theory by integrating social-ecological and systems perspectives. Ungar (2021) conceptualized resilience as a process of navigation and negotiation within social systems that either provide or withhold resources. Borazon and Chuang (2023) demonstrated that collaborative school cultures enhance both teacher and student resilience by creating reciprocal networks of support. Pearson (2025) analyzed national datasets and reported that institutions characterized by relational trust and adaptive leadership exhibit stronger academic continuity following stress events. These findings position resilience as an institutional as well as individual phenomenon, reinforcing the theory's ecological orientation.

Collectively, empirical and theoretical developments show that resilience functions as a multi-level construct linking individual agency with contextual opportunity. The educational literature corroborates the foundational premise that supportive relationships, coherent structure, and consistent expectations generate adaptive capacity. This convergence between developmental and educational research confirms the durability and applicability of resilience theory as a framework for understanding how students with emotional and behavioral difficulties sustain engagement and growth within inclusive settings.

The progression of resilience theory from Garmezy's early work through Masten's developmental-systems model illustrates how foundational theorists collectively shaped the conceptual base of this study. Table 1 summarizes these major contributors and the ways their findings inform the current theoretical framework. As shown in Table 1, each theorist's work emphasizes the interaction between individual capacities and environmental supports—a principle reflected in contemporary resilience-based approaches to inclusive education.

Table 1

Foundational Resilience Theorists Informing the Study's Theoretical Framework

Theorist	Years	Core focus	Major findings/concepts	Educational implications
Norman Garmezy	1971–1985	Competence under adversity	Identified protective factors and interaction between individual and environment	Stable teacher support predicts adaptive outcomes
Emmy Werner & Ruth Smith	1989–2001	Longitudinal child outcomes	Found that one caring adult mitigates risk and promotes adaptation	Teacher relationships function as buffers against stress
Michael Rutter	1985–1999	Cumulative risk and coping	Demonstrated that moderate stress with guidance builds efficacy	Guided exposure to manageable challenges fosters coping skills
Ann Masten	2001–2014	Developmental-systems model	Described "ordinary magic" of adaptive systems and resilience as common capacity	Classroom routines and SEL practices parallel adaptive systems
Urie Bronfenbrenner	1979–1999	Ecological systems theory	Defined nested contextual supports influencing development	School as microsystem of resilience; relationships shape outcomes

The practical application of resilience theory in educational settings has become a focus for researchers investigating how instructional practices, relational dynamics, and institutional structures influence student outcomes. Within this framework, resilience is viewed as a process of positive adaptation that can be developed through deliberate environmental design. Luo et al. (2025) analyzed longitudinal data on students with emotional and behavioral challenges. They found that structured routines, consistent feedback, and teacher modeling of coping skills reduced disruptive behavior and improved classroom engagement. Their results demonstrated that resilience-building interventions function most effectively when emotional safety and predictability are prioritized. Similarly, Hynes et al. (2022) reported that interventions integrating SEL strategies with behavioral supports promoted academic persistence and reduced conflict among middle school students identified with emotional disturbance. These findings align directly with the theoretical principles outlined by Rutter (1985) and Masten (2014), demonstrating that adaptive outcomes occur when protective processes are strengthened in the presence of moderate, manageable stress.

Teacher behavior and perception have also been recognized as central to the development of resilience in students with behavioral difficulties. Beltman and Jovanoska (2023) found that educators who maintained supportive relationships, communicated high expectations, and modeled calm problem-solving cultivated improved student coping and decreased classroom disruption. Their qualitative analysis of teacher interviews revealed that professional resilience, characterized by reflective practice, collegial collaboration, and emotional balance, parallels the protective factors identified for students. Zhang (2023) reached similar conclusions in a study of teacher resilience, reporting that self-reflection and adaptive emotional regulation predicted instructional persistence and positive classroom climates. These studies reinforce that resilience

operates reciprocally: educators model the same adaptive processes they seek to cultivate in their students, thereby strengthening the ecological interdependence described by Bronfenbrenner (1979).

Institutional culture further contributes to resilience by creating environments that sustain adaptive capacity across multiple system levels. Borazon and Chuang (2023) identified that schools characterized by collegial trust, shared leadership, and resource accessibility demonstrated stronger collective resilience following crises. This aligns with Masten's (2014) depiction of resilience as a property of interrelated systems rather than isolated individuals. Cai et al. (2025) advanced this perspective by proposing dynamic assessment methods that capture fluctuations in resilience across changing contexts, and by illustrating how institutional adaptation parallels individual coping processes. When educational institutions function as cohesive systems that value relationship-building and inclusivity, they become protective environments that can mitigate behavioral and academic risk factors.

Empirical evidence from inclusive and trauma-informed education research further supports these theoretical premises. Brunzell and Stokes (2022) examined Australian schools implementing trauma-informed models and found that teacher-student attunement and relational consistency predicted improvements in student self-regulation and engagement. Their work demonstrates that resilience is strengthened when educational settings acknowledge and accommodate emotional needs rather than relying solely on punitive behavioral approaches. Cavioni et al. (2021) also identified that cooperative learning structures, empathy-based discipline, and prosocial modeling increase students' adaptive functioning and social competence. These findings are consistent with Bernard's (2004) assertion that educators act as mediators of resilience by creating emotionally safe learning environments.

Systematic reviews conducted by Taylor et al. (2023) and Liu et al. (2024) confirm that resilience-oriented approaches yield measurable benefits across educational levels. Taylor et al. synthesized intervention data from multiple countries and found consistent associations between school connectedness, teacher empathy, and student perseverance. Liu et al. examined inclusive school climates and reported that multi-tiered systems of support effectively reduced emotional distress and improved behavioral outcomes. These studies collectively reinforce the theoretical argument that resilience emerges from sustained exposure to predictable, supportive, and relationally rich environments.

Research examining risk and protective factors in students with emotional disturbance continues to illustrate the value of resilience-based frameworks. Day et al. (2021) observed that while students with emotional and behavioral disorders face disproportionate exposure to risk factors such as trauma, instability, and social exclusion, the presence of consistent adult advocacy and structured interventions can significantly alter trajectories. Katz et al. (2022) added that peer collaboration and restorative communication models promote belonging and reduce maladaptive coping behaviors. These findings correspond with Rutter's (1985) conclusion that protective influences accumulate over time, increasing the likelihood of adaptive outcomes even when vulnerability is high.

Overall, the application of resilience theory to education emphasizes that adaptive behavior results from a network of interrelated supports rather than isolated skill development. Consistent with developmental and ecological principles, the evidence demonstrates that resilience in students with emotional and behavioral challenges arises through multi-systemic collaboration among teachers, peers, administrators, and families rather than from individual

intervention alone. This systemic understanding of resilience positions it as a central construct for addressing behavioral and emotional challenges within inclusive educational contexts.

Although resilience theory has been examined extensively across developmental and educational research, continued investigation is necessary to understand how resilience can be systematically strengthened for students with emotional and behavioral challenges. Existing studies provide strong evidence that resilience emerges from the interaction of protective and risk factors, yet gaps remain in how these processes operate within inclusive learning environments. Ungar (2021) described resilience as a process that fluctuates across contexts depending on access to social and institutional resources. This conceptualization has guided recent work emphasizing dynamic adaptation rather than fixed personal traits. However, few empirical studies have investigated how classroom-level practices translate these theoretical ideas into measurable outcomes for students identified with emotional disturbance.

Longitudinal analyses have been limited in their capacity to capture how resilience develops across stages of schooling. Yates and Masten (2021) observed that resilience trajectories are influenced by cumulative exposure to supportive systems but emphasized the need for studies examining transitions between educational settings. Mansfield et al. (2022) similarly concluded that while short-term interventions often demonstrate improvement in behavior or engagement, there is insufficient evidence regarding how those effects persist once students leave structured support programs. These observations reveal an enduring gap between theoretical understanding and practical implementation, particularly for populations with chronic behavioral difficulties.

Scholars continue to examine how educators' beliefs and instructional practices influence student resilience. Chafouleas et al. (2023) reported that general education teachers often have a limited understanding of resilience theory, leading to inconsistent strategies for fostering coping and self-regulation. Beltman and Jovanoska (2023) found that professional development programs integrating reflective practice and SEL improved teachers' capacity to support students with behavioral challenges. These findings underscore the importance of equipping educators with conceptual and applied knowledge of resilience, as classroom implementation is the conduit through which theoretical principles directly influence student outcomes.

Recent reviews have also highlighted inconsistencies in how resilience is operationalized and measured. Cai et al. (2025) argued that static assessment tools fail to capture the adaptive fluctuations that define resilience processes. Viner et al. (2023) recommended multidimensional models combining behavioral observation with student self-reports to reflect ecological and temporal variation. Such methodological advancements contribute to a more nuanced understanding of resilience but also demonstrate the continued need for context-specific investigation in diverse educational settings.

Studies of school climate and institutional adaptation have further been used to reinforce the ecological foundation of resilience theory. Pearson (2025) found that relational trust, administrative stability, and collaborative leadership predict organizational resilience that, in turn, supports individual coping and academic performance. Liu et al. (2024) observed that schools implementing tiered systems of support demonstrate more substantial alignment between social-emotional competencies and behavioral outcomes. These institutional perspectives correspond with Bronfenbrenner's (1999) ecological systems model, affirming that resilience operates across nested layers of interaction rather than within the individual alone.

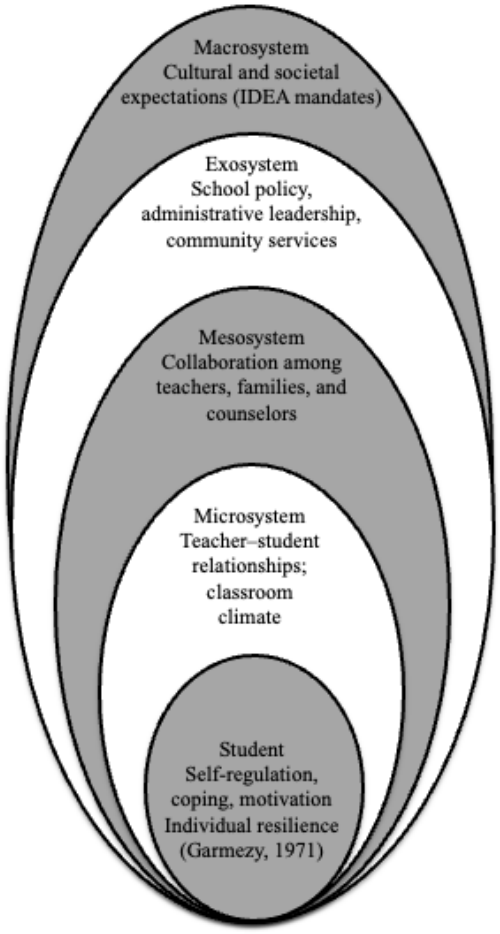
Despite substantial theoretical and empirical progress, research remains limited regarding how resilience-based frameworks can be integrated into inclusive classrooms to prevent or reduce behavioral escalation. Hynes et al. (2022) and Luo et al. (2025) demonstrated that resilience-focused interventions improve engagement and self-regulation for students with emotional and behavioral difficulties. Yet, these approaches are not consistently implemented across schools. The literature suggests that while the foundations of resilience are well established, translating them into sustained, schoolwide practice continues to pose challenges. Future inquiry may address how educational systems can align academic, behavioral, and emotional supports to promote resilience as a core competency for all students.

The convergence of developmental, ecological, and educational perspectives establishes resilience theory as a comprehensive model for understanding adaptation within complex learning environments. Its principles of protective and risk factors, relational supports, self-regulation, and contextual alignment remain essential to addressing behavioral and emotional difficulties in schools. The collective evidence demonstrates that resilience is a dynamic and teachable construct that can inform the design of environments enabling all learners to adapt, engage, and succeed despite adversity.

Figure 1 (created by the researcher) illustrates how the foundational elements of resilience theory, originating with Garmezy's (1971) concept of competence under adversity and later expanded by Masten (2014) and Bronfenbrenner (1979), interact within inclusive educational contexts through an ecological systems model. As depicted in Figure 1, resilience operates across multiple ecological levels, linking individual coping processes and teacher–student relationships with the broader school, community, and cultural systems that influence adaptive outcomes.

Figure 1

Ecological Model of Resilience in Inclusive Education



History of Students with Emotional Disturbance

Before 1975, approximately 1.75 million students with disabilities were educated outside of the public-school system, while an additional 2.5 million received instruction that failed to

meet their individual needs. As a result, nearly half of all children with disabilities either received no education or inadequate educational services (Ballard & Zettel, 1978). These conditions led to the passage of the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975* (Pub. L. No. 94-142, 89 Stat. 773 [1975]), which guaranteed a free and appropriate public education for students with disabilities. The act was later renamed the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA, 1990; 20 U.S.C. § 1400 et seq.), reorganized in 1997, and reauthorized in 2004 as the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act* (IDEIA; Pub. L. No. 108-446, 118 Stat. 2647 [2004]; Marsico, 2021).

The IDEA remains the cornerstone of special education in the United States. It ensures educational access and equality for all children with qualifying disabilities. The law identifies 13 eligibility categories, including intellectual disability, hearing impairment, visual impairment, speech or language impairment, orthopedic impairment, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairment, specific learning disability, deaf-blindness, multiple disabilities, and emotional disturbance (U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], 2024). Under federal law, emotional disturbance is defined as exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects educational performance: (a) an inability to learn not explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors; (b) difficulty in building or maintaining satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers; (c) inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances; (d) a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; or (e) a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems (Flanagan et al., 2020; USDOE, 2023).

The 2024 U.S. Department of Education Annual Report to Congress on IDEA implementation indicated that approximately 7.7 million children and youth ages 3–21, or about

15% of all public-school students, received special education services under IDEA, with roughly 4% identified under the emotional disturbance category (USDOE, 2024). Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2024) further show that most students with emotional disturbance spend part of their instructional time in general education classrooms, aligning with IDEA's requirement for education in the least restrictive environment whenever possible. Federal mandates stipulate that students identified as eligible for special education services must not be excluded from educational opportunities, and their academic and behavioral needs must be appropriately addressed through individualized supports (Freeman et al., 2019; McLeskey et al., 2023). Each student qualifying under IDEA is entitled to an Individualized Education Program (IEP)—a legally binding document outlining specific goals, accommodations, and services to meet the student's educational needs. The IEP must be reviewed and updated annually and, beginning at age 14, include a transition plan to assist the student in preparing for postsecondary education, employment, and independent living (Mitchell et al., 2019; National Technical Assistance Center on Transition [NTACT], 2022).

Students identified under the ED category often require additional behavioral supports, such as a Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) and a Behavioral Intervention Plan (BIP), to address behaviors that interfere with learning (Walker et al., 2023; Kelm et al., 2021). IDEA also mandates that all students receive a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment, ensuring that students with disabilities are educated alongside nondisabled peers to the greatest extent appropriate (Yell, 2019; Marsico, 2021; USDOE, 2024). While IDEA has expanded educational access, challenges persist in ensuring equitable outcomes for students with emotional disturbance. Recent analyses emphasize that these students experience higher rates of exclusionary discipline, lower academic achievement, and a greater

risk of dropout than peers with other disabilities (National Center for Special Education Research [NCSER], 2024; USDOE, 2024; Losen et al., 2023). Researchers have identified systemic factors—such as insufficient teacher preparation, limited behavioral supports, and inconsistent implementation of IDEA mandates—as barriers to effective service delivery (Chan et al., 2022; McLeskey et al., 2023; Evans et al., 2024).

Despite these challenges, IDEA's enduring framework provides the legal and ethical foundation for equitable education. Its evolution reflects a broader shift toward inclusion, accountability, and evidence-based intervention. Understanding this legislative and historical context underscores the ongoing need to ensure that students with emotional disturbance not only access education but also experience environments that foster social-emotional growth, academic success, and resilience.

Individualized Education Plan

An IEP is a component of federal legislation that ensures compliance with the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (*IDEA*; 20 U.S.C. § 1400 et seq.) (U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], 2024). An IEP is an educational plan strategically designed to ensure a FAPE is delivered in the least restrictive environment (LRE). This plan provides the foundation for educational access and equity, ensuring that students with disabilities receive specialized instruction and supports necessary to promote academic, behavioral, and functional growth (McLeskey et al., 2023). The IEP functions both as a procedural safeguard to ensure compliance with federal mandates and as a practical instrument that translates individualized needs into actionable educational goals (Kors, 2022; USDOE, 2024).

An IEP is created by a team that includes an agency representative, a general education teacher, a special education teacher, parents or guardians, the student when appropriate, and any

related-services personnel (USDOE, 2024). Each participant serves a specific and collaborative role. The general education teacher contributes information regarding classroom expectations and academic standards; the special education teacher identifies necessary instructional adaptations and accommodations; and related-services personnel, such as counselors or speech-language pathologists, provide specialized insight into communication, social-emotional, or behavioral needs (Carter et al., 2023). Parents or guardians contribute valuable contextual information about the student's strengths, interests, and learning history, while the agency representative ensures compliance with IDEA and district policy. This team works collaboratively to establish measurable goals, determine necessary accommodations and modifications, and identify transition needs based on the student's strengths and challenges (Wehman et al., 2023).

The required components of an IEP include a description of the student's present level of performance, progress toward goals, special or related services, supplementary supports, participation in the general education setting, transition services, and progress reporting (USDOE, 2024). The IEP serves as a dynamic, living document that evolves throughout a student's academic journey to reflect updated assessments, observations, and instructional needs. This plan is applicable throughout all academic endeavors, including secondary education, and ensures consistency of services across settings. Each IEP must be reviewed and revised annually based on the student's educational and behavioral progress to maintain alignment with IDEA mandates and current best practices (Kors, 2022; McLeskey et al., 2023).

An IEP is considered a guide or map to instruction for students with exceptional needs. IEPs for students with emotional disturbance (ED) require the same criteria as mentioned, whereas behavioral aspects must also be considered. When designing an IEP for students with

ED and/or behavioral issues, interventions and related services must be included. Behavioral goals are often addendums to academic goals, and related-services personnel, such as behavior specialists, are incorporated. Assessments such as Functional Behavioral Assessments (FBAs) and Behavioral Intervention Plans (BIPs) are included in IEPs for those with an ED eligibility (Johns et al., 2002; Albrecht et al., 2022). These assessments assist educators in identifying the underlying causes of behaviors and implementing data-driven strategies that support student success within structured and predictable environments.

In addition to behavioral interventions, IEPs for students with ED also integrate transition services that focus on preparing students for postsecondary success. Transition plans, which must be initiated at or before the age of 14, are designed with behavioral and emotional development in mind (Yell, 2019; National Technical Assistance Center on Transition [NTACT], 2022). These plans include preparation for postsecondary education, employment, and independent living, emphasizing emotional regulation, decision-making, and resilience-building skills that promote long-term independence and adaptability (Wehman et al., 2023). The integration of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) further strengthens this process by ensuring that behavioral and academic interventions are proactive, evidence-based, and aligned with IDEA standards (Freeman et al., 2019; Kelm et al., 2021).

Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) and Behavioral Intervention Plan (BIP)

According to federal legislation, if a student's behavior adversely affects their learning or others' learning, the IEP team must address the behavior through appropriate assessment and intervention (U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], 2024). A Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) is a systematic, required process used to identify the underlying causes and functions of challenging behaviors. The purpose of an FBA is to collect and analyze data

regarding antecedents, behaviors, and consequences to determine the environmental and social factors that maintain the behavior (Scott et al., 2022). Once the function of the behavior is identified, the IEP team develops a BIP to outline targeted strategies for improvement.

The BIP is an individualized, research-based plan that describes proactive interventions, supports, and replacement behaviors designed to reduce or eliminate problem behaviors while promoting positive behavioral outcomes (Walker et al., 2023). Like the IEP, the BIP establishes measurable goals, specifies responsible personnel, and details the frequency and method of monitoring progress (Albrecht et al., 2022). Both the FBA and BIP are legally required components for students with behavioral challenges under the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA; 20 U.S.C. § 1400 et seq.), particularly for those identified as having emotional disturbance (ED). The integration of these tools ensures that behavioral concerns are addressed using evidence-based, data-driven strategies rather than punitive measures, aligning with IDEA's focus on educational access and inclusion (McLeskey et al., 2023).

Recent research supports the effectiveness of FBAs and BIPs in improving behavioral outcomes and increasing instructional engagement among students with ED (Simonsen et al., 2021). The implementation of positive behavioral supports and functional assessment processes has been associated with reductions in office disciplinary referrals, improved classroom participation, and stronger teacher-student relationships (Kelm et al., 2021). Schools that employ a proactive, multi-tiered framework for addressing behavior—such as integrating FBAs and BIPs within Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) or Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)—demonstrate higher fidelity of implementation and improved long-term student outcomes (Freeman et al., 2019; Sugai et al., 2022).

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

A FAPE is a central mandate within the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (*IDEA*; 20 U.S.C. § 1400 et seq.) and was initially established under the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act* of 1975 (Pub. L. No. 94-142), which evolved from the Education of the Handicapped Act of 1974. The concept of FAPE has remained consistent for nearly five decades, ensuring that students with disabilities are entitled to a publicly funded education that meets federal and state standards and is tailored to individual needs through an Individualized Education Program (IEP) (Yell, 2019; U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], 2024). FAPE guarantees students access to appropriate educational opportunities from preschool through secondary school without a financial burden on families, thereby reinforcing equity and inclusion within public education.

Under IDEA, FAPE encompasses not only academic instruction but also the behavioral, functional, and developmental supports required for a student to benefit from education. Behavioral deficits that impede learning or social functioning must therefore be addressed in the IEP, particularly when they interfere with a student's ability to participate successfully in academic or social settings (USDOE, 2024). The IEP team is legally required to consider behavioral interferences and provide positive behavioral interventions, supports, and other strategies that promote success (Cannon et al., 2013; Freeman et al., 2019). These requirements align with the broader intent of FAPE to ensure access to education that is both meaningful and effective, enabling students with disabilities to make progress that is appropriate in light of their individual circumstances (Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District, 2017; Zirkel, 2022).

Recent research emphasizes that FAPE extends beyond procedural compliance to encompass educational benefit and student growth. Studies have shown that consistent

implementation of individualized supports and behavioral interventions within IEPs increases engagement and reduces disparities in disciplinary outcomes among students with emotional and behavioral disorders (Kelm et al., 2021; Scott et al., 2022). The integration of evidence-based behavioral strategies, such as FBAs and BIPs, within the IEP ensures that schools fulfill the FAPE mandate through proactive, data-driven practices that support both academic and behavioral progress (Walker et al., 2023).

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

The least restrictive environment (LRE) requirement, as mandated under the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (*IDEA*; 20 U.S.C. § 1412[a][5]), ensures that students with disabilities are educated with their nondisabled peers to the greatest extent appropriate (U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], 2024). Schools are required to provide access to the general education curriculum and facilitate participation in academic and nonacademic activities alongside peers without disabilities whenever possible. The decision to remove a student from the general education setting must be based on individual needs rather than administrative convenience or categorical placement (Yell, 2019; Zirkel, 2022).

Students with ED are among those most frequently served outside of the general education environment due to behavioral challenges that interfere with learning or safety (Azizoglu, 2018; McLeskey et al., 2023). In such cases, placement decisions must balance ensuring access to the general curriculum with maintaining a safe, structured environment conducive to learning. Temporary separation or specialized instruction may occur as part of a behavior intervention or safety protocol, but these measures are intended to be minimal and subject to review (Freeman et al., 2019). Federal law emphasizes that behavioral supports and interventions must be incorporated into a student's IEP to address such behaviors, thereby

enabling continued participation in the least restrictive setting possible (Yell, 2019; USDOE, 2024).

Recent studies underscore the relationship between inclusive practices, behavioral support, and academic engagement. When behavioral interventions and social-emotional supports are consistently implemented in general education environments, students with ED demonstrate improved self-regulation, reduced disciplinary incidents, and higher rates of academic participation (Kelm et al., 2021; Scott et al., 2022). The application of evidence-based frameworks such as Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) has been shown to increase the success of inclusion for students with ED by addressing behavioral needs before removal becomes necessary (Sugai et al., 2022; Simonsen et al., 2021).

The LRE principle thus reinforces the IDEA's broader goal of ensuring equitable access to meaningful educational opportunities. Placement decisions must always be grounded in data, individualized assessment, and collaborative team input to uphold both the student's rights and the safety of the school community. By emphasizing proactive behavioral support within inclusive settings, the LRE mandate continues to align with the evolving understanding of educational equity and positive outcomes for students with emotional and behavioral disorders.

Transition Plan

The *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (*IDEA*; 20 U.S.C. § 1400 et seq.) specifies that a transition plan be developed and implemented for each student with a disability beginning no later than age 14. This plan identifies in-school and post-school supports, as well as expectations, to promote a coordinated set of activities that prepare the student for further education, employment, and independent living (Yell, 2019; U.S. Department of Education

[USDOE], 2024). A transition plan incorporates formal and informal assessments, measurable postsecondary goals, identified strengths and needs, and related services and supports that together establish a functional strategy for high school and beyond (Yeager et al., 2021).

Transition planning focuses on the student's strengths, preferences, interests, and long-term goals. As with an IEP, the transition plan must be reviewed and revised annually or as needed to reflect progress and changing aspirations. The primary goals of transition planning are to facilitate postsecondary education, promote independent living, and support meaningful employment that enables financial self-sufficiency and social participation (Wehman et al., 2023). Collaboration among school personnel, vocational rehabilitation agencies, parents or guardians, and community organizations ensures that the transition process remains comprehensive and individualized (McConnell et al., 2021).

For students with ED, transition planning emphasizes building on personal strengths while addressing behavioral and emotional challenges that may hinder postsecondary success. These plans often include supports such as counseling, mentoring, social-emotional learning interventions, and community partnerships designed to enhance self-determination and coping skills (Haber et al., 2021). Research suggests that transition planning for students with ED benefits from early initiation, ongoing evaluation, and coordination among educational and community systems to maintain service continuity into adulthood (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2022; Wagner et al., 2020).

