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Challenges of early career school psychologists

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CHALLENGES OF EARLY CAREER SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

LIST OF TABLES

Page

LIST OF FIGURES

Page

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all of the students, families, and staff members who have inspired and encouraged me to continue my work.

This work is also dedicated to all school psychologists who have committed their time to empower kids and families and whose efforts are often overlooked.

Thank you to everyone who took part in this research for your contributions.

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ABSTRACT

Transitioning from a student to a practitioner can be a very difficult and challenging period in one's career. Early career school psychologists are not only responsible for adapting to the everchanging and fast paced work of school psychology but must also deal with adjusting to a new career. This qualitative phenomenological study focused on shedding light to the challenges that are encountered by early career school psychologists. Additionally, it set out to discover the strategies, methods, and resources that they use to overcome these obstacles. With the purpose to answering the four main research questions of this study, thirteen participants who were in their first to second year of practice were interviewed with approved semis-structured opened ended questions. Research findings found that early career school psychologists confronted various challenges and used multiple strategies and instruments to combat such challenges. Based on the findings from this study, the researcher developed the M.A.R.S Model of Supporting Early Career School Psychologists in the hope that it can be utilized to guide school districts in supporting early career practitioners.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Background/Historical Context

School psychologists are qualified members of school teams that support students' ability to learn and staffs' ability to meet student's needs (National Association of School Psychologists [NASP], 2017a). Specifically, school psychologist assists school staff in understanding the connections between psychology, education, behavior, and motivation. School psychologists' expertise in education and mental health makes them uniquely qualified to help tackle the needs of students and schools in various areas (NASP, 2020a). Due to the proficiency that school psychologists must have to complete their expected job duties successfully, it is crucial that they receive comprehensive professional preparation to ensure effectiveness in the field (NASP, 2017a, 2020a).

School psychologists become certificated to work in the school setting at the master, specialist, or doctoral levels (NASP, 2020a). School psychologists are trained and prepared by completing both coursework and fieldwork hours in a variety of areas. Training programs that meet the standards for preparing school psychologists can become accredited by the NASP. These NASP accredited programs are evaluated to ensure that all candidates graduate with professional competencies, including skills and knowledge, in the ten domains developed by the NASP. Because school psychologists must be well-versed and ready to help school staff understand complex topics, school psychology training programs must ensure that their graduates are competent in these areas in order to complete their job duties successfully (NASP, 2020a, 2020b).

Early Career School Psychologists (ECSP) are professionals who face their own unique career challenges (Arora et al., 2016). The experience of an ECSP can be exhilarating but also overwhelming and stressful (Arora et al., 2016; M. R. Silva et al., 2020). The NASP (2019)

indicated that ECSP start learning how their graduate training translates into their everyday work, which can create new challenges daily. Arora et al. (2016) found that ECSPs reported high levels of need for mentorship, particularly in the transition from their student status into career professionals. Even the most seasoned school psychologists experience challenges due to the ongoing changes to their job tasks and obligations. If even veteran school psychologists are experiencing challenges, ECSPs have the difficult task navigating a new career and also dealing with the complexities of the job (NASP, 2020a). With all of this is mind, it is critical for not only training programs but also districts and organizations to ensure that ECSPs are being supported and prepared to perform their job duties effectively.

Job Readiness

Job readiness creates a productive workforce and allows people to adapt to changes and evolve their existing skills (C. Johnson, 2016). Job readiness not only looks at a person's foundational and technical skills but also encompasses teamwork, critical thinking, problem-solving, and professionalism. Research on this topic, specifically in educational psychology, is significantly lacking (Schweinsberg et al., 2021). This could be due to the unique nature of educational professionals because early career educations are expected to perform at the same level and complete the same duties as their more experienced peers (Mohamed et al., 2016). Job readiness skills in the field of education is assumed to be developed throughout graduate training and schooling, however, concerns arise when theories and models learned in the classroom don’t easily transition into practice (Mohamed et al., 2016; Schweinsberg et al., 2021).

Graduate programs should place significant importance on their recent graduates' perceptions of job readiness to measure their graduate program's success (Bocanegra et al., 2017; NASP, 2022a). Not only will gauging job readiness help employers understand what graduate students are learning in their training programs but it will also assist them in developing trainings

and supports to close the gaps in knowledge and skills (Bocanegra et al., 2017). Zook (2022) defines job readiness as preparing students with the skills needed to find, acquire, keep, and grow within a job or career. Similarly, Farrow and Parkin-Bashizi (2019) indicated that job readiness prepares students with the skills needed to find, acquire, keep, and grow within a job or career. ECSPs assessments of their job readiness would provide crucial information about how graduate programs could enhance their current curricula, which would ultimately improve ECSPs' work in the schools they support.

Schweinsberg et al. (2021) indicated that job readiness skills should be considered during all levels of training and career. An emphasis should be placed on measuring job readiness at the training, early-career, and long-term career levels to ensure effectiveness and innovation within various job fields. Job readiness is critical during the early career years because new employees frequently become overwhelmed with job responsibilities, struggle to transition into their new careers, and have less mentorship than they did as students (Mohamed et al., 2016). Organizations and school districts should activity work on embedding job readiness skills to their trainings and supports in order to ensure that their novice practitioners will be successful and effective for the company (Cochran-Smith, 2005).

Training Programs

According to the NASP (2010) database, there are currently 14 NASP approved graduate programs in California. School psychology graduate training programs include master's, specialists, or doctorate degrees, as well as a year-long supervised internship (NASP, 2022c). In their training, school psychologists gain a wide range of knowledge and skills framed around six organizational principles that guide their standards of practice and service (NASP, 2020b). The organizational principles are: (a) the organization and evaluation of service delivery by school psychologists; (b) climate; (c) physical, personnel, and fiscal support systems of students and

practitioners; (d) professional communication amongst all administrative levels of the organization; (e) supervision, peer consultation, and mentoring of personnel; and (f) professional development and recognition systems for individual school psychologists and school systems. The organizational principals guide school district and practitioners in order to support effective psychological services (NASP, 2020b).

In addition to these organizational principles, the NASP has developed national standards to guide school psychology graduate programs. The model of comprehensive and integrated school psychological services is a model that consists of ten domains of practices in which school psychologist provides comprehensive and integrated services (NASP, 2010). The domains include data-based decision making and accountability, consultation and collaboration, intervention and instructional support to develop academic skills, interventions and mental health services to develop social and life skills, school-wide practice to promote learning, preventative and responsive services, family-school collaboration services, diversity in development and learning, research and program evaluation, and legal, ethical, and professional practice (NASP, 2010).

The NASP 2020 domains of practice are embedded and practiced throughout school psychology graduate programs (NASP, 2021). Some of the domains, if not all domains, interact or intersect with one another during practice. During a student's field experience, they must complete multiple activities that within these domains in to ensure they are getting a well-rounded experience (Davies et al., 2015). The NASP 2020 domains of practice are part of training schools to ensure that practitioners are well trained in a variety of areas that can best assist the growth and success of schools, families, and students (NASP, 2021).

School Psychologists

School psychologists' core knowledge is rooted in psychology and education, and their work includes completing psychoeducational assessments and diagnoses (American Psychological Association [APA], 2020). School psychologist must be prepared to work with students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds and provide researched-based interventions for all populations (APA, 2020; NASP, 2020a). School psychologists must also have excellent communication and collaboration skills because they often relay sensitive information to parents and school staff about students' academic and behavioral needs (Christenson, 1995). The work of school psychologists is multifaceted, and practitioners need to be actively involved in all levels of support as the work landscape is constantly evolving (Chafouleas et at., 2002).

As previously mentioned, the NASP (2020a) developed the model of comprehensive and integrated school psychological services, also known as the NASP practice model. This model serves as a guide in efficient and consistent implementation of school psychological services to ensure effectiveness across the field. Furthermore, it gives detail to delivery services to deliver quality care to schools nationwide. The NASP practice model also provides organizations with assistance in how to utilize school psychologist's psychologist to their fully capacity and move away from the model of school psychologist only engaging in psychoeducational assessments in the school settings. Through this model organizations and school districts are given the opportunity to utilize school psychologist at their full potential as practitioners with expertise in multiple areas within the school setting (Filter et al., 2013).

The role of a school psychologist can vary between school, district, county, and state. Several factors can impact and influence the specific role of a school psychologist. Bell and McKenzie (2013) stated that some of the factors dictating school psychologists' duties are

administrative decisions, district policies, school culture, or the expectations of the educational community they serve. For some school psychologist, their main job duties may be solely in psychoeducational test administration and determining if students meet the criteria for special education services. In other cases, a school psychologist might be an integral part of the school community who is responsible for a variety of job duties ranging from psychoeducational testing to running educational workshops for parents and the community. As previously stated, the role of a school psychologist is ever evolving and growing and all of these changes come from federal and state laws, and district policies (Bell & McKenzie, 2013; Chafouleas et al., 2002). School psychologists must be able to adjust to these changes and develop the skills needed to complete their job duties even if they were not formally trained (Bell & McKenzie, 2013). As a result, school psychology training programs should go beyond teaching the fundamentals of psychology and education to prepare students for the variety of job duties they may encounter in the field as well as developing skills sets to adjust to an ever-evolving career.

Job Burnout

Even with high levels of job preparedness, school psychologists can still experience job burnout for a variety of reasons (Rodriguez & Carlotto, 2017; Schilling et al., 2021). According to Schilling and Randolph (2020) job burnout is the state of physical and mental exhaustion caused by the stressors of one's professional life. It is a terminology used in the workplace when an individual's job becomes stressful or demanding, resulting in work-related mental health issues (Schilling et al., 2021). In 2019 the World Health Organization (WHO) defined job burnout as a syndrome related to long-term, unresolved work-related stress, and frustration (WHO, 2019). Job burnout is associated with many forms of adverse reactions and feelings about one's workplace. It can cause employees to withdraw from their job duties, become ineffective workers, and ultimately cause a person to leave their careers altogether (Simbula & Guglielmi,

2010). It is vital for companies and organizations to address burnout and come up with solutions to help their employees better cope with job-related stressors.

School psychology can be a very stressful and overwhelming career (Schilling & Randolph, 2020). School psychologists should be cognizant of the needs of their students and school communities and the fast-changing educational policies and procedures implemented by the states and the districts they work in. These huge responsibilities can cause school psychologists to feel overwhelmed and overworked throughout the school year (Schilling & Randolph, 2020). According to Schilling and Randolph (2017), school psychologists experience job burnout for several reasons. Some of the key contributors to school psychologist burnout include unsupportive administrators, the number of school assignments, large caseloads, and pressures to act unethically. School psychologists are experiencing more levels of burnout due to their packed schedules on top of other responsibilities assigned to them within the school setting (Schilling & Randolph, 2017, 2020). Due to school psychologist shortages becoming more prevalent, school districts must address the factors contributing to burnout and identify ways to solve these issues.

Addressing the causes of burnout among school psychologists is not only important for practitioner retention, but it can also aid in the development of procedures and policies to prevent ECSPs from experiencing it (Schilling & Randolph, 2017). ECSPs have expressed feelings of being overwhelmed and exhaustion for the same reasons that more experienced school psychologists have expressed feelings of burnout (Arora et al., 2016). These factors include lack of administrative support, lack of collaboration with other staff members, and an overwhelming caseload, amongst other things (Arora et al., 2016; Dreison et al., 2018). ECSPs are in a unique position within their career that allows for them to be given the tools and knowledge on steps to help them prevent burnout later on in their career. Taking preventative steps to burnout has the

potential of combating school psychologists' shortage and can help provide practitioners with the tools to maintain healthy work life balance while also doing their job effectively (Schilling & Randolph, 2017).

Stresses Experienced by Early Career School Psychologists

The first years of a school psychologist's career can be very exciting (NASP, 2022a). However, with this excitement comes stress and anxiety over their work and the time it takes to adjust to their new roles (Rønnestad et al., 2018). Within this period, ECSPs begin to understand how their graduate training translates into their everyday work (NASP, 2022b). In addition to all of their new responsibilities, ECSPs must also stay updated on laws and policies that dictate their job duties (Boccio, 2015; NASP, 2022c). These developmental challenges that ECSPs face can impact their abilities to be competent practitioners (A. E. Silva et al., 2016).

Rønnestad and Skovholt (2012) reported that ECSPs often lack preparation for some of the areas of their practice, question their skills, and begin to wonder about the validity of their training programs due to these challenges. These negative feelings and doubts can get so intense that individuals question whether they entered the right profession. Additionally, in research conducted by A. E. Silva et al. (2016) they found ECSPs find that mentoring and supervision to be crucial at the start of one's career. However, their study found that only about 38% of respondents reported receiving professional supervision and most respondents who were getting supervision reported being supervised less than 1 hour per week. ECPSs are not only experiencing similar stressors and challenges that more experienced school psychologists, but they are also faced with trials that are unique to the start of one's career (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2012).

The support and retention of ECSPs is critical for not only tackling the shortages but also in developing practitioners that have the resources and tools to combat burnout and maintain a

healthy work life balance. The NASP created the NASP's Early Career Committee which services as a bridge between ECPSs and the NASP (NASP, 2022d). The committee has developed various resources and mentorship opportunities for early career professionals (NASP, 2019). During the NASP national conference, ECSPs are given individualized training to assist them overcome the problems they confront in their profession. The NASP is prioritizing assisting ECSPs navigate the complexities and challenges that are faced when beginning one's career (NASP, 2022d).

Statement of the Problem

According to the NASP (2017b), there is a critical shortage of both practicing school psychologists, graduate programs, and available faculty that are needed to train future school psychologists. Additionally, the NASP recommends a ratio of one school psychologist per 500 students to provide comprehensive and effective services. However, this ratio is vastly different when looking at data from school districts and states around the country. The NASP reported that the national ratio is around 1:1211, and it is important to note that this number can vary among states. The NASP reported that there are various states are moving closer to a ratio of 1:5000.

In addition to shortages in school psychologists all over the country, schools and districts continue to push for expanding the services provided by school psychologists (Castillo et al., 2014). When faced with staff shortages and more job duties, School psychologists can begin to feel burned out, leading to their decision to leave the job altogether, which will only add to the existing problems. Davis et al. (2004) indicated that one factor attributing to the shortage might be that school psychologists feel overwhelmed by the number of assessments they must conduct, timelines they must adhere to, and other demands of the profession.

Several factors impact a school psychologist's ability to complete their job effectively and efficiently (NASP, 2020a). Furthermore, dealing with the consequences of school psychologist

shortages can add more duties and responsibilities to the role of a school psychologist and therefore add more stress. Considering all this, it can be very stressful for a veteran school psychologist to adapt. ECSPs not only have to deal with the learning curve that comes from applying their graduate-level training to the real world but now must also deal with the high demands placed on them due to staff shortages (NASP, 2020a, 2020c). These factors can drastically impact the effectiveness and overall well-being of school psychologists that are new to the field.

It is critical for training programs to identify the challenges that school psychologists are facing in the field to better support and train preservice school psychology students (NASP, 2019, 2022b, 2022d). Schilling et al. (2018) found that most school psychologist report feeling some level of burnout at some point in their career. Additionally, these feelings of burnout can be a major factor contributing to the shortage of school psychology practitioners we are seeing across the U.S. However, burnout does not appear to be the only contributor to the school psychologist's shortage. A detailed analysis on the challenges school psychologist are facing in the field will provide helpful information not only to graduate programs but to school districts and policymakers to help them better support all school psychologists.

ECSPs face the same challenges that more experienced school psychologists face, however they must also learn to navigate a career that is new to them, which brings on its own stressors (Boccio et al., 2016a). A. E. Silva et al. (2016) stated that ECSPs face developmental challenges that may get in the way of competent practices. Furthermore, ECSP may face feelings of inadequacy and not feel ready to face the complex responsibilities required of school-based practitioners. Several studies have indicated that school psychologists are aware of the importance of guidance and supervision, especially in the first years of practice (Chafouleas et al., 2002; Curtis et al., 2012; A. E. Silva et al., 2016). These studies reported that ECSPs often

feel overwhelmed with job duties and report needing some guidance, resources, and mentoring throughout their first years of practice. Additionally, Daly and Gardner (2020) indicated the importance of training programs and districts developing tools and strategies as a means of preventing burnout among new practitioners. Due to the shortages of school psychologists that are now happening, it is crucial school districts and training programs to develop supports and resources for ECSPs in order to help them through the challenges they face (Boccio et al., 2016a). These supports will not only help school psychologist feel more supported in their early years of practice but will help retention rates, which will in turn help combat the school psychologist shortages (Boccio et al., 2016a; Davis et al., 2004).

Little research has been conducted on the efforts and strategies that have been implemented in order to assistance ECSPs overcome the challenges of transitioning from students to practitioners (Arora et al., 2016; Klingbeil & Collier-Meek, 2020; A. E. Silva et al., 2014, 2016). However, there has been research conducted on the pressures and factors impacting school psychologists' job performance, burnout, and lack of retention (Castillo et al., 2014; Rønnestad et al., 2018; Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2012; Worrell et al., 2006). More research needs to be conducted on the strategies, tools, and supports that are needed by ECSPs in order to feel supported and successfully complete their job duties (A. E. Silva et al., 2016). There is a critical need for schools, districts, and professional organizations to develop ways to overcome and understand the challenges faced by ECSPs in order to support them and ensure retention in the field.

Purpose Statement

This qualitative study aims to determine the challenges ECSPs face when entering the field, as well as the strategies used to overcome these challenges. This research seeks to

understand the experiences of ECSPs and what challenges they face as new school psychologists. This study sets out to determine the following:

- Identify the challenges that early career school psychologists face in their line of work.
- Discover the successful strategies and practices ECSPs employ to complete their job duties.
- Gain an understanding of how ECSPs measure their success.
- Discover recommendations that ECSPs would make for students that are in the preservice phase of their school psychology training.

Research Questions

The following research questions (RQ) are addressed in this study:

- RQ1: What challenges are faced by early career school psychologist when entering the field?
- RQ2: What strategies and best practices are employed by early career school psychologist to complete their job duties?
- RQ3: How do early career school psychologist track, measure and define success in their practices?
- RQ4: What recommendations would early career school psychologist have for new school psychologists coming into the field?

Theoretical Frameworks

Theoretical frameworks provide a lens that shapes and informs various aspects of a study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Additionally, Saldana and Omasta (2021) indicated that theories allow research to be transferred to other social settings (e.g., time, location, and population).

Creswell and Poth (2017) stated that thinking about theories when conducting our research will allow the researcher to connect their findings with established theoretical context. The theoretical lens of a study guides the researcher on what types of questions to ask participants and how to analyze them (Collins & Stockton, 2018). The following theories will be used in order to frame the study: (a) appreciative inquiry and (b) critical constructivism.

Appreciative Inquiry is a way of engaging people in change that focuses on what works well within an organization and its people instead of defaulting to a deficit change model (Cooperrider, 2008). Cooperrider states that Appreciative Inquiry focuses on the imagination and innovation of people instead of the typical negative and critical feedback that most organizations use. This method of inquiry maximizes a person's curiosity and interest and minimizes the biases and beliefs that are pushed on to people being asked the questions (Schein, 2013). In addition, appreciative inquiry is characterized by an interactive and collaborative approach to problem-solving that welcomes diverse perspectives and ideas.

Furthermore, Appreciative Inquiry permits an innovative approach to problem-solving in research and inquiry (Cooperrider, 2008). It allows research to put a spotlight on what is successful with the current issue or topic and to capitalize on its strengths. This framework allows researchers to view obstacles as opportunities for advancement (Cooperrider, 2008; Schein, 2013). Examining the study through the lens of appreciative inquiry will aid in the development of best practices in the field of education, particularly when working with ECSPs.

Critical constructivism is used to prompt transformation and social change (Levitt, 2021). Constructivist research looks at how researchers and participants co-construct the meaning of the studied topic. Using critical constructivism, the researcher can look at the status quo amongst ECSPs and the organizations that support them to create the change needed to ensure their success. The researcher develops questions and interview questions, and the participants respond

to these inquiries through this process, both the researcher and the participants influence each other's understanding of the topic that is being studied (Levitt, 2021). The use of this lens for this study will help the researcher understand the sociopolitical structures that impact the work of ECSPs and what factors need to be addressed to improve their experiences in the field.

Significance of the Study

The current study is significant since there has been very little research on the challenges that ECSPs face in their first years of practice. Due to the lack of research, there is little known about the tools and resources that ECSPs use to overcome the challenges they face. This study focuses on the challenges that ECSPs face and how they overcome these hardships. The researcher aims to find resources and tools that ECSPs are currently using to overcome challenges so that these tools can be used to combat challenges in the future. Additionally, this research will contribute to the literature by shining light on the issues the ECPSs confront, as well as the techniques and tools that they employ to overcome them.

The study's results are intended to assist school districts and organizations in establishing successful methods for supporting ECSPs. The hope is that with these findings, districts, and organizations can embed the identified strategies into new hire training to provide new employees with the tools they need to complete their jobs successfully. Moreover, using these strategies, ECSPs may apply the skills they have acquired throughout their careers.

Additionally, this research study will contribute to the ongoing research and outreach being done by national and state professional organizations in school psychology. These professional organizations work to advocate for the needs of all school psychologists. Therefore, they will be able to use the findings of this study to integrate and highlight the many challenges of ECSPs and develop ways to address these issues. At the national and state levels, professional

organizations can further build on this study to find and address challenges faced by ECSPs on a broader scale.

The findings from the research are intended to assist ECSPs in establishing appropriate techniques and tools to deal with the challenges that come with starting a new career. This study will assist ECSPs in Los Angeles County but can also be expanded to school psychologists across the country that face similar challenges. Combating these challenges early on in someone's early career can help them develop the skills for a long successful career, and in turn, help combat the national shortage of school psychologists by promoting retention.

Key Assumptions

Several key assumptions are presented in this study:

- It was assumed that the participants of this study will be able to identify areas of their work activities which they found challenging.
- Participants provides truthful responses to the interview questions.
- The sample of ECSP represents a larger population of practicing ECSP in Southern California.
- The participants understand the term challenges.
- It was assumed that participants of the study would be open and honest with their responses and would be able to reflect on their experiences with a critical eye.
- It is assumed that ECSP face challenges in their first two years of working.

Limitations

The current study had various limitations. Creswell and Creswell (2018) indicated that a researcher's personal beliefs, background, and experiences could potentially impact the way themes and data are interpreted. Creswell and Creswell (2018) proposed that researchers should bracket their personal beliefs and experiences as much as possible to understand the participants'

experiences. The researcher for this study is a working school psychologist, therefore any biases or experiences may be tough to overcome. The following are additional limitations:

- Due to the criteria of participants, the study may only reflect early career school psychologists from one age group and not capture the views of a diverse range of ages.
- Participants for this study are required to be working in Southern California within the United States. The current study does not investigate ECSPs that are practicing in rural or small-town. Therebefore, the experiences of school psychologist working in these areas were not represented in this study.
- The current study only includes participants that were practicing school psychologist in the public-school setting. Therefore, the experiences of early career school psychologist in the private school sector or psychologists working in private practice were not represented in this study.
- Participants in this study do so voluntarily, therefore, the data may not be representative of all school psychologists that are currently practicing in the field. Specifically, ECSP may be feeling overwhelmed and stressed, therefore they may have been less likely to participate or take on more tasks. Due to this, the voices of overly stressed and overwhelmed ECSPs may be a critical voice that may be missed in this study.

Definition of Terms

- *Early Career School Psychologist (ECSP)*: A school psychologist practitioner that is in their first two years of practice (NASP, 2022d).

- *Education:* The process of providing or receiving systematic teaching, particularly at a school or university (Oxford Languages, 2020).
- *Educational Stakeholder*: Individuals who are dedicated to the success of students, which can include administrators, teachers, school staff, parents, families, community members, and students (Hamza et al., 2021).
- *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*: A federal law that ensures all children with disabilities are guaranteed a free appropriate public education to meet their specific needs (U.S. Department of Education, 2022).
- *Job Burnout:* A syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chorionic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed (Mayo Clinic, 2014).
- *Job Readiness:* Foundations of a career or job that demonstrate requisite core competencies that broadly prepare an individual for success in the workplace (National Association of Colleges and Employers, n.d.).
- *K-12:* Kindergarten through 12the grade. Refers to the kindergarten and 12 years of formal education. (Huck & Zhang, 2020).
- *National Association of School Psychologists: National* professional association that works towards developing effective practices for school psychologist to ensure students learning, behavioral, and mental health needs are being met (NASP, 2017a).
- *Preparedness:* An individual's state or feeling about being prepared for a particular activity or situation (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).
- *Pre-Service School Psychologists:* Students enrolled in a graduate program that do not have an active credential. Students may be in the pre-fieldwork, practicum, or internship year of their graduate studies (Griffin & Scherr, 2010).

- *Psychoeducational Assessment:* An assessment conducted by a credentialed school psychologist that details how a child learns and is used to determined eligibility for special education services (Reynolds & Livingston, 2014).
- *Self-Efficacy:* The degree to which individuals think they are capable of carrying out particular actions and/or behaviors in order to achieve a given objective (Bandura, 1994).
- *School Psychologist:* Members of the school team with experience in mental health, learning, motivation, and behavior who assist kids with their social, academic, emotional, and behavioral needs (NASP, 2010).

Chapter Summary

School psychologists play an important role within the school community, not only with special education students but with general education students and the community they serve (NASP, 2017a). School psychologists apply expertise in mental health, learning, and behaviors in order to help students succeed within the school setting. They collaborate with all stakeholders at the school to create healthy, supportive, and safe environments for students to learn (NASP, 2020b, 2020d, 2022a). Furthermore, school psychologists play a critical role in strengthening connections between home, school, and the community (NASP, 2022c). Due to the vital role that school psychologists play in the success of our schools, it is crucial to examine the challenges they face in the field, specifically the challenges that ECSPs face. Examining the challenges that are faced by ECSPs are critical in ensuring practitioners develop the skills and have the tools to cope with challenges not only early on in their career but throughout their careers. By addressing these issues and providing tools early on in a school psychologist's career will help with the retention and longevity of a career in school psychology.

The NASP (2017b) reports a critical shortage of school psychologists at a national level. School psychologists are working far above the student ratio that the NASP recommends. In addition to dealing with issues of staff shortages, the role of school psychologists is expanding and is now moving towards leadership positions within schools to lead structural changes (Castillo et al., 2014). As new school psychologist enters the field, not only do they deal with the consequences of the shortages and the added responsibilities, but they must also navigate how to apply their coursework knowledge to the real world.

After completing field training and coursework requirements, graduate-level trainees are expected to begin their careers with the abilities and expertise needed to execute their job duties effectively (Schweinsberg et al., 2021). This could become difficult if their training programs did not prepare them to navigate a school psychologist's ever-changing and evolving role in the field. Despite recognizing coursework and fieldwork's role in developing a competent and effective practitioner, there is very little research on the challenges that are faced by ECSP and even less data on how ECSPs are coping with and overcoming the challenges they are facing (Arora et al., 2016; Bell & McKenzie, 2013; Castillo et al., 2014; NASP, 2017a). By investigating the challenges faced by ECSPs, how they overcome and cope with these challenges, and how they are able to measure success, this research will provide recommendations on how organizations, school districts, and training programs can prepare and assist ECSPs in their first years as practitioners.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Starting a career can be exhilarating and rewarding, yet it can also be met with many challenges and difficulties. ECSPs are transitioning from a student to a practitioner and must learn to complete their job duties without a direct supervisor or a school mentor (Arora et at., 2016). With the ever-evolving role and increasing demands that many school psychologists now face, ECSPs must also figure out ways to tackle issues that may not have been explicitly taught to them during their graduate training (NASP, 2020a). School psychologists are considered vital members of the problem-solving process in education systems. Therefore, school psychologists must be ready to take on multiple roles within the school setting (NASP, 2022a). ECSPs must deal with all of these challenges on top of figuring out their professional identities, building their professional toolkits, and learning how the theories learned in graduate school fit into their practice (Arora et al., 2016; NASP, 2022a; A. E. Silva et al., 2016).

This literature review will begin with a discussion of special education history and how the role of school psychology evolved into what it is today. The role of a school psychologist has evolved from solely psychometric duties to comprehensive services within the school setting. An overview of the NASP 2020 domains of practice will be provided, which details the roles and duties of school psychologists. ECSPs deserve to be discussed because they are at a unique point in their careers with many challenges and experiences. The shortages in school psychology and how they impact students, schools, and the field of school psychology will then be discussed. After, the effects of burnout and job readiness on school psychology practices will be thoroughly reviewed. There will be a thorough review of the literature on the impact of burnout and job readiness levels on school psychology practices. Then self-efficacy will be discussed, as well as how ECSPs can use the four sources of self-efficacy to improve their performance. Lastly,

Chapter 2 will conclude with best practices for supporting ECSPs. This review will demonstrate the need for more research on training for ECSPs, as stated in Chapter I.

School Psychology

Lightner Witmer has been credited with developing the fundamental concept of school psychology (D'Amato et al., 2011). As a former schoolteacher, Witmer became interested in the learning differences among his students (D'Amato & Perfect, 2020). More specifically, he was interested in why some of his students had more difficulty learning compared to their peers. After attaining his doctoral degree, Witmer continued to study students with school-related problems (Burns, 2019; D'Amato & Perfect, 2020; D'Amato et al., 2011). While studying this area of learning and psychology, Witmer found that there was not much research on the causes or treatment of learning disorders (D'Amato & Perfect, 2020). Witmer created the first psychological clinic at the University of Pennsylvania in 1896, in which part of his work was diagnosing and treating children with school-related problems.

As the U.S. began to make cultural and social advances, the need for school-based practitioners increased (Rotatori et al., 2011). Social reforms, including compulsory school, juvenile courts, child labor laws, mental health, and vocational guidance, began to create more opportunities for psychologists, teachers, and other service providers to work with students in the school setting. By 1910, some special education services became available in many schools throughout the country. These services mainly provided services for children who were deaf, blind, or had an intellectual disability (Winzer, 2009). Due to the development of these services, the need for a school team member to assist in the selection, assessment, and placement of these students was needed.

Training programs began to emerge as the need for these specialized professionals in schools increased (Fagan & Wise, 2007). The first psychology training program was developed

at New York University in the mid-1920s. In the late 1930s, Pennsylvania State University was the first to provide a doctoral coursework in school psychology. From 1940 to 1970, the number of school psychologists increased from 500 to 5,000 to address the needs of the expanding population caused by the post-World War II baby boom (Fagan & Wise, 2007). Additionally, the number of formal training programs increased from two to more than 100, enrolling around 3,000 students (Fagan, 2014).

The American Psychological Association (APA) held a conference in 1954 to discuss school psychologists' roles, qualifications, and training (Fagan & Wise, 2007). The Thayer Conference addressed the lack of appropriately trained school psychologists. This conference marked the beginning of school psychology as a distinct branch of psychology concerned with the application of psychological knowledge to problems encountered in the school setting. In 1969, the NASP was created to provide school psychologists with resources and guidance to ensure ethical and research-based practices (Fagan, 1994).

The creation of the NASP allowed school psychologists to strengthen their identities and roles in the school setting and move away from their homogeneous role of assessment and evaluation (Fagan, 2014). As the years progressed, professional organizations at the national and state levels began seeing an increase in membership (Fagan & Wise, 2007). The work of these organizations allowed for advocacy and awareness around the work of school psychologists as well as promoting better work conditions within the field (Fagan & Wise, 2007). These professional organizations also made efforts to ensure that training programs followed guidelines to ensure effective and proper training and preparation for future school psychologists (Fagan, 2014).

In 1975, Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, known as Public Law 94-142 (Winzer, 2009). This law required equal access to education for students with

a broad range of disabilities, including physical handicaps, intellectual disabilities, speech and language problems, learning disorders, and emotional and behavioral disorders (Osgood, 2007). This law ensured that all students would be guaranteed a free and appropriate public education regardless of any needs they may have had (Fagan & Wise, 2007; Winzer, 2009). The passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act prompted an enormous growth in the number of school psychologist practitioners and other service providers in school settings (Osgood, 2007).