Accommodations

Accommodations are individualized supports designed to assist students in overcoming academic, medical, and behavioral barriers within educational settings. These supports are implemented on an individualized basis and tailored to each student's needs to promote equitable

access to learning. Accommodations are defined as modifications to assessments, instruction, or the learning environment that allow students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills without compromising validity or rigor (Kern et al., 2019; U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], 2024). The IEP team determines appropriate accommodations and specifies how they should be administered. Regulations, mandates, student strengths and needs, and disability characteristics are among the primary factors considered when selecting and implementing accommodations (Strunk et al., 2022).

Common accommodations include extended time, organizational and study-skill supports, alternative testing formats, and the use of assistive technologies such as speech-to-text or adaptive keyboards (Blasey et al., 2023). For students with ED, additional accommodations are often required to address self-regulation and attention-related challenges. These may include structured routines, behavioral prompts or cues, reduced distractions, and small-group testing environments (Kern et al., 2019). Although federal regulations mandate that accommodations be provided to ensure equal educational access, research indicates that implementation fidelity varies across districts and schools, particularly for students with ED (Carlson et al., 2020; Freeman et al., 2019). Inconsistent application may result from limited professional development or the absence of disability-specific guidance in federal policy (McLeskey et al., 2023).

Integration within the general education setting, or inclusion, reflects an educational philosophy that promotes the education of all students in shared learning environments regardless of ability, disability, or other diverse characteristics (Slee, 2018). The goal of inclusive education is to create equitable and supportive classrooms where every student can participate meaningfully, develop academically, and engage socially. Inclusive education is grounded in the principle that all students have the right to access quality education within

community schools (USDOE, 2024). Inclusion recognizes learner diversity and emphasizes removing barriers through collaboration, differentiated instruction, and individualized supports (Avramidis et al., 2000; McLeskey et al., 2023).

Recent studies have shown that inclusion benefits both students with and without disabilities by improving social competence, empathy, and academic engagement (Scott et al., 2022; Simonsen et al., 2021). For students with ED, inclusive environments can support positive behavioral modeling and social learning when combined with evidence-based frameworks such as PBIS and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) (Kelm et al., 2021; Sugai et al., 2022). These approaches align with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandate to educate students in the least restrictive environment and reflect a broader shift toward systems-level collaboration that ensures both access and meaningful participation for all learners.

Emotional Disturbance (ED)

According to the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE, 2024), during the 2021–22 school year, approximately 5.7% of students ages 6 through 21 served under the IDEA were identified with ED. State-level prevalence continues to vary, ranging from about 1.5% to more than 17% of all students with disabilities (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2024). These percentages have remained relatively stable over the past decade, despite fluctuations in diagnostic practices and service delivery models (Gilmour, 2023).

The IDEA defines emotional disturbance as exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree, which adversely affects a student's educational performance: (a) an inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors; (b) an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers or teachers; (c) inappropriate behaviors or feelings under

normal circumstances; (d) a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; or (e) a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems (USDOE, 2024). These behavioral and emotional characteristics persist even when supports and accommodations are in place (de Carvalho & Skipper, 2020).

The concept of ED is an educational classification used within special education to identify students whose emotional and behavioral conditions significantly interfere with learning, social functioning, and adaptive skills. Common manifestations include anxiety, depression, oppositional or conduct behaviors, and social withdrawal. Such challenges frequently impact peer relationships, classroom engagement, and overall academic achievement (Cullinan et al., 2023; Bruhn et al., 2022).

Recent national data show that nearly half of all students with ED (48%) receive instruction in general education settings for at least 80% of the school day, reflecting efforts to implement LRE mandates and inclusive practices (NCES, 2024). However, these students continue to demonstrate higher rates of academic failure, disciplinary exclusion, and dropout compared to peers with other disabilities (Gilmour & Wehby, 2020; Valenti et al., 2019).

The educational and behavioral needs of students with ED are extensive, reflecting deficits in self-regulation, social problem-solving, and resilience (Leggio & Terras, 2019; Watts et al., 2019). Students with ED often require more intensive supports and place greater instructional and behavioral demands on educators (Carlson et al., 2020). Within the broader youth service system, education remains the only legally mandated entity required to provide ongoing interventions and supports for this population (Valenti et al., 2019; Freeman et al., 2019).

Adolescents identified with ED may experience physical, cognitive, and social impacts that collectively influence school functioning. Core characteristics can include hyperactivity, aggression, withdrawal, immaturity, and learning difficulties, which often present as impulsivity, inattention, anxiety, or poor coping skills. These behaviors typically persist over time and occur with significant intensity (Wykes et al., 2022). Students with ED frequently experience co-occurring mental health challenges, social isolation, and limited community participation, underscoring the importance of comprehensive educational and behavioral supports that extend beyond the classroom (Bruhn et al., 2022; McLeod et al., 2023).

Students with Emotional Disturbance in the General Education Classroom

The inclusion of students with ED in general education classrooms has expanded steadily since the implementation of the IDEA. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2024), approximately 67% of students ages 6 through 21 served under IDEA spent 80% or more of the school day in general education classrooms during the 2021–22 school year. Although NCES does not annually disaggregate these figures by disability category, previous analyses suggest that nearly half of students identified with ED spend most of the day in general education settings (NCES, 2022).

National survey data continue to indicate rising behavioral and mental-health challenges in schools. During the 2022–23 academic year, 87% of public schools reported an increase in classroom behavioral incidents, 56% of teachers observed more frequent student disruptions, and 70% identified a need for enhanced behavioral-support training and mental-health resources (NCES, 2023; Institute of Education Sciences [IES], 2024). Similar concerns were reflected in a multi-district study conducted by the Educational Advisory Board (EAB, 2019), which found that teachers across 41 districts reported losing approximately 144 minutes of instructional time

each week due to student disruptions. General education teachers estimated that 23% of their students exhibited significant behavioral challenges, while special education teachers reported 26%.

Recent research corroborates these findings. Zahid et al. (2023) found that approximately 6 percent of surveyed students were identified with ED, and nearly two-thirds of students receiving special-education services were responsible for substantial disruptions in inclusive environments (Office of Special Education Programs [OSEP], 2024). Students with ED often present complex behavioral profiles that include aggression, defiance, withdrawal, and mood instability, all of which interfere with instruction and social development. Managing such behaviors while maintaining a productive classroom climate requires targeted preparation in evidence-based behavior management, trauma-informed practice, and social-emotional learning (Hemmeter et al., 2022; Menzies & Lane, 2022).

Since the 1990s, inclusive placements for students with ED have increased by more than 100%, largely in response to IDEA's LRE provisions (McKenna et al., 2021; U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], 2024). Despite this progress, many teachers report feeling underprepared to address the behavioral and emotional complexities associated with ED in general education settings (Bonfiglio et al., 2023). Middle-school students with ED demonstrate exceptionally high rates of disruptive behavior due to developmental transitions, increased academic pressure, and peer influence (Simonsen et al., 2022).

The concepts of IEPs and BIPs remain central tools for supporting students with ED, yet they are often implemented inconsistently. Barriers include limited teacher training, insufficient individualization, generic behavioral goals, inadequate collaboration among IEP team members, and weak progress monitoring (Freeman et al., 2019; Pullen et al., 2023; Zirkel, 2017;). Studies

emphasize that collaborative planning among educators, counselors, and families improves the fidelity of behavioral supports and increases successful inclusion outcomes (Mendoza et al., 2022; Vincent et al., 2023).

Resilience remains an essential construct in the education of students with ED. Students who demonstrate higher resilience exhibit greater engagement, stronger coping strategies, and fewer behavioral disruptions (Wang et al., 2022; Bruhn et al., 2022). Emerging evidence also links teacher resilience and self-efficacy with improved academic and behavioral outcomes for students with ED (Hoglund et al., 2023; Owens et al., 2024). The implementation of resilience-oriented frameworks that integrate trauma-informed instruction, social-emotional learning, and restorative approaches has been shown to strengthen classroom climate, reduce disciplinary incidents, and promote long-term student success with ED (Kim et al., 2023).

Middle School General Education Teachers and Inclusive Strategies

Middle school general education teachers often confront complex challenges when integrating students with ED into inclusive classrooms. These challenges stem from the developmental volatility of adolescence, the increased academic and social demands of middle school, and limited professional preparation in evidence-based behavior management (Lane et al., 2023). Teachers frequently report insufficient resources and training to meet the behavioral and social–emotional needs of students with ED, which can hinder both classroom management and instructional efficacy (Freeman & Sugai, 2021; Menzies & Lane, 2022).

Research examining inclusive practices in middle school environments demonstrates that teacher self-efficacy, ongoing professional learning, and structured collaboration are central to supporting students with ED (Gage et al., 2022). In a multi-site quasi-experimental study, Gage and colleagues found that middle school teachers who participated in targeted professional

development on proactive classroom management and tiered behavior supports demonstrated significant reductions in office discipline referrals and improved perceptions of inclusion readiness. The findings underscored that practical behavioral support training enhances both teacher confidence and student outcomes.

Similarly, Simonsen et al. (2022) analyzed the implementation of school-wide positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS) across several middle schools. They found that consistent, data-driven interventions were associated with reduced behavioral disruptions and greater academic engagement among students with emotional and behavioral disorders. These outcomes emphasize that middle school teachers benefit from embedded coaching and team-based consultation when implementing inclusive strategies to support emotional regulation, resilience, and peer interaction.

Collaboration among general educators, special educators, school counselors, and behavioral specialists remains a critical component of inclusive success. Studies show that middle school teachers who engage in cross-disciplinary planning demonstrate more effective classroom management, improved differentiation practices, and greater alignment between academic and behavioral interventions (Beahm et al., 2021; Bonfiglio et al., 2023). Teacher collaboration not only supports consistency of expectations but also promotes a unified framework for reinforcing positive behaviors across instructional contexts (Gage et al., 2022).

Recent evidence underscores that teachers' beliefs and resilience are closely tied to their ability to sustain inclusive practices (Owens et al., 2024). Middle school teachers with higher self-efficacy and emotional resilience demonstrate lower burnout rates and greater persistence when implementing behavioral interventions for students with ED. Professional development initiatives that incorporate resilience training, data-based decision-making, and trauma-informed

approaches have shown measurable improvements in student engagement and teacher-student relationships (Hoglund et al., 2023; Kim et al., 2023).

Collectively, the literature affirms that middle school educators require ongoing support, targeted professional learning, and structured collaboration to include students with ED in general education classrooms effectively. When teachers are equipped with adaptive behavioral management skills and resilience-building strategies, inclusive environments are more likely to foster academic growth and positive behavioral outcomes (Lane et al., 2023; Freeman & Sugai, 2021).

Building Student Resilience in Middle School

Resilience, defined as the capacity to adapt positively in the face of adversity, has become a focal point of educational research due to its strong association with academic success, social adjustment, and long-term emotional health. For middle school students, particularly those with emotional or behavioral disorders, resilience serves as both a protective factor and a mechanism for improving behavioral outcomes and classroom engagement (Cai et al., 2025; Xia et al., 2024). As adolescence represents a developmental period marked by rapid social, emotional, and cognitive changes, cultivating resilience during middle school is essential for fostering coping strategies and self-regulation (Frontiers in Psychology, 2023).

A growing body of evidence indicates that resilience can be explicitly taught and reinforced through intentional instructional practices. Cai et al. (2025), in a meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials involving school-based resilience interventions, concluded that structured resilience programs significantly enhance emotional regulation, motivation, and academic performance. Similarly, a 2024 longitudinal study by Xia et al. demonstrated that resilience mediates the relationship between physical activity and emotional security among

junior high students, underscoring the role of daily routines, social relationships, and self-efficacy in maintaining adaptive functioning. These findings support the theoretical position that resilience is a dynamic construct, capable of development through environmental, relational, and instructional influences.

Qualitative findings further highlight the importance of teacher awareness in developing student resilience. Ramos (2020) found that teachers who demonstrated personal resilience and adaptability were more effective in fostering resilience among their students. Teachers who maintained consistency, emotional balance, and positive communication reported improved student engagement and reduced classroom disruptions. Likewise, Khuluqo et al. (2021) emphasized the role of teacher modeling, cooperative problem-solving, and reflective practices in helping students develop perseverance and self-regulation in post-crisis environments such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Yang and Zhang (2023) extended this evidence by analyzing data from over 1,600 K–12 educators, concluding that teachers' collective efficacy and leadership practices were predictive of school climate and student motivation. When teachers implemented proactive behavior management strategies, provided clear expectations, and engaged in supportive communication, students exhibited higher levels of engagement and lower instances of disruptive behavior. This finding aligns with resilience theory's focus on the interaction between environmental supports and individual adaptability. Moreover, Zhang et al. (2024) found that resilience-focused classroom climates, characterized by predictability and emotional safety, significantly improved middle school students' social problem-solving skills and coping responses.

Behavioral interventions remain critical for supporting students with ED in general education classrooms. Gersib and Mason (2023) conducted a meta-analysis of interventions

targeting students with emotional and behavioral disorders, finding that individualized approaches—such as behavior contracts—significantly improved on-task behavior and reduced externalizing actions. Sari, et al. (2022) similarly reported that behavioral contracting techniques were effective in lowering classroom disruptions and improving student accountability, particularly when paired with SEL frameworks. In middle school settings, behavior contracts are most effective when they emphasize collaboration, student choice, and ongoing feedback, reinforcing core tenets of resilience such as autonomy and problem-solving (Smith & Garcia, 2023).

Professional development also plays a key role in sustaining resilience-based practices. A 2023 report by the National Center for Learning Disabilities emphasized that continuous, collaborative teacher training enhances educators' ability to use data to identify behavioral patterns, implement targeted supports, and design inclusive classroom strategies. De-escalation and restorative practices training, now widely adopted in middle schools, has demonstrated measurable reductions in aggressive incidents and disciplinary removals (Price et al., 2023). Zoromski et al. (2020) noted that integrating social-skills instruction within academic lessons helps students build emotional regulation and interpersonal competence—both essential components of resilience. These interventions are strengthened through family engagement, which ensures consistent behavioral expectations and reinforces coping skills across home and school environments (Tutt & Williams, 2021).

Resilience-building frameworks increasingly intersect with multi-tiered systems of support such as PBIS and SEL. Lloyd et al. (2023) found that middle school students perceived PBIS initiatives as effective in improving school climate and reducing problem behaviors, particularly when expectations were clearly communicated and consistently enforced. Tyre et al.

(2023) further emphasized that SEL programs supporting self-awareness, empathy, and emotional management are foundational to developing student resilience and reducing behavioral challenges. Complementary research by Delvecchio et al. (2022) suggests that resilience-focused SEL interventions yield significant improvements in peer relationships and decreases in emotional distress among middle school students.

Recent studies also underscore the influence of resilience education on long-term academic outcomes. A longitudinal analysis by Ward and Carter (2024) revealed that middle school students who received resilience-based instruction demonstrated higher rates of high school completion and lower disciplinary referrals than their peers without such instruction. These findings affirm that resilience is not merely a personality trait but a teachable construct that supports both academic and social development across adolescence.

Despite continued challenges related to limited resources, teacher burnout, and systemic inequities, resilience-based approaches offer a viable path toward improving inclusion and behavioral outcomes for students with ED. When teachers implement evidence-based strategies such as behavior contracts, SEL integration, positive feedback, and structured classroom environments, they contribute to a culture of safety, engagement, and adaptability. By embedding resilience practices into daily instruction, middle school educators help all students, including those with emotional or behavioral challenges, thrive both academically and socially.

Building Resilience Skills in Teachers

Resilience is cultivated through sustained supportive relationships, psychological safety, and organizational environments that nurture belonging and self-efficacy. In educational contexts, teachers play an essential role in shaping resilience through daily interactions and structured programs designed to strengthen adaptability and emotional regulation (Hwang et al.,

2022; Renshaw & Hebert, 2024). Recent models describe teacher resilience as a multidimensional construct encompassing personal traits, professional agency, and contextual supports that help educators adapt to occupational stressors and sustain engagement (Zhang & Yang, 2024; Gu & Day, 2023).

Teacher resilience is also a learned and developable skill, influenced by preservice education, professional learning, and institutional culture (Castillo et al., 2024; Marin et al., 2024). Educators who are explicitly trained in SEL and resilience frameworks report higher levels of self-efficacy and greater capacity to respond to classroom challenges (Kim et al., 2022; OECD, 2023). Research on the integration of SEL into teacher education has demonstrated positive associations with adaptive coping strategies, reduced burnout, and more consistent classroom management practices (Gao et al., 2025). When teachers understand and apply resilience principles, they create classroom climates that promote belonging, emotional safety, and academic persistence among students (Schwartz, 2023).

Teacher well-being and resilience are now recognized as interdependent processes central to effective instruction and retention (Allen et al., 2022; Shin & Wang, 2023). Empirical findings from *Educational Psychology Review* (2025) show that collaborative peer networks, manageable workloads, and supportive leadership are the strongest predictors of sustained resilience among educators. Similar results were found in a multi-country survey by UNESCO (2023), which reported that teachers who experience autonomy and collegial trust demonstrate 35% lower burnout rates and 40% higher instructional satisfaction. Peer reflection and shared problem-solving have also been shown to buffer against emotional exhaustion and improve job satisfaction (Renshaw & Hebert, 2024; Garner et al., 2024).

Mindfulness-based interventions and resilience-focused training programs continue to demonstrate effectiveness in strengthening teacher well-being. Studies examining programs such as CARE (Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education), SMART for Teachers, and MindUP have shown reductions in stress and improvements in emotion regulation, empathy, and classroom interactions (Hwang et al., 2022; Lomas et al., 2023). A meta-analysis by Torres et al. (2023) found that teachers participating in mindfulness or self-regulation interventions experienced a 22% increase in positive effect and a 17% reduction in stress-related absenteeism. These programs foster internal awareness and reflective practice, allowing teachers to maintain composure during behavioral or academic challenges (Gu & Day, 2023).

Teachers who intentionally engage in self-care and mindfulness practices are more likely to identify and nurture resilience in their students. Current research links teacher resilience to improvements in classroom relationships and student engagement (Torres et al., 2023; Gao et al., 2025). Emotionally balanced educators create conditions that encourage cooperation, persistence, and intrinsic motivation (Kim et al., 2022; Castillo et al., 2024). Middle school studies demonstrate that resilience-focused instruction correlates with fewer behavioral referrals and higher academic performance, suggesting that teacher well-being directly impacts student outcomes (Stories of Resilience: Middle Level Educators and Trauma, 2024).

Professional development and mentoring also remain essential in cultivating and sustaining teacher resilience. Recent longitudinal studies highlight the benefits of structured collaboration, mentoring programs, and professional learning communities in promoting long-term adaptability (Garner et al., 2024; Mansfield et al., 2023). Teachers engaged in ongoing reflective dialogue and goal-setting reported higher resilience, reduced emotional fatigue, and greater classroom satisfaction (OECD, 2025). These findings reinforce earlier evidence that

resilience can be developed through intentional practice and professional culture rather than being an innate characteristic (Marin et al., 2024).

Ultimately, fostering teachers' resilience contributes to the stability and sustainability of entire educational systems. Resilient educators maintain instructional quality despite adversity, model perseverance and self-regulation, and foster classroom environments that reflect empathy and hope (Gu & Day, 2023; Zhang & Yang, 2024). As Ramos (2020) observed, even educators without formal resilience training can acquire and internalize these competencies through reflection, coaching, and support networks. In doing so, schools evolve into resilient systems; environments that empower both teachers and students to adapt, recover, and thrive academically, socially, and emotionally (OECD, 2025).

Teachers' Perceptions of Resilience

Teachers who possess a deep understanding of resilience are better equipped to help students develop adaptive coping mechanisms, self-regulation, and problem-solving skills (Renshaw & Hebert, 2024). Teacher perceptions of resilience encompass recognizing nonacademic characteristics such as perseverance, adaptability, emotional control, and social competence (Edwards & Konold, 2020). When educators acknowledge and reinforce these attributes, they promote students' self-efficacy and self-esteem, fostering both academic and behavioral growth (Wang et al., 2024).

Teacher characteristics that influence resilience development include maintaining a favorable classroom climate, building strong teacher–student relationships, and demonstrating cultural awareness and empathy (Kim et al., 2022; Gao et al., 2025). Teachers who conceptualize resilience as a skill that can be intentionally cultivated are more likely to integrate practices such as explicit coping-strategy instruction, opportunities for reflection, and encouragement of a

growth mindset (Castillo et al., 2024). These perceptions are essential for shaping students' persistence, adaptability, and stress management in academic settings (Schwartz, 2023).

Drew and Sosnowski (2019) established a foundational model identifying three guiding principles of teacher resilience: the importance of community connectedness, the ability to transform uncertainty into opportunity, and the role of relationships as protective factors. This framework remains relevant; however, recent studies have expanded upon it. Zhang and Yang (2023) proposed a multidimensional model integrating personal, professional, and contextual components that interact dynamically to influence teacher resilience. Likewise, Squires, Clarke, and Walker (2024) introduced the teacher resilience model (TRM), emphasizing how educators balance adversity with access to supportive resources. These updated frameworks underscore that resilient teachers directly contribute to classroom stability, effective behavior management, and the development of student resilience.

Many teachers remain unaware of how their own resilience mechanisms function, particularly under stress or policy constraints (Yang & Zhang, 2023). This gap in awareness underscores the ongoing need for professional learning focused on reflective practice, emotional regulation, and resilience theory (Garner et al., 2024). In a mixed-methods study, Raghunathan et al. (2022) found that 86% of teachers identified family support and 68% identified student support as critical contributors to classroom resilience. The study categorized resilience into three domains: internal (self-efficacy, motivation), interpersonal (relationships, collaboration), and external (institutional leadership, community). These findings emphasize the systemic nature of resilience and the need for school-wide efforts to sustain it.

In addition to conceptual models of resilience, the use of standardized measurement tools has allowed researchers to assess teachers' resilience levels quantitatively. Instruments such as

the UWRS and the Connor–Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) have been employed to evaluate educators' adaptive capacity, emotional regulation, and coping efficacy within school contexts (Connor & Davidson, 2003; Shin et al., 2023). These tools help identify relationships between self-efficacy, support systems, and stress tolerance among teachers. Integrating such scales into professional development provides a data-driven means to gauge resilience over time and to evaluate the impact of resilience-building interventions. Utilizing a resilience scale such as the UWRS can therefore serve as a valuable addendum to teacher training initiatives, offering measurable outcomes aligned with theoretical frameworks (Yang & Zhang, 2023; Squires et al., 2024).

Emerging research continues to confirm that professional development, mentoring, and peer collaboration strengthen teachers' perceptions and practice of resilience (OECD, 2025; Gu & Day, 2023). Kim et al. (2022) found that educators who participated in structured resilience training demonstrated improved emotional balance, more consistent instruction, and greater student engagement. As the understanding of resilience evolves, the literature increasingly supports intentional teacher training that integrates self-care, emotional literacy, and adaptive pedagogy to foster resilience across school systems (Squires et al., 2024; Zhang & Yang, 2023).

Building Resilience Among Students with Emotional Disturbance (ED)

Resilience, though not a familiar term among adolescents, can be observed through measurable behaviors such as academic persistence, emotional regulation, and adaptive problem-solving. Among students with ED, resilience is often reflected in improvements in self-confidence, self-efficacy, and reductions in impulsive or reactive behaviors. These qualities fall under broader social–emotional domains, including self-awareness, self-management, decision-making, and growth mindset (Dos Santos, 2022). Identifying and developing these attributes

requires structured opportunities for self-reflection—through journaling, class discussion, and feedback loops that connect experiences with outcomes (Toros, 2021).

Mertens et al. (2018) conducted an experimental field study with seventh-grade students exhibiting significant behavioral challenges to examine the impact of the *Rock & Water* intervention. This program integrates psychological and physical components to enhance emotional awareness and behavioral control. Participants demonstrated significant gains in self-regulation and social problem-solving after engaging in activities designed to promote self-reflection and adaptive responses to stress. The study provided early evidence that physical-activity-based interventions can build resilience in middle school students with ED by combining movement, reflection, and emotional modeling.

Building upon this foundation, more recent studies have reinforced and expanded the evidence supporting structured resilience interventions. Hester et al. (2021) found that incorporating self-reflection and goal-setting into daily SEL routines improved emotional regulation and classroom engagement among middle school students with behavioral disorders. Similarly, Bowers and Lozano (2023) demonstrated that resilience-based interventions emphasizing mindfulness, self-assessment, and peer feedback led to measurable reductions in disruptive behavior and increased persistence in academic tasks. These findings confirm that resilience is a skill that can be intentionally taught and strengthened through consistent modeling, reflection, and feedback.

Programs such as *Rock & Water* have since been adapted to include virtual and hybrid components to extend accessibility to diverse populations. A longitudinal mixed-methods study by Keane et al. (2023) found that middle school participants in a hybrid *Rock & Water* program showed sustained improvements in coping skills, emotional vocabulary, and peer collaboration

over two academic years. The authors noted that students identified with ED showed the most significant gains when resilience instruction was combined with explicit coaching from teachers trained in trauma-informed practices. This aligns with findings from Durlak and Mahoney (2022), who reported that resilience-based SEL programs significantly improved both emotional stability and academic outcomes for students in alternative or inclusion settings.

When implemented according to its original design, PBIS further reinforces the development of resilience among students with ED. Rather than operating as a token-based reward system, PBIS is most effective when used as a proactive instructional framework that teaches behavioral expectations, provides guided practice, and delivers consistent feedback (Sugai et al., 2022). Recent evidence indicates that schoolwide PBIS implementation is associated with higher perceived safety, stronger teacher–student relationships, and reduced emotional dysregulation among students (Lloyd et al., 2023; Tyre et al., 2023). When applied with fidelity, PBIS supports resilience by fostering predictable environments where students learn self-regulation and adaptive coping skills critical for long-term behavioral and emotional success (Gao et al., 2025).

In combination, these findings suggest that resilience-building among students with ED requires a multifaceted approach that integrates reflective practice, SEL, structured interventions, and consistent modeling by educators. Schools that embed resilience development into both behavioral and academic frameworks demonstrate improved engagement, stronger student–teacher relationships, and measurable reductions in reactive behavior (Chen & Adams, 2022). Through these evidence-based approaches, resilience becomes not just a concept, but a functional skill set that empowers students to navigate adversity both inside and beyond the classroom.

Teacher Roles in Building Resilience

Teacher perceptions of student resilience are a critical component in fostering student success and engagement, particularly for middle school students with emotional and behavioral challenges. Research continues to demonstrate a direct relationship between perceived teacher support and the development of student resilience. Levkovich et al. (2023) conducted a quantitative study involving 1,242 adolescents in grades 6-9. They found that teacher support was among the most significant predictors of student resilience, surpassing even parental and peer influences. The findings indicated that students who perceived high emotional availability and teacher encouragement reported greater persistence, optimism, and academic motivation. Similarly, Romano et al. (2021) reported a statistically significant correlation ($p < .01$) between teacher emotional support, resilience, and school engagement, reinforcing the essential role of teacher-student interactions in building adaptive coping skills and academic endurance.

Teachers who maintain consistent communication, demonstrate empathy, and provide individualized support help students recognize their own strengths and develop problem-solving skills. Johansson et al. (2023) conducted a mixed-methods study examining teacher perceptions of resilience across three middle schools. They found that teachers who engaged in reflective practices—such as journaling and peer discussions—developed stronger insight into their students' emotional needs and exhibited higher self-efficacy in addressing behavioral concerns. These teachers also reported improved classroom climates and reduced incidences of disciplinary referrals.

Despite the importance of resilience-building, many educators lack structured professional learning opportunities focused on this area. Schussler et al. (2019) found that preservice teachers often received minimal instruction on resilience theory or coping

interventions, resulting in limited understanding of how to apply resilience-building strategies in real classrooms. More recent work by Nicholson et al. (2023) confirmed this gap through a survey of 350 K–12 teachers, noting that educators who participated in resilience-based professional development were significantly more likely to report lower burnout, improved classroom relationships, and stronger belief in their ability to promote student resilience.

The transition from elementary to middle school represents a developmental inflection point that magnifies the need for resilience. During early adolescence, students experience rapid cognitive and social-emotional changes, increased academic expectations, and peer influences that can affect motivation and self-regulation. A 2022 study by the Association for Middle Level Education emphasized that supportive teacher relationships during this period are essential for helping students navigate these transitions successfully. Similarly, the American Psychological Association (2021) highlighted resilience-building instruction as a protective factor that mitigates the impact of stress and academic pressure during early adolescence.

Recent studies have reframed resilience-building as a shared institutional responsibility rather than an individual trait (Neumann & Tillott, 2022; Msila, 2021). Poulou and Norwich (2022) analyzed resilience interventions across 20 schools. They found that whole-school approaches—combining classroom-level social-emotional learning, teacher modeling, and administrative support—were more effective than isolated teacher efforts. Enhancing a student's self-esteem, sense of belonging, and emotional safety lays the foundation for greater motivation, engagement, and persistence.

Teachers' understanding of resilience significantly influences their instructional decisions and behavior management strategies. Boon (2021) found that teachers with high resilience awareness implemented more restorative and student-centered classroom practices. LaDuca

(2022) extended these findings through a multi-site case study that revealed how teacher self-efficacy and resilience awareness directly correlated with students' academic resilience and reduced behavioral incidents. Moreover, Romano et al. (2021) observed that when teachers explicitly modeled problem-solving and coping behaviors, students were more likely to replicate those strategies and exhibit higher emotional regulation.

Even teachers who initially lack familiarity with resilience theory can strengthen these competencies through structured reflection and evidence-based training. Irizarry Ramos (2020) found that teachers who completed resilience-focused professional learning reported significant improvements in classroom climate and student engagement. More recently, Stamatis et al. (2024) emphasized the use of the UWRS as an evidence-based tool for assessing both teacher and student resilience. The UWRS enables educators to identify personal and collective resilience factors, track growth over time, and align interventions with student needs. When used as part of a professional development framework, such scales help teachers adopt reflective, data-driven approaches to fostering resilience in middle school settings.

In sum, teachers serve as the primary conduit for cultivating resilience within schools. Their perceptions, behaviors, and relationships directly influence students' emotional growth and academic outcomes. Research over the past five years underscores the importance of equipping teachers with training, reflection tools, and institutional support that prioritize resilience as both a personal competency and an instructional practice. By doing so, schools can create sustainable cultures that nurture both teacher and student resilience across the middle school years.

Summary

This chapter reviewed the theoretical and empirical literature on inclusive education, ED, and resilience development among middle school students. The review began with an overview

of federal legislation that has shaped special education practices, including the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 and its reauthorization as the IDEA (IDEA, 2004). These mandates established students' rights to a FAPE within the LRE, requiring schools to ensure individualized educational planning and equitable access for students with disabilities. The chapter also explored the components of IEPs, BIPs, and transition services, emphasizing the collaborative responsibilities of teachers, parents, and administrators in promoting successful outcomes for students with emotional and behavioral challenges.

Despite decades of legislative progress, inequities persist for students with ED. Research consistently indicates that these students are more likely to experience lower academic achievement, chronic absenteeism, and disciplinary exclusion compared to peers without disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2024; National Center for Education Statistics, 2024). The literature revealed that general education teachers often feel underprepared to manage behavioral complexities, implement evidence-based strategies, or balance academic and emotional needs in inclusive classrooms (Chafouleas et al., 2023; Gage et al., 2022). These challenges are particularly pronounced in middle school, a developmental stage characterized by rapid social, emotional, and cognitive changes. During this period, students experience increased academic pressures and heightened sensitivity to peer relationships, often resulting in behavioral volatility and decreased motivation (American Psychological Association, 2021).

Resilience theory provided a conceptual framework for understanding how students and educators adapt to adversity within educational settings. Originating with Garmezy (1971, 1985), Werner and Smith (1989), and Rutter (1999), and expanded by Masten (2001, 2014, 2021), resilience theory emphasizes that positive adaptation emerges through the interaction of internal strengths and external supports. Contemporary scholarship has reconceptualized resilience as a

process rather than a fixed trait—one that can be intentionally cultivated through consistent support, structured environments, and relational trust (Masten & Motti-Stefanidi, 2020; Ungar, 2020; Borazon & Chuang, 2023). Within this framework, schools serve as protective systems where educators can directly influence students' ability to recover from setbacks, regulate emotions, and sustain engagement.

A key finding across recent studies is the vital role of teachers in fostering resilience. Teachers act as mediators between external expectations and students' internal coping capacities. When educators use SEL, trauma-informed practices, and restorative approaches, students demonstrate improved self-regulation, persistence, and classroom participation (Hynes et al., 2022; Luo et al., 2025; Johansson et al., 2023). In addition, research by Nicholson et al. (2023) and Levkovich et al. (2023) found that teacher empathy, consistent expectations, and emotional availability are strong predictors of student engagement and the development of resilience. These findings converge to highlight that resilience-building is not an isolated intervention, but a relational and instructional process woven into daily classroom interactions.

However, the literature also reveals divergent views on the consistency of resilience implementation and teacher preparedness. Studies report that while many educators value the concept of resilience, they often lack the theoretical understanding or practical training to operationalize it in inclusive classrooms (Schussler et al., 2019; Boon, 2021; Chafouleas et al., 2023). Professional development opportunities are often limited to behavior management rather than resilience education, leaving teachers unsure of how to apply resilience frameworks effectively (LaDuca, 2022). Furthermore, assessment of resilience within educational contexts has historically been inconsistent. Emerging tools such as the University of Washington Resilience Scale (UWRS) and similar dynamic measures provide educators with structured

means of gauging both student and teacher resilience, encouraging data-informed decision-making and reflective practice (Stamatis et al., 2024; Cai et al., 2025).

The review also examined the intersection of inclusive education, resilience, and emotional disturbance. Evidence supports that fostering resilience among students with ED is associated with higher academic achievement, stronger interpersonal skills, and reduced behavioral referrals (Gage et al., 2022; Luo et al., 2025). However, effective implementation depends heavily on teacher perceptions and school climate. Teachers who perceive resilience as a teachable, malleable skill are more likely to incorporate SEL frameworks, positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS), and proactive engagement strategies that align with resilience theory. In contrast, environments that treat resilience as an innate characteristic or rely solely on extrinsic reward systems demonstrate limited long-term gains (Lloyd et al., 2023; Taylor et al., 2023).

Areas of convergence in the literature affirm that inclusive practices grounded in resilience theory yield significant benefits for both students and teachers. Consistent structure, authentic relationships, and collaborative problem-solving emerge as common protective factors across multiple studies. Conversely, divergence appears in the degree to which these practices are embedded within middle school general education classrooms. The research further identifies a notable gap: limited exploration of how general education teachers perceive resilience when working with students with ED, and how those perceptions influence their instructional decisions and classroom management strategies.

This gap underscores the need for continued investigation into teacher perceptions, preparation, and application of resilience-building approaches in inclusive middle school settings. The present study aims to address this gap by exploring how middle school general

education teachers define, understand, and implement resilience-building strategies to support students with emotional disturbances. Insights gained from this research can inform professional development, enhance inclusive instructional practices, and contribute to the broader understanding of resilience as a critical factor in student success. Chapter 3 will present the research methodology and design used to investigate teacher perceptions of resilience, including the research questions, participant selection, data collection, and analytical procedures that guide this qualitative inquiry.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The problem addressed in this study was that middle school general education teachers who implemented inclusive strategies exhibited limited understanding and skills for fostering resilience in students with emotional disturbance (ED), resulting in increased classroom disruptions (Brown & Dixon, 2020; Houchins et al., 2020; Zolkoski et al., 2020). This gap in teacher knowledge and practice created a need to examine how resilience supports were being understood and applied in the inclusive classroom. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore middle school teachers' knowledge and skills for building resilience among students with ED in inclusive classroom settings.

This chapter provides an overview of the research methodology and design used to conduct the study. It includes a description of the research questions, participant selection, data collection procedures, instruments, data analysis methods, and ethical considerations. The qualitative case study design enabled an in-depth exploration of teachers' perceptions and classroom practices related to resilience-building within inclusive middle school settings in Mississippi. Thematic analysis was used to identify and interpret patterns across multiple data sources, providing a comprehensive understanding of how general education teachers perceived and supported students' resilience with ED.

The following questions guided the research:

RQ1. How do middle school general education teachers in southern Mississippi perceive resilience among students with ED in the inclusive setting?

RQ2. How do middle school general education teachers in southern Mississippi describe the instructional methods they use to build resilience among students with ED in inclusive settings?

RQ3. How do middle school general education teachers in southern Mississippi describe the best practices they have experienced for building resilience among students with ED in inclusive settings?

Research Methodology and Design

This study used a qualitative case study methodology to explore how middle school general education teachers perceived and implemented strategies to build students' resilience in inclusive classrooms. A qualitative approach was selected because resilience is an abstract, multidimensional construct best understood through personal experiences and contextual meaning. Qualitative research enables researchers to examine complex social processes and interpretive perspectives that cannot be fully captured through quantitative measurement (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018, 2023).

Resilience, as explored in this study, is a dynamic process involving emotional regulation, problem-solving, and adaptation within challenging classroom environments. Previous research has shown that resilience is context-dependent and influenced by both internal and external protective factors (Herrman et al., 2022; Southwick et al., 2014). A qualitative methodology enabled the researcher to capture the depth of teacher perceptions and classroom practices that fostered resilience among students with ED, an insight that numerical data alone could not provide.

A case study design was chosen to examine the real-life, context-bound experiences of teachers within inclusive middle school settings in southern Mississippi. Case study research allows for an in-depth exploration of a bounded system, focusing on a specific group or setting to develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Bengtsson,

2023; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Stake, 1995). This design aligned with the study's purpose and research questions, which sought to explore how teachers perceived resilience, the instructional methods they used, and the best practices they identified to support students with ED. Yin (2018, 2023) emphasized that case study research is appropriate when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly defined, making it suitable for investigating teacher behaviors in authentic educational environments.

Alternative research designs were considered but found less appropriate. A quantitative design would have limited the study to statistical associations and failed to capture the nuanced, experiential nature of teacher perceptions (Creswell, 2021). Phenomenology was also reviewed as a potential approach; however, its emphasis on describing the essence of a universal experience did not align with this study's focus on applied strategies and contextual practices. Instead, the case study approach enabled the collection of multiple data sources: semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and the UWRS to provide a holistic and practical understanding of how resilience was supported in inclusive classrooms (Tellis, 1997).

Data from interviews served as the primary source, while observations and resilience scale results were used only for triangulation to enhance trustworthiness and confirmability (Fetters et al., 2013; Thurmond, 2001). The use of multiple data sources provided richer insight into teacher practices while ensuring credibility through the convergence of findings. This approach aligned directly with the problem, purpose, and research questions by providing an in-depth examination of how middle school general education teachers perceived, supported, and implemented resilience-building practices for students with ED in inclusive classrooms.

Population and Sample

The population for this study included middle school general education teachers working in inclusive classroom settings within a public school district located in southern Mississippi. According to the most recent publicly available reports, the district served approximately 10,500 students across five community zones encompassing rural and suburban areas (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2024). The district maintained a student–teacher ratio of approximately 12:1, with nearly 14% of students receiving special education services. Demographic data indicated that the student population was approximately 59% White, 29% African American, 6% Multiracial, 4% Hispanic, and 2% Asian (Niche, 2024). The district's diverse student body and commitment to inclusive education made it an appropriate setting for examining teachers' perceptions of resilience-building practices in classrooms that included students with emotional and behavioral challenges.

This population was appropriate for the study because the research focused on teachers who instructed students identified with ED in inclusive classrooms. Middle school general education teachers play a critical role in supporting academic, social, and emotional growth by fostering environments that promote resilience and adaptive skills. Their perspectives provided meaningful insight into how inclusive practices are implemented and how teacher knowledge and experience influence student outcomes.

A purposive sampling approach was used to select participants who met the inclusion criteria: (a) currently employed as general education middle school teachers, (b) teaching in an inclusive setting with students identified with ED, and (c) possessing at least three years of teaching experience. Purposive sampling allows researchers to intentionally recruit participants who can provide in-depth, relevant information about the phenomenon under investigation

(Andrade, 2021). Recruitment occurred through district email invitations distributed by school principals, and participation was voluntary with informed consent obtained before data collection.

The final sample consisted of 10 middle school teachers representing grades 6 through 8 and multiple academic disciplines, including English language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, and career and technical education. Table 2 presents an overview of participant demographics. Data were self-reported via participant information forms and confirmed during interviews.

Table 2

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Teacher ID	Gender	Race/ethnicity	Years teaching	Grade level(s)	Subject area	Certification area
T001	Female	White	11	8	English Language Arts	English Education
T002	Male	White	22	8	Cyber Foundations II	CTE, Computer Science, Business Education
T003	Female	White	23	7	Mathematics	Math (K–8), Elementary Ed (K–6), Reading (K–12)
T004	Male	Black	15	8	English Language Arts	Secondary English
T005	Female	White	16	7	Mathematics	Secondary Mathematics
T006	Male	White	9	8	Mathematics & Social Studies	Mathematics & Social Studies
T007	Female	Black	13	8	Science	Biology, General Science
T008	Female	White	21	8	Science	All Subjects (K–6), Math (6–8), Science
T009	Female	White	12	6	ELA & Social Studies	ELA (6–8), Social Studies (6–8)
T010	Female	White	13	7	Mathematics	Mathematics

The sample included eight female and two male teachers, of whom six identified as White and four as African American. Participants' teaching experience ranged from three to 23 years ($M = 12$). The demographic composition of the sample reflected the district's teaching workforce, which is predominantly female and racially diverse. This range of experience and backgrounds provided a well-rounded representation of teacher perspectives and enhanced understanding of how resilience was supported in inclusive middle school settings.

Materials or Instrumentation

Data were collected using the UWRS (see Appendix A), a semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix C), and a classroom observation checklist (see Appendix E). The UWRS was used solely to triangulate data from interviews and classroom observations, thereby enhancing the credibility of the findings. All participants were given the option to complete the UWRS online through Qualtrics or to receive a digital or printed copy by email or mail. Following completion of the scale, interviews were conducted either in person or via video conference, depending on the participant's preference and accessibility within the large school district. Classroom observations were documented using a checklist developed and field-tested by the researcher in collaboration with three experts in resilience and inclusive education for students with emotional disturbances. The checklist included key components of resilience observed in classroom interactions and instructional practices.

The University of Washington Resilience Scale

The UWRS (see Appendix A) was designed to measure adults' perceived resilience and was applied in this study to assess teachers' perceptions of resilience. The scale was created by a panel of researchers and clinical psychologists with expertise in positive psychology and rehabilitation (Hartley, 2017). The measure was developed to be generalizable across adult

populations and field-tested to ensure strong psychometric properties. During development, focus groups and cognitive interviews were conducted to confirm that the items were meaningful, person-centered, and relevant to real-world contexts.

The UWRS is an eight-item self-report instrument that can be completed either electronically or on paper. The eight-item form is highly reliable, with a reliability coefficient of .90, supporting its use to triangulate perceptions of adult resilience alongside qualitative data (Amtmann et al., 2020). Amtmann and colleagues (2020) conducted a series of four studies to establish the scale's reliability and validity. The first study included 802 adult participants and used exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis to refine the scale's structure. Six key factors of resilience: problem-solving, social support, socialization, adaptability, coping skills, and goal orientation were identified through both empirical data and a comprehensive literature review. Internal consistency for these factors was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, yielding an alpha of .82.

In the second study, test–retest reliability was examined with 52 participants who completed the scale twice over a 2-week interval. Pearson product–moment correlations ranged from .30 to .75 across items, demonstrating moderate to strong reliability. The third study evaluated convergent and discriminant validity by correlating UWRS scores with five established resilience measures among 114 participants, confirming theoretical consistency with related constructs (Amtmann et al., 2020). The fourth study replicated these analyses to verify the factor structure's stability across samples. Collectively, these findings demonstrated that the UWRS possesses strong psychometric properties, making it suitable for both research and applied settings (Ahn, 1991).

In the present study, the UWRS was used solely to triangulate data from semi-structured interviews and classroom observations, thereby enhancing the credibility of the findings. This application aligned with the study's qualitative design and focus on exploring perceptions of resilience among middle school teachers. Data derived from the scale provided contextual insight into teachers' perceived resilience. They informed the interpretation of interview themes related to instructional practices and best practices for fostering resilience in students with emotional disturbances (Liu & Duan, 2023). Participant scores were grouped into three interpretive categories of low, average, and high perceived resilience to support the integration of quantitative and qualitative findings (Liu & Duan, 2023).

Semi-structured Interview Guide

A semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix C) provided a structured outline to ensure consistent and reliable qualitative data collection across participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The guide was developed based on the research questions and supported by literature on resilience and qualitative interviewing methods. Semi-structured interviews allow researchers to balance consistency across participants with the flexibility to probe deeper into relevant experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

The interview guide consisted of four questions per theme identified in the literature: perceptions of resilience, instructional strategies used to build resilience, and experiences with best practices in fostering resilience, for a total of 12 questions. The guide was field-tested by three to five individuals in the field of middle school education who had at least 3 years of experience teaching students with emotional disturbances in inclusive settings and held valid Mississippi teaching certification. Feedback from the field test was incorporated to ensure clarity, content validity, and alignment with the study's purpose and research questions.

A table (see Appendix D) was developed to illustrate the relationship between the research questions and corresponding thematic categories. Each interview question was derived directly from these themes to maintain precise alignment between the research design, data collection, and analytical framework. This structure ensured that all components of the study were grounded in the thematic focus guiding the exploration of teacher perspectives.

Classroom Observation Checklist

The classroom observation checklist (see Appendix E) is a 35-point instrument designed to guide the collection of observational data and to support the development of narrative descriptions of classroom practices. This checklist was developed by the researcher, drawing from existing literature and the *California Healthy Kids Survey: Resilience and Youth Development Module* (Hechtman, 2022) to ensure comprehensive coverage of classroom factors associated with resilience. Observations were recorded in each category using descriptive field notes to capture both teacher and student behaviors in the classroom.

Content validity was established through a field test conducted with three to five individuals in the field of middle school education. Each reviewer had at least three years of experience in inclusive instructional strategies and teaching students with emotional disturbances, as well as current certification to teach in Mississippi. Feedback from the expert review was incorporated to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment of the checklist items with the study's purpose.

The classroom observation checklist included three major components: student–teacher relationships, classroom expectations, and participation (Furlong, 2015). These domains were selected for their established links to resilience-building and positive behavioral outcomes in inclusive settings. The finalized checklist was used to complement qualitative data gathered from

interviews and to triangulate findings with results from the UWRS. This process strengthened the credibility and trustworthiness of the overall data set.

Study Procedures

Study approval was obtained from the school district superintendent, the district research committee, and the National University Institutional Review Board (IRB) before recruitment and data collection began. Following receipt of district and IRB approval, the principals of each middle school within the research site were contacted via official school email to initiate communication with potential participants. All study activities, including recruitment, interviews, and classroom observations, were conducted in compliance with district policies and procedures governing research, confidentiality, and classroom access. The researcher adhered to all established protocols for ethical conduct and participant protection during data collection.

IRB Approval Procedures

The researcher completed educational training through the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) program at National University before the initiation of the study. Resources from the IRB website were utilized to obtain recruitment and consent materials and to establish online data collection procedures. The IRB application was submitted through the Cayuse system, and approval was secured before recruitment and data collection began.

Recruitment Procedures

Participants were recruited via emails sent to the official school email addresses of middle school teachers at each middle school, by the building principals, within the research site district. The initial email included an invitation to participate, study details, and a request for a response within seven days. After the initial seven-day period, a follow-up email was sent to nonrespondents. The recruitment process continued until 10 eligible participants volunteered for

the study or until the end of the third email cycle, for a total of 21 days. Interested participants were provided with detailed information about the research and allowed to ask questions before participating. Purposive sampling was used to ensure that participants met the inclusion criteria described in the recruitment materials.

Consent Procedures

Participants who agreed to participate were then emailed a consent form and interview schedule. National University's approved consent template was used to ensure compliance with ethical research standards. The consent form was reviewed with each participant before the interview, and verbal informed consent was obtained before data collection. Screening for inclusion criteria was conducted after obtaining verbal consent.

Data Collection

Data were collected using the UWRS, a semi-structured interview guide, and a classroom observation checklist. Participants were given the option to complete the UWRS online through Qualtrics or receive a copy via email or postal mail. Results from the UWRS were used to categorize participants' perceived resilience levels into three groups: low resilience, everyday resilience, and high resilience (Wagnild, 2009).

Following the completion of the UWRS, semi-structured interviews were conducted using the interview guide (see Appendix C) to triangulate data. Each interview consisted of 12 open-ended questions, lasted approximately 30 minutes, and was recorded with participant consent. Participants were given the option to participate in person, by phone, or via video conferencing (Zoom) to accommodate scheduling and geographic factors within the district.

Classroom observations were conducted in 45-minute intervals using the classroom observation checklist (see Appendix E). The checklist included 10 student behavioral expectations and 10 teacher behavioral expectations related to resilience. Observations were scheduled through the building principals at each school site.

Utilization of the University of Washington Resilience Scale for Perceived Resilience Assessment (RQ1). The University of Washington Resilience Scale (UWRS; Wagnild, 2009) was used to assess middle school general education teachers' perceptions of resilience among students with emotional and behavioral disorders (ED) in inclusive classroom settings. The UWRS provided quantitative data that established a baseline understanding of participants' perceived resilience. These quantitative results were included solely t support triangulation across the study's multiple data sources.

Participants completed the UWRS electronically via Qualtrics or by email, depending on their preference. Scores from the UWRS were used to categorize participants into three levels of perceived resilience: low, normal, and high. These classifications provided context for interpreting participants' responses during subsequent interviews and classroom observations.

The data obtained from the UWRS directly addressed Research Question 1 (RQ1) by offering insight into how teachers perceived resilience in their students and themselves within the inclusive setting. These quantitative measures were triangulated with qualitative data from interviews and classroom observations to enhance the credibility and depth of the findings. This process supported a more comprehensive understanding of the study's multiple data sources. The integration of the UWRS data ensured that the quantitative component contributed appropriately to the study's overall triangulation plan.

Semi-Structured Interviews to Identify Instructional Methods (RQ2). Semi-structured interviews were conducted to identify the instructional methods used by middle school general education teachers to build students' resilience in the face of emotional and behavioral disorders. The interviews consisted of 12 open-ended questions (see Appendix C) developed from the research questions and literature themes on teacher perceptions, skills, and best practices for fostering resilience. This interview structure provided consistent opportunities for participants to describe their instructional approaches in relation to the study's focus.

Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes and was conducted in person, by phone, or via video conferencing, depending on participant preference and scheduling availability. Interviews were audio recorded with participant consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis. This format allowed participants to elaborate on their instructional approaches, classroom experiences, and personal insights regarding resilience-building practices within inclusive classrooms.

Data from the interviews addressed Research Question 2 (RQ2) by providing detailed qualitative insights into the instructional methods teachers used to support students with ED in developing resilience. The interview data were triangulated with UWRS results and classroom observation findings to strengthen the study's credibility and validity. This integration ensured that interview responses were systematically aligned with the study's overall data-collection framework.

Classroom Observations for Identifying Best Practices (RQ3). Classroom observations were conducted to identify best practices used by middle school general education teachers to foster resilience among students with ED in inclusive classrooms. Each observation lasted approximately 45 minutes and was guided by a structured checklist (see Appendix E) that

included 10 teacher behavioral indicators and 10 student behavioral indicators related to resilience. This structure ensured observations consistently captured classroom actions relevant to the study's focus on resilience practice.

Observations were scheduled in coordination with school principals to minimize disruption to instructional time and capture authentic classroom interactions. The observation checklist focused on three core components of resilience-supportive environments: student-teacher relationships, classroom expectations, and student participation. Notes were recorded in narrative form to capture the observed context, behaviors, and interactions.