In 1990 and 1997, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act was reauthorized and renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; Osgood, 2007). IDEA has compromised four main sections, Part A serves as an introduction to the law and defines the general details of the law (NASP, 2022d). Part B provides guidelines for the education of children ages 3-21, and Part C covers the education and mandates for the education of children ages 0-2. Lastly, Part D provides guidelines, research, and resources to help improve the education for children with disabilities across the nation. The history and laws developed around their work have influenced the progress and expansion of the responsibilities of a school psychologist's work (Fagan, 1994; Jacob, 2022; Osgood, 2007). Professional organizations and policy implementations have helped expand the role of school psychologists from solely performing evaluations to providing comprehensive care to all students and helping bridge the relationship between schools, families, and communities (Osgood, 2007).

Educational Requirements of School Psychologist

School psychologists may pursue certification at the master's, specialist's, or doctorate levels (NASP, 2022b). However, the NASP states that school psychologists, at minimum, should complete a specialist-level program in school psychology, including a 1,200-hour internship. Additionally, school psychologists are acquired to attain a Pupil Personnel Services Credential

that authorizes them to work within a public school district (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing [CCTC], 2020).

Prospective school psychologists receive training through their graduate education program (NASP, 2022c). In addition to coursework, school psychology students also participate in supervised hands-on training in the school setting. Admission criteria and application procedures vary amongst schools, but they typically require a bachelor's degree with a major in psychology, education, or child development (NASP, 2022a). Depending on the degree level, a graduate degree in school psychology can take from three years to six years to complete (NASP, 2020a). Additionally, university training programs approved by NASP ensure that students meet specific competencies and experiences to be well-prepared for practice (NASP, 2022a). Rigorous training and close alignment to NASP standards translate to well-trained school psychologists that are ready for the various responsibilities they will be asked to take on (McNamara et al., 2019). The NASP developed the NASP Graduate Preparation Standards to help graduate programs ensure high quality training for school psychology candidates.

NASP Graduate Preparation Standards

The NASP developed the Standards for Graduate Preparation of School Psychologists to assist graduate training programs with the tools to teach and prepare school psychologist candidates for effective practice (NASP, 2020e). In addition to developing guidelines for graduate programs, the NASP graduate preparation standards were also developed to assist organizations in establishing standards training and practice. These standards are also used as the foundation for program review and national recognition procedures for school psychology graduate programs. The National Standards for Graduate Preparation of School Psychologists cover five areas: (a) program context and structure, (b) content knowledge, (c) supervised field

experiences, (d) performance-based program assessment and accountability, and (e) program support and resources.

Program Context and Structure. The first area is the school psychology program context and structure (NASP, 2020e). This area details how school psychology programs should follow a comprehensive framework based on objectives and goals. These programs should also follow a sequential format that incorporates supervised field experience (Hicks et al., 2014). The NASP recognizes that graduate preparation requires intensive support, guidance, and direct supervision (NASP, 2020e). Faculty in these programs must be ready to advise candidates and provide high-quality instruction based on theory and research (Hicks et al., 2014; NASP, 2020e). Faculty must also engage in activities that help the program improve to better student outcomes and experiences (NASP, 2020e).

At the specialist level program, students must complete at least three years of full-time study and at least 60 graduate semester hours or the equivalent (NASP, 2020e). Students at the specialist level must also complete an internship with a minimum of 1,200 hours. Programs must also place an emphasis on diversity and social justice (Grapin et al., 2016). The NASP broadly defines human diversity in relation to race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic status, age, and linguistic diversity (NASP, 2020e). The program's emphasis on diversity and social justice ensures that school psychologists are trained to advocate for all students and protect students' rights within the school community.

Content Knowledge. The content knowledge area focuses on building graduate students' knowledge as it pertains to the practice of school psychology (NASP, 2020e). Graduate programs should explicitly integrate the NASP domains of practice throughout all of their courses and fieldwork experiences. Schools should also ensure that students attain foundational knowledge in education and psychology, which include, learning theories, research, and

evidence-based practices. Training programs also ensure that students are equipped with the ability to create school environments that are safe, supportive, and equitable for all students and families (Grapin, 2016). Lastly, graduate programs should make sure that students demonstrate a high level of competency across all ten domains of school psychology to ensure a range of comprehensive services for all students.

Supervised Field Experiences. The supervised field experiences in school psychology ensure graduate programs provide supervised and sequential practicum and internship experiences that align with the program's goals (NASP, 2020e). Programs must ensure that the fieldwork outcomes and competencies are clearly explained and detailed to students. These field experiences allow candidates to practice the skills learned in their courses in the real world (Binder et al., 2015). Additionally, schools should place importance on collaborating with placement agencies to ensure that candidates are given a wide range of experiences and are fully supported while completing their fieldwork (Binder et al., 2015; NASP, 2020e).

Graduate programs should also ensure that they give their candidates a clear and detailed overview of the activities that must be completed during their fieldwork hours (NASP, 2020e). These activities should be reviewed by the fieldwork course faculty and the internship supervisor so that objectives are clear from the start (Binder et al., 2015; Hicks et al., 2014). The NASP also recognizes that candidates should receive adequate supervision while completing their fieldwork (NASP, 2020e). Candidates should be encouraged to ask questions and engage in detailed discussions that will assist in their professional development.

Performance-Based Program Assessment and Accountability. The area of performance-based program assessment and accountability focuses on how graduate programs assess and monitor the learning of candidates (NASP, 2020e). School psychology programs need to accurately employ systemic, comprehensive assessment of candidate knowledge to ensure

they will be able to practice effectively as early career practitioners. Candidates should be able to demonstrate their expertise in various methods and assessments (Grapin et al., 2015; NASP, 2020e). During fieldwork experiences, graduate program faculty should work closely with field supervisors to evaluate each candidate's performance (NASP, 2020e). Candidates should demonstrate knowledge of providing and assessing programs and intervention-based services for students, families, and schools. Lastly, graduate programs should use assessment data to improve the quality of courses and the overall program.

Program Support and Resources. The last area, school psychology program support, and resources focuses on graduate programs providing adequate resources for candidates and faculty to provide successful learning and teaching environments (NASP, 2020e). The first step is to ensure that the school psychology program is located within an accredited institution. Additionally, graduate programs should ensure that their faculty are compensated for the time it takes to teach and other program responsibilities. The program should also ensure that they establish an environment in which candidates can feel supported and secure reaching out to faculty members for assistance and mentoring. The program should also ensure that they establish an environment in which candidates can feel supported and secure reaching out to faculty members for assistance and mentoring. The program should also ensure that they establish an environment in which candidates can feel supported and secure reaching out to faculty members for assistance and mentoring. The program should also ensure that they establish an environment in which candidates can feel supported and secure reaching out to faculty members for assistance and mentoring (Grapin et al., 2015). Creating a collaborative and supportive environment will help support students from culturally diverse backgrounds and help with student retention. Lastly, graduate programs should ensure that students and faculty have adequate access to resources, including library material and technology (NASP, 2020e).

School Psychologist Role

A school psychologist's responsibilities include evaluation and assessment, consultation, intervention, prevention, investigation, and planning (NASP, 2022a). School psychologists are qualified to provide direct and indirect therapies to satisfy the educational, behavioral, and social-emotional needs of children and adolescents (NASP, 2020a). School psychologists collaborate with children, families, educators, and other school professionals to provide a positive learning environment for all students. Practitioners must demonstrate professional capabilities, including knowledge and skills, in 10 areas of practice, according to the NASP.

The NASP developed the model of comprehensive and integrated school psychological services (the NASP practice model) to address the service delivery of school psychologists working within the context of educational settings (NASP, 2020e). The model gives details, and best practices for the many challenges faced when providing psychological services to children and their families in schools. The model includes two sections detailing the individual responsibilities of school psychologists working in school settings and responsibilities of organizations to sustain school psychological services. First is the area of professional practices, also known as domains of practice which describes the ten domains of practice that are the core components of a school psychologist's job (NASP, 2020e, 2022a). The second part is the organizational principles, which detail the responsibilities of school systems that employ school psychologists (NASP, 2020e). The organizational principles' section discusses what supports need to be in place for school psychologists to complete their job duties effectively.

Domains of Practice

Considering the many responsibilities of a school psychologist, the NASP developed ten domains of practice for school psychologists. The NASP 2020 domains of practice help advance the consistent implementation of school psychological services to help ensure maximum quality,

effectiveness, and efficiency in schools nationwide (NASP, 2020a). The NASP's ten domains of practice outline the essential competencies that practitioners should have. The NASP practice model domains are: (a) data-based decision-making; (b) consultation and collaboration; (c) academic interventions and instructional supports; (d) mental and behavioral health services and interventions; (e) school-wide practices to promote learning; (f) services to promote safe and supportive schools; (g) family, school, and community collaboration; (h) equitable practices for diverse student populations; (i) research and evidence-based practice; and (j) legal, ethical, and professional practice. Although the ten practice model domains detail different responsibilities of a school psychologist, they are all interconnected and depend on each other to ensure the success of all students. The following sections will give detailed summaries of the job duties that fall within specific domains.

Data-Based Decision Making. School psychologists are knowledgeable in various methods of data collection and assessments to help solve various school-based problems (NASP, 2020a). The methods of assessment and data collection used by school psychologists help schools develop targeted interventions, educational programs, and staff supports tailored to the school population (Christ & Arañas, 2014). During their graduate studies, school psychologists are taught the importance of looking beyond just identifying school-based problems and taking a problem-analysis approach to all of their work.

Christ and Arañas (2014) described a problem as identifying an unacceptable discrepancy between an expected and actual outcome. However, to go beyond identifying the problem, a school psychologist must use problem analysis to understand what is causing the problem and identify possible solutions. The problem analysis consists of school psychologists or staff members collecting data and using it to verify or reject the developed hypothesis on the causes

and solutions to problems (Kovaleski & Pedersen, 2014). This data collection will also help with the development of new solutions or the elimination of barriers getting in the way of success.

In addition to ensuring the best ways to collect data, school psychologists must also be able to make decisions based on research and data (NASP, 2020a). Accurately analyzing data to make decisions about curriculum, instructional techniques, and targeted interventions is crucial in ensuring students' needs are met (J. A. Marsh & Farrell, 2014). Prenger and Schildkamp (2018) indicated that data-based decision-making could increase student achievement results when done correctly. School psychologists are in a unique role, with their training and expertise, to persuade school staff to develop their data collection and problem analysis skills (M. R. Silva et al., 2020).

One of the primary functions of a school psychologist is completing evaluations to discover a student's learning, behavior, or mental health needs (Lovett et al., 2020). Within this process, it is crucial for a school psychologist to collect data from multiple sources, be able to thoroughly analyze the data, and ultimately make data-based decisions (M. R. Silva et al., 2020). A comprehensive assessment conducted by a school psychologist consisted of gathering information from multiple sources. The school psychologist and staff members then analyze this information to create a data-based individualized education plan for the student being assessed (Maki & Adams, 2020).

Consultation and Collaboration. School psychologists must also be aware and well-versed in several models and strategies of consultation and collaboration (NASP, 2020a). Their expertise must allow them to consult and collaborate with individuals, school staff, administrators, families, and school systems. Critical to the success of school psychologists' success within a school system is their ability to adequately and clearly consult, collaborate, and communicate with all the individuals or groups they work with. These abilities enable school

psychologists to utilize their understanding of data-based interventions and methods for helping in changing and modifying curriculum and teaching practices to suit the needs of kids (Eagle et al., 2014).

Consultation is a practice that is observed in all aspects of a school psychologist's service delivery (Erchul & Young, 2014). Consultation is often the most essential tool for school-based problem-solving (Castro-Villarreal & Rodriguez, 2017). Consultation is intended to be a cooperative process between school psychologists and teachers to promote success in struggling students. Consultation is intended to be a collaborative process between school psychologists and teachers to promote success in struggling students. To successfully consult with staff, school psychologists must have the proper training to ensure that their approach will be successful (Castro-Villarreal & Rodriguez, 2017).

Kratochwill et al. (2014) indicated that the two major goals of consultation are to provide a method of change and to use these methods to help develop improvements. The first goal addresses changing a system, classroom, or individual issue. The second goal looks at improving a system or a consultee's skills to apply the implodents to future problems. To achieve these goals, a school psychologist must be able to clearly and effectively communicate, establish cooperative partnerships, understand problem analysis, and deal with pushback (Erchul & Sheridan, 2014).

As previously mentioned, consultation and collaboration are crucial to the role of a school psychologist (Erchul & Young, 2014). It is at the root of most of the work that they do and is a practice used in most, if not all, activities completed by a school psychologist. School psychologists must consult with students, teachers, and families in the evaluation and assessment process to get a holistic picture of a student's abilities and areas of need (Wood & Hampton, 2020). Similarly, when providing counseling services to students, they must frequently consult

with the student to ensure progress is being observed. Regardless of the method of consultation or the goals, there will always be three parties interacting with each other (the consultant, the consultee, and the system, or individual the consultation is about; Kratochwill et al., 2014).

Collaboration is crucial to a school psychologist's role (Arora et al., 2018). The individualized education program (IEP) team is one of the most important collaboration teams a school psychologist is part of. These teams work together to develop appropriate services, accommodations, supports, and placements for students with disabilities within the school setting (D'Amato et al., 2011; D'Amato & Perfect, 2020; Eagle et al., 2014). IEP teams can range in size between four to 10 people, and school psychologists must be able to appropriately collaborate with all team members to ensure students' success. School psychologists must be able to effectively collaborate with other team members and let people lead in their areas of expertise (Arora et al., 2018). By doing so, the team is able to ensure that students are getting the best services possible based on expertise and knowledge (Erchul & Martens, 2010).

A significant part of effective collaboration is establishing a school environment that promotes respectful and trustworthy partnerships among school professionals (Codding et al., 2014). If a culture of collaboration does not exist, the school psychologist can encourage and consult with the administration to change policies for more collaboration (Eagle et al., 2014). The Model for Comprehensive and Integrated School Psychological Services emphasizes the importance of school psychologists promoting effective collaboration within the school setting to ensure all students' academic and social-emotional success (Eckert et al., 2014). The NASP not only recognizes the importance of collaboration in a school psychologist's job effectiveness but the importance of collaboration amongst all school personnel to find solutions to key educational problems (NASP, 2017a, 2020a).

School psychologists must be able to make deliberate choices in communication styles to ensure that collaboration is effective (Eckert et al., 2014). Within the school setting, school psychologists are often sought out to help in various aspects of a student's life. School psychologists must be able to successfully collaborate with school professionals, community members, students, and families. At times, these collaborations can be complex due to pushback or culture. Still, it is within the job of a school psychologist to find the best ways to effectively collaborated for the benefit of all students (Arora et al., 2018).

Academic Interventions and Instructional Supports. School psychologists are trained in the many factors that impact students' learning abilities (NASP, 2020a). Additionally, school psychologists have ample knowledge on effective evidence-based curricula and educational strategies to be able to support students and teachers. Considering students' skills vary in the classroom, teachers must accommodate their needs by offering students unique supports and tools to help them progress academically (Prater et al., 2014). As professionals familiar with effective teaching strategies, classroom management, and learning, school psychologists are well-qualified to help teachers with various issues within the classroom setting (Gettinger & Miller, 2014).

School psychologists can serve as helpful resources to teachers to develop and create instructional practices that are beneficial to all students (Martinez, 2014). This assistance can be provided through one-on-one sessions with teachers, teacher workshops, or a resource library for school staff to use with their students (S. R. Shaw et al., 2015). School psychologists collaborate with staff to identify learning barriers and implement evidence-based approaches that are proven to improve student success (Utley & Obiakor, 2014). Additionally, within this practice domain, school psychologists can identify and analyze the fidelity and validity of intervention programs

to ensure students are not being referred for evaluations without the proper opportunities for an effective intervention (S. R. Shaw et al., 2015).

The NASP developed the guiding principles for effective schools and successful students to help school districts and organizations provide the best possible education for all students (NASP, 2020e). The item in the guiding principles is for districts and schools to review, evaluate, and reimagine existing school policies attributing to inequitable outcomes. In order to make sure our students are learning, we must change or eliminate practices that are not producing positive outcomes, even if these practices have been done for many years (NASP, 2016a). School psychologists are in a great position to help create these changes due to their training in consultation, academic and behavioral interventions, research, and evaluation (NASP, 2016b, 2020e). Additionally, with the emphasis that the NASP places on diversity and equity, school psychologists must also ensure that schools are providing high-quality instruction and interventions that are culturally responsive (NASP, 2016b).

Mental and Behavioral Health Services and Interventions. School psychologists have extensive training on the many factors that impact a child's mental and behavioral health (NASP, 2020a). School administrators and teachers face significant pressure to ensure all students can perform well on standardized testing (Addison & McGee, 2015; Molony et al., 2014; Parcerisa et al., 2022; Pease-Alvarez & Thompson, 2014). In addition to this pressure, they also face the obstacle of educating the "whole child" to ensure that not only are students' academic needs being met but also their social and emotional needs (Molony et al., 2014). School psychologists play an essential role in the "whole child" approach to educating because they are able to provide not only direct services to students but also provide tools and resources to teachers to ensure that the needs of all students are being met.

In their role as direct service providers, school psychologists provide school-based mental health counseling to ensure students can access their educational programs and curriculum (R. Marsh & Mathur, 2020). These school-based services may consist of direct interventions, consulting with staff and teachers, working with families, consulting with community mental health services, and working with administrators to create school-wide mental health policies and practices. Additionally, school psychologists take on the role of mental health advocates to ensure that all students are being treated fairly regardless of their needs (Kurian et al., 2021).

In many cases, students are only exposed to mental health services at school due to several barriers, including the cost of services, stigma, logistical challenges, and insurance issues, to name a few (Demaray & Malecki, 2014; Eklund et al., 2019; Nguyen et al., 2022). To overcome these barriers, school psychologists play a key role in not only offering school-based mental health services but also fighting the stigma against mental health services in the communities that they work in. Empowering communities with the knowledge and fighting the stigma against mental health can provide students and their families with the tools and resources to create communities that enable everyone to grow and learn.

School-Wide Practices to Promote Learning. School psychologists understand the systems, organizations, and theories that drive decisions in general and special education programming (NASP, 2020a). In collaboration with other school personnel, school psychologists work to develop effective evidence-based approaches to promote learning for all students. School psychologists often advocate for system-level changes that benefit all students, even if that means going against the grain (Oyen et al., 2020). The NASP has stated that school psychologist must promote changes in schools, systems, and laws for the betterment of students and their families (NASP, 2010). One example of this is school psychologist working with their schools and districts in order to place greater importance on academic interventions and supports

when high number of students are being referred for special education evaluations (Eagle et al., 2014). The development of these preventative measures can be difficult for school psychologist as they must advocate for a system change that will benefit the school and its students but also create a major interruption in the status quo.

School reform and rapid changes in district policies allow school psychologists to expand their roles into developing innovative and updated policies at the schools they work for (Castillo & Curtis, 2014). For example, when the school district creates a new policy for more social-emotional learning in the classroom setting, school psychologists can help develop an evidence-based and data-driven social-emotional learning (SEL) curriculum. According to NASP (2020a), school psychologists should have a concrete understanding of how to create a macro and micro-level changes at all levels of education.

Castillo and Curtis (2014) proposed that school psychologists must first analyze a school's culture and customs before trying to implement changes that may change how people are accustomed to doing things. Building on the expertise they already have, school psychologists help develop infrastructures at the school, community, and district levels that help cultivate resources and opportunities for all students and their families. By understanding the systems and structures they are working in, school psychologists become better equipped to create lasting change within the school setting (NASP, 2020a).

Services to Promote Safe and Supportive Schools. The NASP (2020a) states that school psychologists should understand the research and principles of how social-emotional functioning, resilience, and risk factors all are connected to a student's ability to learn. In collaboration with other school personnel and members of the surrounding communities, school psychologists can help build systems of support that are beneficial for all students (McIntyre &

Garbacz, 2014). They may also provide both preventive and reactive services to ensure that the school community feels secure and supported (NASP, 2020a).

Students' perceptions of teacher support and sense of community at school are significant factors in students feeling safe within the school environment (Lenzi et al., 2017). School psychologists play an important role in making students feel safe and supported at school (Sulkowski & Wolf, 2020). These supports can encompass a myriad of services, from individual and group counseling to developing district-wide anti-bullying policies.

The NASP and other education-related organizations developed a framework for safe and successful schools, outlining evidence-based policies and practices to promote safe and supportive schools for students (Cowan et al., 2013; NASP, 2022e). The framework gives a detailed overview of policy and practice recommendations to help guide federal and state government, county departments of education, and districts into implementing evidence-based procedures for school safety and mental health support. The NASP recognizes that school safety and supportive schools are not an endeavor that can be taken on by a single person or organization but must be a collaborative process that involves all stakeholders (NASP, 2022f).

There are policy recommendations within the framework for government agencies and school districts to consider (NASP, 2022f). The framework calls for adequate funding streams for schools to implement support and services. One-time funding or grants are beneficial in some circumstances, but it does not ensure longevity or security that change implementation will last (Bohnenkamp et al., 2022). Another recommendation is the push for staffing ratios and fully staffed schools. Schools cannot make the necessary changes unless they have the staff to implement changes without overwhelming the staff they already have with new projects. The framework also discusses the importance of establishing clear outlines for district-level policies to promote effective school discipline and positive behavior. This gives school personnel the full

capacity to focus on tasks without taking on multiple responsibilities outside their area of expertise.

Another recommendation that is tied to funding is the funds needed to provide schools with sustainable crisis and emergency preparedness teams (NASP, 2022f). These teams will be composed of key school personnel that are trained in responding to various crises and be ready to take on team responsibilities as needed (Bohnenkamp et al., 2022). A significant role of school psychologists takes a leadership role on these teams because of their expertise in psychological crisis and mental health support (NASP, 2022f). The last two recommendations place importance on collaboration with all stakeholders (Bohnenkamp et al., 2022). First, schools must work with community organizations, local government agencies, and law enforcement to ensure that they are all supporting one another and exchanging resources. Lastly, collaboration among the school staff is critical for the success of all students (Allen et al., 2016; Wang & Degol, 2015). Implementing the appropriate services and accommodations for all students at all levels of need is critical for school improvement and safety (Wang & Degol, 2015). School personnel should have a clear understanding of the specific school staff members to ask for support in a variety of areas dealing with a student's learning and progress. Working together as a team will provide opportunities for teachers to help students holistically and not the standard one size fits all model (NASP, 2022f).

Along with the policy recommendation, the framework details eight best practices for safe and successful schools (NASP, 2022g). The first step is the integration of services through a collaborative process. Schools must collaborate with community-based services to provide the best care for students and their families (Cowan et al., 2013). The second step is the development of school-wide multitiered systems of support (MTSS). MTSS is a school-based model for early identification, intervention, progress monitoring, and data-based assessment of student progress

(Eagle et al., 2014). MTSS encompasses (a) prevention, (b) universal screening in the areas of academics and behavior, (c) implementation of evidence-based interventions, and (d) monitoring of student progress at all levels to determine the level of support needed. MTSS is a model that ensures all students are checked on and provided the appropriate services and support for their success.

The next best practice in creating safe and supportive schools is improving access to school-based mental health support (Cowan et al., 2013). Although schools have a school psychologist on campus to help support students' mental health, more support is needed to ensure all students are cared for (NASP, 2022g). This includes allocating funds to provide schools with full-time school psychologists and other mental health service providers (Brock, 2011). Additionally, as mentioned previously, the development of school safety and crisis teams is critical to ensure that all students and staff are taken care of during emergencies (Brock, 2011; Cowan et al., 2013). The framework also discusses the importance of creating policies and procedures to improve students' physical and psychological safety in schools (Cowan et al., 2013). This can be done by ensuring the safety of students at schools by improving assessing points and safety structures around the school and evaluating policies for campus guests. The next practice focuses on reevaluating school discipline practices to focus on positive behavior and integrating the new and improved practices throughout the school system. The last two practices focus on a holistic plan for educational safety and recognize that the one-size fits all approach will not be beneficial because all schools are different. Lastly, schools and organizations must remember that sustainable and effective improvement is not immediate and will happen over time. Patience and consistency are key in providing students with safe and supportive schools that create learning and success environments (Brock, 2011; Cowan et al., 2013; Nickerson & Martens, 2008).

Family, School, and Community Collaboration. School psychologists have a significant impact on empowering families to be active partners in their child's educational development (Kurian et al., 2021). School psychologists have extensive knowledge of principles and research that strengthen the relationship between families and schools (NASP, 2020a). Students' academic, social, and behavioral skills are enhanced when collaboration between families, schools, and community agencies occurs (Eagle et al., 2014). The collaboration process is more beneficial when the relationships between all of these entities are meaningful and supportive. In their graduate school education, school psychologists are trained to understand and support the various types of family dynamics and cultures they are working with (Proctor & Meyers, 2014).

Collaboration between family, school, and community occurs in almost all aspects of a school psychologist's job responsibilities (Sheridan et al., 2014). When conducting a psychoeducational assessment, school psychologists must collaborate with the families and teachers of the student to ensure that they are collecting data that speaks to the whole child (Ortiz, 2014). School psychologists are well aware of the importance of designing, implementing, and evaluating services that promote partnerships between families, schools, and community agencies to improve the outcomes of all students (NASP, 2022c).

Equitable Practices for Diverse Student Populations. School psychologists have extensive expertise of learning styles, disabilities, diverse characteristics and their impact on students' ability to learn and develop (NASP, 2022c). They also demonstrate an understanding of strategies to enhance services and promote awareness of diversity-related issues. School psychologists can identify how diverse backgrounds and culture impacts families and students to develop research-based policies and procedures for the growth of all communities (NASP, 2016a).

Due to their work with diverse and vulnerable populations, school psychologists must understand that social justice advocacy is foundational in all aspects of service delivery (NASP, 2016a). In May 2020, NASP (2020d) composed the *NASP 2020 practice model*, which emphasized the development of multicultural competence in the practice of school psychology. When working with students, school psychologists must understand the complexities of diverse populations and view students as multidimensional (Miranda, 2014). For school psychologists to do their jobs efficiently, they must develop personal awareness, continue learning about other cultures, and apply their learned knowledge to skills-based practice.

In addition to culture competence and having equitable practices, school psychologists must also serve as advocates for effective cross-cultural practices (Miranda, 2014). The role of a school psychologist should be promoted as a systemic change agent that covers many areas of education and development (Shriberg et al., 2013). A lack of culturally sensitive or anti-racist school-wide practices and policies may cause students and communities to see the school as dangerous or unwelcoming, resulting in less investment in student educational achievements (Betters-Bubon et al., 2022). In order for school psychologists to be effective practitioners, culturally responsive practices must be incorporated in all aspects of service delivery, including assessments, interventions, direct services, and consultations (J. L. Johnson et al., 2019).

Research and Evidence-Based Practice. School psychologists have extensive awareness of statistics, data collection, and research to assist in the appropriate development of interventions and accommodations for all students (NASP, 2020a). Additionally, they understand how evaluating research and applying appropriate research is the foundation of the services they provide in the school setting. School psychologists can incorporate data collection, analysis, and application techniques in evaluating services at the individual, group, and system levels. School psychologists are educational scientist-practitioners that have extensive understanding in both

research and clinical practice in order to improve the learning outcomes of all pupils (Jurišević et al., 2019; Kriewaldt et al., 2017).

School psychologists are given a great deal of responsibility and should be prepared with the methods and practices they use to carry out these duties (Neugebauer et al., 2020). School psychologists must make decisions based on their expertise and knowledge of what interventions might be most beneficial for a particular student, classroom, or school (Song et al., 2014). Data-based decision-making is practiced at the assessment and direct service level and at the school and system level when recommending programs and interventions that will improve students' learning (Floyd & Norfolk, 2014). Lastly, School Psychologists can provide direct services and help analyze existing polices to ensure effectiveness (NASP, 2020a).

Legal, Ethical, and Professional Practice. School psychologists are well-versed in the origins and principles of school psychology (NASP, 2020a). They are well aware of the ethical, legal, and professional standards that guide their work and its impact on all aspects of practice. School psychologists must understand the implications of educational legal cases, laws, and policies (California Association of School Psychologists [CASP], 2019). Furthermore, school psychologists must be aware of federal laws and mandates that dictate their work and how these laws are interpreted and followed at the state level.

School psychologists work towards legal and ethical practices by working collaboratively with school administrators, teachers, and other school personnel to ensure that practices adhere to legislative decisions in general education and special education (Sadeh & Sullivan, 2017). This can be done by ensuring the fidelity of special education plans by teachers, conducting professional developments on current legal cases, and collaborating with administrators to ensure school policies are following state and federal mandates. In addition to keeping up to date with federal and state policies and mandates, school psychologists must also be aware of the school

district's policies and procedures. The promotion of legal, ethical, and professional practices in the field ensures practicing school psychologists are up to date on new educational trends and research regardless of the number of years they have been out of school (Armistead et al., 2013).

Organizational Principles

The organizational principles are the second part of the model of comprehensive and integrated school psychological services (NASP, 2020e). The organizational principles sections describe the supports and obligations of institutions that hire school psychologists in order to provide successful psychological services to students, families, and schools. The model provides best practices and supports that organizations can utilize to ensure school psychologists have the appropriate climate to complete their jobs. The NASP developed six organizational principles: (a) organization and evaluation of service delivery; (b) climate; (c) physical, personnel, and fiscal support systems; (d) professional communication; (e) supervision, peer consultation, and mentoring; and (f) professional development and recognition systems.

Organization and Evaluation of Service Delivery. The organization and evaluation service delivery principle focuses on how well a system is organized and the clear and conscience methods for delivery of services (NASP, 2020e). The first part of this principle is that services are provided by licensed or credentialed practitioners who received graduate a graduate degree. The services that are provided are based on systematic assessment and developed based on the need of each student. Additionally, service delivery is available to all students on an equal basis and is integrated within the school and community environment (Loftus-Rattan et al., 2021; NASP, 2020e). Organization and evaluation of service delivery encompass the evaluation of not only the delivery of services and practices being used by also the evaluation of the individual school psychologist, utilizing methodologies and criteria that reflect their education and professional experience (Loftus-Rattan et al., 2021). Lastly, this principle covers the importance

of school systems supporting consultative environments in which school psychologists can collaborate with school personnel to create methods that enhance results for all children (NASP, 2020e).

Climate. The climate principle addresses the school system's obligation to establish a positive atmosphere in which all school staff can accomplish their responsibilities effectively (NASP, 2020e). This consists of developing a culture of mutual respect and collaboration for all school personnel working together (Epstein et al., 2018). The NASP indicates that school systems should not only create an environment for collaboration but should systematically and actively put strategies and procedures in place so that all school personnel work together to improve student outcomes (NASP, 2020e). This principle also covers the school system's responsibility of taking professional and constructive steps to resolve conflicts between team members.

Within the organizational principle of climate, there is also the crucial aspect of school systems creating an environment where school personnel can ask questions and advocate for their needs (Epstein, 2018). Advocacy is not seen as defiant but as a way in which school staff pushes for materials, services, or procedures that are most beneficial for students and their families (Epstein et al., 2018). Creating an advocacy environment allows school staff not to fear consequences or write-ups from supervisors or administrators. Lastly, school systems should promote an environment that maximizes job satisfaction and place importance on a healthy balance between their employees' professional and personal lives (NASP, 2020e).

Physical, Personnel, and Fiscal Support Systems. The physical, personnel, and fiscal support system principle details the importance of school systems ensuring that their staff has all the necessary resources in order to complete their jobs effectively (NASP, 2020e). The first part of this principle is that school systems should develop appropriate steps for recruiting qualified

and diverse staff members. Recruiting the necessary staff ensures that school personnel are only practicing in their area of expertise and are not expected to take on multiple roles outside of their training field (J. Shaw & Newton, 2014). Additionally, school systems should take active steps to support the recruitment and retention of qualified school personnel. For school psychologists specifically, school systems can advocate for improving the ratio of school psychologist to students (NASP, 2020e). The appropriate ratios between school psychologists and students are among the most critical factors in delivering high-quality, comprehensive services to all students (NASP, 2020c, 2020e). School systems are responsible for providing school personnel with the appropriate technology to successfully innovate and develop current student support (NASP, 2020e). Finally, school districts must guarantee that all of their employees have access to suitable professional work resources (e.g., office space, up-to-date assessments, administrative assistance) in order to improve service delivery to kids and their families.