Data from classroom observations directly addressed Research Question 3 (RQ3) by identifying real-time examples of practical strategies and practices that promoted resilience in inclusive middle school classrooms. Observation data were triangulated with interview transcripts and UWRS results to provide a comprehensive understanding of how teachers' perceptions and instructional methods translated into practice. This alignment allowed the observational data to contribute to the overall consistency of the study's findings.

The UWRS (see Appendix A) established a baseline understanding of teachers' perceptions of resilience (RQ1). Semi-structured interviews (see Appendix C) provided in-depth qualitative insights into instructional methods teachers used to build resilience (RQ2). Classroom observations (see Appendix E) offered real-time examples of best practices and contextualized how teachers applied resilience-supportive strategies in inclusive settings (RQ3).

Together, these three data sources created a comprehensive, multi-perspective approach to examining how middle school general education teachers perceived, implemented, and demonstrated practices that fostered resilience among students with emotional and behavioral disorders in inclusive classrooms. The integration of these data sources enhanced the credibility

and depth of the findings through triangulation, aligning with the study's qualitative case study design and thematic analysis framework. This triangulated structure ensured that each research question was supported by evidence from multiple data sources, maintaining consistency across the analytic process.

Procedures for Establishing Trustworthiness

Four elements were used to ensure the trustworthiness of the data: credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Ellis & Levy, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility refers to the confidence in the truth and accuracy of the research findings, and to the extent to which the results reliably represent the information shared by participants (Ellis & Levy, 2009). In alignment with Yin's (2018) guidance for enhancing construct validity in case study research, credibility in this study was strengthened through data triangulation and member checking. Dependability refers to the consistency and stability of research procedures over time and to the degree to which processes are documented clearly enough for others to follow or evaluate (Shenton, 2004). This aligns with Yin's (2018) emphasis on maintaining a transparent chain of evidence and detailed documentation to support reliability in case study designs.

Transferability refers to the extent to which qualitative findings can be applied to other contexts, settings, or populations (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To support transferability, this study incorporated rich, thick description, enabling readers to determine the applicability of results to similar environments. Confirmability reflects the extent to which findings can be verified by other researchers and the degree to which results are shaped by participants rather than researcher bias (Ellis & Levy, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Confirmability in this study was reinforced through an audit trail, reflexive journaling, and the

systematic organization of data, consistent with Yin's (2018) guidance for maintaining transparency and minimizing bias in case study research.

Credibility. The credibility and dependability of the study were established through member checking and data triangulation. Interview transcripts were returned to participants for verification to ensure accuracy and authenticity of the recorded responses. Triangulation was achieved through multiple data sources. These sources included: observations, interviews, and the UWRS, which were used to enhance the overall credibility of the findings.

Dependability. Dependability was supported using a peer debriefer, a middle school educator with at least three years of experience and familiarity with qualitative research. A research audit was conducted to review transcriptions, observation data, and the data analysis process (Koelsch, 2013). An audit trail was maintained to strengthen dependability by allowing other researchers to confirm the study's findings and procedures (Ortlipp, 2008).

Transferability. Transferability was established by providing detailed descriptions of the research process. These descriptions incorporated the setting and the study population, along with a structured data-collection timeline (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). These details allow readers to determine whether the findings could be applied to other educational contexts or populations.

Confirmability. Confirmability was achieved through peer debriefing, reflective journaling, and multiple data sources (Ellis & Levy, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The peer debriefer reviewed data analysis procedures and the final thematic outcomes to minimize researcher bias, a strategy aligned with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria for establishing confirmability. A reflective journal was maintained throughout the study to enhance objectivity and document analytic decisions (Shenton, 2004). Triangulation and member checking further

supported confirmability by ensuring that the data reflected participants' authentic perspectives rather than the researcher's interpretations (Yin, 2018).

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2021a) systematic approach, was used to analyze qualitative data and identify key patterns relevant to the research questions. Data from interviews, classroom observations, and UWRS were analyzed to uncover themes related to teacher perceptions of resilience (RQ1), instructional methods (RQ2), and best practices for supporting resilience among students with emotional disturbances (RQ3). All analytic steps were carried out in the sequence outlined by Braun and Clarke to maintain consistency throughout the process.

Step 1: Familiarization with the Data (Open Coding)

The researcher transcribed all recorded interviews and reviewed observation notes and UWRS summaries multiple times to become immersed in the data. Initial ideas, phrases, and keywords were highlighted in the margins. This open-coding process allowed the researcher to become familiar with participants' language and to note patterns related to teacher beliefs, strategies, and classroom experiences. Each stage of this review process contributed to organizing early coding notes for the next phase of analysis.

Step 2: Generating Initial Codes

Systematic coding of data focused on teachers' beliefs, experiences, and practices related to resilience was organized in a table. Points relevant to student/teacher relationships (RQ1), instructional strategies (RQ2), and best practices (RQ3) were categorized, creating meaningful data segments. This organization supported the tracking of recurring ideas across interview, observation, and survey data.

Step 3: Searching for Themes (Cross-Case Analysis)

Coded data were grouped into broader categories to identify relationships among responses. A cross-case analysis was conducted to compare participants' findings, highlighting similarities and differences in how teachers perceived and implemented resilience-building practices. The initial thematic map connected codes and categories to the three research questions.

Step 4: Reviewing Themes

The identified categories underwent a meticulous review to discern themes related to teachers' perceptions (RQ1), instructional methods (RQ2), and best practices (RQ3). Each theme was defined and named to maintain alignment with the research questions. This step also involved verifying that each theme reflected the codes data accurately.

Step 5: Defining and Naming Themes (Axial Coding)

Axial coding was utilized to delve deeper into emerging themes, refining the understanding of resilience-related concepts in the context of Middle School general education classrooms in southern Mississippi. This step aimed to illuminate nuances within identified themes from RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3. During this stage, codes that shared similar characteristics were examined together to support the development of clearer thematic connections.

Step 6: Creating a Thematic Framework (Selective Coding)

Selective coding was used to synthesize all coded data into a final thematic framework. The framework, summarized in Appendix F (Data Analysis Audit Trail), organized findings by research question and theme, providing a visual link between raw data and emergent concepts. The finalized themes of teacher perceptions of resilience, instructional strategies, and best practices formed the basis for reporting results in Chapter 4.

An audit trail was maintained throughout the analysis process (see Appendix F) to ensure transparency and confirmability. The audit trail included analytic memos, coding spreadsheets, and peer-debriefing notes documenting decisions made during data interpretation. This documentation supported the dependability and credibility of the findings and aligned with the trustworthiness procedures outlined earlier in this chapter.

Assumptions

Study assumptions are elements of research accepted as accurate or true but outside the researcher's control (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). Assumptions provide the foundation for a viable research design and enable the researcher to address questions that may arise throughout the study (Grodal et al., 2021). Recognizing and articulating assumptions contributes to credibility by clarifying what is presumed within the research context (Mazandarani & Najariyan, 2022).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) categorized assumptions as ontological, epistemological, and axiomatic. Ontological assumptions address the existence of multiple realities influenced by political, cultural, economic, social, ethnic, and gender-based values. Epistemological assumptions relate to the connection between the knower and what is known, whereas axiomatic assumptions concern consistency in what is understood to be true (Creswell, 1991).

In this study, the ontological assumption involved recognizing that each participant's understanding of resilience was shaped by their personal experiences, professional background, and classroom context. Through interviews, the UWRS, and classroom observations, multiple perspectives were captured, reflecting how individual realities influenced perceptions of resilience among students with ED. These varying viewpoints contributed to a fuller description of how resilience was understood across participants.

The epistemological assumption addressed how teachers' professional knowledge informed what they knew and needed to know about resilience-building in inclusive classrooms. Data from interviews, the UWRS, and observations were compared with existing literature and researcher memos to identify consistencies and gaps between knowledge and practice. These comparisons documented how teachers described the relationship between their knowledge base and their day-to-day instructional decisions.

The axiomatic assumption recognized that certain instructional practices and resilience strategies are consistently effective across educational settings. Data collected through the UWRS, interviews, and classroom observations revealed methods and principles that were repeatedly demonstrated as effective in supporting resilience among students with ED. These recurring approaches reflected practices that teachers described as reliable across their instructional experiences.

Three additional assumptions guided this study:

1. Participants provided honest and sincere feedback reflecting genuine perceptions of resilience.
2. Participants made good-faith efforts to complete the UWRS, interviews, and classroom observations.
3. Participants had an adequate understanding and prior experience with the concept of resilience, as evidenced by their responses and observations.

These assumptions were reasonable given the voluntary nature of participation, the informed consent process, and participants' professional expertise. Supporting details are documented in the researcher's reflective journal and analytic audit trail (see Appendix F and

Appendix L). These records provide the contextual background for how the assumptions were applied during the study.

Limitations

Limitations are potential weaknesses beyond the researcher's control that may affect the credibility, dependability, transferability, or confirmability of findings. These limitations outline factors that could influence how the results are interpreted within the broader context of the study. Identifying these issues provides transparency in the research process and clarifies the conditions under which the findings should be understood (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018; Ellis & Levy, 2009).

Credibility could be limited if data saturation was not achieved. This risk was minimized through triangulation of multiple data sources (interviews, UWRS, and classroom observations). Member checking, in which participants reviewed transcripts and summaries for accuracy, also supported this process. These steps were incorporated during data collection and analysis to address potential gaps in the development of findings.

Dependability could have been affected by the researcher's relative inexperience with large-scale qualitative data management. To mitigate this limitation, a reflective journal was maintained to document personal assumptions and analytic decisions. A peer debriefer reviewed portions of coded data and emergent themes to ensure accuracy and alignment. These materials were recorded in the audit trail (Appendix F and Appendix L).

Transferability was limited because data collection occurred within a single southern Mississippi school district with unique economic and geographic characteristics. To strengthen transferability, thick description was provided of participant demographics, setting, and context, allowing readers to assess the applicability of the findings to other settings. This detailed

contextual information supports the reader's ability to make informed judgements aboit potential transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Confirmability was a potential limitation due to the researcher's role as an educator within the region studied. To minimize bias, triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, and an external audit of coding records were used. The audit trail (Appendix F) documents these verification processes.

Delimitations

Delimitations were intentional boundaries established by the researcher to define the study's scope. The study focused exclusively on middle school general education teachers who implemented inclusive strategies for students with ED in one southern Mississippi school district. The study's timeline was limited to one academic year to maintain consistency among participants and to account for variations in instructional context.

These delimitations were necessary to ensure that findings reflected the targeted population and maintained internal consistency. Other grade levels or school settings were excluded because they may have introduced confounding variables beyond the scope of this research. These parameters helped maintain a focused and clearly defined study context (Yin, 2018).

Ethical Assurances

Ethical assurances were maintained throughout all phases of the study. Approval was obtained from the National University Institutional Review Board (IRB) before data collection. The study adhered to the three ethical principles of *The Belmont Repor*t, which are respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (Miracle, 2016; Anabo et al., 2019).

Respect for Persons. Each participant received an explanation of the study's purpose, procedures, and confidentiality measures. The National University consent template was used to ensure informed consent, emphasizing voluntariness, comprehension, and the right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Participants were allowed to ask questions before agreeing to take part. All consent procedures followed district and IRB requirements. The National University consent template was used to ensure consistency and transparency in the information provided to participants.

Beneficence. Participants were protected from harm, and confidentiality was preserved using pseudonyms (e.g., Teacher001–Teacher010). No students were identified in classroom observations, and the study presented minimal risk as it adhered to district protocols, protected participant privacy, and focused solely on professional practice. All data were stored securely, and only the researcher had access to raw files to ensure continued protection of participants' identities. These safeguards align with ethical guidelines that outline the responsibility to minimize risk and ensure participant well-being throughout the research process.

Justice. All qualified teachers meeting the inclusion criteria were provided the opportunity to participate, ensuring fairness and equal treatment. Each participant followed the same procedures and was provided the same materials and participation options. Data were securely stored in accordance with IRB guidelines, and access was restricted to the researcher. Supporting documents, including consent forms, recruitment emails, and observation confidentiality statements, are available in Appendices E-G.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how middle school general education teachers in southern Mississippi understood and implemented strategies to build

students' resilience in the face of emotional disturbances. The problem addressed was that teachers who implement inclusive strategies often demonstrate limited understanding and skills for fostering resilience, contributing to increased classroom disruptions (Brown & Dixon, 2020; Houchins et al., 2020; Zolkoski et al., 2016). This study aimed to address that gap by examining teachers' perceptions and practices regarding resilience-building within inclusive settings.

Data were collected from 10 purposively selected middle school teachers using the UWRS, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations. Triangulation across these three data sources enhanced trustworthiness and provided a comprehensive understanding of teachers' perceptions, instructional practices, and classroom-based strategies. Each data collection method contributed distinct information that supported alignment with the research questions.

A thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2021a) was used to identify key themes aligned with the three research questions. The analytic process and results were documented in an audit trail (Appendix F) to ensure transparency and replicability. This documentation supported a clear record of the steps taken during coding and thematic development.

Trustworthiness was established through triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, and an external audit. Ethical standards were upheld through IRB approval, informed consent, confidentiality measures, and adherence to The Belmont Report principles. These procedures ensured that data collection and analysis were conducted consistently and with methodological rigor.

Chapter 4 presents the results of the data analysis, including detailed descriptions of the themes derived from interviews, observations, and UWRS data. In contrast, Chapter 5 provides an interpretation of these findings in relation to existing literature, implications for practice, and

recommendations for future research. Both chapters build upon the analytical foundation developed earlier in the study.

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore middle school general education teachers' perceptions, instructional methods, and best practices for building students' resilience with ED in inclusive classroom settings. The problem addressed in this study was that middle school general education teachers who implement inclusive strategies often lack sufficient knowledge and skills to effectively promote resilience among students with ED, negatively impacting both student success and classroom functioning. These issues formed the basis for the study's focus on examining teachers' experiences within real classroom environments.

A purposive sample of 10 middle school general education teachers in a large school district in southern Mississippi was recruited into the study. Administrators at each middle school distributed a recruitment email to their faculty, which included a link to a Google Form. Interested teachers completed the form to indicate their willingness to participate. Teachers were eligible to participate if they were currently teaching in middle school, had at least 3 years of teaching experience, held a valid Mississippi teaching license, and were presently teaching students with ED in inclusive settings. Participants for this study were identified based on their qualifications and relevance to the research focus. Data were collected using the UWRS, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations. Multiple data sources were used to triangulate data and build credibility, deepening understanding of how teachers define, support, and implement strategies to foster resilience in students with ED.

Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step approach to thematic analysis, which enabled systematic coding, categorization, and the identification of emergent themes grounded in the data. This structured method supported a clear progression from initial finalization to the development of defined themes that aligned with the study's research

questions. Details of the analytic procedures are presented in the introduction to the results section, where each step of the process is outlined to demonstrate how the final themes are generated.

This chapter is organized into four main sections. The first section addresses the trustworthiness of the data, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The second section presents the findings, organized by themes that emerged from the data. These themes are then used to address the three research questions guiding the study, with evidence supported by participant quotations, classroom observations, and UWRS scores. The third section provided an evaluation of the findings in relation to the existing literature and conceptual framework. The chapter concludes with a summary of key findings that set the stage for the implications discussed in Chapter 5.

Trustworthiness of the Data

Establishing trustworthiness is essential to ensure the rigor and credibility of qualitative research. Trustworthiness refers to the degree of confidence in the data, interpretation, and procedures used throughout the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In qualitative research, trustworthiness is established by addressing four key criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Each of these criteria was carefully applied in this study to ensure the findings accurately reflect participants' experiences and were not shaped by researcher bias or methodological flaws.

Credibility

Credibility refers to the confidence that can be placed in the truth of the research findings and the degree to which those findings accurately represent participants' perspectives and experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this qualitative study, credibility was established

through triangulation of three distinct data sources UWRS scores, semi-structured interview responses, and classroom observations. UWRS scores ranged from 25 to 40, indicating varying levels of self-reported resilience among participants. These scores aligned with patterns in the interview data. Observational data further supported the themes. Member checking was used to enhance credibility further. All 10 participants were provided with transcripts of their interviews and invited to review them for accuracy. Each participant confirmed the accuracy of their transcript without requesting revisions or clarifications. This convergence of scale results, self-reported practices, and observable behaviors, combined with verified transcript accuracy, confirmed the credibility of the findings and reflected consistency across data sources (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Ellis & Levy, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Data were collected using the UWRS, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations. Observation data, UWRS scores, and interview-derived categories were triangulated to allow comparison across all three data sources (Patton, 2015). The result of this triangulation was the extent to which these three data sources aligned for each participant. Specifically, UWRS scores were compared with interview responses and classroom observations to determine whether teachers' self-reported practices were consistent with what they described in interviews and with classroom observations. For example, participants with higher UWRS scores often described and demonstrated more frequent use of resilience-building strategies. In contrast, those with lower scores reported fewer or less consistent use of such practices. This alignment across sources established the credibility of the findings.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the stability and consistency of data collection and analysis processes over time, ensuring that findings are repeatable and not subject to random variation

(Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, dependability was established through a transparent and systematic research process that can be reviewed and replicated. Interview and observation protocols were field-tested before full implementation to ensure clarity and consistency. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and coded using a structured approach. The data analysis process followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step method of thematic analysis. Coding charts were created for each participant to document timestamps, verbatim quotes, specific codes, and later collapsed categories. These mid-level categories were then analyzed and grouped into overarching themes.

An audit trail was maintained to document coding, code collapsing, and theme derivation, which is provided in Appendix F. In addition, an audit trail of analytic decisions and coding processes is included in Appendix F. Together, these appendices provide transparency and support the dependability of the study. This audit trail enhances transparency and provides a detailed account of how the findings were systematically developed, thus supporting the overall dependability of the study was addressed by maintaining a consistent and transparent research process. Interview and observation protocols were field-tested before full implementation, and all procedures were clearly documented. Transcriptions were professionally completed, and an audit trail of coding processes (Appendix F) and analytic decisions (Appendix F) was preserved to allow for external review or replication, as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the degree to which a study's results are shaped by participants' responses rather than by the researcher's bias, motivations, or perspectives (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, confirmability was established through multiple strategies designed to minimize researcher subjectivity and increase transparency. A reflexive journal was maintained

throughout the research process to document personal assumptions, decisions, and reflections. This journal helped the researcher remain aware of and bracket potential biases during data collection and analysis. Additionally, peer debriefing with a qualified educational researcher provided external oversight and critical feedback on emerging codes, categories, and themes. The coding process was grounded in verbatim quotes from participants, and the development of themes followed a structured, traceable pathway from raw data to interpretation. By triangulating data sources and maintaining an audit trail of analytical decisions, the researcher ensured that the findings accurately reflected participants' voices and experiences rather than the researcher's interpretations.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings of a qualitative study can be applied to other contexts or settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). While generalization is not the goal of qualitative research, providing rich, detailed descriptions allows readers to determine whether the findings may be relevant to their own educational environments. In this study, thick descriptions were provided regarding the participants' demographics, instructional settings, and observed classroom behaviors. These contextual details, including grade level, subject area, years of teaching experience, and inclusive practices, enable other educators and researchers to assess the applicability of the findings to similar middle school settings. Additionally, the inclusion criteria for participant selection were clearly defined, and data were collected across multiple schools within a large southern Mississippi school district. The demographic overview of participants is provided in Appendix H to support the contextual grounding necessary for transferability.

Results

Interview and observation protocols were field-tested before full implementation to ensure clarity and consistency. All interviews were transcribed verbatim, and the data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step method of thematic analysis. Coding charts documented timestamps, verbatim quotes, codes, and collapsed categories, which were then grouped into overarching themes. Coding sheets are included in Appendix F, and the audit trail of analytic decisions is provided in Appendix F, allowing external review and replication.

The UWRS scores were calculated using the *University of Washington Resilience Scale User Guide* (University of Washington, 2017). Participants completed the 8-item short form, with responses on a 1- to 5-point Likert scale. Raw scores (range 8–40) were summed to obtain a total resilience score. According to the UWRS guide, scores were categorized as follows: 8–19 (low resilience), 20–29 (moderate resilience), and 30–40 (high resilience). The participant number, resilience score, and corresponding resilience level were then added to a chart for reference, as these scores were used in data triangulation with interview and observational data (University of Washington, 2017).

Teacher interviews were conducted via Zoom, recorded, and transcribed verbatim. Each transcript was reviewed and member checked to verify accuracy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Participants confirmed the accuracy of their transcripts, and no substantive changes were requested. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis framework, the researcher familiarized with the data by reading and rereading transcripts to gain an in-depth understanding. Initial codes were generated by highlighting quotations related to the interview questions and research questions. These quotations were added to a spreadsheet and assigned a descriptive code (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Related codes were then grouped and collapsed into

categories for each participant in a process of searching for and revealing themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). All categories from the participants were compiled into a matrix for cross-case analysis, and then refined into overarching themes, ensuring consistency and clarity in defining and naming themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Documentation of the coding process and analytic decisions was maintained through an audit trail (Appendices H and I), allowing for transparency and external review.

Observation data were collected using a standardized checklist for each classroom visit (Miles et al., 2020). The checklist included pre-identified resilience-related behaviors and strategies, such as adaptability, attitude, coping with stress, open communication, resilient responses to setbacks, positive reinforcement, differentiated instruction, social-emotional learning, collaborative learning, goal setting, peer mentoring, inclusive practices, individualized support, and teacher-student relationships (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Each behavior observed was tallied during the visit. These tallies were entered into a spreadsheet with columns for each checklist item and rows for each participant. Totals were calculated for each behavior and organized to display the overall frequency of each resilience-related behavior per participant.

Participant Descriptions

This section provides brief descriptions of each participant to contextualize the study's findings. The 10 participants in this study were middle school general education teachers working in inclusive classrooms at one middle school in a southern school district in Mississippi. They represented a range of teaching experience, subject areas, and grade levels, with service ranging from 3 to 24 years.

Teacher001. A Black female with 22 years of teaching experience taught eighth-grade English. Her area of experience was English education. She was certified in English, and her UWRS score was 36.

Teacher002. A White male with 6 years of teaching experience taught eighth-grade Cyber Foundations II. His areas of experience included CTE, computer science, and technology. He was certified in business education, computer applications, economics, business management, business technology, computer science, finance and accounting, marketing, ICT I and II, technology foundations, and digital media technology. His UWRS score was 28.

Teacher003. A White female with 3 years of teaching experience taught seventh-grade mathematics. Her areas of experience included mathematics, elementary education, and reading. She was certified in mathematics (K–8), elementary education (K–6), and reading (K–12). Her UWRS score was 25.

Teacher004. A Black male with 3 years of teaching experience taught eighth-grade English language arts. His area of experience was ELA. He was certified in ELA, and his UWRS score was 23.

Teacher005. A Black female with 11 years of teaching experience taught seventh-grade mathematics. Her areas of experience included mathematics. She was certified in secondary mathematics (7–12), ELA/reading/math/science (4–6), and social studies. Her UWRS score was 30.

Teacher006. A White male with 7 years of teaching experience taught eighth-grade mathematics. His areas of experience were in mathematics and social studies. He was certified in mathematics and social studies, and his UWRS score was 35.

Teacher007. A Black female with 6 years of teaching experience taught eighth-grade science. Her areas of experience included seventh and eighth-grade science. She was certified in biology, general science, and physical education. Her UWRS score was 32.

Teacher008. A White female with 7 years of teaching experience taught eighth-grade science. Her areas of experience were in science. She was certified in all subjects (K–6), mathematics (6–8), and science (7–12). Her UWRS score was 27.

Teacher009. A White female with 5 years of teaching experience taught sixth-grade English language arts. Her areas of experience included ELA and social studies. She was certified in ELA and social studies, and her UWRS score was 24.

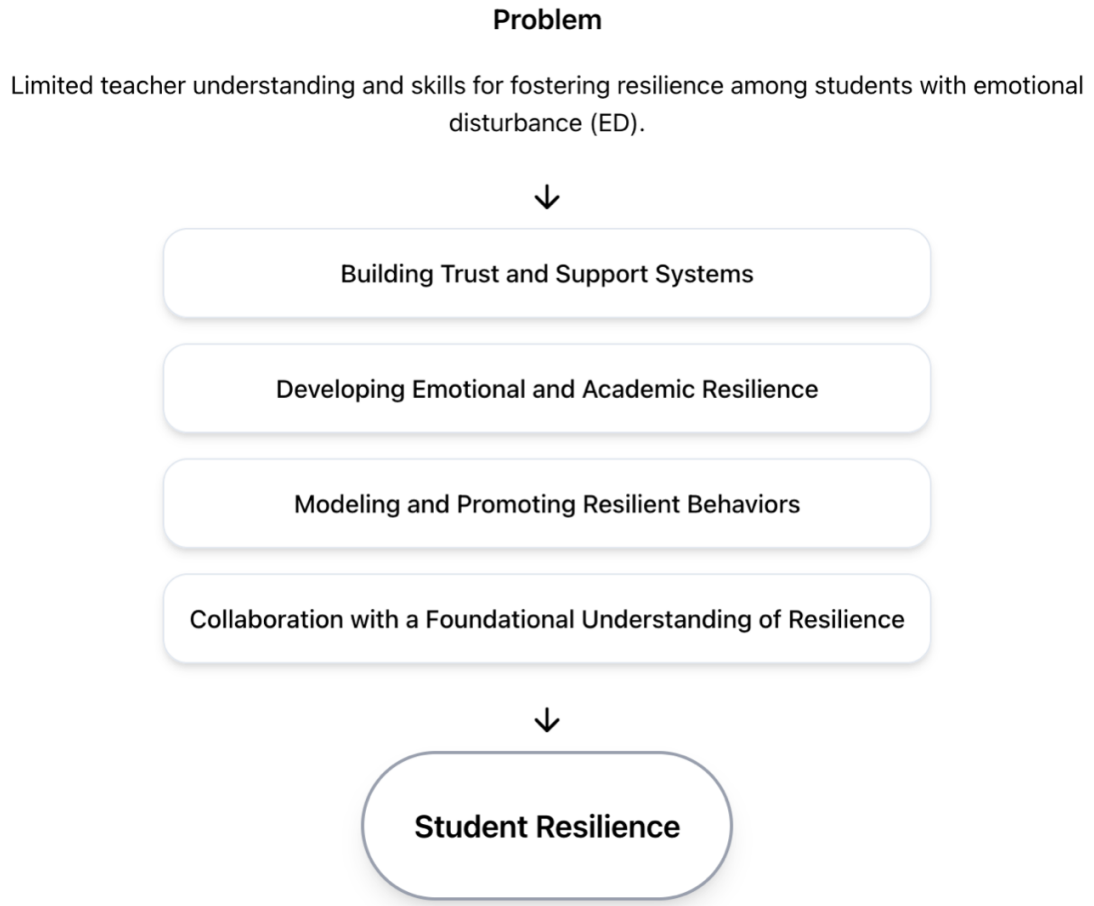
Teacher010. A White female with 24 years of teaching experience taught seventh-grade mathematics. Her areas of experience included mathematics, science, and social studies. She was certified in mathematics, English, history, science, and economics. Her UWRS score was 38.