Professional Communication. The professional communication principle covers the importance of school systems creating an environment where clear and open communication is prioritized (NASP, 2020e). This consisted of school systems creating policies that promote the use of professional communication. Schools should encourage personnel to communicate with one another about work-related matters (Hughes et al., 2014; NASP, 2020e). Additionally, school systems should endorse the use of collaborative problem-solving processes so that all staff feels like they are being heard and to develop school policies that are created using expertise from several areas of practice (Epstein et al., 2018). Lastly, the professional communication policy details the need for school systems to provide school personnel with high-quality technology in order for them to accomplish their job obligations and to keep sensitive data as safe as possible (NASP, 2020e).

Supervision, Peer Consultation, and Mentoring. The supervision, peer consultation, and mentoring principle detail the need for school systems to create an environment where all personnel have opportunities for supervision, peer consultation, and mentoring (NASP, 2020e). School systems should understand that supervision and mentoring must be provided through an ongoing, career-long process with employees and their employers (J. Callahan, 2016). Specifically, school psychologists and school systems should implement policies that allow the supervision of school psychologists throughout their careers (NASP, 2020e). According to the NASP (2020e), school psychologists that take on the role of supervisor should have a valid state credential and have a minimum of 3 years of experience practicing as a school psychologist.

The NASP also recommends that supervision approaches be tailored to each school psychologists' experience, abilities, and requirements (NASP, 2020e). For example, interns and novice school psychologists require more time for direct supervision and support than those of their more experienced counterparts. Supervision for these groups might include more frequent face-to-face meetings and observing their work to ensure competence and effectiveness. The NASP also suggests the use of peer consultation groups in order to promote professional growth among all school psychologists (NASP, 2020b). The more novice school psychologists can discuss new research and models in the field, the more experienced school psychologists can bring in their knowledge of working in the field for multiple years. The groups also allow mentoring relationships to develop amongst collogues, creating strong bonds between colleagues (NASP, 2020e).

Professional Development and Recognition Systems. The last principle in the Comprehensive and Integrated School (NASP, 2020e). Psychological services model is professional development and recognition system. This principle details the school system's responsibility of developing annual professional development plans for its employees. The

professional development topics should be up to date with current research in the field and also relevant to the cultures and issues arising at individual schools and school districts (Epstein, 2018; Epstein et al., 2018). School systems should ensure enough funding for professional development to take place at their schools and encourage their school personnel to find other formats of professional development outside of the school setting (e.g., professional conferences, webinars, and literature; NASP, 2020e). Lastly, the NASP states that school systems should provide recognition (e.g., salary increase, promotion opportunities) for individual school psychologists motivated to improve and stay current in their practice.

Early Career School Psychologist

The NASP defines ECSPs as professionals in the field that are in their first five years of working as a credentialed school psychologist (A. E. Silva et al., 2014). Upon completing their graduate studies, school psychologists are expected to have the knowledge and skills to be competent practitioners (A. E. Silva et al., 2016). A. E. Silva et al. (2014) indicated that the early career period marks a district period within a person's career trajectory. During this period, early career professionals find the theories and models that will drive their practice and begin discovering their professional identity.

In order to assist with the stresses and challenges faced by early career professionals, the NASP created the *Early Career Committee,* which serves as a bridge between NASP leadership and early career professionals (NASP, 2022d). The primary mission of the Early Career Committee is to engage and support the professional growth of ECSPs through activities, resources, and projects that closely align with the mission of the NASP. The committee members work to develop resources specifically for ECSPs. Additionally, at the annual national conversation ECSPs are invited to specific sessions to enhance their experience as novice practitioners and to network with other colleagues who have also recently started their career.

The committee developed five focus areas to ensure that early career professionals are supported during their transition from students to practitioners. The five focus areas are (a) research and publication, (b) professional practice and membership, (c) self-care, (d) mentoring and supervision, and (e) collaborations with the NASP Graduate Student Committee. These focus areas help develop early career professionals both professionally and personally.

Lifespan Developmental Model

The lifespan development model of supervision created by Rønnestad and Skovholt (2012) was designed for counselors and therapists, yet it could offer a valuable foundation for comprehending the early career years of school psychologists. The model details six phases of therapists' and counselors' development. The lifespan developmental model consisted of six stages: (a) lay helper, (b) novice student, (c) advanced student, (d) novice professional, (e) experienced professional, and (f) senior professional (Carlsson, 2015). The first stage lay helper is described as the pretraining phase, in this phase, people have experience helping those around them (i.e., friends, family, children, colleagues), however, they have not had formal training to assist other, and during this phase, boundaries are blurred or nonexistent (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2012).

The novice student phase encompasses the time in which a person becomes a student and starts to get some formal knowledge of theories and practices (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003). During this time, students are usually overwhelmed with the influx of knowledge and the balance of school and personal life. Students in this phase usually look towards professors or mentors to get feedback and recurrence (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2012). The next phase is the advanced student, in which students move from learning in the classroom and begin to learn through experiences (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003). This phase is usually when students are enrolled in

an internship, practicum, or field placement. At this phase, students begin to establish and recognize professional etiquette and policies.

The next phase is novice professional, which usually encompasses the first 5 years after completing graduate studies. ECSPs are within the novice professional phase of Rønnestad and Skovholt's lifespan development model. Early career professionals face many challenges during these years and make many decisions about their professional practices (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003). During the novice professional phase, there appears to be three district periods, the first being a period in which the early career professionals are seeking to confirm the validity of their training. In other words, are the models, theories, and research they studied during their training helpful and useful in the field of practice (Rønnestad et al., 2018)? School psychologists are applying the knowledge gained during their graduate program and applying it to on-the-job issues. Through this process, they can analyze whether the information they learned is actually relevant to their work.

The second is a period of disillusionment, in which the early career professional faces challenges they are inadequately prepared for (Rønnestad et al., 2018). These challenges force them to look not only at their training but also at themselves and whether they are well prepared for practice. ECSPs face various challenges that they might not have received adequate training on (A. E. Silva et al., 2016). These setbacks often leave them feeling like they are unable to practice alone or overwhelmed by the complexities of school-based practices. Often these gaps in knowledge require a school psychologist to reach out to mentors, supervisors, or administrators for assistance (Boccio et al., 2016a). School systems are also responsible for filling in these gaps with professional developments and resources in order to ensure effective practices. Shernoff et al. (2017) found that ECSPs are often faced with the expanding roles of a school psychologists and are required to meet the needs of schools and students regardless of their training. Due to the

new responsibilities that ECSPs must take on it is critical for school systems and districts to ensure that school psychologists are receiving professional development that is effective and relevant to the work they are doing. The period of disillusionment may cause school psychologists to experience feelings of inadequacy and incompetence.

The final period is a period of exploration. During this period, early career professionals explore their professional practices and work environments (Rønnestad et al., 2018). ECSPs are developing a sense of self and figuring out aspects of the jobs they enjoy versus those they do not (Arora et al., 2016). They are also working on developing programs, interventions, and theories that drive their practice, which may be different than the ones used by previous supervisors. During this period, early career psychologists also determine whether the district or school they work in is a right fit for their practice (Daly & Gardner, 2020). School psychologists' first couple of years of practice can be challenging and overwhelming but also rewarding in that they can build their toolkits and find their professional identity (Arora et al., 2016).

As ECSPs navigate the novice professional phase, there are many challenges and strong emotions to overcome (Daly & Gardner, 2020). ECSPs are a district group with unique needs and challenges (Arora et al., 2016). Specifically, as recent graduates, ECSPs are much more prone to have higher debts, dedicate more extensive portions of time to developing professional skills and building up their resources, figuring out work-life balance, and developing their professional identities (Arora et al., 2016; Burns, 2013; Newman et al., 2017). In order to combat the challenges that are being faced school districts must be able to specifically address these issues and develop tools and resources to improve the experiences of ECSPs.

School Psychologist Shortage

The shortage of school psychologists encompasses not only the practitioners in the field but also the number of faculty available to train students and the availability of qualified

graduate programs (NASP, 2020c). These shortages are predicted to continue through the year 2025, causing significant issues for K-12 education (Castillo et al., 2014). The NASP has officially recognized the shortage and has placed importance on the scarcity of trained school psychologists, emphasizing the lack in recruitment of practitioners from diverse backgrounds (NASP, 2020c). Shortages in school psychology practitioners have the potential to drastically limit the opportunity for high-quality services to our students, families, and schools.

The NASP recommends a ratio with no more than 500 students per school psychologist when extensive and preventative services are being provided (NASP, 2020c). However, during the 2019-2020 school year, the student-to-school psychologist ratio in the United States was predicted to be 1,211 to one (NASP, 2021). Just one state achieved the necessary ratio in the 2019-2020 school year, while 24 states had an estimated ratio of 1,500 or more students per school psychologist (NASP, 2021). In addition to a shortage of school psychology personnel overall, there is also a critical shortage of culturally and linguistically diverse school psychologist practitioners (Goforth et al., 2021). In a survey conducted by Goforth et al. (2021), they found that about 86% of practitioners were White and 8% identified as Hispanic. The high student-to-practitioner ratio and lack of diversity among practitioners exacerbate the problems now confronting the field of school psychology (Grapin et al., 2016).

These shortages can impact various areas related to education (NASP, 2020c). They can impact the number of psychologists that are available to work within our school systems, the number of qualified school psychologists willing to supervise practica and internship students, graduate faculty, and the number of psychologists from diverse backgrounds and cultures. Castillo et al. (2014) estimated that approximately 1,000 to 1,500 more school psychologists will exit the field for several reasons (retirement, change of job) than will enter the field through graduating from a school psychology program from 2015 to 2025. Although research has not

identified a single cause for the critical shortage of school psychologists, many factors contribute to people not wanting to pursue a career in school psychology or existing school psychologists leaving the field (Castillo et al., 2014; Goforth et al., 2017; Young et al., 2020).

One reason we do not see many graduate students in school psychology programs is the lack of awareness of school psychologists' skills and job duties (Bocanegra et al., 2019). If people are not aware of the job of a school psychologist, they will not consider it when selecting a career (Bell & McKenzie, 2013). The field of school psychology has minimal representation in introductory psychology textbooks and is underrepresented compared to other professional psychology specialties discussed in introductory psychology courses (Haselhuhn & Clopton, 2008; Lucas et al., 2005). Graves and Wright (2007) found that most students in school psychology graduate programs learned about the field through self-directed learning rather than formal undergraduate coursework. According to research, school psychology training programs have fallen short in recruiting students from diverse backgrounds (Fiegener, 2009). It has been suggested that the possible factor to the lack of awareness in the field is the undergraduate students' lack of knowledge and exposure to school psychology versus their exposure to other professional fields in psychology (Graves & Wright, 2009; Haselhuhn & Clopton, 2008).

Even students who are actively enrolled in school psychology graduate programs tend to have misinformation about the various roles of a school psychologist (Weiner et al., 2021). Weiner et al. (2021) found that students enrolled in school psychology graduate programs underestimated the time spent engaging in special education programs by 20%. Newly enrolled graduate students in school psychology programs also overestimated the amount of time school psychologists spent providing direct services such as individual and group counseling. Similarly, Graves and Wright (2007) found that graduate level school psychology students exhibited a general lack of information regarding the field of work and the tasks that would be asked of them

once they became practitioners. Tarquin and Truscott (2006) found that even students at the practica level of their training were unaware of the full range of their supervisor's responsibilities. In order to combat these shortages, there needs to be more awareness and representation and awareness of school psychology at the undergraduate level (Bocanegra et al., 2017). Additionally, potential applicants need to be well-informed and have a realistic vision of the roles of school psychologists before they commit their time and money to a graduate program.

Another key factor to the school psychologist's shortage is the overwhelming workload and expanding responsibilities that school psychologists must deal with (Gorforth et al., 2017; Judge et al., 2017; Unruh & McKellar, 2013). As previously mentioned, the school psychologist-to-student ratio is well over the recommended ratio by the NASP. Creating more work for practitioners in the field. In a study by Brown and Sobel (2019), they found that school psychologists that reported lower levels of job satisfaction attributed this to job ambiguity and excessive demands (e.g., large caseload, excessive calls for crisis response, etc.; Cottrell & Barrett, 2015). Young et al. (2020) found that 90% of school psychologists in their study reported their job as being stressful. They attributed the stress to their professional opinions not being valued, lack of administrative support, believing they are not making a difference in students' lives, not having enough opportunities for creative problem solving, large caseloads, and holding the belief that they are not good school psychologists.

Regardless of the school psychologist shortage and its contributing factors, there is an adverse negative impact on students, families, and communities (Bocanegra et al., 2019; Brown & Sobel, 2019; Young et al., 2020). This problem has an influence not only on the job of school psychologists and their capacity to deliver high-quality work, but also on the options accessible to our pupils. Dissatisfaction amongst practitioners and the lack of awareness of the school

psychologist's job is a multi-faceted complex issue that needs to be assessed from all angles to come up with effective and comprehensive solutions (Young et al., 2020).

Burnout

Burnout is a form of work-related stress defined by a condition of prolonged emotional, bodily, and psychological suffering (Grossi et al., 2015). Burnout also includes a sense of diminishing accomplishment as well as a feeling of losing one's identity. Although burnout is not included in the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), it is included in the World Health Organization's eleventh Revision of the International Classification of Diseases (APA, 2013; WHO, 2019). Burnout impacts a person's quality of life by reducing motivation and productivity, which influences their interest in their work (Maslach, 2001). Additionally, burnout negatively impacts a person's feelings toward work and motivation to work collaboratively with colleagues. In rare circumstances, burnout may cause a person to quit their current job or even change careers (George-Levi et al., 2020).

There are three major components or symptoms that a person may experience when feeling burnout (George-Levi et al., 2020). These components include emotional exhaustion, inefficiency and distancing, and cynicism and depersonalization (George-Levi et al., 2020; Simbula & Guglielmi, 2010). In regard to burnout, emotional exhaustion has been described as a feeling of extreme exhaustion and low energy (George-Levi et al., 2020). Inefficiency and distancing are described as increased mental distancing from one's job and reduced professional efficacy. This might also bring a feeling of low self-fulfillment about one's career and a negative perception of their effectiveness on the job. The last symptom is cynicism and depersonalization, characterized by negative emotions towards the people a person works with, which can lead to hostility towards work and colleagues (Engin, 2019).

Burnout in the Education Field

For many years burnout has been referred to as a worldwide epidemic in K-12 education (Bauer et al., 2006). Burnout represents one of the largest issues facing education today and is one of the key factors contributing to high levels of educator turnover (Haynes, 2014; Jahan, 2017). The APA (2020) conducted a study about workplace stress and found that almost 50% of teachers leave the profession within their first five years. Haynes (2014) conducted a study in which he estimated the turnover rates in K-12 can cost up to $2.2 billion annually. Turnovers in education can not only cost districts and schools money but also have a critical impact on the quality of education students receive.

Bauer et al. (2006) discovered that instructors who were suffering greater levels of burnout had larger classroom sizes and lower levels of classroom management abilities. Alsalhe et al. (2021) reported that teachers operate under high levels of pressure for long periods of time throughout the school year. This pressure can lead teachers or school staff to be less empathetic to students, have less productivity, and show low tolerance for students with difficulties. Teachers who report high levels of burnout attribute it to various factors of their job, such as lack of clarity in their role, time pressure, caseload overload, and lack of support from administrators (Garwood et al., 2018).

Burnout in School Psychologists

Similar to their colleagues, school psychologists also report a variety of reasons that lead to feelings of burnout (Young et al., 2020). Several research studies on job satisfaction reported that school psychologists are generally satisfied with their work (Dickison et al., 2009; Vanvoorhis & Levinson, 2006; Worrell et al., 2006). They indicated that working with students and families, collaborating with teachers, and having summers off were significant factors in their job satisfaction (Dickison et al., 2009). However, practitioners have reported being less

content with salaries, district policies interrupting their job duties, and an inability to advance within the field (Vanvoorhis & Levinson, 2006). It is essential to note that research has shown that school psychologists' overall employment satisfaction does not predict fatigue (Worrell et al., 2006). In fact, school psychologists may have high levels of job satisfaction while yet suffering from burnout. Studies have found that more than 90% of school psychologists have reported feeling some level of burnout throughout their careers (Schilling & Randolph, 2017; Schilling et al., 2018).

A school psychologist's job can be very demanding and overwhelming when considering their responsibilities (Schilling et al., 2018). In some cases, school psychologists are the sole mental health practitioner at their schools, making them the default staff member to deal with mental health crises on top of their other responsibilities (Weaver & Allen, 2017). School psychology is regarded as a difficult profession in which practitioners must deal with significant pressures such as emotional demands, long-term exposure to suffering and difficulties, decreased decision-making control, and pressure from various sources such as parents, children, and teachers (George-Levi et al., 2020).

School psychologists may be predisposed to burnout due to the high demands placed on them (Schilling et al., 2018). According to Rodriguez and Carlotto (2017), burnout rates among mental health professionals were greater than those in other professions, and school psychologists were more likely to experience burnout. Similarly, greater degrees of discontent with present compensation and school-psychologist-to-student ratio are associated with increased experiences of burnout among school psychologists when considered together (Schilling & Randolph, 2017). Additionally, when psychologists report high levels of burnout, they also report more significant feelings of exhaustion and a lower sense of personal success (Boccio et al., 2016b).

With the known national shortages of school psychology practitioners, it is critical to detect, avoid, and respond to possible burnout issues (Castillo et al., 2014). A decrease in workload, feelings of being valued, administrator support, and better salary and incentives help higher the levels of job satisfaction (Young et al., 2020). A key factor contributing to the retention of school psychologists is a competitive salary. This not only eliminates some of the external stressors faced by practitioners but also helps with feeling valued and appreciated by their employers.

In a study by Schilling et al. (2021), they found that annual evaluation caseloads were the number one reported work-related activity that was predictive of feelings of burnout. Caseload reduction can play a key role in lowering the burnout levels of school psychologists (Castillo et al., 2014). The reduction in caseload would allow school psychologists to engage in other activities that would help them feel more part of the school community and more integrated into the school (Schilling & Randolph, 2020). Young et al. (2020) found that effective collaboration and communication with school staff and administrators contributed to higher levels of job satisfaction. The more a school psychologist is integrated with the school as a whole, the more they can utilize all of their skills and training to better the school community (Schilling & Randolph, 2020).

In a study by Boccio et al. (2016b), practitioners reported feelings of burnout due to administrative pressure to behave unethically while completing their job duties. Some of the reported behaviors were avoiding recommending services due to finances, placing students into wrong placements, and working with incorrect material. These unethical acts contribute to school psychologists feeling like they do not have control over their work and feeling inadequate at their job. Boccio (2015) indicated that developing strong work relationships with supervisors,

prompting solutions that benefit both students and the school, and reaching out to professional organizations can help with the issue of unethical pressures in the workplace.

It is important for school districts to continue their advocacy for more school psychologists in the field so that school psychologists are not forced to do the work of multiple practitioners (Castillo et al., 2014). In addition, the recruitment and retention of school psychologists in the field will help practitioners closely align to the roles outlined in the NASP's 2020 model for comprehensive and integrated school psychological services so that they are not only completing evaluations but using their expertise and knowledge in other ways (Schilling et al., 2021). Additionally, the school psychologist shortage plays a major role in the factors that contribute to practitioner burnout; therefore, it is important for professional organizations and school districts to continue to advocate and recruit more school psychologists into the field (Schilling et al., 2021; Boccio, 2015; Young et al., 2020).

Job Readiness

Work readiness is the measure to which graduates possess the characteristics and skills that prepare them to be successful within their workplace (Caballero & Walker, 2010). Work readiness is also defined as an individual's possession of foundational skills to be minimally qualified for a specific occupation as determined by a job analysis or a professional organization (Farrow & Parkin-Bashizi, 2019). Work readiness has been referred in many ways, such as work preparedness, generic work attributes, and graduate employability. Regardless of what you call it, job readiness can be complex to define, as stakeholders tend to perceive attributes related to a field with varying importance (MacDermott & Ortiz, 2016).

Despite the training they receive in their graduate programs, educators will continue to encounter numerous challenges that they were not trained in (Mohamed et al., 2016). These new challenges are brought on by the diversity of school populations, policy changes, and the

different responsibilities schools may place on educators. To analyze how the learning in a graduate program translates into a real school, programs usually incorporate field experiences for their students. These field experiences typically serve as a crucial component in analyzing a student's preparedness for the job (Farrow & Parkin-Bashizi, 2019).

According to the *Standards for Graduate Training of School Psychologists*, in addition to academics, school psychology graduate students must engage in applied training activities such as practicum and internship (NASP, 2020d). These fieldwork experiences allow students to get fundamental world interactions with students and staff while supervised by a credentialed supervisor (Cook et al., 2016). Graduate programs in school psychology are responsible for ensuring that applicants receive experience in all 10 areas of practice (NASP, 2020d). Internship and school supervisors check to see that students are applying their knowledge appropriately and accurately and to help ensure students are successful once they become practitioners (Cook et al., 2016).

Although job readiness is a critical factor in ensuring that school psychologists have the skills to conduct their work effectively, there is minimal research on the satisfaction of practicing school psychologists in their training programs (McCleary et al., 2020). In one study, school psychologists discussed the modification of specific components of their training programs to better meet the needs of their current roles (Schilling & Randolph, 2020). Furthermore, they found that participants in their study reported dealing with issues they were not trained in, specifically with students' behavioral and emotional needs. Additionally, participants reported that what they were taught in schools didn't reflect the experiences in their current work. For example, they noted that in their training programs, they were trained using ideal scenarios which didn't reflect the complexities of working in schools today.

Another study found that participants often found gaps between the best practice content they would learn in class and the limitations they faced in the field (K. Callahan, 2021). K. Callahan (2021) also found that participants reported dissonance between what they had learned in the classroom and what they were practicing in the field. One participant noted the lack of training she received in social-emotional learning during her training and how it negatively impacted her job experience due to the demands her district placed on this topic. Findings from these studies demonstrate the importance of school psychologists' training programs by analyzing the differences between their curriculum and what is being practiced in the field (J. L. Johnson et al., 2019).

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is described as an individual's conviction in their ability to execute or accomplish a given activity effectively (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy influences which tasks or activities they choose to participate in. Bandura (1977) observed that individuals had a self-system that allows them to exert some degree of influence over what they think, feelings, and behaviors. Bandura (1997) indicated that people are more likely to avoid activities they believe they will not be good at and will actively participate in tasks they perceive themselves capable of. People with high belief in their abilities approach difficult tasks as challenges they can work to overcome, not as activities they must avoid. Hence, whereas preparation relates to a person’s conviction that they have gained skills and information, self-efficacy refers to a person’s view that these talents can be effectively executed.

Self-efficacy is the driving force behind whether or not someone wants to learn a particular task or activity. It has an impact on the goals that people set for themselves as well as how they tackle obstacles. Bandura (1977) discussed the importance of self-efficacy and how it is built through firsthand experiences, modeling, and observational learning. Bandura (1977)

outlined the four sources contributing to an individual's efficacy: accomplishments, vicarious learning, verbal persuasion, and psychological states. Although it is helpful to look at the sources at the individual level, it is also important to understand that the four sources are reciprocally influenced by one another and can also be influenced by other environmental factors (Hendricks, 2016).

Performance Accomplishments. The performance accomplishment source describes confidence derived from successful past experiences (Bandura, 1997). Performance victories are seen to be the most powerful factors because they relate to events in which a person effectively overcame a barrier or accomplished a task (Bandura, 1994). This is a beneficial source of self-efficacy because it is based on past successful experiences that boost one's confidence in a task. In contrast, repeated failures lower one's expectations and can impact their willingness to attempt the task again. However, when an individual continues to put forth the effort and accomplishes repeated success, the negative impacts of occasional failures are reduced. Bandura et al. (1977) indicated that once self-efficacy is established, it can become easily generalizable to other situations in which one's fears of failure are holding one back.

The first couple of years of one’s career can be challenging due to feelings of inadequacy (Brown et al., 2014). Graduate students completing their fieldwork and early career professionals must quickly adjust to the fast-paced world of education. Through their experiences, early career professionals may encounter numerous failures and significant successes (Brown et al., 2014; A. E. Silva et al., 2016). Early career professionals must acknowledge and embrace their performance accomplishments to maintain motivation and confidence in completing their jobs (Pfitzner-Eden, 2016). As an early career practitioner, it is vital to maintain a sense of accomplishment so that when failure is experienced, it does not derail them from being successful at the job (Brown et al., 2014; Pfitzner-Eden, 2016). Although failure will be

experienced throughout a person's career, early career practitioners are more vulnerable to letting these setbacks impact their overall self-efficacy and self-esteem (Pfitzner-Eden, 2016). Brown et al. (2014) found that performance accomplishment played the most prominent role in developing preservice teachers' self-efficacy. Performance accomplishment provides preservice and early career practitioners the confidence to take on new roles and adjust to their new careers.

Vicarious Learning. The second source of developing self-efficacy is vicarious learning, in which expectations are derived from watching others do the tasks that people are fearful of (Bandura, 1994; Myers, 2018). Seeing other complete activities that are perceived as difficult or scary can generate the observer's expectations that they, too, with effort, can complete the task (Bandura & Adams, 1977; Mayes, 2015). This source persuades people to think that if someone else could complete the activity without adverse consequences, they could complete it or at least improve their skills (Bandura & Barab, 1973). Social modeling enables an individual to gain confidence in their own abilities by observing individuals with who they identify with achieve success (Bandura, 1994).

Vicarious learning plays a significant role in developing and training education professionals (Kozar et al., 2015; Steenekamp et al., 2018). Many graduate programs in education require a course, if not multiple courses of student teaching, internship, or fieldwork (Kozar et al., 2015; NASP, 2022b). These courses are implemented into the curriculum for students to get hands-on learning in their future careers and learn from the experiences of their field mentors and supervisors. These fieldwork experiences are also crucial in that they allow students to identify how theories and practices discussed in class are implemented in the real world by professionals (Mayes, 2015). Having the opportunity to make meaning from others' experiences allows graduate students to see themselves as successful within the job and potentially increasing their self-efficacy. Fieldwork experiences enable students to gain

knowledge through real-world practices and begin to identify their own professional identities outside of the classroom setting (Steenekamp et al., 2018).

Verbal Persuasion. The third source is verbal persuasion. Verbal persuasion is the process of people being led by suggesting that they possess the coping skills necessary to face a situation or activity that has previously overwhelmed them (Bandura, 1994). In other words, it allows people to be convinced into their ability to succeed at a task through the use of staged opportunities. This source tends to be frequently used due to its ease and availability. This source is important because it allows individuals to be motivated to change their behaviors. However, verbal persuasion is also likely to be weaker than performance accomplishments because it is not based on one's achievement but on others' opinions.

Verbal persuasion can be easily used and integrated into the field of education. Bandura (1994) indicated that the effectiveness of verbal persuasion depends on the trustworthiness, credibility, and expertise of the person that is giving the verbal persuasion. With early career practitioners, this can be a direct supervisor, a field mentor, or a veteran staff member (Moulding et al., 2014). Receiving words of encouragement and praise from someone trustworthy can motivate an early career practitioner to continue pushing forward and attempting new tasks (Moulding et al., 2014; Mulholland & Wallace, 2001). Mulholland and Wallace (2001) found that feedback and praise from colleagues and supervisors is an excellent source of self-efficacy for new educators. Furthermore, praise and encouragement from supervisors and mentors have been found to be a great tool for developing preservice and early career practitioner self-efficacy (Rots et al., 2007). Although verbal persuasion is not the strongest source of developing self-efficacy, it can still be a valuable tool to motivate and encourage early career professionals, especially when they are going through challenging experiences or feeling overwhelmed (Clark & Newberry, 2018).

Emotional Arousal. Emotional arousal is the process of analyzing one's emotions toward a certain situation (Bandura, 1994). People rely on their state of physiological arousal in judging their anxiety or capability towards a task. For example, when a situation elicits high arousal, individuals usually associate that with fear and anxiety. However, when a situation produces low arousal, and an individual is calm before engaging in an activity, they typically expect success. Fear arousal can be detrimental to future attempts at a task because the mind begins to create fear-provoking thoughts that far exceed the fear experienced during the first attempt (Bandura & Adams, 1977). Diminishing emotional arousal can reduce avoidance behavior.

It is often the case that fears, and deficits are interdependent (Bandura & Adams, 1977). Avoidance of stressful activities impedes the development of coping skills and results in the lack of competency that provides a realistic basis for fear (Bandura, 1997). In contrast, an individual with a high state of self-efficacy is more likely to persevere and maintain resilience in meeting their stated goals and aspirations. Emotional arousal is important in a person's capacity to cope with perceived pressures or barriers (Bandura & Adams, 1977).

As previously mentioned, early career practitioners experience many challenges and are faced with many tasks that can make them feel overwhelmed (Brown et al., 2014; Clark & Newberry, 2018; NASP, 2019). These somatic indicators can cause early career professionals to shy away from certain tasks or complete a task with less confidence due to the way their bodies respond during the task performance (Pendergast et al., 2011; Pfitzner-Eden, 2016). For example, when completing a task for the first time an early career professional may experience emotional arousal such as sweating or increased heart rate, which they then might attribute the symptoms to anxiety, which can lead to feelings of inadequacy (Pfitzner-Eden, 2016). O'Neill and Stephenson (2011) found that emotional arousal was the strongest predictor in teacher's classroom management skills. Physiological and effective states are important in developing the

self-efficacy of early career professionals. Therefore, it is important for training programs and organizations to integrate emotional and physiological self-regulation strategies into their curriculum and job training programs (Pfitzner-Eden, 2016).

School Psychology and Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy research in school psychology is based on the ideas of Bandura's self-efficacy theory (Huber, 2006). During their training programs and early career years, school psychologists should reflect on the sources of self-efficacy to guide them in analyzing how they approach learning and complex situations (Stoiber & Vanderwood, 2008). Self-efficacy directly impacts a person's willingness to engage in an activity, their coping skills to deal with difficulty, and their level of effort to complete specific tasks (Bandura, 1977). School psychology training programs aim to promote self-efficacy amongst students in various areas of working within a school setting (Stoiber & Vanderwood, 2008). Based on the four sources of self-efficacy, self-efficacy ultimately focuses on the personal assessments of how well a school psychologist can perform specific tasks.

A study by Barmlett et al. (2002) found that school psychologists reported that they did not feel "very confident" in consulting with teachers about students' behavioral and academic issues. The study participants also noted that because they did not feel confident consulting with teachers on this issue, they did not seek out opportunities to improve their consultation skills Erchul and Young (2014) indicated that this discomfort with teacher consultation could result from training programs focusing on traditional roles in school psychology, such as assessment and counseling. Participants in this study also reported high confidence levels in their abilities to deal with behavioral problems and reported that they would often seek out these duties and even present workshops on these topics. This study coincides with Bandura's (1997) theory that when people have higher levels of self-efficacy towards a task, they are more likely to engage in those

tasks and seek out opportunities, and in contrast, when people report lower levels of self-efficacy, they are more likely to avoid the task altogether.

In another study by Glang et al. (2017), they found that over 60% of participants reported low self-efficacy levels in working with students with traumatic brain injury (TBI). Participants reported that their low ratings were due to a lack of training or experience working with TBI students during their graduate studies. Additionally, participants of the study that reported higher levels of self-efficacy indicated that they had previously worked with TBI students. The findings of this study closely align with Bandura's (1995) performance accomplishment and the impact it has on people's self-efficacy levels. Individuals who have experience successfully accomplishing a task will feel more confident in themselves and will tend to seek out opportunities to engage in the activity repeatedly.

Runyon et al. (2017) found that self-efficacy mediated the relationship between training and practice. They looked at school psychologists' self-efficacy towards working and using applied behavior analysis (ABA) techniques with the students. They found that modeling, mastery experiences, feedback, and encouragement allowed for the development of self-efficacy toward using ABA. School psychologists who encountered appropriate modeling and feedback in their ABA work during internship reported higher levels of self-efficacy. Similarly, mastery experiences and encouragement also predicted the levels of self-efficacy. High self-efficacy increases the initiation of a specific behavior and results in increased effort and persistence to achieve and further develop one's skills (Bandura & Cervone, 1983; Schunk et al., 2014; Tirpak & Schlosser, 2015). The findings of Runyon et al. (2017) shed light on the importance of the four sources that develop a person's self-efficacy. School psychologists that were able to have experiences with ABA during their internships observed a supervisor or mentor work with the techniques of ABA and received words of encouragement to attempt the techniques of ABA all

reported higher levels of self-efficacy when it came to working with ABA techniques now as practitioners.

Conclusion

ECSPs are a unique group of professionals that face their own unique challenges and experiences (Newman et al., 2017; NASP, 2022d; A. E. Silva et al., 2014 , 2016). When faced with these challenges, ECSPs are forced to deal with various emotions regarding their perceived competency levels. Additionally, because ECSPs are freshly out of graduate school, they often analyze how well their training programs prepared them for their current challenges as practitioners. Research has been conducted on the experiences and efficacy levels of early career mental health practitioners however little research has been done on the self-efficacy levels of early career psychologists and how it impacts their work (K. Callahan, 2021; Glang et al., 2017; Huber, 2006).

Examining the work of ECSPs and how it aligns with the NASP 2020 domains of practice can provide extensive information on how theory and models taught in graduate programs reflect in the real world. It is critical that school psychologists be trained to be competent in all of these domains in order to meet the issues that are emerging in today's educational system. Furthermore, analyzing self-efficacy's role in early career practitioners' practices can provide information on how important it is to embed self-efficacy practices within the graduate school curriculum.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

Introduction

The main goal of this study is to find the challenges that are faced by ECSPs and the strategies they use to overcome these challenges when entering the field as new practitioners. Chapter 3 will focus on the methodology and research design of the current study. First, there will be a discussion of the phenomenological approach to research and how it will be used in this study. Following, there will be a discussion on the research design that covers the units of analysis, population, sample size, and the type of sampling that will be utilized. The following sections will include a review of participant selection, protection of human subjects, expedited review rationale, data security, and the collection of the data. Protocols of the interviews are discussed, including specific interview questions, techniques, and how validity and reliability were checked. Personal biased are mentioned, as well as how they were remedied through epoché. Finally, this chapter will finish with an explanation of how data was gathered, transcribed, categorized, and coded.

Re-Statement of Research Questions

The following research questions (RQ) were addressed in this study:

- RQ1: What challenges are faced by early career school psychologists when entering the field?
- RQ2: What strategies and best practices are employed by early career school psychologists to complete their job duties?
- RQ3: How do early career school psychologist track, measure, and define success in their practices?
- RQ4: What recommendations would early career school psychologists have for new school psychologists coming into the field?

Nature of the Study

To properly answer the research questions and achieve the study's goals, this study will adopt a phenomenological qualitative technique. This is because qualitative research focuses on discovery rather than replication or verification (Conklin, 2007). This is beneficial because ECSPs are in a unique stage in their careers where they experience situations and phenomena not encountered by practitioners who have been in the field for many years. Qualitative research builds a holistic picture of a topic to help better understand or explore the meaning that people have for a specific social or human problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Qualitative research seeks to find the distinctive qualities of a social phenomenon under consideration, usually focusing on how members of a specific group understand their subjective experiences (Pajo, 2017).

Qualitative Research

Generally, qualitative research is concerned with cases rather than variables and understanding differences or similarities within an experience rath than calculation (Sullivan & Sargeant, 2011). Qualitative research is concerned with the point of view of the individuals in the study and how they experience a specific situation. Qualitative research has several common characteristics outlined by Creswell and Creswell (2018), the first is that qualitative research collects data in the natural setting. Researchers tend to collect their data and information in the field where participants experience the issue being studied rather than bringing them into a lab (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The second feature is that researchers are the primary instrument in their research. Although they may use protocols or specific instruments to collect the data, researchers are the ones that collect and interpret the information they receive. Another characteristic is that qualitative researchers usually gather multiple forms of data. Researchers

typically collect data from interviews, observations, and documents rather than one single data source.

The fourth characteristic is that researchers use deductive and inductive analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Researchers usually use an inductive process by working from the bottom up and organizing their data into themes or codes. Once themes are established, researchers will use deductive analysis and look back at their data set to see if more support is needed or if they need to go back to participants to gather more information (Thomas, 2006). The fifth characteristic is that researchers work with the participant's meaning of a problem or issue and do not bring their own meaning into the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). Qualitative data is also an emergent design in which researchers must be flexible in all processes throughout their study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Another feature of qualitative research is reflexivity, which asks investigators to reflect on their participation in the study. Researchers must acknowledge personal backgrounds, cultures, experiences, and biases and how they will impact their interpretation of the data collected (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Lastly, qualitative research is holistic (Moustakas, 1994). Researchers strive to comprehend research participants from a variety of viewpoints (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Qualitative research attempts to look at an issue or problem holistically in order to get a comprehensive understanding from all angles.

Assumptions

Creswell and Creswell (2018) discussed that researchers conduct qualitative research with four philosophical assumptions: ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological. The ontological assumption relates to the nature of reality. In qualitative research, researchers are aware of multiple realities when they are doing their research. Participants of the study and the researchers themselves all have different realities of their

experiences and situations. The second assumption is epistemological, in which researchers of a study try to get as close as possible to the participants being studied. Researchers rely heavily on quotes from participants as evidence for their research. Additionally, researchers try to lessen the distance between themselves and the people in their study.

The third assumption is axiological, in which researchers openly discuss the values that drive their narratives and openly discuss their biases (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Researchers directly discuss their positionality in the context of the study and the research setting. The researcher's age, gender, race, immigration status, personal experiences, and professional beliefs are described so that researchers are able to position themselves within the study. The final assumption is methodology. The methodological assumption refers to the research process and procedures. This assumption discusses the way qualitative research is carried out and the characteristics of qualitative research previously mentioned.

Strengths of Qualitative Research

There are several strengths to using a qualitative approach to research. First, qualitative research allows researchers to explore the views of a homogenous group to help unpack differing perspectives or experiences within a community (Choy, 2014). Due to the nature of qualitative research, it allows researchers to get more nuanced responses than they would get from a survey or questionnaire. Researchers who conduct qualitative research receive detailed and descriptive responses from their participants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). These responses can potentially lead researchers in unexpected directions (Choy, 2014).

Another benefit of qualitative research is that it focuses on the interviewee’s viewpoint, experiences, and opinions rather than on literature (Choy, 2014). Researchers can collect first-hand accounts of how a person experienced and interpreted a specific phenomenon or situation. Participants' personal experiences are gathered through observations, interviews, or personal

encounters (Anderson, 2010). These data collection approaches enable researchers to be flexible in compiling comprehensive responses. For instance, when using open-ended questions during an interview, a researcher can inquire further into a participant's response to uncover new data (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Lastly, qualitative research empowers participants of the study to share their stories and minimize the power dynamic that is usually present between the researcher and participants in a study (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Weaknesses of Qualitative Research

One of the major drawbacks of qualitative research is that it is time-consuming (Choy, 2014). The amount of time it takes to conduct interviews, transcribe, and analyze the data can be overwhelming. Qualitative research requires a labor-intensive analysis process encompassing categorizing, recording, and coding a large data set. More so, in qualitative research, there are no objectively verifiable results, which can be a drawback for some researchers. Also, the interpretation of qualitative data is impacted by the researcher's own experiences and biases (Anderson, 2010). Due to this influence, some fields of study do not accept qualitative studies as much as they do quantitative studies because they cannot be generalized to broader populations (Anderson, 2010; Choy, 2014). Lastly, throughout the qualitative data collecting process, participants' replies may be influenced or persuaded by the presence of the interviewer (Choy, 2014; Moustakas, 1994; Thomas, 2006).

Methodology

Creswell and Creswell (2018) note five approaches to qualitative research: narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study. This qualitative study utilized the phenomenological research method. A phenomenological approach explores a commonly shared phenomenon experienced by various people (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Researchers focus on describing what participants have in common when they encounter a

specific phenomenon. All participants' experiences are then analyzed to form an overall essence of the shared experience (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Process of Phenomenology

Creswell and Creswell (2018) indicate that phenomenological research has several key features: an emphasis on a phenomenon, the identification of a group that has all experienced the phenomenon being studied, a discussion on the researcher's personal biases and experiences and how they may impact the study, interviews with individuals that have lived through the phenomenon, data analysis on what and how participants experienced the phenomenon and lastly, a synthesis of the data that discussed the lived experiences of the participants. Laverty (2003) indicated that phenomenology research aims to distinguish significance from essence in daily life by investigating the situation and experience of the phenomena. This approach utilizes data collection methods such as interviews, observations, documents, or videos. Based on the information acquired, the investigator acts as the main tool for determining the overall organization of the respondents' experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Appropriateness of Phenomenology

The most suitable technique for understanding the issues of ECSPs and the tools they employ to address these challenges was a phenomenological approach. As mentioned previously, a phenomenological study is an appropriate approach when attempting to understand the collective meaning of a group of individuals' lived experiences of a phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher was able to comprehend the lived experiences of ECSPs through semi-structured interviews. The similarities and differences of their experiences were gathered through the interviews, in which common challenges were identified as well as how ECSPs overcame them.

Phenomenological research provides a detailed and complete description of specific human experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In phenomenological research, findings can emerge from the interviews and participant experiences rather than being imposed by the researcher (Moustakas, 1994). Researchers can get detailed and comprehensive data on participants' experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This comprehensive data allows the researcher to gain a significant understanding of a specific group and the phenomenon they have all experienced. This also allows the researcher to gain unique perspectives of a shared experience (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Moustakas, 1994).

Weaknesses of Phenomenological Research

Phenomenological researchers must be aware of the philosophical assumptions underlying phenomenology, which are not always evident in research (Creswell & Poth, 2017). In phenomenological studies, the researcher depends heavily on the language skills of the participants to collect their data. This becomes an issue when participants cannot express their true experiences or find the language to discuss their lived experiences. Additionally, researchers in phenomenological studies must be able to recognize and address their biases and find ways to avoid those biases when collecting and analyzing data (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Gray, 2013). Lastly, in phenomenological research, identifying and selecting participants may be difficult due to the specificity of finding participants that have all experienced a common phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Research Design

Research design is an essential element of research. Creswell and Creswell (2018) define research design as the process of conceptualizing a problem by generating research questions, collecting data, analyzing the data, interpreting, and synthesizing the results. In the current study, open-ended interview techniques were used to attain detailed information from participants on

their unique experiences of a specific phenomenon. The sections that follow go through the study's research design, including data collecting, analysis, interpretation, and report writing.

Participants and Sampling

Unit of Analysis. The unit of analysis for this research study was a school psychologist working in a K-12 public school district within Los Angeles County in the State of California for no more than two years. Participants of phenomenological qualitative studies must be knowledgeable and deeply understand the phenomenon being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The purpose of this study was to analyze the challenges that ECSPs face as they transition from students to practitioners and the tools they use to overcome these challenges.

Population. Grossoehme (2014) recommended getting thorough and detailed descriptions of participants' lived experiences pertaining to the phenomenon being studied. The population of a research study includes all persons within a certain group who are related to the issue or have experienced the topic being studied (Robinson, 2014). The population of this study included participants who work within a K-12 public school districts in Los Angeles County in the State of California who graduated from their training programs no more than two years ago.

Sample Size. The sample size for qualitative studies is influenced by both theoretical and practical considerations (Robinson, 2014). Practical consideration of sample size is needed to determine the study's duration and resource allocation. Robinson (2014) indicated that idiographic research typically aims to have a small sample size so that participants can have an impactful voice within the study. Therefore, these studies are given guidelines of 3-16 participants for a single study.

Similarly, Creswell and Creswell (2018) indicated that participants for phenomenological research could range from 3-10. Dukes (1984) recommends that participants be kept between three to ten. Additionally, in the analysis of eleven phenomenological studies in the field of

education, Gutterman (2015) found that the mean number of participants was fifteen, and all studies ranged from eight to thirty-one participants. Another crucial factor of qualitative research is that by keeping the sample size smaller, one can take more time with each participant and collect extensive details from each participant (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher aims to attain saturation throughout the interview and analysis process (Epstein et al., 2018). Saturation is defined as the point when data collection no longer provides new insights or information (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Therefore, based on a combination of the foregoing suggestions from the literature, the researcher decided on a sample size of 15 participants to assure saturation.

Purposive Sampling. Purposeful sampling allows researchers to intentionally sample a group of people that can best inform the researcher about the research topic being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2017). This sampling technique allows the researcher to select participants based on the knowledge and experience they will bring to the study (Pajo, 2017). More specifically, purposive sampling enables the researchers to choose participants based on their experience with a specific phenomenon (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). This allows researchers to gain information about the lived experiences of participants within a certain problem and thereby be analyzed for improvement (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2002).

While sample size ranges varied widely, it is clear from the literature that keeping sample numbers small will enable researchers to approach saturation and gather useful data (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Dukes, 1984; Gutterman, 2015). By maintaining a smaller sample size, researchers can find detailed information from the data to explain the phenomenon's impact on the population (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Purposive sampling allows the researchers to use various sampling techniques to attain meaningful participants in the study (Pajo, 2017). Therefore, this study aims to interview 15 ECSPs working in public school districts within Los Angeles County.

Participant Selection

Participants in phenomenological qualitative research must have lived experiences with the studied topic (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The researcher will use a screening process to identify and select participants who meet the criteria for this study. The process will consist of creating a master list of individuals who met the criteria, creating an additional list of inclusion and exclusion criteria to narrow down participants further, and lastly, implementing criteria for maximum variation. The objective of this study was to interview 15 participants. Therefore, maximum variation was applied to generate a sample population of 15-20.

Sampling Frame. A sampling frame is a list of the entire population for a study (Pajo, 2017). For this study, two steps will be taken to create the master list. The first is reaching out to the NASP Early Career Committee to obtain a list of members. The second was by utilizing LinkedIn, a professional networking platform. The NASP's Early Career committee bridges the NASP leadership and early career professionals (NASP, 2022d). The committee also works diligently on resource development and NASP Convention sessions to help early career professionals network and access resources. The NASP Early Career Professional website was reviewed, and the contact information for the chair and co-chair of the Early Career Professional Committee was located. The chair and the co-chair will be contacted via e-mail with a formal request to obtain the contact information for school psychologists that are part of the Early Career Professionals network. Once the list was obtained, the researcher went through the list and identified members that were practicing within Los Angeles County.

Secondly, LinkedIn (https://www.linkedin.com) will be used to create a post asking for referrals for ECSPs with no more than two years of work experience practicing in a public school in Los Angeles County. The researcher will use the search function of the LinkedIn website and put the keywords school psychologist. After the initial search, the researcher will use the filter

function and change the list to show only people in the Los Angeles Metropolitan Area, Los Angeles, California, and Greater Los Angeles, California, to locate participants practicing in Los Angeles County. Potential participants will then be contacted through direct messages on the LinkedIn website. Once contact is made, the researcher will review the inclusion criteria again to ensure the participant meet all requirements for the study.

Criteria for Inclusion. The following benchmarks for inclusion in the study are:

- Work in a public school district.
- Have worked as a school psychologist for no more than two years.
- Have graduated from a graduate program in school psychology.
- Have an active Pupil Personnel Services (PPS) credential.
- Work for a public school district within Los Angeles County.

Criteria for Exclusion. The following are criteria for exclusion to reduce and exclude participants who were ECSPs but did not qualify for the study:

- The participant is not currently working in the elementary school setting.
- The participant is not a member of the NASP.
- The participant declined to be recorded for the interviews.
- The participant was not available for an interview between February and March of 2023.
- The participant refused to sign the informed consent form.

Criteria for Maximum Variation. If, after applying criteria for inclusion and exclusion, there are more participants than needed, the following criteria for maximum variation will be used to narrow the list down:

- School psychologists identifying with any gender were invited to participate.

- The participants worked in public school districts in different areas of Los Angeles County.
- The participants reflected diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds.
- The participants reflected diverse linguistic backgrounds.

Protection of Human Subjects

Researchers must consider what ethical issues might surface during the study and how they will be addressed when they appear (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Ethical issues arise throughout the study and may become more apparent when sensitive issues arise during interviews and other data collection forms. Many efforts will be taken to resolve any ethical issues that arose as well as to protect the human subjects of the study. First, the researcher completed a Human Subjects Research (HSR) training certification with the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI; see Appendix A). Second, before recruiting participants, the researcher will obtain Internal Review Board (IRB) permission through Pepperdine University. Application for IRB includes the informed consent form for participants (see Appendix B), the recruitment script (see Appendix C), the interview protocol, including the interview questions (see Appendix D). These documents will demonstrate to the IRB that the qualitative research being conducted complied with the Board's guidelines and requirements for ethical research.

The recruitment script will be utilized by the researcher to discover and select prospective volunteers for the study. The informed consent form that participants receive will detail the advantages and disadvantages of participating in the study. Participants that agree to partake in the study will be reminded that their participation is voluntary, confidentiality will be a priority for the researcher, and will be given information on the purpose of the study. Lastly, participants will be notified that there will be no extrinsic rewards provided to them. However, the

information provided will benefit the field of school psychology, particularly in helping ECSPs overcome the challenges they face.

Security of Data

The following steps will be taken to ensure that data are secure throughout the length of the study:

- data will be kept on the researcher's own computer in a secure database protected by a password and only viewable by the investigator,
- once interview transcriptions are completed, audio and video recordings will be destroyed,
- personally, identifiable information also will be destroyed,
- hard copy files such as handwritten notes will be destroyed upon the completion of the study.

Confidentiality

The following steps will be taken in order to ensure confidentiality is maintained throughout the length of the study:

- participants will be given pseudonyms instead of individual names (e.g., Participant 1, and Participant 2, etc.)
- names of schools or school districts they worked for also will not be provided in the study.

Data Collection

Once IRB approval is granted for the study, the researcher is within the guidelines to begin data collection (see Appendix E). Participants will be e-mailed the recruitment script inviting them to participate in the study. Once 15 participants state they are interested in participating in the study, a follow-up e-mail will be sent thanking them for their participation.

The e-mail also will include a Microsoft Forms link to schedule their interviews via a virtual meeting platform. Once the form is complete and the interview time is scheduled, the researcher will send a calendar invitation via e-mail to the participant to confirm. Participants will be instructed to allow about one hour to complete the interview process. If there is no response to the initial e-mail, a follow-up e-mail will be sent from the initial e-mail reminding them to schedule the interview.

Included in the interview confirmation e-mail, participants also will be given the pre-approved consent form and the interview questions. The signed consent form from the participants serves as a final confirmation to participate in the research study. Interviews will take place on Zoom (https://www.zoom.us), which will allow the researcher to record the audio of the participant interviews. The researcher will utilize the Zoom account through their Pepperdine University e-mail. Once participants log on to the Zoom interview, the researcher will confirm their permission to record it. If participants decide at the time of the interview that they revoke permission to be recorded, per the exclusion criteria, they would no longer be able to participate in the study. The consent form will be reviewed, and participants will be informed that they could opt out of the study at any time. Once the interview is completed, the recorded files will be saved on a personal password-protected computer so the researcher could assess them later to begin the transcription and coding. A follow-up e-mail will be sent to participants thanking them for their participation and an attached interview transcription to be verified. This procedure will help the research study's internal validity. The interview procedure will be used for all research participants.

Interview Techniques

During the interview process, the researcher attempts to understand the world from the participant's point of view (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Through this process, researchers can gather

data on how the participants experience specific events or how they make sense of their lived experiences. Patton (2002) defined three types of interviews: informal or unstructured, semi-structured, and structured. A structured interview approach has a clear interview protocol, and all participants are asked the same questions. A semi-structured interview technique has a bit more flexibility regarding the questions being asked to the participant (Pajo, 2017). In this approach, researchers still have a specific structure and protocol; however, the researcher is able to probe participants based on responses to gain more understanding. Lastly, an informal or unstructured approach flows more like a conversation geared toward the research topic (Pajo, 2017; Patton, 2002). As previously mentioned, a semi-structured interview approach was employed to provide for open-ended questions while maintaining structure throughout the interviews.

Interview Protocol

The interview protocol is essential in the researcher's interview approach that guides them through each interview (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). An interview protocol allows for the researcher to maintain focus, therefore allowing them to gain a deep understanding of the research questions. Creswell and Creswell (2018) indicated that the interview protocol consists of several components; (a) basic information, which consisted of information such as the time of the interview, date, and an identifier for the participation to keep material organized; (b) an introduction to the process, the researcher may begin with an introduction of themselves and the study being conducted, participants may also be asked if they have any questions about the process before it starts; (c) an opening question that serves as an ice-breaker to help participants feel at ease; (d) the content questions, consisting of the sub-questions of the study were the researcher will get the bulk of their data; (e) probing, in which the researcher uses to get more information or ask for an explanation of an idea or thought; and (f) the closing instruction, in which the participants are thanked for their time and can ask any questions they may have

following the interview.

Interview Questions

- Interview Question 1: What would you say was the single most difficult professional challenge you faced early in your career? Tell me what happened and how it affected you.
- Interview Question 2: How did you overcome that challenge?
- Interview Question 3: What other challenges did you face early in your career?
- Interview Question 4: What strategies and practices did you use to overcome these challenges? Follow up: Were there institutional resources that you used? Were there opportunities for mentoring? Did local, state, or national school psychologist associations play a role in supporting you?
- Interview Question 5: What are some common strategies, tools, or resources you use outside of work to help overcome the challenges of being an early career school psychologist?
- Interview Question 6: Are you aware of challenges faced by others early in their careers?
- Interview Question 7: How have they dealt with their challenges?
- Interview Question 8: What would have made your early career as a psychologist even more successful?
- Interview Question 9: How would you measure and track that?
- Interview Question 10: Knowing what you know now, what strategies, tools, or resources would you recommend to other early career school psychologists?
- Interview Question 11: What advice would you have for school psychologists who are just starting their careers?

Relationship Between Research and Interview Questions

The interview questions were developed from a literature review, the researcher's personal experiences, and a three-step process to ensure validity. The interview questions align with the research questions so that the data collected from the participants provide answers to the questions this study seeks. Table 1 provides the research questions and subsequent interview questions to validate the relationship between the four proposed research questions.

Table 1

Prima-Facie RQs and Corresponding IQs

Research Questions	**Corresponding Interview Questions**
RQ1: What challenges are faced by early career school psychologists when entering the field?	IQ 1: What are the most difficult challenges you have to overcome as an early career school psychologist? IQ 2: From the 10 NASP Domains, which domain do you feel less comfortable with? and why? IQ 3: Do you feel like your graduate school training should have put more focus on training you in a specific Domain of Practice?
RQ 2: What strategies and best practices are employed by early career school psychologists to complete their job duties?	IQ 4: How do you stay motivated in the midst of the challenges you face as an early career school psychologist? IQ 5: What are some things that you do in order to fill these gaps in knowledge? IQ 6: How do local, state, or national school psychologist associations play a role in your professional development?
RQ3: How do early career school psychologist track, measure, and define success in their practices?	IQ 7: From the 10 NASP Domains, which domain do you feel more comfortable with? and why? IQ 8: Knowing what you know now, what would you do differently to help

Research Questions	Corresponding Interview Questions
	minimalize the challenges faced as an early career school psychologist? IQ 9: What are some common strategies, tools, or resources you use outside of work to help overcome the challenges of being an early career school psychologist?
RQ4: What recommendations would early career school psychologists have for new school psychologists coming into the field?	IQ 10: Knowing what you know now, what strategies, tools, or resources would you recommend to other early career school psychologists? IQ 11: What attributes or personal traits would benefit someone coming into the profession?

Note. The table identifies four research questions and corresponding interview questions as developed by the researcher.

Validity of the Study

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), validation in qualitative research is the effort to determine the accuracy of the research as best represented by the researcher, the study participants, the reviewers, and the individuals who eventually will read the study. Additionally, the detailed data the researcher attains from the in-depth interviews with each participant adds to the study's accuracy. As previously mentioned, the researcher used a three-step method (e.g., prima facia, peer review, and expert review) to demonstrate validity and ensure that the interview protocol answered the overall study questions.

Prima-Facie Validity

Prima-facie validity was established by ensuring that interview questions were explicitly associated with the research questions. The interview questions were developed based on the research presented in Chapter 2, which focused on various aspects that impact ECSPs. The

dissertation committee examined and approved the research topics before proceeding with the study.

Peer-Review Validity

Once the interview questions were initially created, three Pepperdine University doctoral cohort members with experience in research and data collection checked the validity of the questions. The peer review process served as a tool to ensure that the questions being asked aligned well with the overall research questions. The peer reviewers were asked via email if they had time to review the questions that were created. Once the peer reviewers agreed to be part of the review process, they were emailed the research questions with the corresponding interview questions. The reviewers had to mark each question with three options, (a) keep the same, (b) delete the question (if they determined it was irrelevant to the research questions), and (c) an option to modify the question in some way with their suggestions provided. Table 2 and Table 3 show the peer reviewed research and interview questions.

Table 2

Peer Review Validity Table

Research Questions	**Corresponding Interview Questions**
RQ1: What challenges are faced by early career school psychologists when entering the field?	IQ 1: What are the most difficult challenges you have to overcome as an early career school psychologist? IQ 2: From the 10 NASP Domains, which domain do you feel less comfortable with? and why? IQ 3: Do you feel like your graduate school training should have put more focus on training you in a specific Domain of Practice?

Research Questions	Corresponding Interview Questions
RQ 2: What strategies and best practices are employed by early career school psychologists to complete their job duties?	IQ 4: How do you stay motivated in the midst of the challenges you face as an early career school psychologist? IQ 5: What are some things that you do in order to fill these gaps in knowledge? IQ 6: How do local, state, or national school psychologist associations play a role in your professional development?
RQ3: How do early career school psychologist track, measure, and define success in their practices?	IQ 7: From the 10 NASP Domains, which domain do you feel more comfortable with? and why? IQ 8: Knowing what you know now, what would you do differently to help minimalize the challenges faced as an early career school psychologist? IQ 9: What are some common strategies, tools, or resources you use outside of work to help overcome the challenges of being an early career school psychologist?
RQ4: What recommendations would early career school psychologists have for new school psychologists coming into the field?	IQ 10: Knowing what you know now, what strategies, tools, or resources would you recommend to other early career school psychologists? IQ 11: What attributes or personal traits would benefit someone coming into the profession?

Note. Peer review validity of research questions and corresponding interview questions.

Table 3

Research Questions and Corresponding Interview Questions (Revised)

Research Questions	**Corresponding Interview Questions**
RQ1: What challenges are faced by early career school psychologists when entering the field?	IQ 1: What would you say was the single most difficult professional challenge you faced early in your career? Tell me what happened and how it affected you. IQ 3: What other challenges did you face early in your career? IQ 6: Are you aware of challenges faced by others early in their careers?
RQ 2: What strategies and best practices are employed by early career school psychologists to complete their job duties?	IQ 2: How did you overcome that challenge? IQ 4: What strategies and practices did you use to overcome these challenges? Follow up: Were there institutional resources that you used? Were there opportunities for mentoring? Did local, state, or national school psychologist associations play a role in supporting you? IQ 5: What are some common strategies, tools, or resources you use outside of work to help overcome the challenges of being an early career school psychologist? IQ 7: How have they dealt with their challenges?
RQ3: How do early career school psychologist track, measure, and define success in their practices?	IQ 8: What would have made your early career as a psychologist even more successful? IQ 9: How would you measure and track that?
RQ4: What recommendations would early career school psychologists have for new school psychologists coming into the field?	IQ 10: Knowing what you know now, what strategies, tools, or resources would you recommend to other early career school psychologists?

Research Questions	Corresponding Interview Questions
	IQ 11: What advice would you have for school psychologists who are just starting their careers?

Note. The table identifies four research questions and corresponding interview questions with revisions based on feedback from the expert reviewers (committee). Subsequent changes were made to the order and phrasing of questions within the interview protocol.

Reliability of the Study

Qualitative researchers must document the procedures of their studies and document as many steps of their procedures as possible to ensure reliability (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Establishing a study protocol and database is crucial so others can follow the study procedures. Gibbs (2018) indicated several procedures to ensure qualitative reliability. The first is checking the transcripts to ensure no obvious mistakes were made during transcription. Second, there should be established definitions of codes so that definitions do not drift and change the coding of the study. Lastly, using an intercoder agreement with another person ensures that codes are used correctly and make sense to the overall study.

Pilot Study

In addition to the processes described above, the researcher identified two test experts who satisfied the inclusion criteria and consented to participate in the study. Once their interviews were concluded with the two experts, they were asked to provide edits on the questions to ensure that the instruments being used for data collection were consistent and reliable. The researcher was capable of verifying the instrument's reliability by conducting a pilot interview. Finally, the researcher utilized the pilot interview feedback and comments to identify any biases, amend questions, and adjust any data gathering techniques as appropriate. (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Statement of Personal Bias

Within a qualitative research approach, the researcher must clarify the bias they bring to the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Creswell and Creswell stated that a good qualitative research study explicitly says how the researcher's interpretations of the findings are impacted by their different identities, such as gender, race, social class, culture, and history. This study's personal biases are as follows:

- The researcher is currently working as a school psychologist within a public school district.
- The researcher has been an intern supervisor for graduate students in school psychology programs for the last three years.
- The researcher has observed and experienced the challenges of being an early career school psychologist.
- The researcher has participated in early career professional workshops and committees.

Bracketing and Epoché

Acknowledging personal bias is referred to as bracketing or epoché (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Qualitative research focuses more on the participants' experiences and less on the researcher's interpretation. Bracketing or epoché is the concept of setting aside one's own experiences as much as possible to get a fresh perspective on a specific phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Epoché is intended to prevent the researcher from consciously or subconsciously misrepresenting the study's findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). One way bracketing can be done is by keeping a journal where the researcher can note down any assumptions or biases they may hold to bring awareness to them and keep them in mind when conducting the study. Additionally, through a semi-structured interview approach, the researcher asks the same

questions to all participants, but they also allow participants to openly talk about their experiences with open ended questions (Ritchie & Spencer, 2002). Through this process, the researcher did not provide input, guidance, or personal experiences that may sway the participant's answers.

Data Analysis and Coding

Creswell and Creswell (2018) discuss the importance of researchers looking at qualitative data analysis as a sequential process that should be followed. Creswell and Creswell lay out a five-step data analysis process, which the researcher employed in this study. The first step in the process is the organization and preparation of the data for analysis. During this process, the researcher transcribes the interview recordings and listens to them multiple times in order to ensure information was transcribed correctly. The second step is to read the data that was collected. The investigator reads carefully through the information obtained from the interviews. This process allows for reflection on the overall meaning of the data collected. The next step is the coding of all the data collected. The coding process consists of bracketing the data into chunks and writing words that represent the overall themes of each data chunk (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Pajo, 2017). Additionally, within the coding process, the responses for each interview question will be analyzed individually and organized to be analyzed later on in the process.

The fourth step is generating descriptions and themes from the coding process (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Usually, the codes are taken from the individual responses, this process is called in vivo coding. Coding is the process of identifying a word or phrase that captures the general essence of the data (Rossman & Rallis, 2011). The themes developed are the ones that appear as the major findings in qualitative studies (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher analyzed the data and developed 25-30 one-word codes describing participants' experiences

(Creswell & Poth, 2017). After that, the researcher categorized the codes into 5-7 recurrent, general themes based on commonalities. Sub-themes were built as needed (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The last step in this process is the findings. Creswell and Creswell (2018) noted that this step summarizes the data collected and the themes created, using narrative passages, visual representations of findings, or a combination of both. Findings for each interview question are then reported in groups that correspond to the overall research question.

Interrater Reliability and Validity

Inter-rater reliability measures are used during the coding process to guarantee that studies can be trusted (McAlister et al., 2017). Creswell and Creswell (2018) noted that researchers should incorporate multiple validity approaches to enhance the ability to assess findings. In order to establish interrater reliability and validity for this study, the following four-step process was followed.