The scores indicate variability in resilience among participants, with individual scores ranging from 25 (lowest) to 40 (highest). This variation reflects differences in how participants responded to the prompts within the UWRS. Individual participant scores on the UWRS are summarized in Appendix A.

Figure 2 (created by the researcher) illustrates the relationship between the study's central problem, the four emergent themes, and the core outcome of student resilience. Arrows indicate how each teacher's practice of building trust and support systems, developing emotional and academic resilience, modeling and promoting resilient behaviors, and collaboration with a foundational understanding of resilience flows from the identified problem and collectively supports student resilience among middle-school students with emotional disturbance.

Figure 2

Findings Model Linking Teacher Practices to Student Resilience in Inclusive Middle School Classrooms



Theme 1: Building Trust and Support Systems

Teachers consistently described trust and support as the foundation for helping students with emotional and behavioral challenges build resilience. They explained that establishing this foundation requires time, intentionality, and repeated experiences in which students learn that adults will respond in steady and dependable ways. Authentic relationships and emotional safety

were viewed as prerequisites for learning. These elements were described consistently across participants' interviews. When students perceived their teacher as steady, fair, and caring, they were more willing to take risks and recover from setbacks.

Teacher 002 explained, "I feel like I'm a safe place for a lot of students, or at least I try to be a safe place. I get them in the hands of somebody who can really provide the comfort that's needed." His approach reflected the belief that stability begins with predictable care and consistent emotional availability. Teachers repeatedly noted that trust develops when students sense genuine concern and patience. This perspective highlights the relational nature of resilience-building: before behavioral interventions can succeed, students must perceive their teacher as emotionally dependable and consistent in their expectations. These observations were reported by several participants, who emphasized the importance of predictability.

Teacher 006 described efforts to build trust and create a supportive classroom environment, saying,

> I try to develop that trust and respect with those students and give them that safe and comfortable place to express their feelings. I also try to talk to them more privately, not calling them out or doing anything negative towards them – just always finding ways to positively help them with whatever they're going through at the moment.

This discretion preserved dignity while addressing behavioral needs, allowing students to calm down and re-engage in instruction. Her comments illustrated how subtle, private interactions can de-escalate emotional responses while maintaining the student's sense of belonging. These practices were commonly described as helpful for supporting emotional regulation.

Teacher 010 reinforced the importance of emotional safety through small, intentional gestures, noting, "I always tell them I love them. I tell all my kids I love them just so that they

feel safe in my classroom. And if anything does happen, they can come to me." Such expressions of care were not sentimental but deliberate structures of emotional reassurance signals that the classroom remained a secure environment regardless of students' prior experiences. Participants frequently emphasized that explicit verbal reassurance, even brief statements of care or safety, helped students internalize a sense of stability. This sense of consistency reduced classroom anxiety and fostered an atmosphere in which students could take academic and social risks without fear of rejection.

Teacher 004's comments highlighted how emotional safety created predictable conditions for student engagement and how empathy also guided daily interactions. Teacher oo4 reflected that resilience involves the ability to "bounce back," as illustrated in the following quote:

> I think with resilience it's just being able to bounce back and still keep up with your day and with your goals for students and for yourself for the year. I encourage students when things don't go as they might want them to or if they're having a rough day in general – just to be able to let them know, hey, this might be a bad moment, but it's not going to be a bad day.

Teacher 004's comments also demonstrated how reassurance and perspective-taking were woven into instruction to normalize setbacks as temporary. These responses modeled composure and self-regulation, allowing students to learn that momentary frustration did not define their overall progress. Other participants, including Teacher 001 and Teacher 010, similarly described using calm reassurance during challenging moments.

Similarly, Teacher 001 highlighted encouragement and humor as tools for strengthening relationships, explaining,

> When I recognize that someone is trying, someone is working on their resiliency, I try to just go ahead and nurture that by just participating in it with them, cheer them on – okay, you're almost there, you almost got this, keep trying – and just try to do what I can to help them. When I see them trying, I try to do what I can to help them get there and to help them keep trying.

Acknowledging progress reinforced students' belief in their ability to persist. These moments of encouragement positioned teachers as co-regulators, demonstrating persistence and optimism that students could mirror when confronted with challenges. Teachers' consistent modeling of calm, supportive behavior thus served as both a relational anchor and an instructional tool. This theme of calm reassurance and emotional grounding is evident in the statements of Teachers 001, 004, 006, and 010.

Trust and support emerged not as peripheral niceties but as deliberate, instructional strategies that enabled resilience. Through calm communication, private conversations, consistent encouragement, and empathetic listening, teacher-built classrooms where students with emotional and behavioral challenges felt secure enough to participate, recover from mistakes, and continue working toward success. The establishment of trust was an intentional, ongoing practice that anchored every other resilience-building approach described by participants and laid the groundwork for sustainable growth in both student confidence and classroom stability.

Theme 2: Developing Emotional and Academic Resilience

Teachers emphasized resilience as a skill that developed through deliberate daily interactions and instructional choices. They viewed emotional and academic growth as interconnected: when students learned to manage frustration, remain engaged, and recover from

mistakes, their academic confidence improved. For many teachers, fostering resilience was not a stand-alone activity but an integral part of classroom life. They deliberately modeled calm behavior, encouraged problem-solving, and reframed setbacks so that persistence became a normal expectation rather than an exception.

Teacher 001 explained that she approached resilience as something modeled rather than merely taught, stating,

> I always try to show them that I'm not perfect either. If something doesn't go the way I planned, I tell them, Well, we're going to try it again and make it better next time. That way they see that mistakes are not the end of the world.

Teacher 001's comment reflected how teachers' openness about their own problem-solving created a classroom climate where persistence was normalized. Students were encouraged to view challenges as opportunities for adjustment rather than failure.

Teacher 004 emphasized consistency and calm responses, explaining, "Even when I'm frustrated, I try to take a deep breath and keep my tone the same. If I lose control, they lose control. When they see me calm down, they usually calm down too." His statement illustrated how self-regulation on the teacher's part modeled the very skills she wanted students to internalize. This mirroring effect demonstrated social learning in practice: students observed emotional control modeled by a trusted adult and then reproduced it in their own behavior. Teachers repeatedly noted that emotional composure and predictable reactions provided stability for students who often struggled with impulsivity and heightened stress.

Together, these teachers demonstrated that emotional regulation and academic persistence were strengthened most effectively through modeling. Rather than telling students how to behave, they showed them what composure and recovery looked like in real time. The

process of seeing an adult navigate frustration helped students internalize practical coping strategies that translated to their own academic work.

> Teacher 006 explained that emotional growth was reinforced through classroom routines: When we do something hard in class, I remind them of a time they already did something hard and got through it. I'll say, Remember when you didn't think you could finish that project, but you did? It helps them realize they can do hard things.

This routine helped students make direct connections between past and present challenges. Linking current challenges to past successes helped students recognize evidence of their own progress, reinforcing a growth mindset essential to academic perseverance.

Teacher 009 described encouraging problem-solving through incremental support, sharing, "If a student says, 'I can't do this,' I say, 'Let's do the first step together.' Once they see that they can do part of it, they usually finish the rest." Her description demonstrated how scaffolding or breaking tasks into manageable portions helped students experience mastery, which in turn strengthened resilience. Teachers frequently mentioned that gradual independence helped build both skills and confidence.

Across these accounts, the teachers connected academic persistence to the emotional security that comes from guided success. They viewed incremental progress as the key to building students' belief in their own ability to manage stress and overcome difficulty, an understanding consistent with research on self-efficacy and resilience development. Teachers described these small success as moments that helped students recognize their own capability and continue working through academic end emotional challenges.

Teacher 005 focused on verbal reinforcement as a daily practice for strengthening resilience, explaining, "When they get frustrated, I remind them that being frustrated means

they're learning something new. I tell them that smart people get frustrated because they're stretching their brains." Reframing frustration as a regular part of learning shifted students' interpretation of struggle from failure to growth. Such reframing aligns with growth-mindset principles, helping students reinterpret challenge as cognitive effort rather than evidence of inadequacy. This conceptual shift helped students persist through challenging assignments and view effort as meaningful.

Teacher 002 described how personal connection enhanced these academic strategies, saying, "If they know you believe they can do it, they'll try harder. I tell them, 'I'm not going to let you quit because I know you can do it.' They need to borrow your confidence until they find their own." This statement captured how teachers functioned as external sources of resilience, offering both encouragement and high expectations. Belief and accountability were presented as inseparable aspects of practical support.

Teacher 007 highlighted the role of emotional literacy, explaining, "We talk about feelings and what to do when you're mad or sad before it turns into a big issue. I let them know it's okay to have those feelings, but it's what you do next that matters." Proactive discussion of emotions allowed students to practice identifying and regulating responses which is a skill teachers viewed as foundational for both social and academic success.

Teacher 010 summarized the relationship between emotional development and academic persistence: "Once they trust you and see that you're not going to give up on them, they start not giving up on themselves. They'll finish work they used to throw away or walk out on." Her comment underscored that emotional security translated into measurable improvements in engagement and task completion. These outcomes illustrated how emotional safety served as a

precondition for academic perseverance, confirming the reciprocal relationship between affective trust and sustained effort.

Developing resilience required more than isolated lessons or interventions. Teachers integrated emotional coaching, consistent modeling, and incremental academic challenges into everyday instruction to help students persist through difficulty. By maintaining calm demeanors, refraining from frustration, and affirming effort, they provided tangible examples of perseverance in action. These findings demonstrate that emotional and academic resilience operate as interconnected capacities: as students learn to regulate their emotions, they become better able to sustain academic effort. In practice, resilience was cultivated as an intentional skill that is taught, modeled, and reinforced across both the emotional and scholarly dimensions of learning.

Theme 3: Modeling and Promoting Resilient Behaviors

Teachers demonstrated resilience through their own actions, using composure, adaptability, and persistence as living examples for students. Modeling was described as an essential component of instruction, transforming abstract lessons about perseverance into tangible behaviors students could observe and emulate. When teachers managed frustration, adjusted plans, or addressed challenges calmly, they provided visible examples of how to respond productively to adversity. Through these daily demonstrations, resilience was presented as something practiced rather than preached.

Teacher 004 explained, “Even when I’m frustrated, I try to take a deep breath and keep my tone the same. If I lose control, they lose control. When they see me calm down, they usually calm down too.” His reflection highlighted how teacher composure served as direct instruction. Rather than relying solely on verbal reminders, teachers modeled emotional control through tone,

body language, and consistency. These behaviors provided nonverbal cues for students who often struggled with emotional regulation, allowing them to internalize calm responses as learned strategies.

Teacher 001 described intentionally modeling perseverance through transparency, stating, "I always try to show them that I'm not perfect either. If something doesn't go the way I planned, I tell them, 'Well, we're going to try it again and make it better next time.'" By sharing her own problem-solving process, she normalized setbacks as part of the growth process. Students witnessed their teacher experience mistakes and recover without discouragement, reinforcing that effort and adaptation were more valuable than perfection. Teachers described such modeling as crucial to shifting students' mindsets toward persistence and self-efficacy.

Teacher 002 emphasized that modeling resilience also required verbal encouragement and consistent emotional steadiness. He explained, "If they know you believe they can do it, they'll try harder. I tell them, 'I'm not going to let you quit because I know you can do it.'" This statement reflected the importance of pairing confident language with calm behavior. Teachers noted that when they maintained a composed presence and expressed belief in students' abilities, students often mirrored that persistence in their own actions. These observations demonstrated how emotional stability and encouraging speech worked together as resilience-building practices.

Teacher 006 discussed how she incorporated reflection and collaboration into her modeling practice, noting, "When something doesn't go as planned, we pause and talk about what happened and what we could do next time. I remind them that we all get frustrated, but we can figure it out together." His approach demonstrated that modeling resilience extended beyond individual behavior; it included engaging students in collective problem-solving. By making

coping strategies explicit and reflective, teachers taught students to analyze challenges and plan for improvement, core elements of both emotional and academic resilience.

Teacher 010 summarized the long-term impact of consistent modeling, explaining, “Once they trust you and see that you’re not going to give up on them, they start not giving up on themselves.” Her comment underscored that students learn perseverance through observation and relationships. Teachers recognized that resilience develops when students repeatedly experience stability, encouragement, and recovery modeled by adults they trust. These experiences contributed to students’ willingness to persist through academic and emotional challenges.

Across interviews, teachers characterized modeling resilience as both a personal discipline and an instructional strategy. They understood that resilience could not be taught effectively through abstract discussion; it had to be lived out in real time. By remaining composed, narrating their own problem-solving, and maintaining steady expectations, teachers created classrooms where resilience was visible, attainable, and reinforced daily. Through these consistent demonstrations, students learned that resilience is not an inherent trait but a learned behavior cultivated through example, reflection, and the belief that progress comes through persistence.

Theme 4: Collaboration with a Foundational Understanding of Resilience

A unified understanding of resilience was largely missing from school-level collaboration. Although participants agreed that teamwork was essential to supporting students with emotional and behavioral needs, they repeatedly pointed to a lack of professional development and coordinated planning. Teachers described relying almost exclusively on inclusion staff for practical guidance, while administrative and behavioral teams were seen as reactive rather than collaborative partners. Without a shared framework or consistent training,

teachers developed their own strategies through experience rather than through structured support.

Teacher 006 reflected on this gap, stating, “We’ve never had any real training on resilience. We get plenty of behavior meetings, but they’re about paperwork and consequences, not about how to actually help kids manage emotions.” Her observation captured the mismatch between procedural meetings and instructional needs. Teachers emphasized that most professional learning focused on compliance, documentation, or crisis response, leaving little attention to the relational and developmental aspects of resilience. This lack of alignment created inconsistency in how resilience was understood and applied across settings.

Teacher 002 noted that, in practice, collaborative problem-solving often depended on individual initiative rather than systemic design: “When something happens, it’s usually me and the inclusion teacher figuring it out. We try to come up with plans, but it’s not like there’s a set model we all follow.” This statement illustrated how informal teamwork filled the void left by the absence of structured, school-wide approaches. Teachers valued their inclusion partners but acknowledged that these efforts were reactive and fragmented rather than coordinated or proactive.

Teacher 004 reinforced this theme, explaining, “The inclusion teacher is really the only person who understands what’s going on day to day. If I need help with a student, that’s who I go to. Administration only gets involved when it’s time to send the student out.” His account reflected the practical hierarchy of support: inclusion teachers functioned as immediate allies, while administrative and behavioral personnel typically appeared only when disciplinary action was necessary. Participants consistently expressed concern that this reactive pattern undermined proactive relationship-building and continuity of care.

Teacher 010 shared similar frustrations, adding, “We don’t really collaborate with the behavior specialist unless there’s a big issue. Most of the time, they’re just the ones who remove the student. I wish there was more planning together before it gets to that point.” Her comment underscored that collaboration was often synonymous with crisis response. Teachers desired more opportunities for joint planning, data review, and shared intervention design so that escalation could be prevented rather than addressed after the fact.

Teacher 007 further elaborated on this perception, noting, “The behavior specialist and admin usually come in when a student is out of control, not before. We need them in the room when things are going right so kids see we’re all on the same side.” Her statement revealed a more profound frustration that support staff engagement was limited to discipline rather than instruction. Participants emphasized that consistent, visible collaboration could model unity and stability for students who often test boundaries to gauge adult reliability. Teachers repeatedly indicated that proactive presence would strengthen student trust and reduce behavioral escalation.

Several participants linked this lack of collaboration to a broader misunderstanding of resilience across the school system. Teacher 001 observed, “It feels like we talk about behavior but not about building skills. If everyone understood that resilience is something you teach, not something kids either have or don’t, we’d all handle situations differently.” Her statement identified a conceptual gap: without recognizing resilience as a teachable construct, institutional responses remained focused on control rather than development. This disparity contributed to inconsistent expectations and inconsistent support across classrooms.

Teacher 007 expanded on that idea, explaining, “We could do so much more if everyone was on the same page about what resilience really means. Right now, it depends on who you

ask—some think it's just about following rules, but it's really about learning how to come back from setbacks." This perspective illustrated that even within the same campus, definitions and expectations varied widely, preventing consistent reinforcement of resilience skills across classrooms. Participants expressed concern that this inconsistency confused students and limited the effectiveness of resilience-building efforts.

Participants concluded that the current collaboration model was reactive rather than developmental. They argued that genuine teamwork requires more than shared space; it depends on common understanding, joint training, and clearly defined roles. By embedding resilience education into professional development and encouraging consistent planning among teachers, administrators, and specialists, schools could build a cohesive support system that promotes lasting growth and emotional stability in students.

Research Questions

This section interprets how the four emergent themes: (a) Building Trust and Support Systems, (b) Developing Emotional and Academic Resilience, (c) Modeling and Promoting Resilient Behaviors, and (d) Collaboration with a Foundational Understanding of Resilience—address the study's three research questions through the lens of Garmezy's (1978, 1991) resilience theory and subsequent work by Masten (2014) and Luthar et al. (2020). Interview data formed the interpretive core, while classroom observations and UWRS scores served only as triangulating evidence. Each research question was examined through the lens of thematic analysis. As shown in Table 3, RQ1 was addressed by Themes 1, 2, and 3; RQ2 by Themes 2 and 3; and RQ3 by Themes 1, 3, and 4.

Table 3

Alignment of Research Questions With Themes

Research question	Themes aligned
RQ1: How do teachers perceive resilience in students with emotional disturbances?	Theme 1: Building Trust and Support Systems. Theme 2: Developing Emotional and Academic Resilience. Theme 3: Modeling and Promoting Resilient Behaviors
RQ2: How do teachers describe instructional methods used for building resilience among students with ED?	Theme 2: Developing Emotional and Academic Resilience; Theme 3: Modeling and Promoting Resilient Behaviors
RQ3: How do teachers describe best practices for building resilience among students with ED??	Theme 1: Building Trust and Support Systems. Theme 3: Modeling and Promoting Resilient Behaviors; Theme 4: Collaboration with a Foundational Understanding of Resilience

RQ 1: How do middle school general education teachers in southern Mississippi perceive resilience among students with ED in the inclusive setting?

Themes 1 and 2 show that teachers perceived resilience as an adaptive interaction between internal regulation and external support, consistent with Garmezy's (1991) view that resilience arises when protective systems offset risk. Teachers emphasized trust, predictability, and belonging as the conditions that enable students with emotional disturbances to re-engage after setbacks, which reflect external protective factors. Their focus on emotional safety and patient redirection illustrates Masten's (2014) "ordinary magic," (p. 3) in which every day relational experiences nurture adaptive capacity.

Participants also described resilience as a learnable, context-dependent capacity rather than an inherent trait, consistent with contemporary conceptualizations of resilience as a dynamic skill shaped by environmental factors (Luthar et al., 2020; Mansfield et al., 2021). Themes 1 and 2 thus illustrate the integration of theory and practice: teachers acknowledged both Garmezy's (1971) systemic protective factors and the modern focus on teachable emotional regulation. Their perceptions framed resilience as an emergent process arising from the interplay of relational trust and academic opportunity, rather than a fixed personality characteristic.

RQ 2: How do middle school general education teachers in southern Mississippi describe the instructional methods they use to build resilience among students with ED in inclusive settings?

Themes 2 and 3 demonstrate that teachers enacted resilience theory through modeling, scaffolding, and reflective dialogue. These actions mirror Garmezy's (1978) assertion that adaptive competence is strengthened through repeated, supported challenge. Participants described narrating their own problem-solving ("We'll try it again and make it better next time"),

keeping a calm tone and body language, and guiding students to reframe frustration as growth—all examples of protective instruction that build internal assets.

This enactment aligns with Masten's (2014) framework of ordinary adaptive systems and with social-learning research showing that teacher composure and explicit reflection promote student self-regulation (Frazier et al., 2020; Yeager & Dweck, 2020). By embedding emotional coaching within academic routines, teachers transformed theoretical principles into observable classroom behaviors. Themes 2 and 3 together illustrate that instruction in resilience is not a discrete lesson but a continuous, modeled experience that allows students to practice recovery within safe boundaries, precisely as the adaptive micro-systems Garmezy and Masten describe.

RQ 3: How do middle school general education teachers in southern Mississippi describe the best practices they have experienced for building resilience among students with ED in inclusive settings?

Themes 1, 3, and 4 reveal that teachers identified trust-building, consistent modeling, and collaborative alignment as essential for sustaining resilience, while also acknowledging systemic weaknesses. Participants stressed that inclusion teachers were often their only reliable partners and that behavioral specialists or administrators tended to appear only after crisis conditions. This pattern contrasts with Garmezy's ecological expectation that protective systems function proactively and in connection with one another.

This partial alignment between theory and reality underscores a shift noted in contemporary literature: proper resilience support now requires whole-school coordination (Beltman, 2023; Day et al., 2021; Gu & Li, 2022). Teachers' descriptions suggest that the core protective relationships emphasized by Garmezy remain indispensable but must be reinforced through structured collaboration, shared professional learning, and consistent communication.

Their best practices thus expand the theoretical model from relational to systemic resilience—where safety, modeling, and partnership converge to sustain adaptive functioning across contexts.

In summary, each research question aligns with distinct yet interrelated aspects of Garmezy's resilience theory: teachers' perceptions illustrate protective systems in practice; their instructional methods operationalize adaptive competence through modeling and scaffolding; and their identified best practices highlight the ecological interplay of relationships and institutional support required to maintain resilience in inclusive middle-school settings. Together, these elements show how resilience develops through everyday interaction within the teacher-student environment.

Evaluation of the Findings

This study examined teachers' perceptions of students' resilience in the face of emotional and behavioral challenges and the strategies they use to foster it. Although classroom observations and resilience scale scores supported triangulation, interpretation of findings centers on the interview data, which provided the richest insights into teachers' beliefs and daily practices. These combined data sources provided a coherent understanding of how resilience was supported in inclusive middle school classrooms.

Grounded in Garmezy's (1978, 1991) resilience theory, the study conceptualized resilience as the ability to maintain or regain adaptive functioning despite adversity. Garmezy identified two key components of resilience: internal assets, such as problem-solving and emotional regulation, and external protective factors, such as caring adults and stable environments. These foundational works, although dated, remain essential to the theoretical grounding of resilience research. They provide the conceptual base from which later models,

such as Masten's (2014) concept of "ordinary magic," evolved. Masten emphasized that resilience is not an extraordinary trait but arises from ordinary systems, such as secure relationships, supportive schools, and consistent caregiving, that enable adaptation.

Contemporary researchers continue to affirm the relevance of these ideas, showing that resilience remains a dynamic and teachable process dependent on social context (Beltman, 2023; Day et al., 2021; Luthar et al., 2020; Mansfield et al., 2021). The findings of this study both support and extend these theoretical frameworks by illustrating how educators in modern classrooms intentionally structure opportunities for resilience through relationships, modeling, and guided reflection, while also revealing system-level challenges that inhibit consistent support. This added perspective shows how foundational theory continues to function within everyday instructional practice.

Theme 1: Building Trust and Support Systems

The first central theme, *Building Trust and Support Systems*, reflected Garmezy's (1978, 1991) and Masten's (2014) emphasis on protective relationships as the foundation of resilience. Teachers described emotional safety and relational consistency as essential for learning and behavioral recovery. Many participants emphasized that before instruction or behavioral change could occur, students had to believe their teachers genuinely cared for them and would respond calmly and predictably, even when behaviors escalated. This sense of safety allowed students with emotional and behavioral challenges to take academic and social risks, knowing that their teachers would respond with empathy rather than punishment. This finding aligns with research showing that trust-based classroom environments predict student persistence and self-regulation.

Brown and Dixon (2020) found that when teachers intentionally use empathy and private feedback, students interpret discipline as supportive rather than punitive, thereby strengthening relational trust and reducing emotional escalation. Likewise, Wang, Degol, and Henry (2021) demonstrated that students in classrooms characterized by high teacher–student trust report greater academic motivation and fewer disruptive behaviors. The present findings extend these conclusions by illustrating how teachers operationalize trust through calm communication, predictable routines, and private dialogue, turning theoretical protective factors into observable classroom practices. Participants consistently emphasized that relational trust was not developed through significant incentives or formal interventions but through consistent, day-to-day actions that conveyed respect, fairness, and dependability.

These findings further affirm Garmezy's ecological model, demonstrating that teacher consistency and empathy establish the environmental stability in which resilience can emerge. Teachers' narratives revealed that supportive relationships not only reduce disruptive behaviors but also create the emotional scaffolding needed for students to recover from setbacks and remain engaged in learning. This connection between emotional security and academic resilience reinforces Masten's (2014) concept of "ordinary magic," in which the simple presence of stable, caring adults becomes transformative for children facing adversity. In inclusive classrooms, trust serves as both the foundation and the outcome of resilience-building practices, shaping the climate in which all other strategies take root. Ultimately, establishing strong support systems enables students with emotional disturbance to experience success, accountability, and belonging—key components of resilient functioning across academic and behavioral domains.