Four Step Process

1. Baseline Themes: The researcher transcribed and coded data from the first three interviews that were conducted to identify and group themes and concepts into different categories.
2. Interrater Review: Three doctoral students in the Educational Leadership, Administration, and Policy program at Pepperdine University Graduate School of Education and Psychology, were sent the interview transcripts and coding results. The reviewers looked at the transcriptions and coding for interrater review and consensus.
3. Baseline Themes for Remaining Interviews: The remaining interview transcripts were studied, coded, and provided to the peer review experts once more for reflection and agreement.

4. Interrater Review: Transcripts and coding for the remaining interviews were sent to the peer reviewer panel for a consensus on the coding results.

No Consensus > Expert Review: If consensus were not reached for at least 80% of the analysis results, the expert committee would be consulted for expert review validity. Once consensus was reached and the codes were finalized, the overall findings were reported in Chapter 4.

Data Presentation

The basic procedure for reporting the results of a qualitative study is to develop descriptions and themes from the data collected (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The purpose is to offer a full account of the research participant' experiences. Data analysis will examine how the current findings compare to previous studies and literature. The data for this research study will be presented with participant quotes, narrative text, charts, and tables. Data will be presented individually for each interview question. Analysis of how the data corresponds to the overall research questions will also be presented.

Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the research design and methodology used in this study. A qualitative phenomenological research technique was used to assess the issues faced by ECSPs working in public school systems in Los Angeles County, California. In this chapter, the techniques for conducting valid and reliable qualitative phenomenological research were discussed in detail. The researcher acquired information from persons with direct experience of the phenomena under examination via semi-structured interviews. After a comprehensive review of the literature, personal knowledge, and a three-step dependability procedure, the research questions were developed. This chapter concluded with the steps for data analysis. Chapter 4 presents the research findings of this study.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

School psychologists play a critical role in the academic, emotional, and behavioral development of students (NASP, 2020a). They are seen as essential members of the problem-solving process in the school settings. School psychologists serve in a variety of capacities within the school context, including direct service, consulting, collaboration, and system change implementation. A school psychologist's work is multifaceted, and designated job duties are always changing and evolving (Oyen et al., 2020). With the fast past and ever-changing nature of a school psychologist's work, it can be difficult for even the most experienced practitioner to not get overwhelmed. As a result, when we begin to thoroughly analyze ECSPs, we see that these novice practitioners are not only adjusting to the difficulties of the work but also to the transition from student to professional (A. E. Silva et al., 2014). Harvey and Struzziero (2008) found that 40% of novice school psychologists reported feeling inadequate while completing their job duties. It is critical that graduate training programs and school districts have policies and supports in place to enable ECSPs effectively transition from students to practitioners.

This qualitative phenomenological study examines the challenges that ECSPs confront and the techniques they employ to overcome them. Since research and data demonstrate that ECSPs encounter unique challenges, Chapter 4 will look at findings from school psychologists in Los Angeles County who are novice practitioners and have experienced challenges on the job. In addition, this chapter will look at the tools and resources that ECSPs use to overcome these challenges. The study's findings will help ECSPs find beneficial tools and resources to help them overcome the challenges they confront when transitioning from students to practitioners. The following research questions were addressed in this study:

- RQ1- What challenges are faced by early career school psychologists when entering the field?
- RQ2- What strategies and best practices are employed by early career school psychologists to complete their job duties?
- RQ3- How do early career school psychologist track, measure, and define Success in their practices?
- RQ4- What recommendations would early career school psychologists have for new school psychologists coming into the field?

In order to answer the research questions presented, 11 semi-structured, open-ended interview questions were developed from the literature and an inter-reliability and validity process. The interview questions were as follows:

1. What would you say was the single most difficult professional challenge you faced early in your career? Tell me what happened and how it affected you.
2. How did you overcome that challenge?
3. What other challenges did you face early in your career?
4. What strategies and practices did you use to overcome these challenges?

   [Follow-up: Were there institutional resources that you used? Were there opportunities for mentoring? Did local, state, or national school psychologist associations play a role in supporting you?].
5. What are some common strategies, tools, or resources you use outside of work to help overcome the challenges of being an early career school psychologist?
6. Are you aware of challenges faced by others early in their careers?
7. How have they dealt with their challenges?
8. What would have made your early career as a psychologist even more successful?

9. How would you measure and track that?
10. Knowing what you know now, what strategies, tools, or resources would you recommend to other early career school psychologists?
11. What advice would you have for school psychologists who are just starting their careers?

The data for this research study was derived from the responses to the interview questions, which provided in-depth insight into the challenges faced by ECSPs and the tools, resources, and strategies they use to overcome these challenges. This chapter describes each participant in-depth and the data collection and analysis process. It will also provide an overview of the inter-rate review process. Lastly, the researcher discusses the data collection results and gives an in-depth review of the analysis process.

Participants

Participants were chosen for their ability to provide their expertise, experiences, and viewpoints in detail in order to attain essential data to answer the research questions. The study's first objective was to interview 15 school psychologists who had not worked as practitioners for over two years. For this study, saturation was reached at ten participants. Participants' comments became quite similar, and new data did not get mentioned as the interviews continued. However, the researcher conducted three more interviews to ensure saturation was met.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, a master list was created using two methods. The first is contacting the NASP Early Career Committee to attain a list of members. The second method was utilizing LinkedIn, a professional networking platform, to identify potential participants. The study participants all met the criteria for inclusion and exclusion.

This study used the following criteria for inclusion:

- Work in a public school district.

- Have worked as a school psychologist for no more than two years.
- Have graduated from a graduate program in school psychology.
- Have an active Pupil Personnel Services (PPS) Credential.
- Work for a public school district within Los Angeles County.

This study used the following criteria for exclusion:

- The participant is not currently working in the elementary school setting.
- The participant is not a member of the National Association of School Psychologists.
- The participant declined to be recorded for the interviews.
- The participant was not available for an interview between February and March of 2023.
- The participant refused to sign the informed consent form.

This study used the following criteria for maximum variation:

- School psychologists identifying with any gender were invited to participate.
- The participants worked in public school districts in different areas of Los Angeles County.
- The participants reflected diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds.
- The participants reflected diverse linguistic backgrounds.

Participants who met the above criteria were invited to participate in an interview via Zoom. Audio recordings were collected from each interview using the Otter.ai platform. All participants had less than two years of experience in the field and worked in Los Angeles County. Table 4 gives further details about each participant, including the type of institution they currently work for, their years of experience, and the date the interview took place.

Table 4

Participant Details

Participant	Type of Institution	Years of Experience	Interview Date
A	Public School District	.9	March 18, 2023
B	Public School District	1.9	March 18, 2023
C	Public Charter School	.8	March 21, 2023
D	Public School District	1.9	March 23, 2023
E	Public School District	1.9	March 28, 2023
F	Public School District	.9	March 28, 2023
G	Public School District	1.9	March 29, 2023
H	Public School District	1.9	March 31, 2023
I	Public Charter School	1.9	April 4, 2023
J	Public School District	.9	April 5, 2023
K	Public School District	.9	April 5, 2023
L	Public School District	1.9	April 8, 2023
M	Public School District	.5	April 8, 2023

Data Collection

This study's researcher started recruiting participants on March 9, 2023, after obtaining full IRB approval on March 8, 2023 (Appendix A). The investigator began recruiting participants through an email database the NASP Early Career Committee provided and the professional social networking platform LinkedIn. Using the IRB-approved recruitment script (Appendix B), the researcher sent approximately five emails from the NASP Early Career Committee database and 30 messages via LinkedIn's InMail system. If the initial recruitment message was not responded to, a follow-up message was sent to potential participants two days after the initial message. Four individuals responded from the initial contact that included the recruitment script, stating they would be interested in participating in the study. Two days after the initial emails were sent, the researcher sent follow-up emails to the individuals on the master list. Six individuals responded several days after the follow-up email, indicating they were interested in partaking in the research study. Two individuals recruited using LinkedIn indicated that they had cohort members interested in participating in the study and forwarded their information to the researcher, which ultimately resulted in three more interviews. When potential participants responded to the recruitment message, the researcher would send them a link to an online

scheduler system, Calendly (https://www.calendly.com). This platform lets participants pick the best dates and times for their schedules.

Once a date and time for the interview were set, the researcher would send a follow-up email that included the informed consent form (Appendix C), the interview protocol (Appendix D), the Zoom meeting link, and the details of the date and time of the interview. Participants were recommended to review both documents in detail before the interview. All participants signed the informed consent form before their interview date and agreed to participate in an audio-recorded interview.

Prior to each interview, the researcher would log onto the Zoom platform 15 minutes early just in case participants arrived at the interview early. Twelve of the 13 participants arrived at their scheduled interview on time. One of the participants did not show up to the interview at the designated time, and the researcher contacted them via email to remind them of the interview. The participant could log in 20 minutes after the start and complete their interview. Once the meeting started, the researcher would ask the participant if they had any questions or needed anything clarified. The researcher would also briefly overview the study and tell the participants they would be explicitly notified when the audio recording would start and stop.

Data Analysis

The responses of each participant during the interview became the primary source of data gathering for this research project. After each interview, the researcher would download the automated transcription from the Otter.ai platform. The researcher would listen to the audio recording while analyzing the automatic transcription to correct any mistakes from the Otter.ai automated transcription. The study participants were all assigned letters from A to M. Once all the interviews were transcribed and checked for accuracy, the researcher permanently deleted the audio recordings.

Once the researcher had reviewed the interview transcriptions several times, the coding process began. The researcher began to take notes on responses and developed primary codes for the participant response. An Excel spreadsheet was used to help develop codes and themes derived from the interviews. The researcher created different Excel sheets for each interview question and noted keywords and phrases that participants stated. Once this process was complete for all participants and all interview questions, the researcher began to combine similar phrases and words in a theme that addressed the overall essence of the words or phrases. The themes were developed using descriptive language from the transcripts of the participants' interviews.

Inter-Rater Review Process

An inter-rater review approach was utilized to check the coding process's validity. Once the researcher had coded and created themes for the first three interviews, the data analysis process was temporarily stopped in order for the inter-rater review process to begin. Two doctoral students enrolled in the Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership, Administration, and Policy program from Pepperdine University were asked to serve as peer reviewers. The two doctoral students were selected for this process due to their expertise in research methodology.

The two inter-rater reviewers were given access using the Google Docs program online. The two reviewers looked at the data and coding independently and were able to make any comments or edit any of the codes. Once the two reviewers were done with the process, the researcher could go into the document and look over the comments that the reviewers left. After reviewing the comments that the reviewers had left, a follow-up Zoom meeting was had to address comments and brainstorm for clarity of codes and themes. The Zoom meeting ended when the two reviewers and the researcher came to an agreement on the codes and themes. The researcher then continued to code the remaining ten interviews. Once the coding for all

interviews were conducted, the inter-rater review process was repeated for the remaining ten interviews.

Data Display

The study's data was organized according to the research questions and the subsequent interview questions. The overall goal of the interview questions was to help answer the overarching research question it corresponded with. The data is presented by each research question and its corresponding interview question. Data was summarized with frequency bar charts to represent the results visually. Additionally, theme descriptions and direct quotes are presented to provide a detailed summary of responses. The participants were identified as Participant A, Participant B, and so on through Participant M. This allowed the researcher to keep confidentiality.

Research Question 1

The first research question (RQ1) asked, what challenges do early career school psychologists face when entering the field? Participants were asked a total of three questions corresponding with RQ1 as follows:

1. What would you say was the single most difficult professional challenge you faced early in your career? Tell me what happened and how it affected you.
2. What other challenges did you face early in your career?
3. Are you aware of challenges faced by others early in their careers?

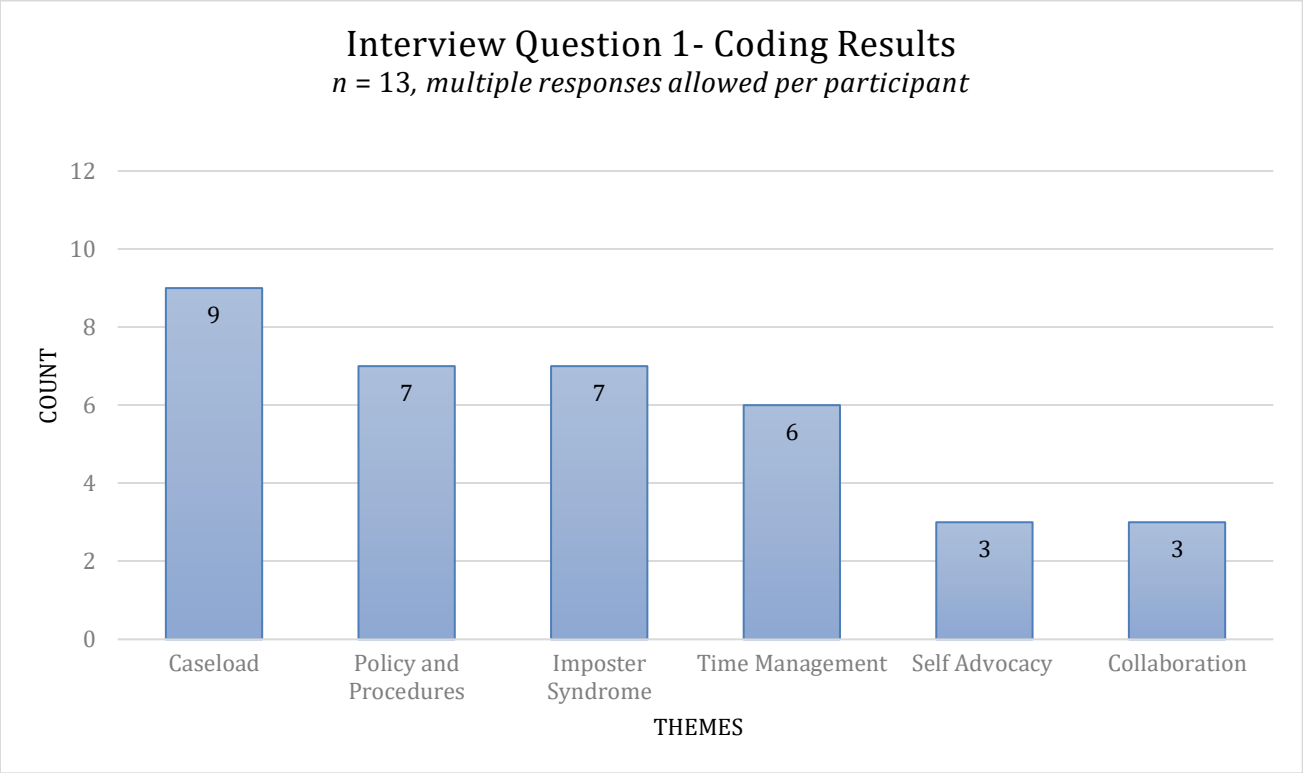
Interview Question 1

Interview Question 1 (IQ1) asked, what would you say was the single most difficult professional challenge you faced early in your career? Tell me what happened and how it affected you. Once the data analysis was completed for IQ1, a total of 35 responses were recorded, with six themes emerging from the data. The six themes developed were: (a) caseload

size, (b) policy and procedures, (c) imposter syndrome, (d) time management, (e) self-advocacy, and (f) collaboration.

Figure 1

Interview Question 1



Caseload. Nine out of the 13 participants (69%) indicated that caseload was the most demanding professional challenge they faced as ECSPs. This theme incorporated various aspects of a psychologist's job duties, but participants of the study identified two factors that impacted their caseload. The first was the number of assessments or evaluations required to complete at a given time, and the next was the number of counseling students they had to see every week. Participant E shared, "For me, it would have to be the large caseload. It is difficult to deal with the learning curve of being new to a job but also having to complete all these assessments with deadlines." Participant, I said, "caseload is a huge challenge for me. At times I have like 15 open

assessments that need to be done within a certain time frame on top of all my counseling students that I have to serve." Dealing with the number of assessments and counseling students was a common topic discussed by many participants, which brought up many feelings of inadequacy. Specifically, Participant D stated, "dealing with a large caseload can be very difficult and frustrating, but also you are scared to ask for help because since you are new to the job, you don't know if this is normal, and you are just not able to keep up."

Policy and Procedures. Seven participants (54%) identified the policy and procedure theme as a challenge ECSPs faced. This theme focused on the challenges of learning new protocols and policies when new to a job. It focused more on the time it took to learn new systems, procedures, and models while fulfilling other job duties. Participant C explained, "I did my internship hours at another school district, so when I entered this job, everything was done differently. The test we used, how we reported our counseling case notes, and who we reported to at our school sites. It kind of felt like my internship really didn't matter because I was confused all over again." Similarly, Participant B said, "learning the protocols to the district was challenging they were so different from what I was used to."

Imposter Syndrome. Imposter syndrome was reported by seven of the participants (54%) of the study. Imposter Syndrome refers to one's feelings of inadequacy or feeling like you are a fraud despite one's level of achievements (Clance & Imes, 1978). For example, Participant H indicated, "sometimes I am doing something, and I start to reflect or question whether I am doing it right, and since we are the only school psychologists at the school site, I can't really ask anyone in a moment's notice." Additionally, Participant C said, "I find myself being nervous or scared to speak up or share my ideas because I feel like I don't have the experience, or I don't know what I am talking about. But I went to school for this, I should be confident in myself, but I am not." Participant J said, "You know Imposter Syndrome, that is what it feels like. It feels

like I have no idea what I am doing but somehow, I am supposed to know everything." Lack of confidence was mentioned by various participants while talking about completing the various responsibilities of a school psychologist.

Time Management. The fourth most notable challenge ECSPs faced was time management. Six of the thirteen participants (46%) reported time management. This theme described the challenges of novice practitioners using their time wisely and getting job tasks done during work hours to avoid taking work home with them. Participant B indicated, "The biggest overarching professional challenge is just time management. I consider myself to be a very organized person, but the things we are expected to do are so robust, and trying to navigate like all the different capacities of what our job gets overwhelming, and I just fall short of deadlines." Participant D also shared similar experiences, "time management is something that I struggle with. I feel like there is never enough time to do things, and I always take piles of work home. But I think it must just be my inexperience because other school psychologists are able to get all this done during work hours."

Self-Advocacy. Self-advocacy was mentioned by three of the participants (23%) as being challenging for ECSPs. When discussing self-advocacy, participants talked about the difficulty in standing up for themselves or expressing the needs that are not being met in order for them to complete their job duties. Participant K explained, "Sometimes it's difficult to stand up for yourself or let your needs be known. I feel like because I am new, I can't really complain, even though advocating for myself isn't complaining, it just feels that way." Participant M also shared similar thoughts, indicating that "in other aspects of my life, I am always setting up boundaries to help my mental health, but at work, it is so hard to advocate for myself or reach out for help." When discussing this issue, it was also reported that even talking to a trusted supervisor about your needs could be challenging. For example, Participant G said, "I feel close to my direct

supervisor, but it is hard for me to talk to them about setting up boundaries or something that I find difficult about the job because it feels like I am telling them I am not good enough."

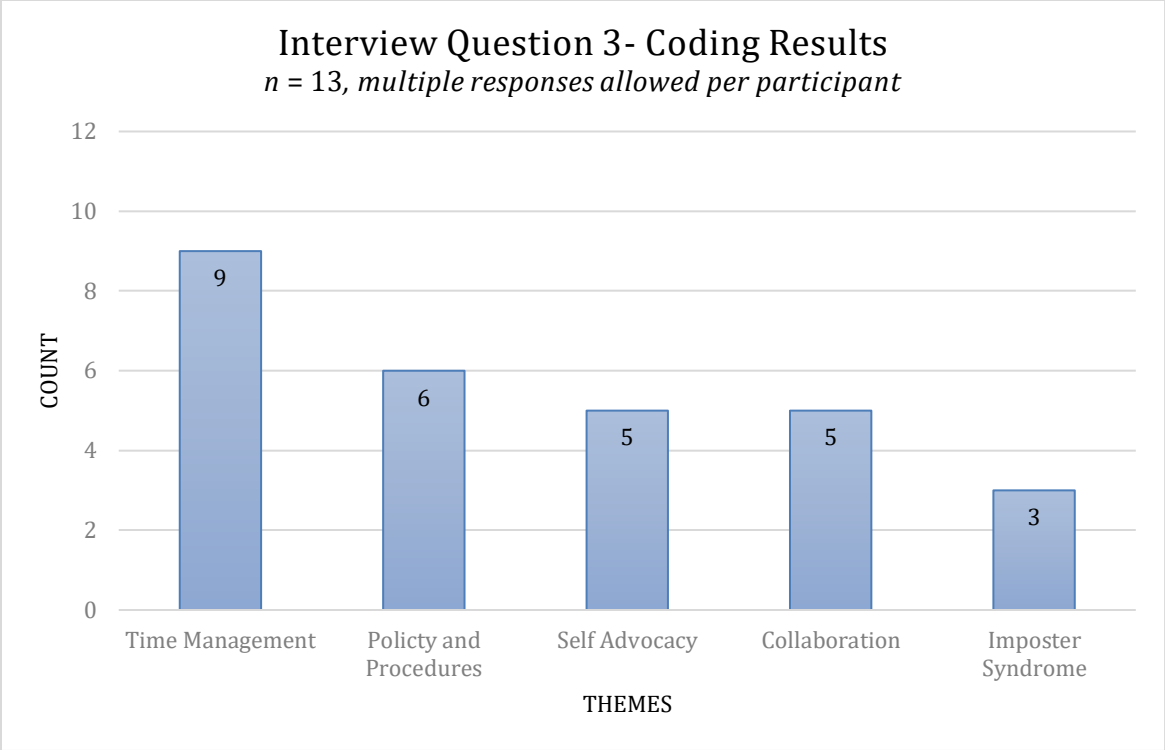
Collaboration. Three participants (23%) reported collaboration was a professional challenge that they found difficult. Specifically, the two factors mentioned were dealing with multiple school administrators and staff and collaborating with parents. Participant D shared, "it can be difficult familiarizing and dealing with two sets of admins and school staff. I am assigned at two different schools, and both are very different in how they like things done. Navigating the differences made it very difficult to do the job the way I want to do it." Additionally, Participant A said, "I found it very hard dealing with parents, I am not sure if it's just my school, but it was difficult to get them to trust me and collaborate with me."

Interview Question 1 Summary. Interview question 1 investigated the most demanding professional challenge faced by an early career school psychologist. About 69% of the participants indicated that caseload size was a significant challenge they faced early in their careers. Additionally, both adjusting to protocols and lack of confidence were mentioned by 54% of the participants as challenging for ECSPs. The other themes mentioned by participants were time management (46%), self-advocacy (23%), and navigating relationships (23%).

Interview Question 3. IQ3 asked participants to identify any other challenges they faced early in your career? After an analysis of the responses to IQ3, a total of 28 responses were recorded, developing five overall themes. The themes developed were (a) time management, (b) policy and procedures, (c) self-advocacy, (d) collaboration, and (e) imposter syndrome.

Figure 2

Interview Question 3



Time Management. Time management was reported by nine of the participants (69%) when asked what other challenges they faced early in their careers. Time management dealt with the feeling that there was not enough time in the day to get all of the work done that is required of a school psychologist. Participant A said, "I think another major challenge I face is how to manage my time when I am at work. I feel like there is never enough time in the workday, and when I leave to go home, I feel like I didn't accomplish anything." Similarly, Participant K indicated that they often feel like "no matter how much work I do my checklist never goes down or I will leave work and think I should have tested this student or met with this teacher instead of writing up my case notes." Often participants talked about the difficulty of prioritizing work and maximizing the amount of work they get done during the workday.

Policy and Procedures. The second most reported theme was learning the policy and procedures of working in a new district. Six of 13 participants (46%) stated policy and procedures. Frequently, novice school psychologists complete their fieldwork hours in districts

different from those in which they work. For example, Participant M reported, "It was challenging having to learn all new systems when I started working for my district, I was so used to the ways I did things in my internship, it was all new to me." Participant I stated, "learning how things are done with my new district is challenging. We used a totally different assessment model in my internship, and I got so used to it. Now that I am working for this school district, I have to learn a whole new testing model, kind of like I am in school without any professors to ask questions to."

Self-Advocacy. Five participants (38%) reported that self-advocacy was a significant challenge they faced early in their careers. Participant D noted, "I don't know why I find it hard to ask for help or guidance. It almost feels like I have to do everything on my own because I was trained to do it, but sometimes help and guidance is needed regardless of one's ability." Additionally, Participant L said, "One thing that I am still finding challenging is standing up for myself when I am asked to do things that aren't in my job description or take away from my actual job duties. Sometimes administrators at our schools will throw a bunch of tasks on us and expect us to get them all done. It's hard to say no or ask for help."

Collaboration. Five out of the 13 participants (38%) mentioned collaboration as one of the most challenging things they faced early in their careers. This theme included collaboration with administrators, teachers, and other school staff. Participant E stated, "something that is challenging for me is joining a team as a new person and trying to figure out how you fit into everything that is already existing. How am I supposed to bring in my knowledge when everyone seems so well connected already." Feels of not being heard or seen as a novice also impact an individual's ability to collaborate. For instance, Participant F noted, "I think being new and everyone knowing you're new impacts how well they take your recommendations and ideas.

Like collaborating with team members, and they don't want to take on your idea because they think their idea is better."

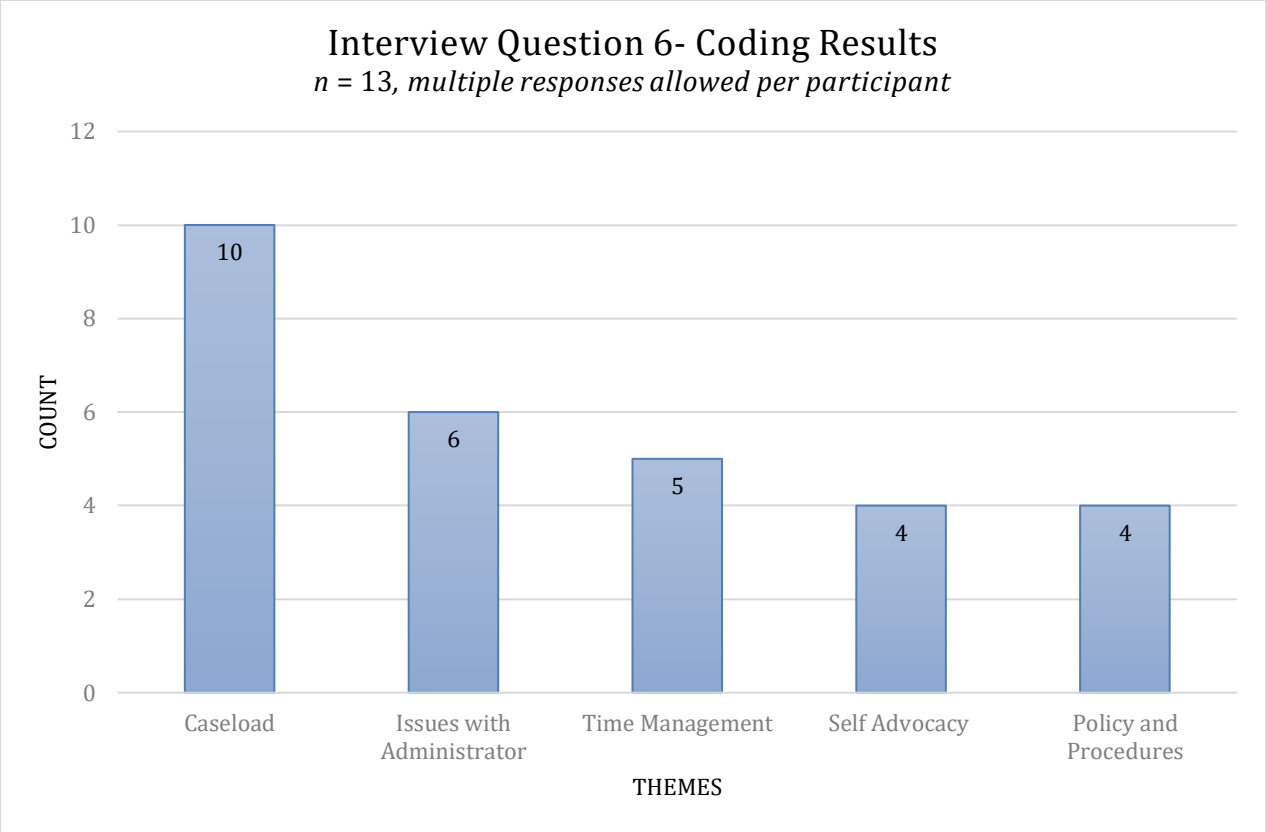
Imposter Syndrome. Lastly, three participants (23%) mentioned imposter syndrome as a challenge they faced early in their careers. Participants discussed their feelings of not feeling good enough or having adequate knowledge to complete their job duties. Participant J noted, "sometimes I just think I cannot do this job, or I am not ready to take on this role." Similarly, Participant B said, "at times, I feel like I didn't pay attention in my graduate training, or I am not cut out for this job because it can't be this difficult all the time." Participant G shared, "sometimes I will drive home in my car crying asking myself if I am even cut out of this career."

Interview Question 3 Summary. Interview question 3 (IQ3) asked participants to discuss any other challenges they have faced early in their careers. Of the 13 participants, 69% reported that time management was a major challenge. Additionally, 46% of participants said that learning new protocols that were district specific was a significant challenge for them. Of the participants, 38% reported that self-advocacy and collaboration were changes that they faced. Lastly, 23% of the participants said that imposter syndrome played a role in the challenges they faced early in their careers.

Interview Question 3. IQ3 asked, are you aware of challenges faced by others early in their careers? A total of 29 responses were recorded for IQ6. The question resulted in five themes: (a) Caseload, (b) Issues with Administrators, (c) Time Management, (d) Self-Advocacy, and (e) Policy and Procedures.

Figure 3

Interview Question 6



Caseload. Ten participants (77%) reported that caseload management was one of the challenges that other ECSPs faced. Participant C said, "from the group chats that I am in with other new psychologist, a lot of the time, we are all complaining about the high caseloads that we have." Similarly, Participant H indicated, "a lot of the time, I hear my cohort complaining about caseload and how difficult it is to get all of the work done." Participant K also mentioned peers talking about difficult caseloads "during new hire meetings, most people are talking about the number of assessments they have to complete and how it gets in the way of doing their other job duties, which ultimately makes them fall behind even more." Participant M reported that "caseload is always something people complain about. The group chats that I am in with cohort members or new colleagues are always asking each other the number of assessments an individual has open because it's never-ending."

***Issues with Administrators*.** Issues with administrators were another theme that many participants discussed. Six participants (46%) talked about administrators micromanaging them, questioning their work, or being unfamiliar with the job duties of a school psychologist. Participant B said, "one of my cohort members told me that one of the first things their administrator told them was that she didn't know what school psychologists did, and she wasn't even sure if the school needed one. My friend has since told me it's been really challenging working with the administrator." Participant M indicated that her cohort members often "talk about how much their administrators micromanage them."

Time Management. Five participants (38%) discussed how their peers are often challenged by time management and learning to effectively use their time to complete job duties. Participant A reported that new hire training is often used to "vent about how we don't have enough time in the day to complete the things that are required from us. My peers are constantly asking how everything is supposed to get done during our contracted work hours." Participant D noted that in her cohort text message group chat, her peers are often "frustrated with not knowing how to prioritize their job duties. My friends are always talking about how they don't know what they should do first or what needs to get done now versus what can wait to get done."

***Self-Advocacy*.** Four participants (31%) reported that self-advocacy was one of the challenges that their colleagues were facing as ECSPs. Participant K indicated that she has heard many of her new colleagues talk about "how difficult it is for them to stand up for themselves or tell an administrator that what they are being asked to do is not part of their job." Additionally, Participant L noted, "a lot of the new psychologists that I talk to tell me it's difficult to set boundaries with administrators and school staff. They often get dragged into doing things that take away from their actual job duties, which forces them to take all this work home. I guess it happens to all of us."

***Policy and Procedures*.** Policy and procedures were mentioned by four of the participants (31%). Policy and procedures refer to the time it takes to adjust to new ways of doing things that significantly differ from the way they were used to. Participant F said, "I think a of my friends that started with me are having a difficult time with adjusting to the ways their district handles things. For some, it's a huge change from what they were used to, and it makes the job that much more harder." Participant F noted that "many of my colleagues had such a difficult time learning the new systems and ways of the district. It really is a big learning curve that I don't think our supervisors take into account."

Interview Question 6 Summary. Participants were asked if they knew of any challenges other new school psychologists faced. The top two themes for this question were caseload size (77%) and issues with administrators (46%). The remaining themes were time management (38%), self-advocacy (31%), and adjusting to the policy and procedures of a new school district (31%).

***Summary of RQ1*.** Research question 1 sought to identify the challenges that ECSPs face. A total of seven themes were identified by analyzing the participants' phrases, experiences, viewpoints, or responses. The seven themes identified were as follows: (a) caseload, (b) policy and procedures, (c) imposter syndrome, (d) time management, (e) self-advocacy, (f) collaboration, and lastly, (g) issues with administrators.

Research Question 2

The second research question (RQ2) asked, what strategies and best practices are employed by ECSPs to complete their job duties? Participants were asked a total of four interview questions corresponding to RQ2:

1. How did you overcome that challenge?
2. What strategies and practices did you use to overcome these challenges?

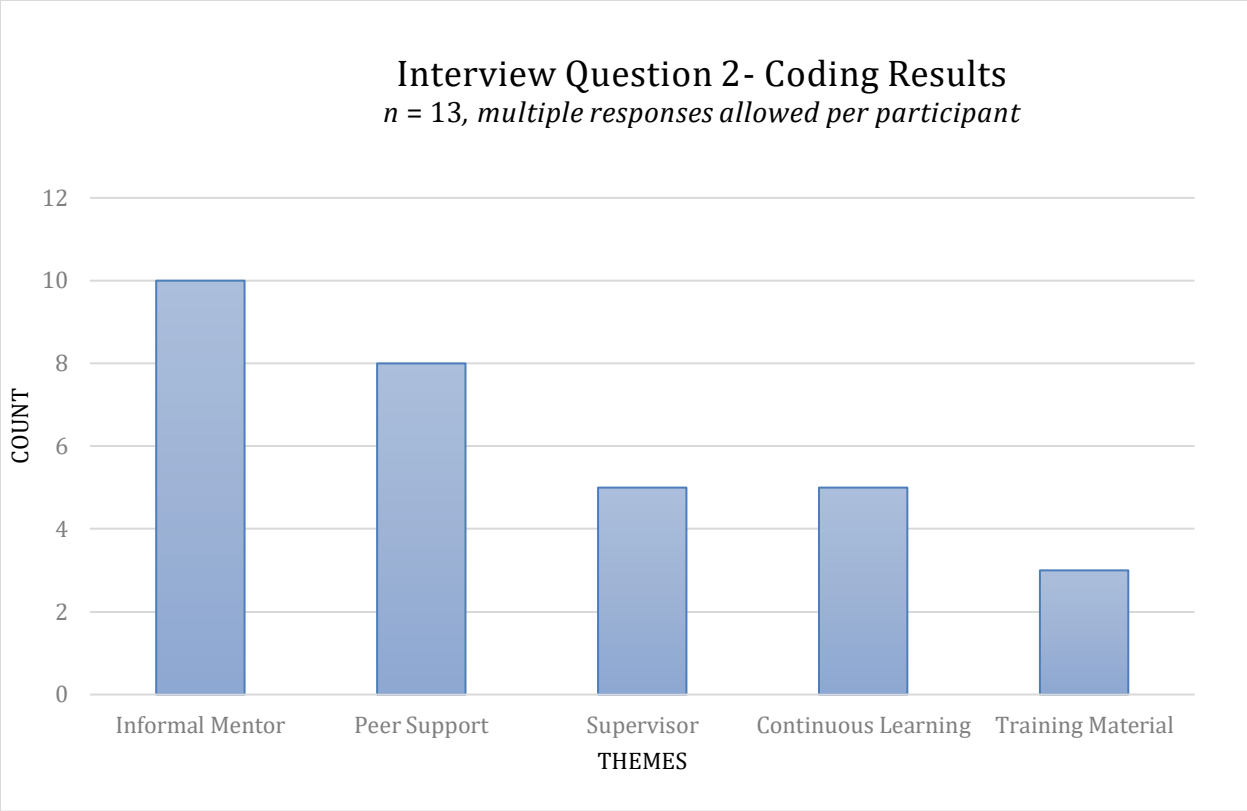
Follow up: Were there institutional resources that you used? Were there opportunities for mentoring? Did local, state, or national school psychologist associations play a role in supporting you?

3. What are some common strategies, tools, or resources you use outside of work to help overcome the challenges of being an early career school psychologist?
4. How have they dealt with their challenges?

Interview Question 2. IQ2 asked the participants how they were able to overcome the various challenges they faced. Completed data analysis for IQ2, a total of 42 were recorded. IQ2 resulted in five themes: (a) informal mentors, (b) peer support, (c) supervisor, (d) continuous learning, and (e) training materials.

Figure 4

Interview Question 2



Informal Mentor. The main theme which emerged with 79% of the participants (10 participants) was informal mentorship. Informal mentorship was mentioned frequently by participants as someone who was not an official mentor but was a more experienced psychologist they got to know and felt comfortable enough to seek support. For example, Participant B shared:

> I found a lot of help in people that were not my direct supervisor. I got to know a couple of more experienced psychologists through meetings and trainings I attended. I honestly felt way more comfortable reaching out to them and asking them questions than I did my own supervisor. It was helpful to know that they would tell me the truth about things and not give me an answer that was so technical or rooted in best practices. Their advice and recommendations were more grounded in real life experiences, which I found more useful.

In addition, Participant J shared, "it is way easier to reach out to someone that isn't a supervisor or mentor. It's more like talking to a college that just has more experience. I have honestly learned so much from these informal mentors I have found." Similarly, Participant C reported that "sometimes it's just easier to talk to someone who has been in the field for a while that is not going to judge you. They really teach you the ins and outs of the job."

Peer Support. Peer support was brought up by eight of the participants (66%) in the study. Peer support differs from informal mentors in that participants talked about leaning on colleagues with similar career experiences or who were part of their graduating class. For example, Participant B said, "honestly, my group chat with all the newly hired psychologists is a lifesaver. We might all be new and not have the answers for each other, but it's just helpful to know you're not alone." Participant M also stated something similar, "it has been so helpful to talk to other new school psychologists and realizing that we all feel the same and I am not alone in this craziness."

Supervisor. The following common theme stated by participants was supervision. Five out of the 13 participants (38%) stated that one of the ways they overcame the challenges they faced was by talking to a direct supervisor. Participant F stated:

> Honestly, talking to my direct supervisor was very helpful for me. They are in a position that allows them to advocate for me and also give me advice that is going to help my work be legally defensible. Once I get advice from my direct supervisor, I feel so much more confident carrying out the task they helped me develop.

Further, Participant L expressed that "Going to my supervisor for help has been crucial in me getting through all my challenges. I just feel reassured and safe when I consult with them."

Continuous Learning. The next common theme brought up was continuous learning. Five participants (38%) talked about the importance of finding solutions to their challenges on

their own through research. Participant D indicated, "When I am really stumped on something or can't get something to make sense, I just go online and try to find the solution. When I finally do figure it out, it boosts my confidence to that I did it on my own." Furthermore, Participant J also said:

> Reaming curious and wanting to learn more is something that has allowed me not to get overwhelmed by the challenges that I face. It helps to shift my mindset and see the challenges as learning opportunities so that they aren't as big of an issue the next time they come around.

Training Material. The final theme developed from the participant's responses was training material. Three participants (23%) noted training materials during their responses. This theme refers to using materials school districts provide during onboarding. Participant E said, "Usually, what I end up doing is going back to all the materials that were provided to us during our job training week. Usually, the answer to my problems is in there somewhere." Similarly, Participant F indicated, "What has been helpful to me is the materials we got during training. I have a huge binder full of all that stuff, and looking over it from time to time has been such a huge help."

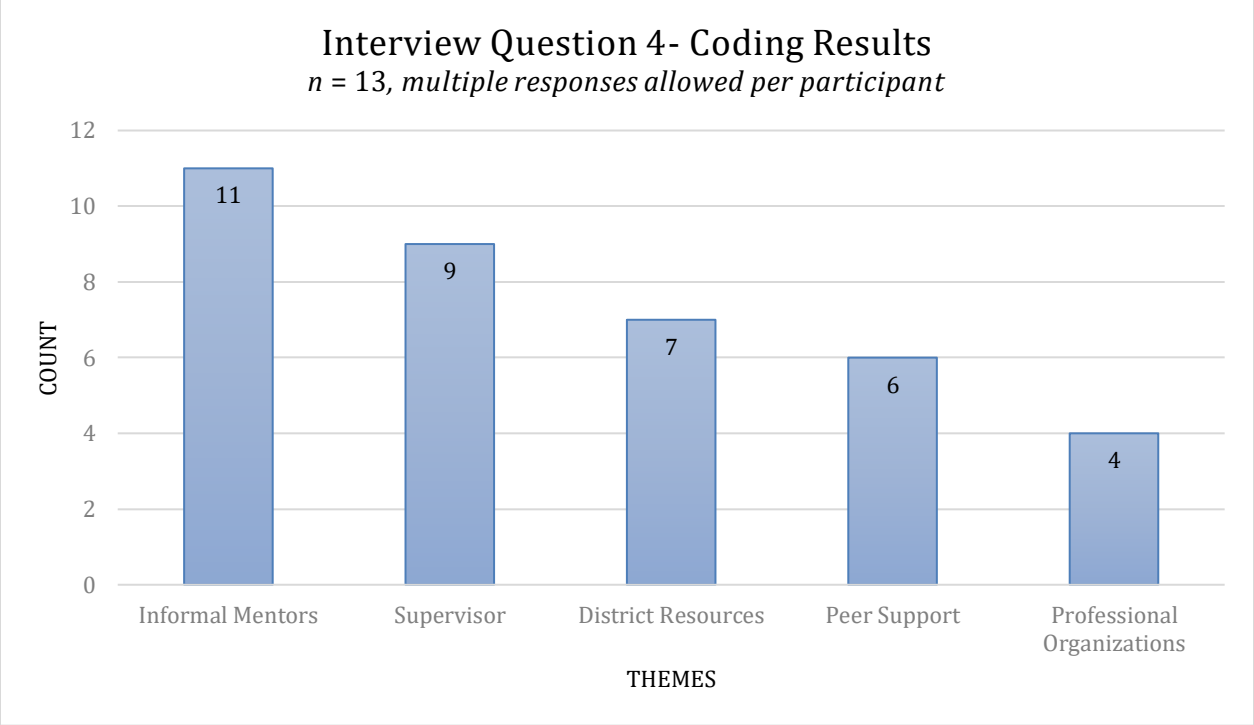
Interview Question 2 Summary. Participants were asked how they overcame their challenges as ECSPs. Among the 13 participants, the majority (77%) reported that reaching out to an informal mentor was the most useful in overcoming the challenges they faced. Furthermore, 61% of participants reported that peer support was a tool they used. The peers they used consisted of other new school psychologists or peers they met in graduate school. The following two themes were seeking out assistance from a supervisor (38%) and engaging in continuous learning practices (38%). Lastly, participants reported that referring back to training

material they were given during their onboarding process was a tool they used to overcome the challenges they faced as ECSPs.

Interview Question 4. IQ4 asked participants what strategies or practices they used to overcome their challenges. Specifically, asking if they utilized institutional resources, mentoring, or school psychologist's associations. The question resulted in five themes: (a) informal mentors, (b) supervisors, (c) district resources, (d) peer support, and (e) professional organizations.

Figure 5

Interview Question 4



***Informal Mentors*.** Informal mentors is the theme that was mentioned by 11 participants (84%). This theme discusses the importance of using more experienced colleagues to help guide and assist you in transitioning from student to practitioner. Participant F said:

> I met a colleague during one of our professional development meetings that had worked for the district for over ten years. She was really nice and gave me her number and told

> me to reach out to her whenever I needed help. I was hesitant at first because she isn't my supervisor or isn't getting paid more to help me, but she offered. Now I feel like I text her all the time, and she is always willing to help me out.

In addition, Participant I indicated:

> The psychologist that was previously at my school has been such a huge help for me this year. They have just provided me with tips and tricks that have really helped adjust to my school. This psychologist is not required to help me, but they still do, and it has really saved me from so much stress.

Similarly, Participant G said:

> My district provided all the new hires with a buddy. Basically, this person served as someone we could go to for help that wasn't our direct supervisor. The buddies that were assigned weren't paid or given any type of rewards they just volunteered to help new psychologists navigate the job. I am so happy that the district did this for us because my buddy has been such a huge help.

Supervisor. Supervisor was the second most mentioned theme by participants. Nine participants (69%) talked about their direct supervisors' role in helping them overcome their challenges. For example, Participant A said, "Usually when I am really frustrated or nervous about something, I reach out to my supervisor, and they are usually a big help." Participant D said:

> I have heard some horror stories, but thankfully I have a really good supervisor, and he has been a huge help during my first year as a school psychologist. I think because he knows I am new, he will always follow up with me or check in on me. He has been a really big help in navigating my role as a school psychologist.

***District Resources*.** The third most mentioned theme was district resources. Seven participants (54%) discussed how utilizing district resources filled in knowledge gaps that they had about specific job duties. Participant B said, "A lot of the time, I find myself looking at the district website and shifting through resources that can help me complete my job duties. It's helpful because it's all backed by research." In addition, Participant I noted, "My district really provides us with a lot of resources. If I am unsure how to do something, there is definitely a procedural manual or bulletin that details what I need to do." Participant K also reported the use of resources provided by the district:

> One of the areas of the job I really struggle with is the behavior management of students. I don't feel like I was really trained in this area. I have learned so much this year because the district provides webinars and classes on behavior intervention… it has really been helpful to grow into a better psychologist.

Peer Support. Peer support was the fourth most mentioned theme by participants. Six participants (46%) talked about the importance of talking to their peers for support and, on occasion, guidance. Participant G said:

> I think like having psychologists who are in the district with you, who were hired with you, is so helpful. It's like you have this connection with them, and it's nice to reach out to them and feeling like you're not alone… they feel the same way, they have the same struggles, and they are sticking it out so you feel like okay I can do this too.

Participant L noted that "It's nice to be able to text your cohort and vent to them or ask them how their district deals with certain things. We often brainstorm and try to come up with solutions for each other's problems."

***Professional Organizations*.** Lastly, utilizing professional organization was a theme mentioned by four participants (31%). School psychologists have a national organization, each

state has its own professional organization, and some counties also have school psychologist organizations. Participant A indicated:

> NASP has been a huge help for me this year. Being part of their early career committee has let me network with so many people but also learn so many things that were not taught to me in school. The membership really pays off because I can't tell you the number of times I have used flyers or information from their website to help out staff and families.

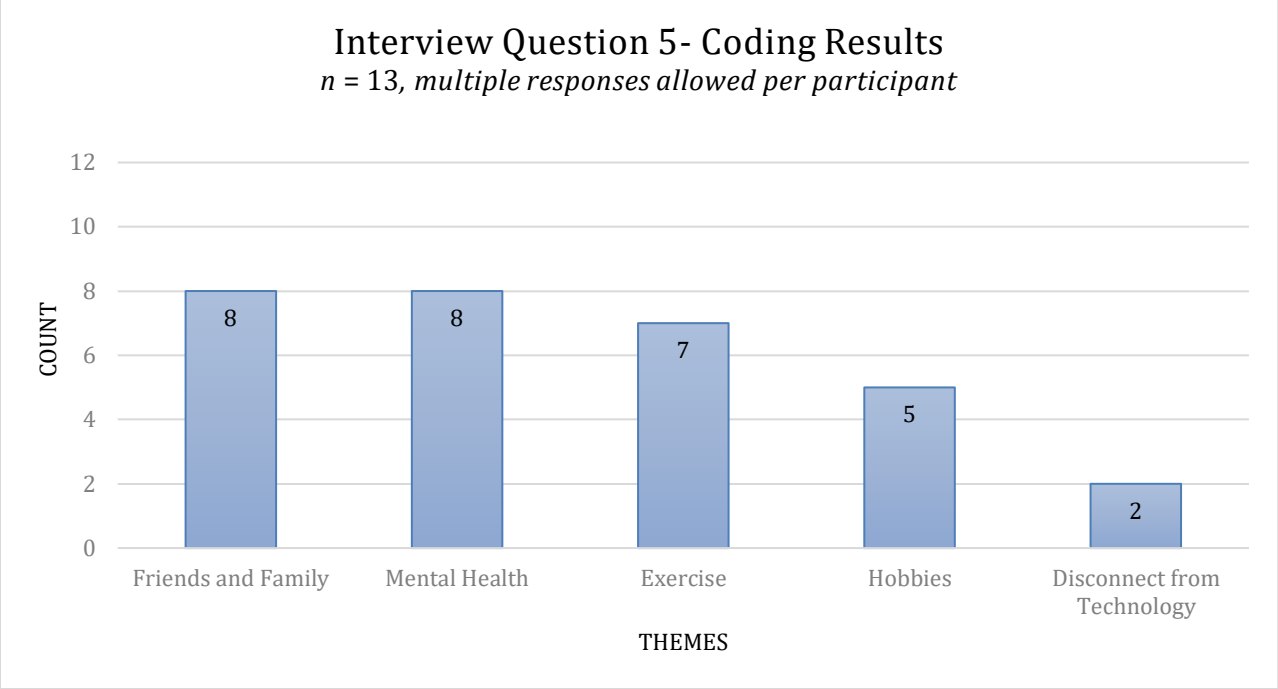
Additionally, Participant E indicated, "CASP (California Association of School Psychologists) has been a lot of help… because it's California specific, I don't have to worry about laws or policies that don't apply to me. Not many of my peers use CASP, but it has been a huge help for me."

Interview Question 4 Summary. Interview question number 4 asked participants to describe what strategies and practices they used to overcome the challenges they faced as ECSPs. From the study 85% of participants reported that the use of informal mentors played a critical role in overcoming their challenges. Furthermore, 69% of participants said that talking to or asking a direct supervisor for help played a role in overcoming their challenges as new practitioners. Of the participants, 53% mentioned district resources, and 46% mentioned peer support. Lastly, 30% of participants indicated that using a national, state, or local professional organization played a role in overcoming challenges.

Interview Question 5. IQ5 asked participants to identify common strategies, tools, or resources they used outside of work to help them overcome the challenges they face at work. Question 5 resulted in 5 themes: (a) friends and family, (b) mental health, (c) exercise, (d) hobbies, and (e) disconnect from technology.

Figure 6

Interview Question 5



Friends and Family. Eight participants (62%) indicated that connecting with friends and family helped them overcome their work challenges outside of work. Participant B said:

> I often think about like connections to people who are really meaningful to me in my life. My fiancé, my mom, and close friends. I really try to lean into those relationships and connect with them frequently as a good reminder of the things that are really important to me outside of work. It lets me know that there is more important things to life than deadlines or caseloads.

Additionally, Participant G stated, "I really make the effort to spend time with my family to get my mind off how hectic work can be. My friends and family really ground me and make me feel relaxed."

Mental Health. The next theme developed by eight participants (62%) responses was the importance of caring for one's mental health. Participant D noted, "My biggest help honestly has been therapy. I don't know where I would be without my therapist. I feel like most of this past

year, my therapy sessions have been all about work and feeling stressed. But it has helped so much to have that support." Similarly, Participant J stated, "Therapy has been one of the tools that have really helped me navigate this huge change in my life. I think going to sessions and talking it out has helped my personal life in that I don't bring the baggage from work home to my family." Additionally, Participant L mentioned, "Self-care. That is something I don't deprive myself of. If I am exhausted or drained all the time, then I can't do my job right, so I always make time for self-care."

Exercise. Another common theme was using exercise to deal with the challenges of being an early career school psychologist. Seven participants (54%) mentioned working on their physical health as a way to destress and disengage from work while at home. Participant C mentioned that "getting home after a tough day at work, the best thing for me to do is to go on a long run. It helps clear my mind." Similarly, Participant I stated:

> When I started my job, I enrolled in a boxing class two nights a week. It has been so helpful in helping me destress and relax. Sometimes I am writing a report or in a really tough meeting, and I think to myself, I can't wait to go to my boxing class tonight. It's been really helpful to me.

Hobbies. Five participants (38%) mentioned using hobbies to help them overcome the challenges of being a new practitioner. Participant A said, "having a hobby has really helped me relax after a long day of work. I have always enjoyed baking, but taking the time to mindfully bake after a tough workday is just perfect." Furthermore, Participant I noted:

> I recently started to take electric guitar lessons since I don't have to worry about homework or class assignments anymore. At first, I was doing it because I thought it would be impressive to people, but honestly, it has helped me decompress from how

> crazy work can be. Even when I am frustrated from how difficult a song is to learn, it's a nice kind of frustrated because it's not work related, the stakes are low.

Disconnect From Technology. Two participants (15%) reported disconnecting from technology as a helpful way of dealing with challenges from work. Participant E said, "Since we are on our computers all day at work, it's nice to just put away all the technology and disconnect. Do something without technology." Lastly, Participant H noted that:

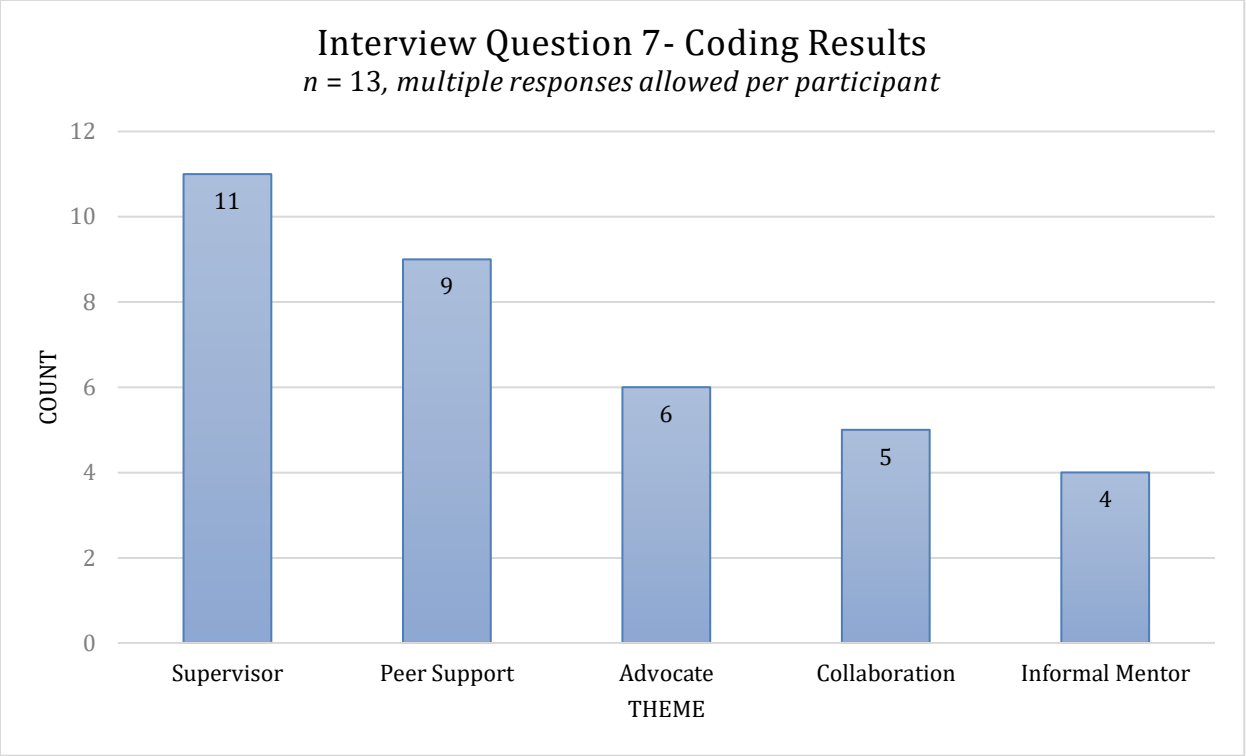
> We spend so much time writing reports or filling out counseling case notes. It seems like we spend so much time on the computer or looking at screens. Sometimes on the weekends, I just put my phone on DND (do not disturb) and forget about it. I try not to be in front of a screen as much as possible, and it is really helpful, it's refreshing.

Interview Question 5 Summary. Interview question 5 asked participants to identify strategies, tools, or resources they used outside of work to help them overcome the challenges of being an early career school psychologist. Both themes of family and friends and mental health were mentioned by 61% of participants. The third most mentioned theme by participants was exercise (53%). 38% of participants said using hobbies, and 15% mentioned disconnecting with technology to deal with the challenges brought on by work.

Interview Question 7. IQ7 asked participants to identify how other ECSPs have dealt with the challenges they have faced at work. Based on the data analysis conducted on the responses, a total of five themes were developed: (a) supervisor, (b) peer support, (c) advocate, (d) collaboration, and (e) informal mentors.

Figure 7

Interview Question 7



Supervisor. The most prevalent theme mentioned by 11 participants (85%) was support for supervisors. Participant A stated, "Most of the time, my peers talk about bringing up issues with their direct supervisors. They are the ones that are supposed to help us and guide us as a new psychologist." Additionally, Participant D noted, "I think as new school psychologists, we just all go to our supervisor. Especially if you don't know anyone else in the district that is really your only person to go to." Seeking out the help of a direct supervisor appeared to be one of the first things that participants and their colleagues do when experiencing a challenge at work. Participant G said:

> I have a group chat with all new psychologists and people I graduated with. We always ask for advice or support when things get tough. When someone brings up an issue, the first thing anyone says is did you talk to your supervisor about it. That is always the go to response to issues that come up.

Peer Support. Nine participants (69%) mentioned the theme of peer support. Early career school psychologist tends to rely on each other for support. Participant B expressed the importance of peer support by stating, "my peers and I always talk about how helpful our groups messages are. Without each other's support, I think we would all be so lost." Participant M noted, "I think a lot of my cohort members rely on each other for support. Every day all day, there is some type of conversation going on about work. We help each other out."

Advocate. Advocate was the mentioned by six participants (46%). Many participants reported their peers advocating for themselves as a way to overcome the challenges they were facing. Participant I said:

> One of my colleagues, that is also new to the district, like me, is very good about advocating for herself. If she sees that something is wrong or that her caseload is getting too big, she will talk to administrators or her supervisor to get help or change the way things are going. I really admire that about her, especially as a new school psychologist.

Additionally, Participant K noted, "I hear a lot from my peers about the importance of advocating for ourselves. They will talk to an administrator about assessment plans or other things that are thrown at them."

Collaboration. Collaboration was mentioned by five of the participants (38%). When discussing challenges being faced, participants talked about engaging in a collaborative process to try to come up with solutions. Participant F noted that "Sometimes I hear from cohort members that when things get tough at work, they try to sit down with the team and try to come up with solutions." Furthermore, Participant L indicated, "One of my friends talks about collaboration a lot. She says it has helped her a lot. Not only in helping her complete her job duties but also getting to know staff members."

Informal Mentor. The last theme mentioned was of using informal mentors. Four participants (31%) mentioned informal mentors. Similar to responses from IQ2 and IQ4, participants discussed their peers using informal mentors to get through challenging aspects of the job. Participant A indicated, "Similar to myself, a lot of my peers use older school psychologists or school psychologists with more experience to help them. They tend to be the most useful resource for us." Additionally, Participant C noted that a lot of their peers would "talk to school psychologists that have worked for your district for multiple years. They tend to be honest and upfront about things."

Interview Question 7 Summary. Interview question seven asked participants to discuss how other ECSPs dealt with the challenges they faced at work. The majority of participants (85%) indicated that their peers would seek the help of their supervisor when faced with a challenge. Of the participants, 69% reported that peer support was helpful when dealing with challenges at work. Advocating for yourself was the third most mentioned strategy to deal with challenges at work. Furthermore, 38% of participants noted that their peers would often engage in collaboration with staff to attempt to solve the challenges at work. Lastly, 30% of the participants reported that connecting with an informal mentor was a method their peers used to overcome the challenges of being an early career school psychologist.

Summary of RQ2. Research question 2 sought to identify strategies and best practices that ECSPs use to overcome challenges and successfully complete their job duties. A total of 14 themes were developed by analyzing responses and experiences of the first three interviews and validated using an inter-rater review process. The 14 themes developed were as follows: (a) informal mentor, (b) peer support, (c) supervisor, (d) continuous learning, (e) training materials, (f) district resources, (g) professional originations, (h) advocate, (i) collaboration, (j) friends and family, (k) mental health, (l) exercise, (m) hobbies, and (n) disconnect from technology.

Research Question 3

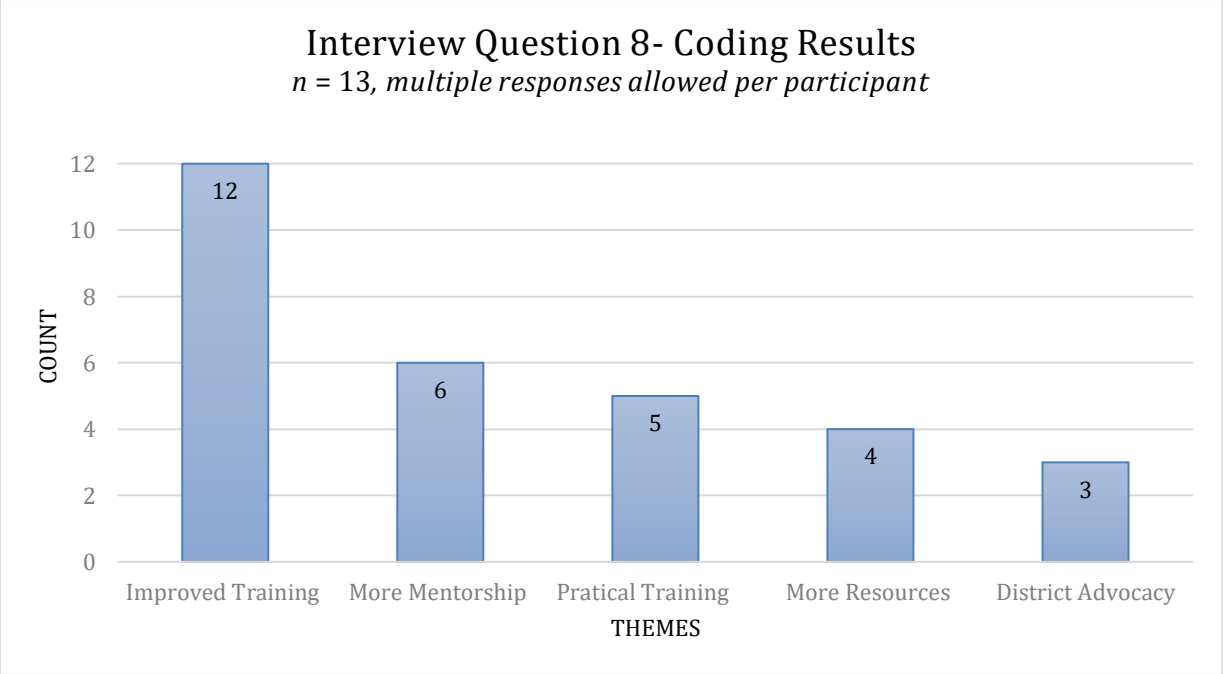
The third research question (RQ3) asked, How do early career school psychologist track, measure, and define Success in their practices? The researcher asked two interview questions to participants to answer RQ3. The two interview questions corresponding to RQ3 were:

1. What would have made your early career as a psychologist even more successful?
2. How would you measure and track that?

Interview Question 8. Interview question eight asked participants to identify what would have made their early career as a school psychologist even more successful. This question resulted in five themes: (a) training, (b) mentorship, (c) practical training, (d) district advocacy, and (e) resources.