Theme 2: Developing Emotional and Academic Resilience

The second central theme, *Developing Emotional and Academic Resilience*, demonstrated how teachers viewed persistence as a skill that could be intentionally taught, practiced, and reinforced through daily classroom interactions. Participants described resilience not as a fixed trait but as a process cultivated through deliberate, consistent opportunities for reflection, problem-solving, and reframing challenges. Teachers noted that many students with emotional disturbance initially struggled to regulate emotions or maintain engagement when faced with frustration. To address this, teachers embedded strategies such as guided reflection, emotional labeling, and goal setting directly into lessons and behavior supports. These approaches allowed students to identify their emotions, consider alternative responses, and gradually build the self-regulation skills necessary for academic and behavioral growth.

This finding aligns with Garmezy's (1978, 1991) concept of adaptive competence and Masten's (2014) assertion that resilience arises from ordinary experiences that strengthen coping and perseverance. Teachers in this study demonstrated these principles by treating setbacks as learning opportunities rather than failures, helping students reframe challenges as part of the growth process. For instance, participants reported using calm redirection, structured breaks, or brief one-on-one conferences to help students reflect and reengage rather than escalate. De Carvalho and Skipper (2020) found that explicit instruction in emotional labeling and regulation improved both on-task behavior and reading achievement, supporting the approaches observed in this study. Similarly, Pusvitasari et al. (2023) reported that integrating emotional coaching into core content lessons increased persistence and reduced avoidance behaviors. Teachers' use of these strategies reflected an understanding that emotional and academic development are intertwined rather than separate processes.

Teachers also highlighted the importance of modeling perseverance and maintaining consistent expectations across academic and behavioral contexts. By acknowledging effort and progress rather than perfection, they encouraged students to view effort as meaningful. This approach parallels Yeager and Dweck's (2020) research on growth mindset, emphasizing that students who interpret struggle as a form of progress display greater persistence over time. Within the inclusive classroom, teachers fostered this mindset by celebrating small successes, encouraging peer support, and emphasizing that resilience can be built through practice. In doing so, they reframed failure as a necessary part of learning and reinforced the message that persistence, not perfection, drives achievement.

Collectively, these findings reveal that developing emotional and academic resilience depends on intentional, consistent teacher practices that merge emotional coaching with instructional design. Teachers' reflections show that when students learn to regulate emotions and reengage after difficulty, they strengthen both their academic competence and their belief in their own capacity to overcome obstacles. This process reflects Garmezy's and Masten's theoretical frameworks, illustrating that resilience is not innate but constructed through guided practice, supportive feedback, and opportunities to recover and try again.

Theme 3: Modeling and Promoting Resilient Behaviors

The third central theme, *Modeling and Promoting Resilient Behaviors*, highlighted the behavioral pathways through which resilience is demonstrated and taught in inclusive classrooms. Teachers described modeling composure, self-correction, and perseverance as intentional instructional acts designed to help students learn adaptive responses. Many participants explained that students with emotional disturbance often mirror the behavior and emotional tone of the adults around them; therefore, maintaining calm, consistent responses in

moments of challenge was essential to preventing escalation. When teachers modeled emotional control, problem-solving, and recovery after mistakes, students began to view these behaviors as attainable rather than abstract expectations. This practice positioned the teacher not only as an instructor but also as a living example of resilience in action.

These accounts support Garmezy's (1978, 1991) recognition of adult modeling as an adaptive mechanism and Masten's (2014) emphasis on resilience emerging through ordinary interactions. Frazier et al. (2020) observed that teachers who verbalize their coping strategies increase students' emotional regulation and task persistence. Similarly, Mansfield et al. (2021) found that teacher self-reflection and visible recovery from mistakes foster students' willingness to take risks in learning. Teachers in this study extended these ideas by describing modeling as a collaborative process. Rather than simply demonstrating perseverance, they engaged students in reflective dialogue about what went wrong and how to respond differently next time. This co-regulation process allowed students to see the teacher's reasoning and apply similar strategies to their own situations, reinforcing the belief that self-correction and resilience are achievable skills.

Participants also emphasized that modeling went beyond emotional regulation to include academic persistence. Teachers deliberately completed challenging tasks alongside students, talked through moments of confusion, and celebrated improvement rather than perfection. By making their own problem-solving visible, they showed that mistakes are a natural and productive part of learning. This transparent modeling encouraged students to take responsibility for their actions, persist despite setbacks, and use constructive strategies to reengage after difficulty. Such classroom practices aligned with Garmezy's ecological model, illustrating how

adults transmit adaptive functioning through consistent demonstration rather than instruction alone.

Overall, these findings affirm that resilience is learned as much through observation and relational connection as through direct teaching. By modeling calm, consistent, and reflective responses, teachers provided students with tangible examples of adaptive behavior in the face of adversity. This visible modeling bridged theory and practice, showing that resilience can be cultivated when teachers intentionally embody the coping strategies and persistence they wish to see in their students. In doing so, educators transform everyday classroom moments into living lessons on how to recover, reflect, and keep moving forward despite challenges.

Theme 4: Collaboration with a Foundational Understanding of Resilience

The fourth central theme, *Collaboration with a Foundational Understanding of Resilience*, revealed an ongoing challenge in translating theoretical principles into consistent schoolwide practices. While teachers demonstrated many resilience-building behaviors individually, they reported that true collaboration across roles, disciplines, and administrative levels was often fragmented or inconsistent. Participants described limited opportunities for professional dialogue about resilience and few structured systems for joint problem-solving. Several teachers noted that inclusion teachers or classroom aides were their most reliable collaborators, as other forms of support tended to occur only during crises. This reactive pattern contrasted sharply with the proactive, multi-layered collaboration that Garmezy's (1978, 1991) ecological model assumes. Instead of cohesive protective systems, participants described working within isolated pockets of support, where individual teachers often carried the primary responsibility for addressing students' emotional and behavioral needs.

These observations align with Houchins et al. (2020) and Gu and Li (2022), who found that inconsistent interprofessional collaboration weakens resilience-building efforts for students with emotional and behavioral disorders. Beltman (2023) and Day et al. (2021) similarly argued that a shared professional language and regular communication among staff are critical for developing resilient school cultures. Teachers in this study confirmed those assertions, emphasizing that while collaboration does occur, it is typically informal and dependent on personal initiative rather than structured policy. They also expressed a need for more training focused on resilience theory and its practical applications, noting that professional development often centers on compliance or procedural requirements rather than strategies that strengthen emotional safety and adaptive functioning.

Despite these systemic barriers, participants viewed collaboration as vital to sustaining resilience-based practices. Teachers described how sharing ideas, debriefing after challenging incidents, and aligning expectations across classrooms allowed them to respond more consistently to students with emotional disturbance. When collaboration did occur, particularly between general and special educators, it fostered a stronger sense of collective efficacy and improved continuity of care for students. These interactions demonstrated the potential for Garmezy's ecological systems to function effectively when communication and shared purpose are prioritized.

In essence, this theme highlights a gap between theory and practice. While resilience frameworks emphasize interconnected systems that reinforce adaptive functioning, teachers often operate within structures that lack cohesion and shared understanding. Addressing this disconnect requires not only professional collaboration but also leadership that values emotional well-being as central to academic success. The findings affirm that resilient schools are built

through collaborative cultures in which teachers, specialists, and administrators work together with a shared understanding of resilience. When such alignment exists, the protective systems Garmezy first identified become tangible supports that enable students with emotional and behavioral challenges to thrive.

Overall, the findings of this study affirm the enduring relevance of Garmezy's resilience theory while revealing its practical evolution in contemporary education. Teachers' practices illustrate the ordinary magic described by Masten (2014): trust, emotional safety, and consistent modeling that enable students to adapt and persist. These results also align with modern perspectives that define resilience as dynamic, context-dependent, and teachable (Luthar et al., 2020; Mansfield et al., 2021; Beltman, 2023). Yet they also expose the limitations of theoretical assumptions when institutional coherence is lacking. Modern resilience-building depends not only on caring relationships and adaptive instruction but also on systemic collaboration, shared professional learning, and leadership that reinforce the protective systems Garmezy first identified (Day et al., 2021; Gu & Li, 2022; Beltman, 2023). These findings demonstrate both continuity and progression: while the foundational principles of resilience remain valid, their enactment in today's classrooms requires deliberate cultivation across relational, instructional, and organizational levels of educational practice.

In summary, this study's findings extend resilience theory by illustrating how teacher–student relationships, instructional practices, and collaborative systems collectively influence adaptive functioning among students with emotional and behavioral challenges. These connections demonstrate how daily interactions and broader school structures shape students' capacity to respond constructively to academic and emotional demands. The next chapter will

explore the implications of these findings for educational policy, teacher preparation, and future research on resilience-based practices in inclusive classrooms.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore middle school general education teachers' perceptions, instructional methods, and best practices for building students' resilience with ED in inclusive classroom settings. The study addressed the problem that middle school teachers who implement inclusive strategies often lack sufficient knowledge and skills to promote resilience among students with ED, which affects both student success and classroom functioning. Data were collected from 10 middle school general education teachers using the UWRS, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step method guided the thematic analysis. Credibility was strengthened through triangulation, member checking, field-tested instruments, and maintenance of an audit trail to ensure methodological rigor.

Trustworthiness was addressed through credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Credibility was established by triangulating data from multiple sources and verifying transcript accuracy through member checking. Dependability was maintained through consistent procedures, field-tested instruments, and documented analytic steps. Confirmability was supported by use of a reflexive journal, peer debriefing, and transparent coding grounded in participant data. Transferability was supported through detailed demographic and instructional information describing participant backgrounds and classroom settings.

Data analysis involved systematic coding and categorization to identify patterns related to teacher perceptions and classroom practices that promote resilience. Interview data, observation checklists, and UWRS scores were reviewed together to determine consistency across sources.

The integration of these data produced a comprehensive understanding of how resilience was conceptualized and enacted in inclusive middle school classrooms.

Participants represented a range of grade levels, subject areas, and teaching experience, spanning three to twenty-four years. UWRS scores ranged from 23 to 38, indicating variation in self-reported resilience. The demographic and professional characteristics of participants established the context for interpreting their instructional approaches and perspectives. This variation provided a broad frame for understanding how teachers with different backgrounds described and applied resilience-building practices in their classrooms.

Four major themes were identified. The first, *building trust and support systems*, reflected the importance of emotional safety and authentic relationships in supporting students with behavioral and emotional challenges. The second, *developing emotional and academic resilience*, described how persistence and self-regulation were encouraged through reflection, problem-solving, and guided opportunities to recover from mistakes. The third, *modeling and promoting resilient behaviors*, emphasized composure, adaptability, and transparent problem-solving as instructional strategies students could observe and apply. The fourth, *collaboration with a foundational understanding of resilience*, indicated that while teachers valued teamwork, collaboration and professional development were inconsistent across school contexts.

The findings corresponded with Garmezy's (1978, 1991) resilience theory and related frameworks by Masten (2014) and Luthar et al. (2020). Teachers described resilience as a dynamic process shaped by relationships and environmental conditions rather than a fixed personal attribute. Instructional practices such as modeling, scaffolding, and emotional coaching aligned with theoretical concepts of adaptive competence and everyday learning experiences.

Resilience was developed through consistent instructional support and structured relational interactions.

The evaluation of the findings showed alignment with prior research emphasizing trust, emotional safety, and modeling as essential to resilience development. The results also revealed gaps between theoretical expectations and practical application, particularly regarding systemic collaboration and professional learning. Teachers effectively implemented resilience-building strategies in their classrooms, but broader institutional coordination was limited. Resilience development in inclusive classrooms depended on both individual practice and organizational structures that reinforced those practices.

The findings in this chapter synthesize teachers' perceptions, instructional methods, and identified practices for supporting students with emotional disturbances' resilience. Evidence from interviews, observations, and UWRS scores indicated that relational trust, structured modeling, and reflective collaboration contributed to resilience-building in inclusive educational environments. These findings form the foundation for the interpretation and implications addressed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Recommendations, and Study Summary

The problem addressed in this study was the limited understanding of how general education teachers perceive and foster resilience in middle school students with emotional disturbance (ED) and how those perceptions influence behavioral and academic outcomes in inclusive classrooms. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how middle school general education teachers understand and implement strategies to build resilience in students with ED in inclusive settings. This explanation clarifies the focus and scope of this investigation.

A purposive sample of 10 middle school general education teachers from a southern Mississippi school district participated in the study. Data were collected using the University of Washington Resilience Scale (UWRS), semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations. Triangulation across these data sources was used to verify consistency among teacher-reported perceptions, observed classroom practices, and reflective responses.

A qualitative case study design was selected to enable detailed exploration of teachers' perceptions and practices in inclusive middle school classrooms. This design was used to support the examination of instructional and relational strategies that foster resilience among students with ED. Thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step process to organize, code, and categorize data into patterns that represented teachers' shared experiences.

Data analysis produced four major themes: building trust and support systems, developing emotional and academic resilience, modeling and promoting resilient behaviors, and collaboration with a foundational understanding of resilience. These categories represent the central findings derived from the triangulated data sources and form the organizational basis for the study's results.

Several limitations bounded the study. The small, single-district sample limited transferability to other settings. Because the usage data relied on teacher self-reporting, responses may have reflected selective recall or personal bias. Observations were conducted during one semester, restricting the ability to examine long-term behavioral or instructional changes. As the researcher served as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, subjectivity was possible. Still, it was addressed through reflexive journaling, peer debriefing, and maintenance of an audit trail to enhance credibility and confirmability.

This chapter includes an interpretation of the findings through the framework of Garmezy's resilience theory and related literature, a discussion of the implications for educational practice and policy, and recommendations for future research. The chapter concludes with a summary of the study's contributions to understanding resilience development among students with emotional disturbance in inclusive classroom settings. This structure provides a clear pathway for examining how the findings inform both practice and future inquiry.

Interpretation of Findings

This section was an interpretation of the study's results to explain how middle school general education teachers foster resilience in students with emotional disturbance (ED) within inclusive classrooms. The discussion is framed by Garmezy's resilience theory and supported by current research emphasizing adaptive systems that promote persistence and emotional regulation (Garmezy, 1978; Masten, 2021; Ungar, 2022). Each theme illustrates a dimension of how teachers' perceptions and practices contribute to resilience-building, directly addressing the limited understanding of how general educators perceive and promote resilience in students with ED. The interpretation highlights the broader meaning of the findings for practice, training, and institutional support within inclusive education.

Theme 1: Building Trust and Support Systems

Teachers in this study emphasized that trust and support formed the foundation for helping students with emotional and behavioral challenges develop resilience. Participants described practices such as calm communication, maintaining discretion, and privately redirecting students to preserve dignity and reduce emotional escalation. These actions reflected intentional relational strategies that enabled students to feel emotionally safe and capable of re-engaging after setbacks. This finding addressed the research problem by showing that, although general education teachers often reported limited training in fostering resilience, many applied strategies grounded in relational consistency and emotional safety.

These findings align with Garmezy's (1991) conceptualization of resilience as a process strengthened by protective systems within the environment, particularly through caring and consistent adults. Teachers' emphasis on empathy, patience, and confidentiality reflected the protective relationships Garmezy identified as essential buffers against stress. Masten's (2014) notion of "ordinary magic" also applies here, as teachers enacted resilience-building through everyday interactions that cultivated predictability, belonging, and trust. Their classroom practices illustrated how ordinary routines such as private redirection or brief reassurance functioned as adaptive systems that nurtured recovery and persistence.

Rutter (2012) similarly highlighted stability and supportive environments as factors that reduce risk exposure and promote adaptive functioning. The teachers' relational strategies, including calm de-escalation and one-on-one communication, created stable micro-environments that supported emotional regulation and engagement. This interpretation aligns with current studies demonstrating that strong teacher–student relationships predict improved emotional adjustment and academic engagement (Collie et al., 2022; Longobardi et al., 2021; Roorda et al.,

2017). Recent research further confirms that students who perceive teachers as trustworthy and caring demonstrate stronger coping skills and fewer behavioral incidents (Naufal & Ismail, 2023; Beltman, 2023).

The alignment between teachers' relational approaches and resilience theory underscores the continuing relevance of Garmezy's (1985) ecological model in modern classrooms. However, the findings also reveal a partial divergence from theoretical expectations: while resilience theory emphasizes coordinated systems of support (Garmezy, 1978; Masten, 2021), teachers in this study often acted as individual agents of protection rather than as members of cohesive institutional networks. This observation suggests that although relational trust remains a central protective mechanism, sustained resilience-building requires systemic reinforcement through schoolwide coordination (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Jennings & Greenberg, 2020).

The evidence suggests that trust-based relationships serve as an essential foundation for resilience among students with emotional disturbance, and that consistent, relationally focused practices across classrooms could strengthen both emotional regulation and academic engagement (Brunzell et al., 2021; Pianta et al., 2022). These findings indicate that relational strategies function as core instructional supports rather than supplemental practices, reflecting how teachers integrated emotional safety into their daily routines. Integration of relational-safety training within pre-service and in-service professional learning may further enhance teachers' capacity to foster resilience through intentional, trust-centered classroom practices (Cowan et al., 2021).

Theme 2: Developing Emotional and Academic Resilience

Teachers in this study described resilience as the capacity of students with ED to persist through setbacks, regulate emotions, and re-engage in learning tasks after frustration. They

emphasized that emotional and academic growth were interconnected, and that helping students recover from emotional challenges directly supported their ability to sustain academic effort. This theme aligns with the research problem by illustrating that general education teachers, even without formal training in resilience-building, recognized and enacted strategies that supported both emotional regulation and academic persistence.

These findings correspond with Garmezy's (1991) identification of adaptive competence as a central feature of resilience, the ability to maintain functioning despite stressors through learned coping processes. Teachers' efforts to guide students through frustration, model composure, and scaffold problem-solving reflected the activation of these adaptive systems in classroom contexts. Masten's (2014) description of resilience as ordinary magic, emerging from everyday adaptive interactions, is directly supported here: through consistent routines, calm modeling, and encouragement, teachers transformed ordinary instructional practices into mechanisms of recovery and growth.

The data also align with contemporary perspectives emphasizing resilience as a teachable, context-dependent skill rather than a fixed trait. Luthar et al. (2020) and Mansfield et al. (2021) found that resilience develops through repeated opportunities to regulate emotion, reframe setbacks, and experience mastery. Teachers in this study promoted these experiences by helping students identify emotions, recognize prior successes, and reinterpret frustration as a normal part of learning. This approach mirrors the growth mindset framework proposed by Yeager and Dweck (2020), in which effort and struggle are reframed as integral to progress rather than indicators of failure.

The participants' emphasis on emotional safety as a prerequisite for academic success also aligns with prior research. De Carvalho and Skipper (2020) and Pusvitasari et al. (2023) reported that emotional regulation and teacher-led coping instruction significantly improve academic engagement and persistence among students with behavioral or emotional difficulties. Similarly, Graziano et al. (2007) found that teacher support and structured emotional guidance enhance both social and academic adjustment. In the present study, teachers' practice of linking emotional coaching with academic scaffolding demonstrates how these processes operate simultaneously to sustain motivation and resilience.

Interpretively, this theme extends Garmezy's ecological model by showing that resilience in students with ED is reinforced not only through external protection but also through guided internal skill-building. Teachers acted as facilitators of adaptive competence, helping students construct strategies for managing emotions and persisting through difficulty within safe, structured environments. The alignment between emotional and academic resilience observed in this study highlights how both dimensions function as mutually reinforcing aspects of adaptive behavior. This finding underscores the continuing validity of resilience theory in inclusive classrooms while also emphasizing the importance of deliberate instructional design to strengthen students' emotional and cognitive coping capacities.

The findings indicate that fostering resilience in students with ED depends on teachers' ability to connect emotional regulation with academic persistence through intentional instructional design. Although general education teachers reported minimal formal training in resilience development, their practices demonstrated a natural integration of emotional coaching and academic scaffolding. This implies that resilience can be supported effectively when educators receive targeted professional learning that links emotional competence to instructional

practice (Jennings & Greenberg, 2020; Yeager & Dweck, 2020). Research on social-emotional learning and self-regulation supports this connection, emphasizing that students' emotional awareness and coping strategies directly influence their engagement and academic performance (Brackett et al., 2019; Masten, 2021). Schoolwide initiatives that promote emotional safety and model adaptive learning environments may enhance teachers' capacity to embed resilience-building within daily instruction, thereby addressing the research problem of limited understanding and inconsistent application of resilience strategies in inclusive settings (Day et al., 2021; Greenberg et al., 2023).

Theme 3: Modeling and Promoting Resilient Behaviors

Teachers in this study identified modeling as a central method for fostering resilience among students with ED. Participants emphasized that students learned most effectively when they observed teachers demonstrating calm, persistence, and adaptive problem-solving in real time. This emphasis reflects the research problem: many general education teachers report limited preparation for explicitly teaching resilience but engage in modeling behaviors that convey it implicitly. Through deliberate self-regulation and transparent reflection, teachers provided living examples of how to respond to frustration, failure, and uncertainty constructively.

This theme aligns closely with Garmezy's (1991) conceptualization of adaptive competence, which develops when children are exposed to consistent, positive models of coping within their environment. By maintaining composure, adjusting instruction when plans failed, and verbalizing problem-solving steps, teachers in this study illustrated the protective systems Garmezy described as essential for promoting resilience. Their actions also reflect Masten's (2014) framework of ordinary magic, in which resilience arises through everyday experiences

and interactions rather than extraordinary intervention. These ordinary classroom routines of acknowledging mistakes, resetting expectations, and re-engaging with persistence served as real-time demonstrations of adaptive functioning.

The significance of teacher modeling is further supported by Bandura's (1986) social learning theory, which posits that observing modeled behavior leads to imitation and the internalization of adaptive responses. In the present study, teachers who managed their own frustration or calmly resolved disruptions effectively provided social cues that students could mirror. Jennings and Greenberg (2009) also found that when teachers exhibit self-regulation and emotional composure, classroom environments become more stable, promoting both behavioral control and academic engagement. More recent work by Schonert-Reichl and Roeser (2023) confirms that teacher modeling of mindfulness and coping contributes to students' emotional growth and resilience in inclusive learning settings.

Interpretively, this theme illustrates how teachers operationalized resilience theory through behavior rather than direct instruction. Their modeling transformed abstract concepts such as perseverance and emotional regulation into observable, repeatable actions. This enactment aligns with Masten's (2021) updated perspective, which holds that resilience is a process of learning adaptive strategies within social contexts. The participants' approaches also extend Garmezy's ecological model by demonstrating how teacher modeling can function as both an environmental and instructional protective factor, simultaneously stabilizing the learning environment and providing concrete behavioral templates for students with ED.

Overall, this theme underscores that modeling resilience represents an instructional mechanism through which students internalize adaptive responses. The teachers' behaviors revealed how resilience can be cultivated not only through explicit lessons but also through

consistent demonstration of problem-solving, emotional steadiness, and persistence. These findings reinforce the theoretical assertion that resilience develops within dynamic social systems and that teachers serve as critical agents within those systems, shaping students' capacity to adapt through example and interaction.

The findings imply that teachers' ability to model composure, problem-solving, and persistence has a measurable impact on how students with ED learn adaptive responses to stress and frustration. This aligns with Bandura's (1986) social learning theory, which emphasizes that individuals acquire behavioral and emotional reactions by observing and imitating others within meaningful contexts. Research supports that when teachers demonstrate calmness and reflective problem-solving, students are more likely to internalize these adaptive behaviors (Frazier et al., 2020; Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010). This suggests that resilience is most effectively fostered when educators are supported in developing their own emotional regulation and reflective practice skills (Greenberg et al., 2023; Jennings & Greenberg, 2020). Professional learning that emphasizes teacher self-awareness, emotional regulation, and visible coping strategies could enhance the consistency and quality of modeling across classrooms. Strengthening this instructional dimension would directly address the research problem by equipping general education teachers who often have limited formal preparation in this area to promote resilience through observable, authentic behaviors embedded in daily practice (Day et al., 2021; Mansfield et al., 2021).

Theme 4: Collaboration with a Foundational Understanding of Resilience

Teachers in this study consistently identified collaboration as a necessary yet underdeveloped element in supporting students with ED's resilience. Participants described relying heavily on inclusion teachers for day-to-day guidance while noting limited proactive

involvement from administrators or behavioral specialists. Collaboration most often occurred reactively after behavioral incidents rather than as part of structured, preventive planning. This theme highlights a critical aspect of the research problem: while general education teachers recognized the importance of coordinated support, the absence of shared frameworks and consistent collaboration limited the systemic reinforcement of resilience strategies across classrooms.

These findings closely align with Garmezy's (1991) ecological model, which conceptualizes resilience as an outcome of interacting protective systems at the individual, familial, and institutional levels. In theory, teachers, specialists, administrators, and families function collectively to create environments that support adaptive functioning. However, participants in this study reported fragmented communication and inconsistent coordination, suggesting a partial divergence from Garmezy's systemic vision. Masten (2014) similarly emphasized that resilience emerges from ordinary systems of care and support that operate reliably within a child's environment. The teachers' experiences demonstrated that when such systems function in isolation rather than concert, their protective potential is diminished.

This interpretation also aligns with contemporary resilience research, which emphasizes the importance of multi-systemic and team-based approaches. Ungar (2012) and Rutter (2012) both argued that resilience outcomes improve when external systems such as schools, families, and community agencies work in alignment. More recent studies support this position, noting that structured collaboration among educators, counselors, and families enhances students' emotional regulation and academic performance (Beltman, 2023; Carter et al., 2019; Gu & Li, 2022). The teachers' reliance on inclusion staff as primary supports underscores how informal, interpersonal collaboration can substitute for formal systemic coordination but also reveals the

vulnerability of such arrangements when they depend on individual initiative rather than institutional design.