Figure 8

Interview Question 8



Improved Training. Training was mentioned by 12 participants (92%). Training referred to trainings provided by districts, specifically trainings provided to new school psychologists. Participant B noted:

> The first week of starting the job, we got a lot of training. Training on pretty much everything that we do, even how to submit our payroll. But everything came all at once. Once the new hire training was over, we got placed at our schools and were expected to remember all the information that was provided to us. It was too much, and honestly, I didn't even remember anything they talked about because I was so overwhelmed.

Additionally, Participant K discussed the need for ongoing training, "I think training for new hires should happen all year. We don't know what questions to ask before we start the job, but once we are at our schools, we have a ton of questions. Similarly, Participant I stated, "I think having trainings that were relevant to the issues we face would have been so helpful. Trainings that are specific to the experiences of new hires and how to handle the early years of our career." Lastly, Participant M said:

> Looking back on my first year and now halfway through my second year, I think more trainings would have been helpful. Not trainings that are mandated by the district because a higher up said we need to be trained about a specific topic. But trainings that relate to the issues I was facing or the questions that I had. A lot of the time, I would be struggling with something for months, and then I would talk to someone, and they would be like, oh, here is the solution, and I would think to myself, wow, this would have been helpful to know months ago. Yea, I think just trainings that actually help us do our jobs.

More Mentorship. The second most common theme was mentorship. Six participants (46%) discussed the critical aspect of mentorship and how having someone to depend on would have made their transition from student to practitioner easier. Participant A said:

> Having some sort of mentorship program would have been so helpful. During our fieldwork hours, when we are in school, we have someone that we can bounce ideas off of or ask a quick question to. But as a new psychologist, you are kind of just on your own, and sometimes asking a supervisor seems too formal, or you feel like you are bugging. Having a mentor would have been so helpful.

Participant D noted, "I know some of my friends that work for different districts were connected with an experienced colleague that serviced as a mentor for them throughout the year. I wish my district implemented something like that."

Practical Training. Five participants (38%) mentioned practical training. This theme referred to training programs providing assignments and lessons that would assist psychologists in the early years of their careers. Participant E said:

> In terms of my graduate school training, I wish they would have given us assignments that I could have used for work. We had so many presentations and projects, but it was information and vocabulary for the graduate level. I wish they would have made us do these assignments as if we were presenting to teachers or parents. Then I could have presentations and information that I can easily give to my school community.

Similarly, Participant L noted:

> Learning about best practices is great and all, but that's all we learn in school. Everything is related to best practices and how to get things done using best practices. But that's not what is happening in our school. Best practices can somewhat guide you, but they don't really work in a school setting when everything is hectic. I wish my school training would have taught me the reality of the job and how to handle it better.

More Resources. The next theme mentioned by participants was resources. Four participants (31%) discussed how beneficial more resources would have been early in their

careers. Participant A noted, "Having some type of resources library or a website with an FAQ would have been very helpful. Sometimes the questions that come up as new psychologists have easy answers, so it seems bothersome to reach out to a supervisor." Similarly, Participant C said:

> Providing me with more resources. My district doesn't really have much for me to reference, so I find myself searching online for answers, but sometimes laws are different between states, so then I have to figure out if it even applies to me. Having resources to reference would have saved me so much time this year.

District Advocacy. District advocacy was the fifth most common theme. This theme was mentioned by three of the participants (23%). Participant I mentioned:

> Something that would have made my first year more successful is having the district support school psychologist more. A lot of the time, people don't even know what we do, even administrators. How is that possible? The district needs to make policies that support and acknowledge school psychologists' roles in our schools. The district needs to work harder in bringing awareness to the role of school psychology.

Participant F noted, "Advocacy, definitely, specifically from the district. I think school psychologists are often forgotten about. But there are needs we have that the district can definitely step in and help with, but they don't."

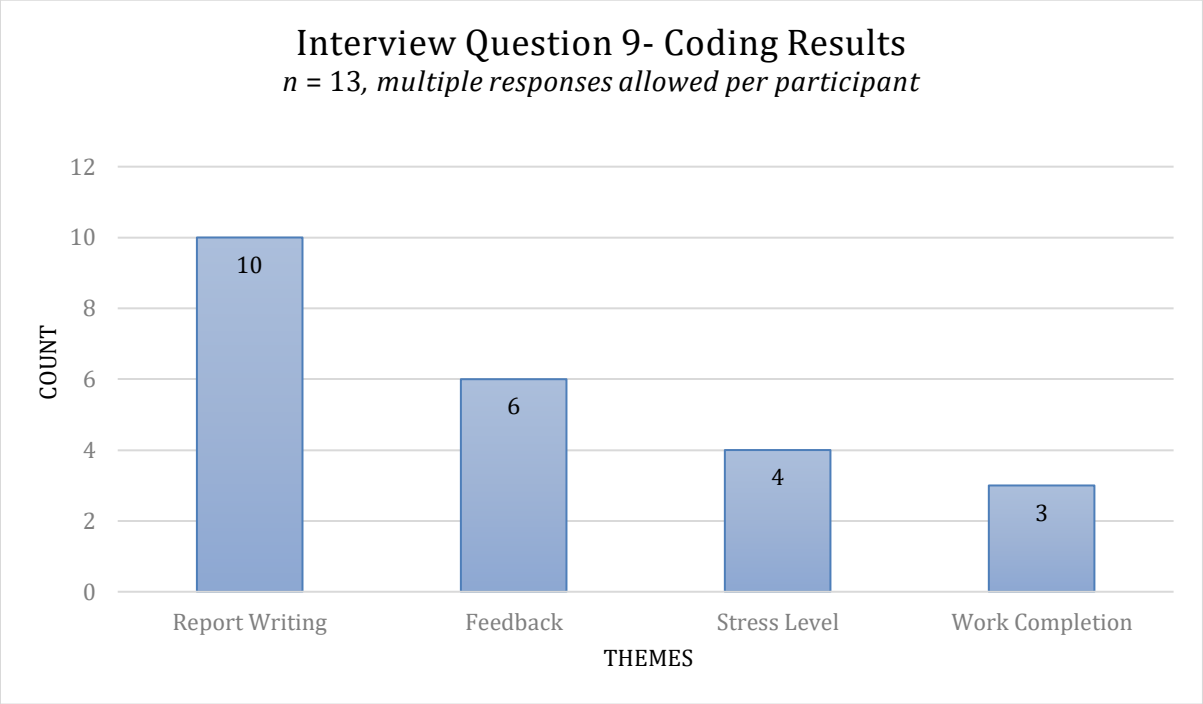
Interview Question 8 Summary. Overall, participants were able to discuss various topics that would have made the early years of their careers more successful. There was a total of five themes that were developed based on the responses of participants' interviews. The majority of participants (92%) reported that more training that was continuous would have made their first year more successful. Additionally, 46% of participants noted that mentorship opportunities could have made their early careers more successful. Of participants, 38% indicated that having more practical assignments and projects during grade school would have made their transition

into practitioners easier and would have made them more successful school psychologists. Lastly, district advocacy (30%) and resources (23%) were the last two themes mentioned when asked about making the early career experience more successful.

Interview Question 9. IQ9 asked, How would you measure and track Success? After the analysis of responses, four themes were developed. The themes were: (a) report writing, (b) feedback, (c) stress level, and (d) work completion.

Figure 9

Interview Question 9



Reporting Writing. Report writing was the most common theme for question nine. Ten participants (77%) indicated that the among of time it took to complete a psychoeducational assessment report was the number one indicator that they were being successful. Participant B

stated, "I should probably say satisfied administrators or something, but realistically it's the amount of time I spend writing a report." Participant D said:

> For me, it has to be the amount of time I spend writing reports. Once I am able to write reports that are good and legally defensible in a timely manner, I know that I am doing a good job. These reports take me forever to write right now.

Similarly, Participant L indicated, "Success? Umm, the amount of time it takes to write reports. If I don't spend an entire workday on a report, then I am being successful."

Feedback. The next most common theme was feedback. Six participants (46%) discussed hearing feedback from colleagues or parents. Participant F stated, "Since I am always doubting myself, hearing good things about my work from the staff always lets me know that I am on the right track." Participant K said:

> I think what is important for me and what makes me feel like I am doing a good job is getting feedback from parents and families. The discussions that we have can often be very sensitive and impactful for parents, so when a meeting ends, and a parent thanks me or tells me I made them feel seen, it really boosts my confidence and lets me know I have done my job right.

Stress Level. The third most common theme was stress levels as indicators of measuring one's Success. Four out of the 13 participants (31%) reported stress level. Participant C said:

> I often gauge my Success for the day if I am able to relax or feel less stressed on my drive home. If I am at home and stressing over everything, then I know that things are getting overwhelming, and I need to find ways to cope and relax.

Additionally, Participant M noted, "Stress is a big indicator of my Success. If I am really stressed out that I know I am not using my time wisely or setting up boundaries for myself at work."

Work Completion. The last theme developed for question nine was work completion. Three participants (23%) talked about how much work they could do during the workday. For example, Participant A reported, "If I can check off everything or most things off my to-do list for the day, then I have had a good day. That is how I stay organized and prioritize what needs to get done." Participant E:

> The amount of work I can get done during the workday lets me know if I am doing a good job. If I end up having to take a bunch of work home, I start to think that I am not using my time wisely or taking too long on things.

Interview Question 9 Summary. Participants were asked to discuss how they measured their Success at work. A total of four themes were developed using participant responses. The most common theme mentioned by 77% of participants was decreasing the time it takes to complete a psychoeducational assessment report. Of the study's participants, 46% reported that feedback from parents or staff members indicated success. Additionally, 31% of participants said that low-stress levels were a method of gauging whether they were succeeding at the job. Lastly, 23% of the participants reported that work completion, or the amount of work they were able to get done during work hours, was a method of measuring their Success.

Summary of RQ3. For research question three, participants were asked to share how they track, measure, and define Success in their field of practice. A total of nine themes were developed in accordance with RQ3: (a) training, (b) mentorship, (c) practical training, (d) district advocacy, (e) resources, (f) report writing, (g) feedback, (h) stress levels, and (i) work completion.

Research Question 4

Question four (RQ4) asked, What recommendations would ECSPs have for new school psychologists coming into the field? Participants were asked the following two questions:

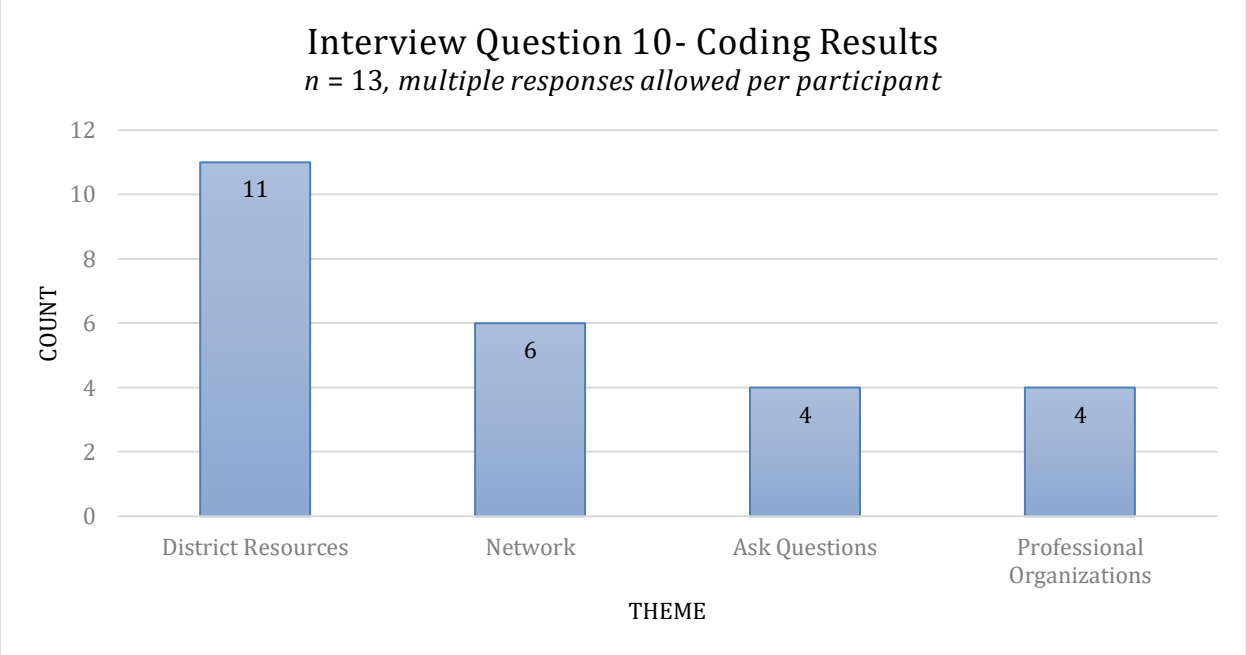
1. Knowing what you know now, what strategies, tools, or resources would you recommend to other ECSPs?

2. What advice would you have for school psychologists who are just starting their careers?

Interview Question 10. Interview question 10 asked participants to recommend strategies, tools, or resources to other ECSPs. IQ10 resulted in four themes: (a) district resources, (b) network, (c) ask questions, and (d) professional organizations.

Figure 10

Interview Question 10



District Resources. The most common theme mentioned by participants was district resources. Eleven participants (85%) reported that they would recommend utilizing district resources for psychologists new to the field. Participant A said:

> It can be overwhelming, much like everything else when starting our career. But I would highly recommend new psychologists look around their district's website. Some districts have so many resources and tools that can be used by employees, but no one is ever

> aware of them. It wasn't until last week I found out that I can have a behavioralist come help students at my school… take advantage of district resources.

Additionally, Participant E indicated, "Use what your district gives you, you don't have to reinvent the wheel. Use what you are given, it will save you a ton of time." Participant K also reported, "District resources is something that has helped me out a lot. Like flyers for parents, trainings for teachers, and community resources that are provided to parents. It's all very helpful information, especially if you are getting to know your community."

Network. The next theme was network. For the network theme, six participants (46%) shared the value of networking work and building connections. Participant B noted, "One of my biggest recommendations is connecting with people. The more people you know, the easier it is to ask for help or get clarity on things." Participant F stated:

> Building connections with people you meet is critical. Sometimes I meet someone at a meeting or training, and I regret not asking for their contact information or how to get in contact with them. Most people you come in contact with are willing to help you, so I would say connect with as many people as you can.

Additionally, Participant I stated, "My biggest recommendation is to network and build connections with people. Our job is all about collaboration, and the more people you know, the easier your job will be."

Ask Questions. The next theme was asking questions, in which four participants (31%) discussed the importance of not being scared to ask questions. Participant D stated, "Ask questions. Always ask questions. It's better to get the correct answer than to spend hours trying to find the answer on your own. People are there to help you." Participant M said:

> One strategy, or a tool, is to ask questions when you don't know something. It doesn't need to be your supervisor but from anyone. For example, teachers have so much

knowledge that we didn't learn about in school, asking them about students' learning will give you so much insight.

Professional Organizations. Lastly, professional organizations were also mentioned by four participants (31%). Participants discussed the importance of using organizations like NASP, CASP, and other local professional organizations. Participant G noted, "I have used CASP a lot this year. It has some really helpful tools that align with all aspects of our job. I would highly recommend using CASP, I don't really use NASP, but I am sure that is helpful too." Additionally, Participant J stated:

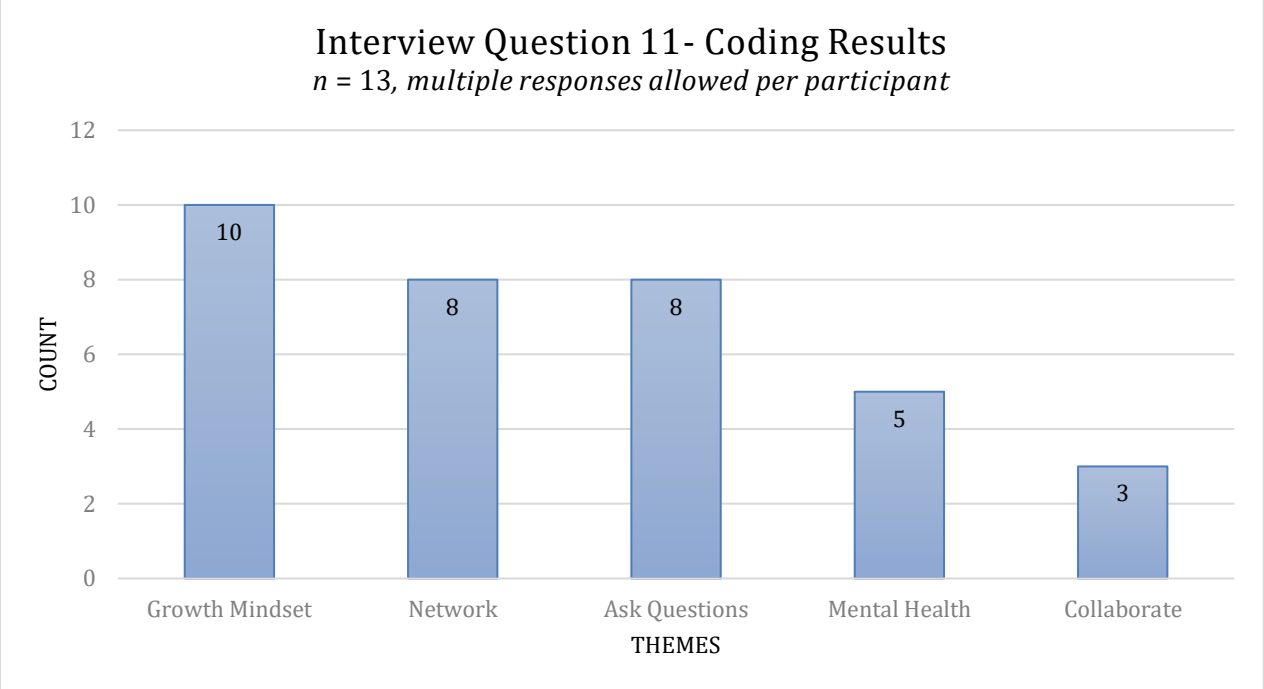
> I was able to go to the NASP convention this school year, and it was really helpful. I was able to attend a lot of workshops and get resources that helped me a lot. I was also able to connect with other new psychologists through a new psychologist meet-up. Connecting with the NASP and using their website is very helpful. I think all new school psychologists should be required to join these associations.

Interview Question 10 Summary. Participants were asked to share any strategies, tools, or resources they would recommend to other early-career school psychologists. After analysis of respondent responses, four themes were developed. Most of the participants 85% noted that they would recommend new school psychologists to utilize resources that are provided by the school district they work for. 46% of participants stated that they would recommend networking with colleagues. Lastly, 30% of participants reported that they would recommend school psychologists to ask questions whenever possible and join professional organizations.

Interview Question 10. IQ10 asked, What advice would you have for school psychologists who are just starting their careers. A total of five themes were developed based on participant responses. The themes were as follows: (a) growth mindset, (b) network, (c) asking questions, (d) mental health, and (e) collaboration.

Figure 11

Interview Question 11



Growth Mindset. Ten participants (77%) noted that having a growth mindset would be their number one piece of advice for new psychologists. Participant B noted, "Being okay with not knowing everything is critical. It's okay not to know all the answers. It leaves room for growth." Participant E said:

> Something that has really helped me through this year is remembering that I still have so much to learn. I will always continue to grow and learn in this profession, and that is okay. We talk about growth mindset with our students all the time, but it also applies to us. I think my main piece of advice is to always be willing to learn because you don't know everything, and that's okay.

Additionally, Participant L noted, "My advice would be to always keep a growth mindset. Realizing that you will always be learning will definitely put you at ease. Especially when you are new, and the learning curve is so steep."

Network. The next theme was networking. Eight participants (62%) talked about the importance of connecting with people you work with and meeting new people. Participant A noted:

> I would tell a new psychologists to make sure that they network and get to know people. Even if you are a person that is more introverted, step out of your comfort zone and connect with people. You never know who can help you in the future or serve as a support group. In this job, you really need people around you for support.

Similarly, Participant D indicated, "Networking. That's why it's important to go to conferences and training. I have met a lot of people this year, and they have all helped me in some capacity. Even networking with staff at your school can make your job so much more easier."

Ask Questions. The next theme that developed was asking questions. Eight participants (62%) discussed the importance of being comfortable asking questions. Participant C said, "My biggest piece of advice would be to always ask questions. I know people get scared of looking dumb or looking unprepared, but you won't find things out without asking." Additionally, Participant M reported, "I would say my biggest piece of advice is to be comfortable with not knowing everything and being okay with asking questions. In school, we learned a lot by asking for clarity, and the same goes with work."

Mental Health. The fourth theme developed from IQ11 was the importance of mental health. Five participants (38%) noted the importance of taking care of oneself in order to be able to do a good job at work. Participant A said:

> One of the most important things in our lives is our mental health. I know that in the moment, issues at work can seem like the biggest deals, but our mental health is very important. Take the time to relax and get your mind off work. As new school

psychologists, it's easy to let work consume you, but you have to prioritize your mental health. Make sure to do fun activities after work and on the weekends.

Furthermore, Participant G noted that the one piece of advice they would give someone starting their career as a school psychologist would be "To take care of your mental health. If you don't take care of it, not only will your work suffer, but so will your personal life, and that's not good for anyone. Remember that work is just work."

Collaborate. The last theme developed from participants' responses was the importance of collaboration. Three participants (23%) noted collaboration when answering question 11. Participant K indicated, "To be a team player. Make sure you always collaborate with everyone. You don't want to be the school psychologist that knows it all. People don't want to work with those types of people." Participant H shared similar advice, "It is important to collaborate. Pretty much everything we do involves collaborating with different people. If you are not good at this, your job will be very difficult."

Interview Question 11 Summary. Participants were asked to provide advice they would give to school psychologists who are just starting their careers. A total of five themes were developed from participant responses. Of the participants, 77% reported that they would advise new school psychologists to keep a growth mindset throughout their careers. Participants also said they would advise new psychologists to network as much as possible (62%). The next piece of advice given was to always ask questions (62%). Additionally, participants noted that taking care of one's mental health was advice they would share with new colleagues (38%). Lastly, 23% of participants reported that they would tell new school psychologists to collaborate while at work to build up their network.

Summary of RQ4. For research question number four, participants were asked to share advice with school psychologists who are about to start their careers. A total of eight themes

were developed in accordance with RQ4: (a) district resources, (b) network, (c) asking questions, (d) professional organizations, (e) growth mindset, (f) network, (g) mental health, and (h) collaborate.

Chapter 4 Summary

The main objective of this qualitative phenomenological study was to discover the challenges and strategies that ECSPs face at the start of their careers. Four research questions were generated to address this topic. The research questions were:

- RQ1- What challenges are faced by early career school psychologists when entering the field?
- RQ2- What strategies and best practices are employed by early career school psychologists to complete their job duties?
- RQ3- How do early career school psychologist track, measure, and define Success in their practices?
- RQ4- What recommendations would early career school psychologists have for new school psychologists coming into the field?

Data was obtained from 13 semi-structured interviews. Interviews were then transcribed, analyzed, and coded. Themes were developed from the codes and were validated using an inter-rater review process conducted by a panel of Pepperdine doctoral candidates. The data was organized using phenomenological techniques discussed in Chapter 3. A total of 38 themes were developed from the analysis of the participant's responses. The summary of the research questions and the themes are presented in Table 5. Chapter 5 will provide a discussion of the research results, implications, conclusions, recommendations, and the researcher's final thoughts.

Table 5

Summary of Themes for the Four Research Questions

RQ1- What challenges are faced by early career school psychologists when entering the field?	RQ2- What strategies and best practices are employed by early career school psychologists to complete their job duties?	RQ3- How do early career school psychologist track, measure, and define Success in their practices?	RQ4- What recommendations would early career school psychologists have for new school psychologists coming into the field?
Caseload	Informal Mentors	Training	District Resources
Policy and Procedures	Peer Support	Mentorships	Network
Imposter Syndrome	Supervisor	Practical Training	Asking Questions
Time Management	Continuous Learning	District Advocacy	Professional Organizations
Self-Advocacy	Training Materials	Resources	Growth Mindset
Collaboration	District Resources	Report Writing	Mental Health
Issues with Administrators	Professional Organizations	Feedback	Collaborate
	Advocate	Stress Levels	
	Collaboration	Work Completion	
	Friends and Family		
	Mental Health		
	Exercise		
	Hobbies		
	Disconnect from Technology		

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

School psychologists are uniquely qualified to address students' unmet educational, behavioral, and mental health needs (Shernoff et al., 2017). Due to these skill sets, school psychologists play a crucial role in creating a secure and supportive school environment for all students (S. R. Shaw et al., 2015). Due to school psychologists' ever-changing and critical roles in the school setting, it can be overwhelming and challenging to fulfill all job responsibilities. Even school psychologists with years of experience can feel overwhelmed and exhausted from all their job responsibilities (Vanvoorhis & Levinson, 2006). Keeping this in mind, what are school districts and graduate training programs doing to ensure that early-career school psychologists will be successful during their transition from students to practitioners?

This phenomenological study aimed to bring awareness to ECSPs' challenges and give insight into the strategies, resources, and tools they utilize to overcome such challenges. Untimely, this research aims to develop a model to enhance the best practices of graduate programs and school districts to support ECSPs. The findings of this study also aim to contribute to the existing body of literature on how to best support early-career school psychologists.

This chapter starts with a research summary. The following section will go over the study's findings. Following a discussion of the present study's implications for training programs and how school districts might train new school psychologists better. The part that follows is devoted to creating a model that may be used to improve the experiences of early-career school psychologists. Finally, Chapter 5 offers an overview of the researcher's recommendations for further research as well as the author's observations.

Summary of the Study

This qualitative phenomenological study aimed to learn about the adversities and barriers obstacles that ECSPs confront, as well as the strategies, tools, and resources they employ to overcome these challenges. The following four research questions were developed and answered to understand the current phenomenon better:

- RQ1- What challenges are faced by early career school psychologists when entering the field?
- RQ2- What strategies and best practices are employed by early career school psychologists to complete their job duties?
- RQ3- How do early career school psychologist track, measure, and define success in their practices?
- RQ4- What recommendations would early career school psychologists have for new school psychologists coming into the field?

Participants for this study were recruited through purposive sampling. The researcher employed a screening method to locate and choose individuals who fit this study's requirements. The approach included producing a master list of individuals who fit the requirements, creating an additional list of inclusion and exclusion criteria to narrow down participants further, and finally adopting maximum variation criteria. Participants were recruited for the study utilizing an email database provided by the NASP Early Career Committee and the professional social networking platform LinkedIn. From a pool of 35 potential interviewers, 13 people replied and were interviewed via the Zoom platform, with audio recordings obtained using Otter.ai software.

Participants of the study were asked 11 open-ended interview questions, which were validated through a three-step validity process, including (a) prima facie validity, (b) peer-review validity, and (c) expert review. The research established reliability by conducting one pilot

interview. All participants were asked the same 11 semi-structured interview questions. Once interviews were concluded, audio transcriptions were provided by the Otter.ai software and double-checked for accuracy by the researcher. Next, the researcher analyzed the interviews and created common themes that were developed using the responses of the interviews. Once the first three interviews were coded entirely, the researcher utilized an inter-rater review process with a panel of peer reviewers. The themes were presented for each interview question with their corresponding research question. The interview questions were presented with a frequency bar chart for visual representation as well as direct quotes from participants.

Discussion of Findings

The primary objective of this study is to cast light on the challenges encountered by school psychologists early in their careers and to identify the strategies, tools, and resources they utilized to overcome these obstacles. This section discusses the findings and reflections from the research in depth. The findings are then compared to the existing literature to determine whether they support, contradict, or add to the current literature.

Results for RQ1

The first research question asked what challenges are faced by early career school psychologists when entering the field.

Discussion of RQ1. Participants reported facing various obstacles in their early careers as school psychologists. Participants said that caseload size was one of the most significant obstacles they encountered as school psychologists in their early careers. Specifically, managing the quantity of psychoeducational assessment reports they were required to complete in addition to providing counseling services to students and other duties. According to the NASP (2020a), one of the primary responsibilities of a school psychologist is to complete psychoeducational

assessment evaluations. The fulfillment of these evaluation reports can consume a significant portion of a novice practitioner's workday (A. E. Silva et al., 2016).

Furthermore, Gorforth et al. (2017) reported that one of the most significant factors in the school psychologist shortage is the stress that comes with an overwhelming workload and expanding responsibilities. Participants noted that due to their caseload, it was difficult to focus on other aspects of their jobs. The inability to focus on preventative student services and school climate activities impacted their ability to feel part of the school community. Cottrell and Barrett (2015) indicated that school psychologists who felt excessive demands were being placed on them reported lower levels of job satisfaction. The existing literature agrees with these findings that one of the most common challenges ECSPs faces is navigating the high caseload demands.

In addition, participants felt that adjusting to new policies and procedures was a significant challenge. Typically, while completing the fieldwork required of their graduate schools, students are told to apply to various districts in the hopes they will graduate with experience in multiple settings (Binder et al., 2015). However, when students transition from students to practitioners, they must learn how to complete their work independently and the procedures of their new district. Many participants noted that their fieldwork was conducted within a school district drastically different from the one they work at. Not only in technical procedures but also differ in the technologies they use and the support they office. Participants noted that challenges like these make them appear underprepared to the collogues they work with. Similarly, Rønnestad et al. (2018) found that when new practitioners cannot complete the expected job duties, they can become easily frustrated and overwhelmed. Despite the fact that the NASP (2022e) provides school districts with guidelines on how to align practice with federal regulations, it appears from this study's respondents that school districts continue to disregard guidelines and develop their own methods of practice. According to the NASP

(2020d), the capacity of graduate programs to effectively prepare their students for practice is impacted greatly by differing practices between school districts. Although the NASP (2020d, 2022e) has reported the importance of school districts adhering to a unified system that adheres with federal guidelines, participants in this study reported the difficulty of adapting to new methods of doing things when switching districts.

Feelings of inadequacy or imposter syndrome, as many participants referred to it, is also one of the challenges posed by ECSPs. Bandura (1997) found that individuals are more likely to evade a task for which they feel unprepared instead of embracing it as a learning opportunity. Similarly, participants noted that they often put off or dread doing the tasks they are unprepared for or have less confidence in. As stated previously, imposter syndrome is characterized by a sense of self-doubt or deception (Clance & Imes, 1978). These sentiments may cause a person to feel incapable of performing a task, despite their past accomplishments and training.

These feelings can also impact one's ability to speak up in meetings and collaborative projects. Rønnestad and Skovholt's (2012) lifespan development model addresses these feelings in the developmental phase of disillusionment in which early career professionals are faced with so many challenges in their career that they begin to doubt themselves and feel inadequate to complete their job duties. Failures during one's early career place a huge impact on a practitioner's self-esteem and are seen as shortcomings rather than lessons to be learned (A. L. Brown et al., 2014). Existing literature agrees with these finds, suggesting that educators often face feelings of inadequacy and incompetence during their first years of practice, and therefore should be prioritized in graduate and job training (A. L. Brown et al., 2014; A. E. Silva et al., 2016).

Typically, school psychologists work within time constraints and must be able to complete certain aspects of their duties within legal time limits. In addition to meeting these

deadlines, school psychologists must be prepared to alter their work obligations while dealing with school crises. Garwood et al. (2018) found that pressure to meet deadlines is one of the factors that contribute to burnout within the education field. Participants reported that managing their time effectively is a significant challenge they face as new psychologists. Davis et al. (2004) found that one factor contributing to school psychologists feeling burnt out is not feeling like they have enough time to complete their job duties. Additionally, the NASP (2020b) has developed standards of practice that help districts develop policies that allow school psychologists to effectively complete their job duties. Findings from this study corroborate with research indicating that early career school psychologist face significant pressure with meeting deadlines and managing their time in the workplace to get all of their work done.

Self-advocacy is the ability to stand up for oneself and ask for help when things become too challenging. Epstein (2018) indicated that advocacy should not be seen as defiant but as a way to bring up necessary change. Early career school psychologist often feels like they are complaining or ruffling up feathers when they bring up issues they are having in the workplace. Participants noted that this is a significant challenge for them because, as new employees, they feel the need to stay low on the radar and project their job. Not advocating for oneself and dealing with the inequities in the workplace can bring out feelings of burnout (NASP, 2020e). When people advocate for themselves, they open up discussions that will in turn help work conditions and expectations (Fagan & Wise, 2007).