The data further suggest that gaps in staff's shared understanding of resilience hindered cohesive practice. Several participants noted that colleagues and administrators often equated resilience with compliance or behavior management, rather than viewing it as a skill that could be intentionally taught and reinforced. This conceptual inconsistency aligns with Day et al.'s (2021) findings, which reported that schools lacking a unified definition of resilience struggle to implement coordinated support systems. In contrast, research indicates that shared professional language around resilience contributes to more consistent interventions and improved student outcomes (Brunzell et al., 2021; Mansfield et al., 2021).

Interpretively, this theme illustrates both the potential and the fragility of collaboration as a protective factor within resilience theory. Teachers' descriptions confirm Garmezy's premise that resilience depends on the interdependence of multiple systems but also demonstrate that these systems must communicate effectively to sustain adaptive processes. The participants' experiences extend Masten's framework by showing that while individual teachers can model and foster resilience within their classrooms, sustained progress for students with ED requires coordinated efforts that integrate emotional, behavioral, and academic supports across professional and institutional boundaries.

Developing a shared professional understanding of resilience is essential for creating consistent, schoolwide practices that support students with ED. Collaborative structures that intentionally include all stakeholders, including general and special educators, administrators, counselors, and families, can strengthen alignment between emotional, behavioral, and academic supports (Brunzell et al., 2021; Carter et al., 2019). Research suggests that when schools

establish professional learning communities or multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) grounded in a common language and shared strategies, outcomes for both students and teachers improve through coherence and collective efficacy (Gu & Li, 2022; Mansfield et al., 2021). Targeted professional learning that cultivates a unified understanding of resilience may reduce the fragmentation observed in this study and enhance continuity of support across classrooms (Ungar, 2022). Institutionalizing these collaborative practices aligns with Garmezy's (1978) ecological model by ensuring that resilience-building is not dependent on individual initiative but is sustained through systemic, coordinated effort across school environments.

Recommendations for Practice

The findings from this study reveal how general education teachers promote resilience in students with ED through relational, instructional, and behavioral practices, often without formal training or systemic support. This limited institutional structure underscores the research problem that resilience-building in inclusive settings depends heavily on individual teacher initiative rather than coordinated, research-based frameworks. The four themes identified in this study, which include building trust and support systems, developing emotional and academic resilience, modeling resilient behaviors, and collaboration with shared understanding, illustrate how teachers compensate for the absence of formalized approaches by creating adaptive, classroom-based strategies that foster student persistence and emotional growth.

Building on the first theme, establishing trust and support systems emerged as the foundation for fostering resilience in students with ED. Teachers described how consistent communication, discretion, and emotional safety allowed students to recover from frustration and remain engaged. These findings reflect Garmezy's (1978) conceptualization of resilience as strengthened by protective environmental systems and align with trauma-informed frameworks

that emphasize predictability, empathy, and relational repair (Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2019; Brunzell et al., 2021). However, participants' reliance on self-developed relational practices highlights the broader absence of structured, policy-supported approaches to relationship-building within district or state guidelines. Professional development grounded in relationship-centered models such as trust-based relational interventions and the trauma-sensitive schools framework (Purvis et al., 2020) could formalize and sustain these practices. Integrating social-emotional learning (SEL) competencies into instructional routines, as outlined in the CASEL 5 Framework (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2023), may further support teachers' efforts to embed trust, emotional safety, and regulation into daily classroom interactions.

The second theme, developing emotional and academic resilience, reflected teachers' understanding that persistence and regulation are interconnected skills that can be explicitly taught. Although general education teachers recognized this relationship, their practices were largely intuitive and unaligned with a standardized behavioral or resilience curriculum. Teachers guided students to reflect on mistakes, link effort to progress, and re-engage after frustration—approaches that align with research on growth mindset and self-regulation (Pusvitasari et al., 2023; Yeager & Dweck, 2020). Embedding programs such as the Zones of Regulation or RULER into classroom instruction could formalize this connection between emotional competence and academic performance (Brackett et al., 2019; Grazzini et al., 2021). The findings indicate that targeted teacher preparation and coaching focused on emotional literacy and recovery strategies may close the gap identified in this study by transforming resilience from an incidental classroom practice to a deliberate instructional priority.

The third theme, modeling resilient behaviors, demonstrated that teachers fostered resilience primarily through their own emotional composure and adaptive responses. Teachers reported that students learned coping skills through observation rather than explicit instruction, illustrating that resilience was often modeled rather than intentionally taught. This finding aligns with Bandura's (1986) social learning theory, which posits that observable modeling shapes adaptive responses. Related research confirms that teacher composure and reflective practice positively influence classroom stability and student self-regulation (Jennings & Greenberg, 2020; Mansfield et al., 2021). Professional learning that supports self-regulation, reflection, and emotional awareness among teachers may enhance consistency in modeling resilient behaviors. Integrating these competencies into teacher mentoring, evaluation, and pre-service preparation would strengthen teachers' ability to foster resilience intentionally and address the broader research problem of limited formal preparation in resilience-based practice.

The fourth theme, collaboration with shared understanding, revealed that teachers valued teamwork and support but often operated without systemic coordination among colleagues, administrators, or specialists. Collaboration typically occurred reactively rather than through structured, proactive planning. This finding corresponds with Garmezy's (1978) ecological framework, which emphasizes that resilience depends on interconnected protective systems rather than isolated individual efforts. The lack of shared professional language and consistent collaboration observed in this study highlights a structural gap between teacher-level resilience efforts and institutional support. Establishing interdisciplinary collaboration through planning teams, professional learning communities, and consistent communication with families and community partners could align emotional, behavioral, and academic supports across settings (Gu & Li, 2022; Ungar, 2022). Strengthening these collaborative systems would address the

research problem by transforming resilience-building from an individual classroom practice into a coordinated, schoolwide process.

Taken together, these findings indicate that general education teachers in inclusive settings intuitively enact resilience-building strategies but lack the structural, policy, and professional frameworks necessary to sustain them consistently. By embedding relational trust, explicit instruction in coping skills, teacher modeling, and collaborative systems into schoolwide and district-level structures, schools can move beyond isolated practices toward comprehensive approaches that promote resilience for students with ED (Beltman, 2023; Masten, 2021). These considerations provide a foundation for understanding how resilience-supportive practices may be strengthened when aligned with broader institutional systems.

Recommendations for Policy

The findings from this study reveal that while teachers demonstrate effective resilience-building strategies within their classrooms, the absence of consistent, research-based behavioral frameworks across policy levels limits the sustainability of these efforts. This gap directly connects to the research problem: general education teachers frequently navigate the needs of students with ED without the structural or policy support needed to ensure equitable, evidence-based practices. Policy recommendations are therefore aligned with the four themes identified in this study, reflecting the need for coherence between teacher practice and systemic policy at the local, state, and federal levels.

In relation to the first theme, which focuses on building trust and support systems, it is recommended that local and state policies establish frameworks that institutionalize trauma-informed and relationship-centered practices. Teachers in this study emphasized that relational trust and emotional safety form the foundation for resilience, yet these conditions rely primarily

on individual teacher effort rather than district or state guidance. The participating school district, for example, maintains structured academic policies but lacks a district-wide behavioral framework or required PBIS implementation model (District Policy, 2025). Policies could be developed to require trauma-informed professional learning for all educators and to integrate relational-trust indicators into district evaluation systems. Similar approaches have been adopted in states such as Massachusetts and Washington, where trauma-informed school frameworks are embedded in educator standards and licensure renewal processes (Cowan et al., 2021). Establishing such policy in Mississippi would ensure that teacher-led trust-building strategies are consistently supported and reinforced by the system.

In connection with the second theme, which addresses developing emotional and academic resilience, state-level policy could expand the Mississippi Department of Education's MTSS to include measurable expectations for the development of emotional and behavioral skills. Teachers in this study linked emotional safety to academic success. Yet, current MDE policy provides only general guidance for behavioral interventions and does not mandate research-based approaches or fidelity monitoring (MDE, 2023). Incorporating social-emotional learning (SEL) competencies into state academic standards, as recommended by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2023), would align instructional accountability with resilience outcomes. Policies could also encourage the inclusion of growth and persistence indicators within assessment systems, recognizing adaptive progress rather than solely academic proficiency.

Aligned with the third theme, which relates to modeling and promoting resilient behaviors, policy can strengthen professional expectations related to teacher self-regulation and emotional composure. Participants in this study described how students learned resilience by

observing calm and adaptive behavior from their teachers. Embedding these competencies into teacher-evaluation frameworks and mentoring programs would institutionalize practices already shown to influence classroom stability and student outcomes (Jennings & Greenberg, 2020; Greenberg et al., 2023). It is also recommended that district and state policy support educator wellness through access to mental-health resources and professional development that reinforces coping and self-care, ensuring teachers maintain the capacity to model resilience authentically.

Finally, reflecting the fourth theme of collaboration with a foundational understanding of resilience, policy reform is needed to strengthen multi-systemic coordination across educational, behavioral, and community agencies. Teachers reported fragmented communication between general and special educators, administrators, and support staff, leading to inconsistent implementation of behavioral interventions. District-level memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with community mental-health providers and family resource centers could create formal pathways for collaboration and continuity of care (Ungar, 2022). At the state level, policy could require interdisciplinary problem-solving teams within schools and mandate scheduled planning time for coordination under the MTSS framework. At the federal level, expanding the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) and MTSS funding parameters to include resilience-specific and trauma-informed interventions would ensure that students with ED receive consistent support that integrates behavioral, emotional, and academic dimensions.

Together, these recommendations address the systemic issues reflected in the research problem: teachers are applying resilience-based strategies effectively but without structural reinforcement. Policy coherence across local, state, and federal levels would allow relational trust, emotional skill-building, modeling, and collaboration to move from isolated teacher practice to institutional expectation. Embedding trauma-informed education, SEL competencies,

and coordinated behavioral frameworks into policy ensures that resilience development becomes a sustainable, system-wide priority rather than an individual initiative.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this study were used to highlight several opportunities for continued investigation into resilience development among students with ED in inclusive middle school settings. Future studies should expand upon the teacher perspectives identified here to examine how resilience is supported, measured, and sustained across diverse educational contexts. Such work would contribute to a clearer understanding of how resilience develops within school environments that vary in structure and support.

Because this study relied primarily on qualitative interviews, future research could benefit from mixed-methods or longitudinal designs to capture both the perceptions and outcomes of resilience-building efforts over time. Quantitative measures such as the UWRS could be used to assess changes in teacher or student resilience following specific interventions or professional development initiatives. Although the resilience scale and classroom observations in this study were used solely for triangulation, future research might examine their predictive value by examining correlations among teacher resilience scores, observed practices, and student behavioral outcomes. Such inquiry could deepen understanding of how resilient teachers influence the climate and coping capacity of their students (Greenberg et al., 2023). These approaches would extend the work begun in this study by connecting teacher perceptions with measurable outcomes.

Building on the first theme, additional research could examine how relationship-based practices influence student outcomes when supported through structured frameworks. Studies might investigate the implementation of trauma-informed programs such as Trust-Based

Relational Intervention or the Trauma-Sensitive Schools model across larger samples and grade levels. Longitudinal research could track how trust-building strategies, particularly those involving discretion, empathy, and consistent care affect the long-term academic engagement and emotional regulation of students with ED (Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2019; Brunzell et al., 2021). Comparative studies across rural and urban districts could also determine whether community partnerships and access to behavioral supports influence the sustainability of relational trust. This line of inquiry would build directly on the relational foundation identified in the present study.

Future inquiry into emotional and academic resilience could explore the effectiveness of specific self-regulation and problem-solving interventions used by general education teachers. Experimental or quasi-experimental studies might evaluate how structured SEL programs, such as RULER or Zones of Regulation, impact the persistence and classroom engagement of students with ED (Brackett et al., 2019). Researchers could also investigate how teacher feedback and framing of frustration, as observed in this study, influence students' motivation and attributional thinking, extending the work of Yeager and Dweck (2020) on the growth mindset within special populations. Such studies would expand on the connections between emotional processes and academic behaviors noted in the findings.

The third theme, modeling resilient behaviors, raises questions about how teachers' own emotional regulation and coping strategies affect student learning environments. Future studies could measure teacher resilience alongside observed modeling practices to identify patterns that promote self-regulation among students with ED. Research on reflective teaching models, mentorship, or video-based coaching could clarify how intentional modeling contributes to classroom culture (Jennings & Greenberg, 2020; Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010). Exploring

the connection between teacher resilience and burnout prevention would also advance understanding of how to sustain resilience-based teaching practices over time. These investigations would extend the present study by examining how teacher characteristics shape classroom dynamics.

Regarding collaboration, future studies should explore systemic supports that enable teachers to share responsibility for students with ED. Qualitative case studies might examine the effectiveness of interdisciplinary problem-solving teams, professional learning communities (PLCs), or family–school partnerships in promoting consistency and emotional stability for students across settings (Murawski & Bernhardt, 2016; Carter et al., 2019). Research that includes family perspectives could illuminate how home–school collaboration contributes to children with ED's resilience development, addressing a gap identified in the present study. Additionally, studies investigating administrative perceptions and behavioral-specialist roles may clarify how collaborative structures can shift from reactive crisis intervention to proactive skill-building and prevention (Ungar, 2022).

Finally, future research should explore the intersection of teacher and student resilience. Although this study did not examine that relationship directly, the data suggested that teachers who demonstrated greater resilience tended to model adaptive behaviors and foster greater student engagement. Expanding on this observation through multi-site or mixed-methods designs could provide valuable insights into how cultivating teacher resilience might indirectly strengthen student outcomes.

Through these avenues, future research can extend the present study's contribution by identifying effective, scalable strategies for resilience-building grounded in both teacher practice and systemic support. Such work would help clarify how resilience approaches can be adapted

across varied school contexts while maintaining their core relational and instructional components. Continued exploration of these relationships will be essential to designing educational environments where students with emotional disturbance can thrive academically and emotionally within inclusive classrooms.

Conclusion

The problem addressed in this study was the limited understanding of how general education teachers perceived and fostered resilience in middle school students with ED and how those perceptions influenced behavioral and academic outcomes in inclusive classrooms. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how middle school general education teachers understood resilience and applied strategies to support students with ED in inclusive settings. Clarifying these perceptions and practices established the foundation for examining how resilience was supported within the everyday realities of inclusive classrooms.

A purposive sample of 10 middle school general education teachers from a large southern Mississippi school district participated in the study. Data were collected through the UWRS, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations. These sources were triangulated to strengthen the credibility of the findings and to ensure that the reported perspectives reflected consistent patterns across self-reports and observed practices. Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step process for thematic analysis, which produced four overarching themes: trust and support systems, emotional and academic resilience, modeling resilient behaviors, and collaboration with shared understanding.

The findings revealed that teachers viewed resilience as a set of adaptive behaviors supported by relationships, modeling, and structured opportunities for reflection and recovery. Across participants, relational trust emerged as the foundation of resilience-building, while

emotional and academic persistence were reinforced through teacher modeling and consistent routines. Collaboration with inclusion staff, counselors, and administrators was recognized as essential but inconsistent, highlighting the need for systemic coordination. Although the UWRS scores and classroom observations were used for triangulation only, they confirmed a relationship between higher teacher resilience and the frequency of resilience-supportive practices observed in classrooms.

The interpretation of these findings affirmed the relevance of Garmezy's (1978) resilience theory and its later extensions by Masten (2021) and Luthar et al. (2020). The results supported the theoretical premise that resilience develops through ordinary adaptive systems like stable relationships, consistent environments, and opportunities for mastery, but also revealed gaps in systemic collaboration that limited consistent implementation. These conclusions demonstrated both the continued applicability of resilience theory and its practical evolution within modern inclusive classrooms.

The recommendations developed from this study emphasized actionable strategies for educators, school leaders, and policymakers. Practice-oriented recommendations included trauma-informed and relationship-centered instruction, integration of social-emotional learning frameworks, and intentional modeling of adaptive behaviors. Policy recommendations focused on embedding resilience-based professional learning into educator standards, ensuring protected collaboration time, and formalizing partnerships with behavioral health and community organizations. Future research was recommended to examine the relationship between teacher and student resilience, evaluate specific resilience interventions, and investigate systemic supports that sustain collaboration and emotional development in inclusive settings.

Overall, this study contributed to a deeper understanding of how general education teachers perceived and fostered resilience in students with emotional and behavioral challenges. By highlighting the central role of relational trust, emotional regulation, modeling, and collaboration, the study demonstrated that resilience building is both an instructional and systemic process. Strengthening teacher capacity through professional development, supportive policy, and coordinated collaboration can enhance the adaptive systems that enable students with ED to succeed academically and socially within inclusive environments.

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Appendix A

University of Washington Resilience Scale (UWRS ©)

University of Washington Resilience Scale ©

8-item short form v1.0.

Instructions: Please respond to all questions. Please mark one box per row.

Please rate how well each statement describes you right now.

	Not at all	A little bit	Some what	Quite a bit	Very much
I maintain a positive outlook even in bad circumstances.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
When something happens that makes me feel stressed, I usually calm down quickly.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
When I experience a set-back, I keep moving forward.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Although I feel bad sometimes, I usually bounce right back.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
During stressful times, I am usually calm and relaxed.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I do what is important to me, even when stressed.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
When something stressful happens, I keep going.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
When things go wrong in my life, I can pick myself up and start again.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Appendix B

University of Washington Resilience Scale © Permission

Fw: Request for Permission to Use the University of Washington Resilience Scale (UWRS) for Doctoral Research

From Dagmar Amtmann <dagmara@uw.edu>
Date Fri 6/20/2025 12:14 PM
To Joan Easterling

Hello Joan, you have the permission to use any version of UWRS in your research, clinical practice and/or research. The instruments and the user guides are available at https://uwcorr.washington.edu/measures/uw-resilience/.
Best of luck with your research and studies. Dagmar

From: Joan Easterling
Sent: Thursday, June 19, 2025 6:18 PM
To: UW REHAB OUTCOMES RESEARCH <uwcorr@uw.edu>
Subject: Request for Permission to Use the University of Washington Resilience Scale (UWRS) for Doctoral Research

Dear UW Resilience Scale Team,

My name is Joan Easterling, and I am a doctoral candidate at Northcentral University conducting research as part of my dissertation titled *"Teachers' Perceptions of Resilience and Its Influence on Behavioral Outcomes of Students with Emotional Disturbances: A Qualitative Case Study."*

I am writing to formally request permission to use the University of Washington Resilience Scale (UWRS), Version 1, as part of my study. The scale will be used exclusively for non-commercial academic research to help triangulate data gathered through interviews and classroom observations.

Participants will complete the scale confidentially, and all data will be anonymized. I will not modify, sell, or translate the instrument, and I will provide proper attribution to the University of Washington in all written reports and publications.

Please let me know if there are any additional steps or documentation required to obtain formal permission. I would be happy to provide further details about my study or institution upon request.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Joan Easterling
Doctoral Candidate
Northcentral University

Appendix C

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Interview Guide: Exploring Perceptions and Practices in Building Resilience Among Students with Emotional Disturbance (ED) in Inclusive Settings

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Research Question 1: How do middle school general education teachers in southern Mississippi perceive resilience among students with ED in the inclusive setting?

Perceptions of Resilience:

1. Can you describe your perception of resilience as a Middle School general education teacher working in an inclusive classroom?
2. How do you think your perception of resilience influences your approach to supporting students with Emotional Disturbance (ED) in inclusive classrooms?
3. Based on your perception of resilience, what signs or behaviors do you associate with students demonstrating resilience?
4. In what ways do you nurture resilience in your students with ED?

Research Question 2: How do middle school general education teachers in southern Mississippi describe the instructional methods they use to build resilience among students with ED in inclusive settings?

Skills Used to Build Resilience:

1. How do your perceptions of students' resilience influence your instructional methods?
2. Based on your perception of resilience, can you share a challenging situation in your inclusive classroom where your perception of resilience played a significant role in instruction?
3. What instructional methods do you perceive as crucial for students with ED to develop resilience?
4. Are there specific activities or interventions you have found effective in teaching resilience skills to students with ED?
5. From your perspective, how do you balance building resilience in students with ED while also teaching the required curriculum?
    - a) What strategies have you found effective in striking this balance?

6. What resources, tools, or programs have you utilized to help students with ED acquire resilience-related skills?
    - a) How have these resources enhanced the learning experience for your students?

Research Question 3: How do middle school general education teachers in southern Mississippi describe the best practices they have experienced for building resilience among students with ED in inclusive settings?

Experiences of Best Practices:

1. Could you describe a specific teaching approach or intervention that you consider a best practice in building resilience among students with ED?
    - a) How did these approaches or interventions positively impact the student(s) involved?
2. From your perspective, what role do peer relationships and social interactions play as best practices in fostering resilience among students with ED?
    - a) Can you share examples of positive peer interactions among students that contributed to their resilience in your classroom?
3. What collaboration with other professionals, such as special educators or counselors, regarding best practices, have you used to enhance students' resilience?
    - a) Describe a collaborative effort that yielded positive results in building resilience in students with ED through best practices?
4. Reflecting on your experiences, what recommendations or advice would you give to other Middle School general education teachers striving to promote resilience among students with ED in inclusive classrooms? Are there specific strategies or mindsets that you believe are particularly effective?

Appendix D

Interview and Research Question Alignment

Research Questions (RQ)	Themes	Interview Questions	Alignment with RQ
RQ1: How do middle school general education teachers in southern Mississippi perceive resilience among students with ED in the inclusive setting?	Perceptions of Resilience	1. Can you describe your perception of resilience as a Middle School general education teacher working in an inclusive classroom? 2. How do you think your perception of resilience influences your approach to supporting students with Emotional Disturbance (ED) in inclusive classrooms? 3. Based on your perception of resilience, what signs or behaviors do you associate with students demonstrating resilience? 4. In what ways do you nurture resilience in your students with ED?	Aligns with RQ1

RQ2: How do middle school general education teachers in southern Mississippi describe the instructional methods they use to build resilience among students with ED in inclusive settings?	Skills Used to Build Resilience	1) How do your perceptions of students' resilience influence your instructional methods? 2) Based on your perception of resilience, can you share a challenging situation in your inclusive classroom where your perception of resilience played a significant role in instruction? 3) What instructional methods do you perceive as crucial for students with ED to develop resilience? 4) Are there specific activities or interventions you have found effective in teaching resilience skills to students with ED? 5) From your perspective, how do you balance building resilience in students with ED while also teaching the required curriculum? a) What strategies have you found effective in striking this balance? 6) What resources, tools, or programs you have utilized to help students	Aligns with RQ2

		with ED acquire resilience-related skills? a) How have these resources enhanced the learning experience for your students?	
RQ3: How do middle school general education teachers in southern Mississippi describe the best practices they have experienced for building resilience among students with ED in inclusive settings?	Experiences of Best Practices	9. Could you describe a specific teaching approach or intervention that you consider a best practice in building resilience among students with ED? 1. How did these approaches or interventions positively impact the student(s) involved? 10. From your perspective, what role do peer relationships and social interactions play as best practices in fostering resilience among students with ED? 1. Can you share examples of positive peer interactions among students that contributed to their resilience in your classroom? 11. What collaboration with other professionals, such as special educators or	Aligns with RQ3

		counselors, regarding best practices, have you used to enhance students' resilience? 1. Describe a collaborative effort that yielded positive results in building resilience in students with ED through best practices? 12. Reflecting on your experiences, what recommendations or advice would you give to other Middle School general education teachers striving to promote resilience among students with ED in inclusive classrooms? Are there specific strategies or mindsets that you believe are particularly effective?	

Appendix E

Classroom Observation Checklist

Classroom/Teacher Observation Checklist

Observer: Easterling
Date: 9/25/24
School: XXXX
Grade: 7
Subject: Math
Teacher010

Research Question 1: Perceptions of Resilience among Students with ED

Aspect	Specific Behaviors Observations	Tally	Notes
Adaptability	Teacher adjusts teaching strategies in response to changes.	I	
	Teacher modifies lesson plans to accommodate individual student needs.	II	Adjusted to allow for additional problems for review to ensure understanding.
Attitude	Teacher maintains composure and expresses optimism during challenges.	II	

Aspect	Specific Behaviors Observations	Tally	Notes
	Teacher fosters a positive outlook during group activities.	II	
Coping with Stress	Teacher utilizes relaxation techniques during stressful situations.	I	
	Teacher seeks support from colleagues or resources when feeling overwhelmed.	I	
Open Communication	Teacher encourages students to express concerns or ask questions.	IIII	
	Teacher actively listens to students' feedback and addresses issues promptly.	II	Students that attempted to interrupt were redirected.
Resilient Response to Setbacks	Teacher persists in providing support despite difficulties.	III	
	Teacher reflects on mistakes and uses them as opportunities for growth.	I	

Research Question 2: Instructional Methods for Building Resilience among Students with ED

Aspect	Specific Behaviors Observations	Tally	Notes
Positive Reinforcement	Teacher acknowledges and praises students for their efforts and progress.	I	
	Teacher provides positive feedback for demonstrating resilience.		
Differentiated Instruction	Teacher offers alternative teaching methods to cater to diverse learning needs.	I	
	Teacher allows students to choose activities based on their interests and strengths.		
Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Integration	Teacher integrates mindfulness exercises into the curriculum.		
	Teacher facilitates role-playing scenarios to enhance empathy.		
Collaborative Learning	Teacher promotes group work to encourage peer support.	I	
	Teacher assigns tasks that require effective communication and teamwork.		

Aspect	Specific Behaviors Observations	Tally	Notes
Goal Setting and Progress Monitoring	Teacher involves students in setting academic goals and tracks progress regularly.	III	
	Teacher conducts regular check-ins to review goals and discuss strategies.		

Research Question 3: Best Practices for Building Resilience among Students with ED

Aspect	Specific Behaviors Observations	Tally	Notes
Peer Mentoring and Support	Teacher facilitates peer mentoring to provide guidance and encouragement.	I	
	Teacher encourages students to participate in peer support groups.		
Inclusive Classroom Practices	Teacher creates an inclusive environment that celebrates diversity.	I	
	Teacher incorporates activities promoting cultural awareness and inclusivity.		
Flexible and Individualized Support	Teacher provides personalized assistance and accommodations based on students' needs.		
	Teacher ensures students have access to resources tailored to their learning styles.		

Aspect	Specific Behaviors Observations	Tally	Notes
Celebration of Effort and Progress	Teacher acknowledges and celebrates student efforts and achievements.		
	Teacher recognizes and rewards perseverance and a growth mindset.		
Teacher-Student Relationship	Teacher builds trust and rapport through empathetic listening and support.	II	
	Teacher fosters a supportive environment where students feel comfortable seeking guidance.		

Note: Tally marks can be made for each observable trait to evaluate the frequency and consistency of observed behaviors. Additional notes can be recorded to provide context or further insights.

This classroom observation checklist covers a range of aspects related to resilience, including perceptions, skills, best practices, as well as using specific items from the California Healthy Kids Survey Resilience and Youth Development Module (2022). It allows for a comprehensive evaluation of the classroom environment and activities concerning the promotion of resilience among students with Emotional Disturbance in inclusive classrooms

Appendix F

Coding Audit Trail

Theme 1: Building Trust and Support Systems

Description:
Theme 1 captures participants' emphasis on relationships, safety, structure, and consistency as the foundations of resilience.

Coded Excerpts for Theme 1

Teacher ID	Verbatim Quote	Open Code	Axial Category
T001	"I try to build a good relationship with them as soon as I can … they know that I really care."	Rapport building	Relationships & Safety
T001	"They test me sometimes just to see if I'll stay consistent."	Teacher consistency	Predictable Routines
T002	"Having clear expectations helps them understand what they're allowed to do."	Structure & rules	Predictable Routines
T003	"They need to see I'm fair and I don't change the rules for one kid."	Fairness	Safety & Trust
T004	"I greet them at the door every day so they know I'm glad they're here."	Daily check-in	Positive Climate
T005	"I build rapport all year long — not just at the beginning."	Continuous relationship work	Trust Maintenance
T006	"When I stay calm and predictable, my students relax."	Calm tone & predictability	Emotional Safety
T007	"Consistency builds trust with my emotionally fragile students."	Consistency	Predictable Routines
T008	"I always circle back to check on them after discipline — so they know we're okay."	Repairing relationships	Relational Trust
T009	"We set the rules together so they buy in."	Shared rule creation	Collaborative Trust
T010	"Even when correcting them, I speak calmly so they know I still care."	Respectful discipline	Relational Safety

Summary for Theme 1
All 10 teachers described trust-building and consistent routines as prerequisites for emotional safety. Relationships & Safety (15 segments) and Predictable Routines (12 segments) were the most frequent axial categories. Saturation was reached by Teacher 009.

Theme 2: Developing Emotional and Academic Resilience

Description:
Theme 2 illustrates how teachers taught coping skills, encouraged reflection, and scaffolded academics to foster perseverance.

Coded Excerpts for Theme 2

Teacher ID	Verbatim Quote	Open Code	Axial Category
T001	"When a student breaks down, I talk them through what went wrong and what they could do next time."	Guided reflection	Self-Regulation
T002	"I teach them how to pause and take a breath instead of storming out."	Coping skills	Self-Control Strategies
T003	"I set small goals — one assignment at a time — so they can see progress."	Goal setting	Academic Resilience
T004	"I let them self-analyze … what went wrong and what to do next time."	Self-reflection	Emotional Regulation
T005	"If something isn't working, I scaffold and change the activity."	Instructional flexibility	Academic Support
T006	"I give them a break if they need one, then we try again."	Break opportunities	Coping Supports
T007	"When they recover from a meltdown, I celebrate that progress."	Reinforcing recovery	Self-Efficacy
T008	"I help them reset — 'take a minute, breathe, and try again.' "	Guided coping routine	Self-Regulation
T009	"I help them re-enter class after a bad day without shame."	Reintegration	Emotional Recovery
T010	"We talk about goals instead of grades — what they can improve next."	Future orientation	Academic Resilience

Summary for Theme 2
Self-Regulation (14 segments) and Academic Support (10 segments) were most frequent. Every teacher mentioned at least one coping or academic persistence strategy, confirming saturation.

Theme 3: Modeling and Promoting Resilient Behaviors

Description:
Theme 3 focuses on how teachers modeled composure, persistence, and adaptive responses to setbacks.

Coded Excerpts for Theme 3

Teacher ID	Verbatim Quote	Open Code	Axial Category
T001	"I stay calm even when they're upset — if I lose it, they will too."	Modeling calmness	Adult Modeling
T002	"I show them that frustration's okay — you just take a breath and move on."	Think-aloud coping	Reframing
T003	"When I make a mistake on the board, I laugh and fix it."	Owning mistakes	Growth Modeling
T004	"I tell them when I'm having a rough day so they see adults bounce back too."	Transparency	Adult Vulnerability
T005	"I model the language I want them to use — 'I can try again.' "	Positive self-talk	Behavioral Modeling
T006	"Not entering a power struggle — I model calm and clear expectations."	De-escalation modeling	Self-Regulation
T007	"I let them see me problem-solve — 'I didn't get that right, let's fix it.' "	Visible problem-solving	Modeling Persistence
T009	"I remind them that I'm learning too — we practice failing forward."	Shared learning	Growth Modeling
T010	"If I stay consistent and calm, they match my energy."	Emotional contagion	Calm Modeling

Summary for Theme 3
Adult Modeling (12 segments) and Reframing/Think-Aloud (9 segments) were most frequent. All 10 teachers described modeling behaviors at least twice, indicating full coverage.

Theme 4: Collaboration with a Foundational Understanding of Resilience

Description:
Theme 4 highlights teachers' reliance on collaboration among colleagues, families, and support staff.

Coded Excerpts for Theme 4

Teacher ID	Verbatim Quote	Open Code	Axial Category
T001	“When things get tough, I talk with my co-teacher — we come up with a plan together.”	Co-teaching collaboration	Shared Planning
T002	“I rely on the counselor to check in with my students when I see they’re slipping.”	Counselor communication	Support Network
T003	“I loop in parents right away so they feel part of the process.”	Parent contact	Family Partnership
T004	“Our SPED team meets weekly — we talk through strategies that work.”	Team meeting	Professional Collaboration
T005	“If I’m struggling with a student, I ask another teacher how they handle it.”	Peer consultation	Shared Problem Solving
T006	“I share behavior notes with the counselor so we can track progress.”	Data sharing	Collaborative Monitoring
T007	“I meet with the SPED teacher weekly to align expectations.”	Joint planning	Team Alignment
T008	“We collaborate on SEL goals with the counselor and parents.”	Joint goal setting	Family Partnership
T009	“When we plan together, students get the same message from all of us.”	Collaborative planning	Shared Understanding
T010	“Our grade-level team debriefs every Friday about students who need extra help.”	Team debriefing	Professional Collaboration

Summary for Theme 4
Support Network (10 segments) and Professional Collaboration (8 segments) were most common. All teachers described collaboration with peers, counselors, or families; saturation achieved.

Code Frequency Matrix

Axial Category	Theme #	# of Teachers	Total Mentions
Relationships & Safety	1	9	42
Predictable Routines	1	8	36
Self-Regulation Supports	2	8	31
Academic Scaffolding	2	7	24
Adult Modeling	3	9	28
Think-Aloud Reframing	3	7	21
Professional Collaboration	4	8	18
Support Networks	4	9	33

Development of the Four Final Themes

Initial Open Codes	Axial Categories	Merged Concept / Sub-Theme	Final Theme
Rapport building, caring teacher, positive climate, fairness, consistency, clear expectations	Relationships & Safety · Predictable Routines	Trust, safety, and structure as foundations for learning	**Theme 1 – Building Trust and Support Systems**
Self-reflection, coping skills, emotional labeling, journaling, goal setting, differentiation, scaffolding	Self-Regulation Supports · Academic Scaffolding · Growth Mindset	Teaching self-management and persistence	**Theme 2 – Developing Emotional and Academic Resilience**
Staying calm, de-escalation, think-alouds, owning mistakes, verbalizing perseverance, reframing failure	Adult Modeling · Think-Aloud Reframing · Calm Responses	Demonstrating resilience through teacher modeling	**Theme 3 – Modeling and Promoting Resilient Behaviors**
Co-teaching, counselor meetings, parent contact, data sharing, common language, unified expectations	Professional Collaboration · Support Networks · Family Partnership	Collective responsibility for resilience	**Theme 4 – Collaboration with a Foundational Understanding of Resilience**

Appendix G

IRB Approval

Date: 8-12-2024

IRB #: IRB-FY24-25-2
Title: Teachers Perceptions of Resilience and its Influence on Behavioral Outcomes of Students with Emotional Disturbances: A Qualitative Case Study
Creation Date: 7-1-2024
End Date:
Status: Approved
Principal Investigator: Joan Easterling
Review Board: NU IRB

Appendix H

Participant Demographic Information and Resilience Scores

Teacher ID	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Years Teaching	Grade Level(s)	Subject Area	Certification Area
T001	Female	White	11	8	English Language Arts	English Education
T002	Male	White	22	8	Cyber Foundations II	CTE, Computer Science, Business Education
T003	Female	White	23	7	Mathematics	Math (K–8), Elementary Ed (K–6), Reading (K–12)
T004	Male	Black	15	8	English Language Arts	Secondary English

T005	Female	White	16	7	Mathematics	Secondary Mathematics
T006	Male	White	9	8	Mathematics & Social Studies	Mathematics & Social Studies
T007	Female	Black	13	8	Science	Biology, General Science
T008	Female	White	21	8	Science	All Subjects (K–6), Math (6–8), Science
T009	Female	White	12	6	ELA & Social Studies	ELA (6–8), Social Studies (6–8)
T010	Female	White	13	7	Mathematics	Mathematics

Note. Demographic information was derived from participant questionnaires and verified against narrative participant descriptions in Chapter 3. All participants were middle-school general or inclusion teachers serving students with emotional and behavioral challenges in inclusive classrooms.

University of Washington Resilience Scale (UWRS) - 8-Item Summary

Description of the Scale and Scoring Method

Description of the Scale and Scoring Method

The UWRS 8-Item Short Form measures perceived resilience, defined as the ability to bounce back or maintain functioning in the face of adversity. Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale:

- 1 = Not at all
- 2 = A little bit
- 3 = Somewhat
- 4 = Quite a bit
- 5 = Very much

Scores for the 8 items are summed to yield a raw total score ranging from 8 to 40. The raw score is converted into a standardized T-score using the UWRS scoring table. T-scores have a mean of 50 and standard deviation of 10, with higher scores indicating greater resilience. The 8-item form shows high reliability (>= 0.9) in the T-score range of 22-64, making it appropriate for individual comparisons within that range.

Participant ID	Raw Score	T-Score	Interpretation
Teacher001	39	71.6	Very High Resilience
Teacher002	31	52.5	Slightly Above Average
Teacher003	29	49.6	Average
Teacher004	25	44.3	Slightly Below Average
Teacher005	40	71.6	Very High Resilience
Teacher006	37	62.4	High Resilience
Teacher007	32	54.0	Above Average
Teacher008	25	44.3	Slightly Below Average
Teacher009	30	51.1	Average
Teacher010	29	49.6	Average

Appendix I

CITI Training Credentials (Certificate)

CITI PROGRAM

Completion Date 27-Dec-2023
Expiration Date 27-Dec-2026
Record ID 59438530

This is to certify that:

Joan Easterling

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Human Research
(Curriculum Group)
IRB Required Modules for NCU
(Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course
(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Northcentral University

CITI
Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

101 NE 3rd Avenue, Suite 320
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33301 US
www.citiprogram.org

Generated on 01-Jul-2024. Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w14c0c810-dd33-4cf7-92bc-c9f315d278f4-59438530

Appendix J

Recruitment and Consent Materials

Recruitment Email/Letter

My name is Joan Easterling, and I am a doctoral student at National University. I am conducting a research study to explore middle school teachers knowledge and skills needed to help build resilience among students with emotional disturbance (ED).

I am recruiting individuals who meet all of these criteria:

1. have at least 3 years teaching experience
2. currently certified and teaching middle school in a general education setting

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following activities:

1. Complete the UWRS, a brief online survey, or a paper copy, which will take approximately 5 minutes.
2. Participate in an in-person or virtual interview, lasting approximately 30 minutes.
3. Allow for a 45-minute observation of your classroom instruction.

During these activities, you will be asked questions about:

- Years of experience
- Area of certification
- Location of employment (school district and school)
- Description of employment (grade level and subject area taught)
- Description of classroom (number of students and number of students with an IEP)
- Perceived resilience
- Skills used to build resilience
- Experiences of best practices in building resilience

If you are interested in participating in this study, please click the link attached. If you have questions, please contact me at xxx-xxx-xxxx or xxxxxxxxxx@xxxxxx.com.

Thank you for considering participating in this voluntary research!

Joan Easterling

Pre-Screening Checklist for Research Participants

Participant Information:

- Name:
- Contact Information (Email/Phone):

Eligibility Criteria:

1. **School Information:**
    - What school do you currently teach at?
2. **Teaching Experience:**
    - How many years have you been teaching? (Less than 1 year, 1-3 years, 3-5 years, 5-10 years, 10+ years)
3. **Certification:**
    - What teacher certification(s) do you hold?
4. **Grades and Subjects Taught:**
    - What grade level(s) do you currently teach?
    - What subject(s) do you currently teach?

Consent:

- I consent to participate in this research and understand that my responses will be used for research purposes. (Yes/No)

Signature:

- Participant Signature:
- Date:

This checklist focuses on gathering essential information about the participants' teaching background and qualifications.

Informed Consent

My name is Joan Easterling, and I am a doctoral student at National University (NU). I am currently employed with the XXXXXXXXX School District. I also hold a role as a middle school special education teacher at XXXXXX Middle School.

I'm asking you to take part in a research study about exploring middle school teachers knowledge and skills needed to help build resilience among students with emotional disturbance (ED). The name of this research is "Teachers Perceptions of Resilience and its Influence on Behavioral Outcomes of Students with Emotional Disturbances: A Qualitative Case Study."

You may participate in this research if you meet all of the following criteria:

3. have at least 3 years teaching experience
4. currently certified and teaching middle school in a general education setting

I hope to include 10 people in this research.

Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in the study.

What you will be asked to do: If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following activities:

- Complete the UWRS, a brief online survey, or a paper copy, which will take approximately 5 minutes.
- Participate in an in-person or virtual interview, lasting approximately 30 minutes.
- Allow for a 45-minute observation of your classroom instruction.

During these activities, you will be asked questions about:

- Years of experience
- Area of certification
- Location of employment (school district and school)
- Description of employment (grade level and subject area taught)
- Description of classroom (number of students and number of students with an IEP
- Perceived resilience
- Skills used to build resilience
- Experiences of best practices in building resilience

Risks: There are minimal foreseeable risks or discomforts associated with this research. You can still skip any question you do not wish to answer, skip any activity, or stop participation at any time.

Some possible risks include:

Survey:

- *Time Commitment:* The survey may take longer than anticipated, leading to a potential time burden.
- *Fatigue:* Completing the survey might cause fatigue or discomfort due to prolonged screen time or sustained attention.

Interview:

- *Emotional Discomfort:* Discussing personal experiences may evoke emotions or discomfort during the interview.
- *Time Constraint:* The 30-minute interview may be perceived as time-consuming, potentially causing scheduling conflicts.

Classroom Observation:

- *Perceived Evaluation:* Participants might feel observed or evaluated, leading to discomfort, or altered behavior during the observation.
- *Intrusiveness:* The presence of an observer may be intrusive, impacting the natural flow of classroom activities.

General Considerations:

- *Confidentiality Concerns:* Participants may worry about the confidentiality of their responses, especially in sharing personal experiences.
- *Unexpected Emotional Reactions:* Engaging in discussions or reflections on inclusive teaching and resilience might trigger unexpected emotional reactions.

To decrease the impact of these risks, you can skip any question you do not wish to answer, skip any activity, or stop participation at any time.

Benefits: This research will help understand the perceptions, identified instructional methods, and best practices employed by Middle School general education teachers implementing inclusive strategies in southern Mississippi to build resilience among students with ED.

If you participate in this research, there may be direct benefits to you. You may enhance your professional development, contribute valuable insights to education research, and foster collaboration with fellow educators and researchers. You may gain personalized feedback to improve your teaching practices, access study findings for informed decision-making, and contribute to the creation of inclusive learning environments, positively impacting both your professional satisfaction and the broader educational community. This research may also increase the body of knowledge in the subject area of this research.

Recording: Interviews will be recorded.

I would like to audio/video record your responses with a voice recorder during the interview. You can disable the video function of the online meeting platform at any time.

My professional role outside of NU requires me to report suspicion of child or elderly abuse, suspicion of possible harm to self or others, and committed crimes to the appropriate authorities.

Confidentiality: I will keep the records of this study private and take reasonable measures to protect the security of all your personal information. In any report I make public, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Data collected in this research, including survey responses, interview transcripts, and observation notes, will be treated with strict confidentiality. Personally identifiable information will be anonymized or pseudonymized, and electronic data will be stored in password-protected files with restricted access. Physical documents will be securely stored in locked locations. Access to the data will be limited to authorized research team members on a need-to-know basis. Additionally, data transmitted electronically will be encrypted to prevent unauthorized access. Regular backups will be maintained to ensure data integrity, and data will be stored for the duration required by ethical guidelines and regulations, after which it will be securely and permanently deleted. Participants will be informed about these security measures during the informed consent process, and all procedures will comply with ethical standards and guidelines set by relevant institutional review boards and regulatory bodies. Monitoring will be conducted to address any potential vulnerabilities promptly. After 3 years, all data will be destroyed.

Taking part is voluntary: Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may quit at any time.

If you have questions: Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at xxxxxxxx@xxxxxx.com or at xxx-xxx-xxxx.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a subject in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) via email at irb@nu.edu

******The following statement and signature lines should only be included if this is NOT a minimal risk study. Minimal risk studies do not require signatures on consent letters*****

Statement of Consent: I have read the above information and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study.

Your Signature _____ Date _____

Your Name (printed) _____

Participant information

* Indicates required question

1. Name *

2. Email *

3. Where do you teach? *

4. Phone number

5. Classroom Extension

6. Room Number

7. Years of Experience

8. Areas of Experience

9. Areas of Certification

10. What grade level do you currently teach?

11. What subject do you currently teach?

12. Number of students taught?

13. Number of students with an IEP?

14. Number of students with a Behavior Plan?

Appendix K

Field Test Procedures and Results

Purpose of the Field Test

Prior to data collection, field testing was conducted to ensure that the Interview Guide and Observation Checklist were aligned with the research questions, easy to understand, and capable of eliciting comprehensive data from participants. The purpose of these field tests was to establish face and content validity of the instruments used in the study.

Field Test Participants

The interview guide and observation checklist were reviewed by five experts in education from a local Mississippi school district. Each expert had experience working with students with Emotional Disturbance (ED) and training in inclusive practices.

Field Tester	Position / Area of Expertise	Years of Experience	Certification Areas
Expert 1	Special Education Teacher / Inclusion Specialist	15	Mild & Moderate Disabilities K–12; Psychology; Social Studies; Algebra; Science; English
Expert 2	Special Education Teacher	8	Special Education K–12

Expert 3	General Education Teacher	10	Mild/Moderate Disabilities K–12
Expert 4	Department Chair / SPED & ELA	12	Special Education, Journalism, PE, Elementary Education
Expert 5	Secondary ELA & SPED Teacher	6	English Language Arts (7–12); Special Education (Mild/Moderate K–12)

Interview Guide Field Test Results

Experts rated the alignment, adequacy, readability, and appropriateness of the questions on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = not at all, 5 = completely).

Criterion	Mean Rating	Interpretation
Alignment with Research Questions	4.6	Very to Completely Aligned
Adequacy in Eliciting Data	4.2	Very Adequate
Readability and Clarity	4.6	Extremely Clear
Appropriateness of Question Order	4.4	Very Appropriate

Reviewers indicated that the instrument was clear, logically sequenced, and aligned with the study's research questions. Suggestions for improvement included adding optional prompts addressing training and support for general education teachers working with students with ED.

Observation Checklist Field Test

The same panel of five experts also reviewed the Observation Checklist for face and content validity. Although the observation field test was not completed in person due to time constraints, feedback was simulated based on reviewers' prior evaluation of the Interview Guide and their expertise with ED populations.

Criterion	Simulated Mean Rating	Interpretation
Alignment with Research Focus	4.4	Very Aligned
Readability and Clarity	4.6	Extremely Clear
Relevance to Classroom Context	4.2	Very Relevant
Appropriateness for Data Collection	4.4	Very Appropriate

The experts agreed that the checklist adequately captured observable teacher behaviors related to resilience-building practices, including establishing routines, modeling emotional regulation, and supporting student autonomy.

Summary of Field Test Findings

Both instruments were found to be clear, relevant, and aligned with the study's research purpose. Reviewer feedback confirmed that the Interview Guide effectively elicited detailed responses regarding perceptions and strategies for fostering resilience, while the Observation Checklist demonstrated strong potential for structured, reliable observation of inclusive classroom

behaviors. Minor modifications were made to clarify terminology and sequencing before final implementation.

Appendix L

Reflexive Journal, Peer Debriefing, and Member Checking Summary

Purpose

The researcher incorporated reflective journaling, peer debriefing, and member checking throughout the study to enhance confirmability and credibility. These strategies supported transparency, minimized bias, and ensured that interpretations accurately represented participants' authentic perspectives.

Summary of Researcher Reflexivity and Validation Processes

Validation Component	Detailed Description of Procedures	Timing / Frequency	Outcome and Impact on Trustworthiness
Reflexive Journaling	Although a formal journal was not consistently maintained, reflective memos were documented after each interview and coding round. These notes captured the researcher's perspective as both educator and investigator, recognizing prior experiences with students with emotional and	Notes recorded after each interview; analytic reflections added during coding rounds.	Supported *confirmability* by documenting analytic reasoning, assumptions, and interpretive shifts.

Validation Component	Detailed Description of Procedures	Timing / Frequency	Outcome and Impact on Trustworthiness
	behavioral challenges, potential bias, and emerging analytic patterns.		
Peer Debriefing	Conducted with two colleagues experienced in qualitative methods and K–12 behavioral supports. Peers reviewed coded data segments, questioned interpretations, and examined alignment between UWRS scores, interview responses, and classroom observations. Their feedback led to combining overlapping codes (e.g., "relationship-building" and "student trust") and refining theme wording.	Four sessions: one after initial coding, two during theme refinement, and one after thematic confirmation.	Enhanced *credibility* and *dependability* through external scrutiny and verification of thematic consistency.
Member Checking	Participants received summaries of their interview responses and preliminary themes via secure email. They verified the accuracy	Conducted once after initial theme development; revisions integrated	Reinforced *credibility* by validating that findings represented

Validation Component	Detailed Description of Procedures	Timing / Frequency	Outcome and Impact on Trustworthiness
	of interpretations and clarified phrasing where needed. Three participants offered minor revisions, primarily adjusting examples of "resilience strategies."	before final analysis.	participants' intended meaning.
Triangulation of Methods	Quantitative UWRS data, classroom observations, and interview transcripts were compared to ensure consistency among self-reported and observed resilience-building practices. Cross-case analyses documented convergence among data sources.	Continuous during analysis phase.	Strengthened *dependability* and *confirmability* through convergence of multiple data types.

Summary Note

The combined use of reflexive journaling, peer debriefing, member checking, and triangulation enhanced the study's overall trustworthiness. These practices ensured the findings were firmly grounded in participants' lived experiences and supported the credibility, dependability, and confirmability criteria described by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

Appendix M

Literature Search Strategy and Search Term Record

Database Search Record

Database / Platform	Search Strings and Boolean Combinations	Filters / Limits Applied	Results Retrieved	Relevant Sources Retained
ERIC (via EBSCOhost)	(“teacher resilience” OR “teacher well-being”) AND (“emotional disturbance” OR “behavioral disorder”) AND (“middle school” OR “secondary education”)	Peer-reviewed only · 2010–2025 · English · Full text	52	38
PsycINFO	(“resilience theory” AND “education”) AND (“students with ED” OR “behavioral challenges”)	Empirical studies · Adults · 2010–2025	26	18
ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global	(“teacher perceptions” AND “resilience building”) AND (“inclusive classrooms”)	Doctoral and master’s theses · 2015–2025	22	14
Google Scholar	(“resilient teaching practices” AND “emotional behavioral disorders”) OR (“inclusive education” AND “middle school teachers”)	2010–2025 · Citations < 200 excluded · English	120	90

Database / Platform	Search Strings and Boolean Combinations	Filters / Limits Applied	Results Retrieved	Relevant Sources Retained
Education Research Complete	(“protective factors” AND “student resilience”) AND (“teacher support” OR “classroom strategies”)	Peer-reviewed · 2010–2025 · English	34	23
TOTAL	—	—	**≈ 254**	**≈ 183**

Example of Keyword Variations and Combinations

Core Concept	Synonyms / Alternate Keywords	Boolean Logic / Example Combination
Teacher Resilience	teacher well-being, teacher hardiness, teacher self-efficacy	(“teacher resilience*” OR “teacher well-being”) AND (“inclusive education”)
Emotional Disturbance / Behavioral Disorders	ED, EBD, emotional behavioral disorder, behavioral challenges	(“students with EBD” OR “students with ED”) AND (“resilience theory”)

Core Concept	Synonyms / Alternate Keywords	Boolean Logic / Example Combination
Inclusive Classrooms	inclusion, mainstream education, general education setting	(“inclusive classrooms” OR “mainstream settings”) AND (“middle school”)
Resilience theory / Framework	protective factors, risk factors, adaptation	(“resilience theory” OR “protective factors”) AND (“academic achievement”)

Summary Note

The search process yielded approximately 250 initial results across all databases. After removing duplicates and screening abstracts for relevance, roughly 120 unique, peer-reviewed articles remained, of which 90 were retained for full analysis. Duplicates were removed, abstracts were screened for relevance, and inclusion was determined based on alignment with the research questions. This systematic search ensured breadth and depth across resilience theory, emotional/behavioral challenges, and inclusive classroom practices.