Collaboration is a vital part of a school psychologist's role. The NASP (2020a) indicated that school psychologists must know several models and strategies for collaboration. However, participants of the study noted that one of the major challenges they face is collaborating with school staff and administrators, especially if they are assigned to multiple schools. However, research has stated that consultation and collaboration are essential for school-based problem-

solving (Castro-Villarreal & Rodriguez, 2017). Despite the fact that the NASP (2020a) emphasizes the significance of collaboration between school psychologists and other school personnel, it appears that school districts and graduate institutions are not adequately preparing recent graduates to collaborate effectively in the school setting. Participants reported difficulty navigating the various personalities and work habits at their assigned sites and figuring out the best collaboration methods with several different school staff.

There is also the belief that administrators may pose one of the most challenging obstacles for new school psychologists to overcome. Participants reported various issues of administrators not knowing the role of school psychologists, instances of belittling, and micromanagement. Boccio et al. (2016b) indicated that school psychologists often would develop burnout or negative feelings towards their job due to administrators' demands or unethical behaviors. Administrators play an important part in creating a pleasant work atmosphere in the school. The NASP (2020a) places importance of early career school psychologists' being trained on how to advocate for themselves and collaborating with administrators to set clear expectations in the workplace. Participants noted that pressure and conflict from administrators placed a huge stress in their motivation and overall work environment. Finds from this study continues to emphasis the importance of school psychologist working collaboratively with administrators not only for better work environments but also to promote policies that are beneficial for all students and families (Boccio, 2015).

RQ1 contributed to the literature in various ways. First, it added to the literature by reiterating that ECSPs face multiple challenges. Specifically in the areas of caseload size, adjusting to policies and procedures, and dealing with time management issues caused by various job duties. Furthermore, the study added to the literature on feelings of imposter syndrome when starting a new career and the importance of advocating for oneself, especially early on in one's

career. Lastly, this study also contributed to the literature on the role administrators play in the experiences of new educators.

Results for R2

The second research question asked what strategies and best practices early career school psychologists employ to complete their job duties.

Discussion of RQ2. The findings for this research question were based on four interview questions. Of this, informal mentors were one of the main themes that participants named as a resource that helped them overcome their challenges early in their careers. Participants reported that these mentors were not formally assigned to them, but the connection were made naturally over time. Often these informal mentors were found through professional development meetings, training, or social events. Literature on early career school psychology emphasizes the significance of strong guidance and supervision for new practitioners to successfully transition into their new careers (Chafouleas et al., 2002; Curtis et al., 2012; A. E. Silva et al., 2016). Additionally, Arora et al. (2016) found that ECSPs reported needing high levels of mentorship, specifically when transitioning from student to practitioner.

However, in a study conducted by Mohamed et al. (2016), they found that early career practitioners reported significantly less opportunities for mentorship than they did when they were students. As reported by this study's participants, the majority of the mentorship they received was informal, meaning it was not assigned by their workplace and there was no formal mentorship program in place for early practitioners. This study adds to the literature on the importance of mentorship early in one's career and how direct guidance is a crucial aspect of one's professional development and growth (A. E. Silva et al., 2016).

Peer support was another strategy ECSPs used to overcome their challenges. In contrast to informal mentors, peer support typically included individuals hired at the same time or

members of participants' cohorts. These peer supports usually were novice practitioners, much like the participants of this study. NASP (2020e) mentioned the importance of peer consultation especially with professional growth and dealing with difficulty situations. Participants relied on peer support to vent about work challenges, check in about work procedures, or get advice on certain situations. As participants put it, peer supports were a strategy to deal with challenges from a low-judgment source. The NASP (2020b) recognizes that peer consultations are a critical aspect of the success of school psychologists. Additionally, Bandura (1997) highlighted the importance of vicarious learning for developing self-efficacy. If early career practitioners can talk to peers they identify as successful, they will grow their confidence and ability to complete the same task (Myers, 2018). Peer support lays out a cost-effective method for helping early-career practitioners adjust to their new careers.

Participants also mentioned the support of their direct supervisors. Most school districts provide ECSPs with a supervisor or coordinator that serves as a resource for them to transition smoothly into their new roles. Supervisors are available to answer a variety of questions, check the quality of work, and ensure that you are completing your job duties in a legally defensible manner. Additionally, Moulding et al. (2014) found that receiving positive feedback and praise from a direct supervisor was an excellent method for developing the professional confidence of early career psychologists. It is important to note that some participants in this study shared that they frequently sought their supervisor's assistance for even the smallest questions, whereas others expressed reluctance to do so for fear of appearing unprepared or incompetent. This research was able to contribute to the literature on the crucial role that direct supervisors have in bridging knowledge gaps in early career school psychologists and in developing practitioners' confidence (Boccio et al., 2016a).

Continuous learning, training material, and district resources were also reported to be great resources to overcome the challenges of being an early career school psychologist. Continuous learning focuses on developing one's research skills and trying to find solutions on your own. Participants mentioned doing online searches or looking through books to find ways to combat their challenges. Training material focused on using materials provided during your studies and during training for your job. The NASP (2020e) indicates that organizations should prepare psychologists with adequate resources to provide appropriate care to students and families.

Similarly, participants noted the importance of utilizing the resources provided for them by the school district. Studies have shown that ECSPs often report needing additional resources when they feel overwhelmed with their job tasks (Chafouleas et al., 2002; Curtis et al., 2012). Effective and clear resources can help practitioners become more independent and confident in the work they are doing (NASP, 2022e). Participants in the study felt that having an organized resource library or dedicated resource bank was helpful in dealing with their challenges. These finds correlate with the research done by Arora et al. (2016) indicating that ECSPs report high levels of need for resource materials and frequent and relevant professional development.

Some participants also mentioned professional organizations as resources that helped them overcome the challenges of a new career. In school psychology, there is the NASP, the national organization, and then there are state organizations. In California, it is the California Association of School Psychologists. In addition, some areas have more localized organizations for school psychologists. For example, Los Angeles County has the LAASP, the Los Angeles Association of School Psychologists. A. E. Silva et al. (2016) found that ECSPs often turn to professional organizations to attain knowledge not taught to them in school or provided by their school districts. Professional organizations provide resources and tools for school psychology

students, practitioners, and faculty. Participants mainly mentioned using the NASP and the CASP. The NASP (2020a) recognizes the importance of utilizing professional organizations for support and resources and continuing job growth as new models and tools are developed. In line with current research, this research discovered that ECSPs often seek to professional organizations to help them create their professional toolkits and also to aid them in solving problems at work (NASP, 2020a; A. E. Silva et al., 2016).

Participants also discussed the importance of advocating for oneself and setting up boundaries. As reported by Rønnestad and Skovholt (2012) ECSPs are significantly overwhelmed and stressed while completing their job responsibilities. Navigating in a state of stress constantly is not beneficial for a person's mental health, nor does it help a person be more effective in their job (Grossi et al., 2015). Alahari (2017) reported that coping with one's stress and building healthy boundaries at work can help school psychologist better respond to the needs of teachers, parents, and students. Participants reported that advocating for themselves decreased their workload and helped their coworkers respect their boundaries, thereby reducing their work stress.

Connecting with family and friends was reported as the most common strategy outside of work in dealing with being an early career school psychologist. Participants noted that these connections helped them see them ground themselves and not be consumed with work. Schilling et al. (2018) reported that early career school psychologists recognize the importance of training programs that emphasize the significance of self-care in order to deal with challenges in healthy ways. Many participants indicated that spending time with family and friends helped them in their work because it allowed them to recharge. Similarly, Vanvoorhis and Levinson (2006) found that receiving support from family and friends can help prevent or minimalize the feelings of job burnout and stress.

Participants also mentioned the importance of mental health. Participants stated that caring for mental health through therapy, counseling groups, mediation, or mindfulness was critical in dealing with work challenges. The APA (2020) recognizes the importance of prioritizing one's mental health to succeed professionally and in one's personal life. Participants noted that one could not successfully do their job if they are constantly stressed or overwhelmed. Participants also mentioned using exercise as a method to combat the challenges faced in their early careers. Schilling and Randolph (2020) reported that school psychologist that engage in self-care and mindfulness practices demonstrate an increase sense of self efficacy and emotional regulation. Participants also reported taking fitness classes, hiking, or going on long walks helped individuals decompress from work stress and ground themselves. Dreison et al. (2018) noted the importance of people taking time for themselves through physical activity or relaxing techniques to care for their overall well-being.

Hobbies and detaching oneself from technology were also mentioned by participants as strategies to overcome the challenges of one's early career. Participants engaging in a non-work-related hobby was a great method to deal with the stress that work brings. Person-directed stress interventions have been seen to minimize individuals' stress and anxiety levels with challenging careers (Dreison et al., 2018; Morse et al., 2011). Morse et al. (2011) also found that increasing one’s internal sense of reward and satisfaction played a major role in coping with stress from work. Additionally, participants noted that disconnecting from technology-assisted them in dealing with their challenges. They noted that because the job of a school psychologist has them spending a significant amount of time looking at screens, it can be nice to disengage and complete an activity that does not require technology. Findings are supported by a study conducted by Kross et al. (2013), which found that taking a break from social media can improve a person's overall well-being.

Results for R3

The third research question asked how early career school psychologist track, measure, and define success in their practice.

Discussion of RQ3. The findings for this research question were based on two interview questions. Participants could discuss various ways in which they track, measure, and define success in the workplace. Training developed to address the issues currently faced in our schools is critical for the success of school psychologists (NASP, 2022c). School psychologists must also be exposed to the proper training to ensure their approaches and methods work successfully (Castro-Villareal & Rodriguez, 2017). Participants noted that adequate and current training would have made their first years in their careers more successful. Additionally, Morse et al. (2011) found that when school psychologists are provided with increase job resources and training, they report to have a decreased level of job burnout. Participants named a variety of trainings from using a specific computer program to training on developing system change in the school setting. Participants wanted training that was relevant to the issues they were facing. Similar to a study conducted by Arora et al. (2016) in which found that participants of their study indicated needing professional development on a variety of topics as well as presented to them in various formats. Both the research and findings from this study highlight the importance of continued professional development especially during one's early career.

Mentorship was another tool that ECSPs felt would have made their transition more successful. The NASP (2020e) recognizes mentors' significant impact in developing early career practitioners. Mentoring is a process that should be provided ongoing and throughout a person's career (J. Callahan, 2016). Participants reported that being supported by a more experienced person would have greatly improved their practice. A. E. Silva et al. (2016) also found that participants in their study reported the need for a mentor during their early career, especially

when dealing with potential ethical concerns. Additionally, as reported by Rønnestad and Skovholt (2013), individuals in the disillusionment stage of the Lifespan Development Model often look to their mentors to help them through the challenging aspects of their job. Participants reported a variety of reasons for needing a mentor during their first two years of practice; regardless of the reason, participants reported that the presence of a mentor would have greatly improved their transition.

In addition, participants emphasized the significance of graduate institutions emphasizing courses that are applicable and reflective of real-world educational issues. Several participants noted that although learning best practices is beneficial, most entered their careers feeling lost and overwhelmed because best practices were not applicable at their school sites. Hicks et al. (2014) found that nearly 71% of participants in their study reported inadequacy of graduate program training on evidence-based interventions. The NASP (2020e) emphasis on content knowledge focuses on the requirement of training programs to ensure that students are gaining knowledge on how to deal with current issues in education. However, as previously mentioned, participants of the study noted that training programs should focus more on current issues and provide students with practical tools to complete their jobs successfully. Both data from this study and the literature indicate the continued barriers that ECSPs face when implementing best practices techniques in their applied practice.

Participants also emphasized the significance of districts advocating for school psychologists' recognition and support. Bocanegra et al. (2019) discussed the lack of awareness of school psychologists' skills and job duties. This lack of awareness can create significant issues for practitioners because it can cause them to be undervalued or given responsibilities outside their scope of work. According to the NASP (2021) it is essential for school administrators to advocate for and raise awareness of the functions of school psychologists. This awareness will

not only benefit school psychologists, but it will also put the spotlight on the skills and resources school psychologists have to assist the school community as a whole (NASP, 2020e, 2021). Similarly, participants reported that districts should be stepping in more to address the lack of knowledge among their administrators on the jobs of school psychologists to ensure everyone is on the same page.

Furthermore, participants were able to define various ways in which they track and measure success. Participants noted the amount of time they spent writing evaluation reports, feedback from staff and parents, gauging stress levels, and work completion as ways they are able to track their success. Productivity and success vary from person to person, but it is important to track how early career psychologists track their success so that we can develop strategies to assist them (NASP, 2020d).

Schilling et al. (2021) indicated that evaluation caseload was the number one predictor of psychologists feeling burnout. School psychologists spend a significant amount of their workday writing evaluation reports. This activity can detract from tasks they must complete, creating considerable work stress (Arora et al., 2016; Klingbeil & Collier-Meek, 2020). Participants reported that minimalizing the amount of time it takes to complete an evaluation report would indicate they are becoming more successful at their job. Similarly, participants also noted that work completion was another indicator of success. They were on the right track if they could complete their to-do list or meet deadlines. However, this response may be because the workload and overextension of school psychologists' abilities significantly affect self-esteem and burnout (NASP, 2019).

Next, participants of the study indicated that success for them was receiving positive feedback from parents and staff. Words of affirmation would help them realize they are doing a good job and becoming successful practitioners. Mulholland and Wallace (2001) found that

receiving positive feedback from colleagues was an excellent motivator for educators. In addition, school psychologists work closely with student's families, and building a positive relationship will help enhance the success of the students they work with (Kurian et al., 2021). Lastly, gauging stress levels was another indicator of success for ECSPs. Participants noted that when they checked in with themselves and felt low levels of work stress, they felt like they were on a more successful path. However, if they found themselves with high levels of stress from work, then they would blame themselves for not managing their time wisely or not getting enough done. This is important to note, considering that Young et al. (2020) found that approximately 90% of school psychologists reported their job as stressful.

Results for R4

The last research question asked early career school psychologists what recommendations they would have for practitioners entering the field.

Discussion of RQ4. The findings for this research question were based on two interview questions. Participants were able to make a variety of recommendations for individuals that are coming into the field. Participants reported the importance of familiarizing and utilizing the resources provided for practitioners within their districts. District resources can be an excellent tool to fill in knowledge gaps and provide materials and interventions that psychologists would otherwise have to spend time creating. The NASP (2020a) indicates that school districts are responsible for ensuring that early-career school psychologists are supported and prepared to perform their duties effectively. Additionally, Cochran-Smith (2005) suggested that school districts should work activity in training employees to be successful throughout their careers. Similarly, participants noted the importance of using district resources to make the transition from student to practitioner easier.

Additionally, participants recommended new practitioners always be open to learning. A growth mindset was a major recommendation given to new practitioners. Understanding that continuous learning is crucial to staying current with updated models and practices. This recommendation corresponds with the research done by the NASP (2020e), indicating that professional development for all staff members is critical to the success of our students. Furthermore, the NASP (2020b) prioritized professional development by including it as one of their organizational principles1. Participants recognized that viewing setbacks and challenges as opportunities to grow within our job capabilities is important for one's success. Similar to maintaining a growth mindset, participants also discussed the importance of asking questions and reaching out to supervisors and mentors as much as possible. Therefore, it is critical for schools and districts to develop spaces in which personnel feel comfortable reaching out for help (NASP, 2020b, 2020d).

Furthermore, participants recommended that new practitioner's network as much as possible. Networking was not only seen as a tool for promotions or job advancement but also related to building a network of people to reach out to for help. Participants noted that having a solid network would make challenges easier to overcome. The NASP (2022d) spotlights the importance of a great network by providing networking opportunities during their annual conventions and on their online forums. Moreover, A. E. Silva et al. (2016) found that mentoring is critical in ensuring that early career practitioners are able to overcome challenges with less stress and anxiety.

Participants also recommended that new practitioners utilize the resources and training professional organizations provide. Most participants reported the importance of using the NASP, however, a few mentioned the CASP, the California specific professional organization. As previously mentioned, the NASP (2020d) works actively to provide resources and tools that

are beneficial for all practitioners. Lastly, participants noted the importance of prioritizing one's mental health when dealing with the challenges of being an early career school psychologist. For many participants, taking care of one's mental health was important because it would ultimately enhance one's work efficiently and help one grow personally (Dreison et al., 2018). Poor mental health due to work-related stress is detrimental to yield productivity and completion and can also affect one's personal life, making matters even worse (Schilling et al., 2021). Mental health is an essential aspect of everyone's lives; therefore, organizations should prioritize the well-being of all their employees to ensure employee retention and less stressful, overburdened work environments (Bauer et al., 2006; Dreison et al., 2018; Simbula & Guglielmi, 2010).

Implications of the Study

This study aimed to identify the challenges faced by school psychologists early in their careers as well as the most effective strategies they employ to overcome these obstacles. School psychologists with no more than two years of work experience were able to share their experiences and perspectives on the challenges they face as early career practitioners. Additionally, they could discuss the strategies, tools, and resources they used to overcome the challenges they faced. Early-career school psychologists are able to navigate the transition from students to practitioners with greater ease when provided with resources, support, and mentoring. Therefore, the research findings of this study can have significant implications for graduate training programs and school districts.

Implications on graduate training programs. The findings of this study may be used to enhance and improve the curriculum of school psychology training programs. Most significantly, training programs should focus on preparing students for issues and challenges they will be facing in the field. Although there is great importance on best practices, most ECSPs become overwhelmed because their training does not reflect the issues they face as practitioners.

Furthermore, training programs should develop and implement assignments and learning that creates tangible materials that can be implemented into school psychologists' work. Lastly, school psychology programs should develop a strong alum network that promotes spaces for collaboration for all alums. The development of a networking community will assist in casting light on the various roles of school psychologists and the differences between school districts, thereby assisting recent graduates in selecting a district that meets their needs and aspirations.

Implications on school districts. The findings of this study also highlight the importance of school districts providing various services to support ECSPs. Similar to the implications for training programs, school districts should also create networking opportunities for new practitioners. These networking opportunities will help new school psychologists connect naturally with more seasoned colleagues. In addition to networking opportunities, school districts should also implement formal mentorship programs for their new school psychologists. Mentorship programs will facilitate a smoother professional transition for new psychologists and reduce the burden on immediate supervisors.

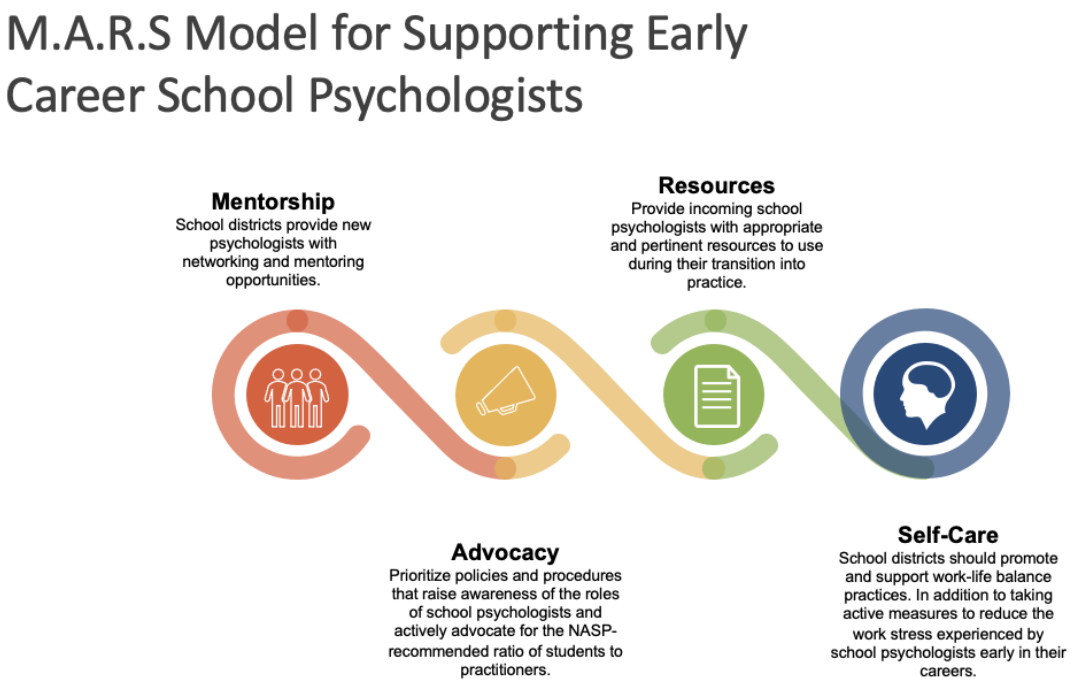
Furthermore, results also indicate the need for school districts to create a database or library of resources that are easily accessible to their practitioners. Due to school psychologists' chaotic and demanding workdays, it would be beneficial to supply them with a designated area equipped with tools and resources to facilitate their work. Additionally, districts must promote and encourage school psychologists' active participation in professional organizations. It is not enough for school districts to solely acknowledge organizations or provide materials from organization websites; they must also offer financial or non-monetary incentives for professional organization participation. Rewards can range from allocated days off for convention attendance, stipends used for convention fees, or stipends for membership fees to professional organizations.

Application

The M.A.R.S Model for Supporting Early Career School Psychologists is a model created by the researcher based on the findings of this study as well as the literature on early career school psychologists (see Figure 11). The M.A.R.S. model is a set of best practices and techniques developed to assist school districts in providing the best support for ECSPs. The model consists of four areas that broadly cover the challenges mentioned both in this study and in the literature. The four areas all cover different areas that can address and help school district and other organizations best support early career school psychologists. The development of these strategies and practices was informed by the experiences of school psychologists in their first two years of practice as well as corresponding literature.

Figure 12

The M.A.R.S Model for Supporting Early Career School Psychologists



Mentorship. The mentorship component addresses the district's responsibility to provide new school psychologists with mentorship opportunities. There are numerous types of mentorships; therefore, districts can promote mentorship through various methods. A formal mentorship program in which new employees are assigned a colleague to function as a mentor is one of the strategies. The next step is to create multiple networking opportunities. These opportunities may result in the formation of a mentor-mentee relationship between coworkers. This step focuses on supporting ECSPs with mentorship that will help them develop professionally.

Advocacy. The advocacy component centers on the responsibility of school districts to provide a safe and suitable work environment for ECSPs to develop and thrive. Promoting the NASP-recommended student-to-practitioner ratio is one of the primary issues addressed in this component. The recommended ratio permits school psychologists to assist schools and communities without feeling overburdened or stressed. In addition, the advocacy component emphasizes the obligation of school districts to educate all other personnel about the role of school psychologists. School districts should ensure that school administrators have a clear understanding of the responsibilities and capabilities of school psychologists in order to maximize their full potential.

Resources. The resource component focuses on the available resources and tools for school psychologists. Even though school psychologists are rigorously trained during their graduate education, they still have learning deficits when entering practice. Therefore, the district is responsible for ensuring that early-career school psychologists have access to adequate resources. Districts should also ensure that these resources are not generic or superficial but rather specific and up to date with regard to the current issues in school psychology. Finally, these resources should be readily accessible to employees and regularly updated.

Self-Care. The final component of self-care emphasizes the significance of maintaining a healthy work-life balance. Districts are accountable for implementing policies that promote the mental health of their early-career school psychologists. In addition, school districts must combat practices and obstacles that contribute to the stress of their early career school psychologies.

Study Conclusion

This qualitative study aimed to identify the obstacles and challenges faced by ECSPs. In addition, it sought to emphasize the strategies, tools, and resources they use to mitigate these challenges. Thirteen school psychologists in their early careers were interviewed and asked 11 open-ended questions to achieve the study's objectives. Following the conclusion of the interviews, the audio recordings were transcribed. The transcriptions of interviews were then coded and analyzed. The results informed four research questions that addressed not only the obstacles school psychologists face early in their careers but also the tools, strategies, and resources they employ to overcome these barriers. The study results and literature findings were used to develop the M.A.R.S Model for Supporting ECSPs, a model intended to assist school districts in supporting and fostering the development of newly employed school psychologists.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study aimed to discover the challenges ECSPs face as they transition from students to practitioners. Additionally, it also sought to highlight the strategies, tools, and resources utilized by ECSPs to overcome these barriers. During the course of this study, opportunities for future research emerged. The recommendations for future research are as follows:

1. Research that is designated to find out what specific NASP Domain of Practice ECSPs have the most difficulty implementing and practicing once they are practitioners. Research on this topic would shed light on what training areas need to be focused on during graduate studies.

2. Design a study on the methods and strategies of mentorship that are more successful in helping ECSPs transition into their careers. This study would specifically look at techniques and strategies that are more beneficial based on the experiences of early career psychologists.
3. Further exploration on the topic of challenges faced by ECSPs. The current study focused primarily on participants that worked in an elementary school setting. Understanding the challenges of ECSPs working in preschool, middle school, and high school settings would be beneficial.
4. Finally, a research analysis exploring the challenges faced by ECSPs across a variety of settings. The current study focused on school psychologists that worked in Los Angeles County, therefore, it would be beneficial to explore the challenges faced by early career practitioners working in rural and suburban areas.

Final Thoughts

As a practicing school psychologist, the researcher thoroughly enjoyed conducting this study. The researcher is very committed to the development of early-career school psychologists and often mentors practicum and internship students. This research shed light on the many challenges that early career practitioners confront during their initial years of practice. The study's participants supplied insightful and critical viewpoints that aided in the formulation of the study.

Moving forward, the researcher hopes that all practitioners new to the field of school psychology have a positive first few years that allow them to grow and develop professionally. In addition, due to the national shortage of school psychologists, the researcher hopes that a greater awareness of school psychology will be created, and that government agencies and school districts will be able to establish improved work environments for all educators. Together with

other school professionals, school psychologists have the capacity to improve the futures of the all the students we serve.

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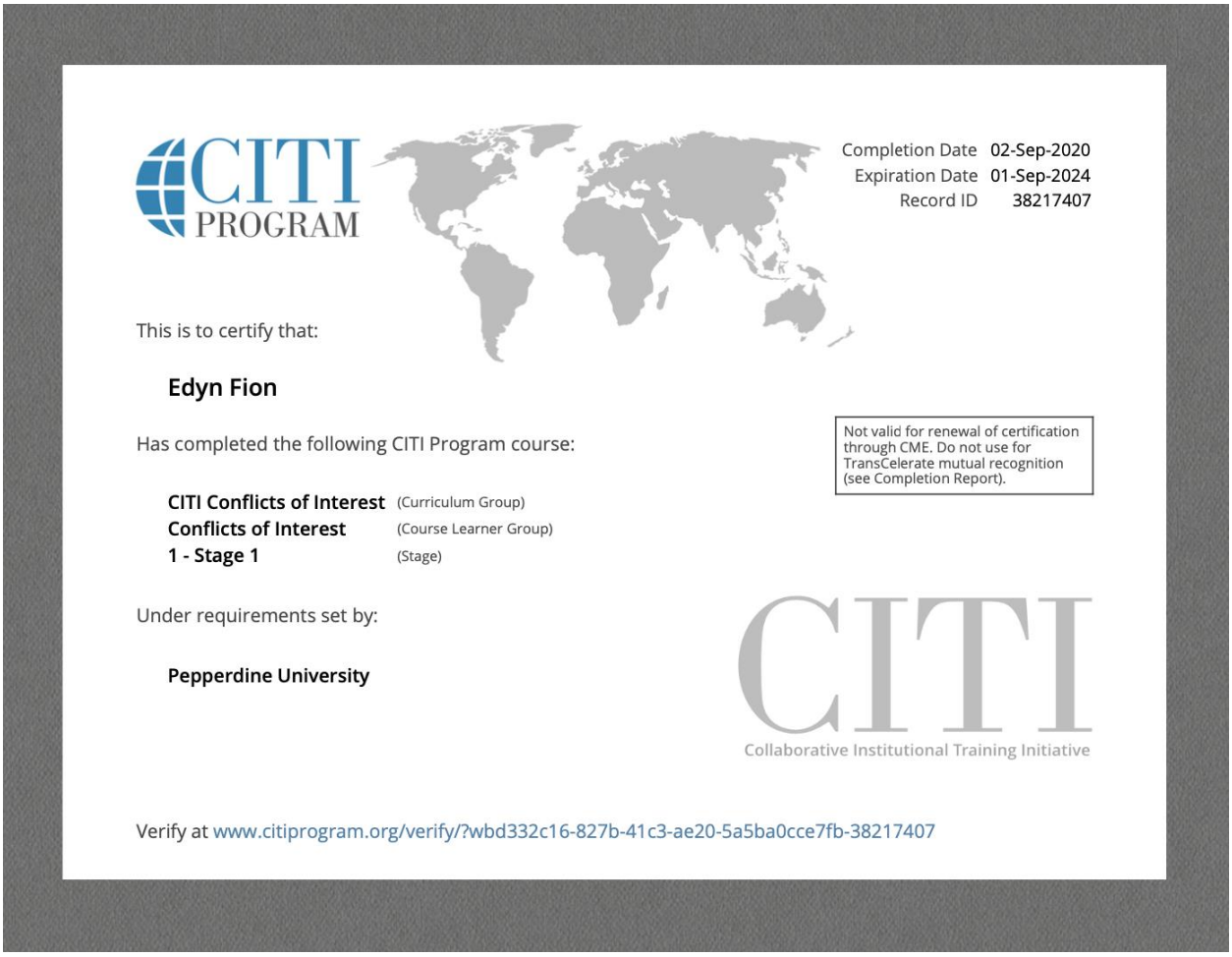
APPENDIX A

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative Certificate



CITI PROGRAM

Completion Date 02-Sep-2020
Expiration Date 01-Sep-2024
Record ID 38217407

This is to certify that:

Edyn Fion

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME. Do not use for TransCelerate mutual recognition (see Completion Report).

CITI Conflicts of Interest (Curriculum Group)
Conflicts of Interest (Course Learner Group)
1 - Stage 1 (Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Pepperdine University

CITI
Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?wbd332c16-827b-41c3-ae20-5a5ba0cce7fb-38217407

APPENDIX B

IRB Approval

Pepperdine University
24255 Pacific Coast Highway
Malibu, CA 90263
TEL: 310-506-4000

NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

Date: March 08, 2023

Protocol Investigator Name: Edyn Fion

Protocol #: 22-09-1945

Project Title: Challenges of Early Career School Psychologists

School: Graduate School of Education and Psychology

Dear Edyn Fion:

Thank you for submitting your application for exempt review to Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). We appreciate the work you have done on your proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. Upon review, the IRB has determined that the above entitled project meets the requirements for exemption under the federal regulations 45 CFR 46.101 that govern the protections of human subjects.

Your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For any proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit an amendment to the IRB. Since your study falls under exemption, there is no requirement for continuing IRB review of your project. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for exemption from 45 CFR 46.101 and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the IRB.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite the best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete written explanation of the event and your written response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the IRB and documenting the adverse event can be found in the Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual at community.pepperdine.edu/irb.

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all communication or correspondence related to your application and this approval. Should you have additional questions or require clarification of the contents of this letter, please contact the IRB Office. On behalf of the IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Sincerely,

Judy Ho, Ph.D., IRB Chair

cc: Mrs. Katy Carr, Assistant Provost for Research

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent

IRB TEMPLATE SOCI FORMED CONSENT

IRB #:

Formal Study Title: Challenges of Early Career School Psychologists

Authorized Study Personnel:

Principal Investigator: Edyn Fion,
edyn.fion@pepperdine.edu

Key Information:

If you agree to participate in this study, the project will involve:

- ☑ (Males and Females) between the ages of (18-80)
- ☑ Procedures will include (Contacting participants using the recruitment script, informed consent, data collection via structured interview, transcription of data, analysis of data, documentation of findings)
- ☑ One virtual visit is required
- ☑ This visit will take 60 minutes total
- ☑ There is minimal risk associated with this study
- ☑ You will not be paid any amount of money for your participation
- ☑ You will be provided a copy of this consent form

Invitation

You are invited to take part in this research study. The information in this form is meant to help you decide whether or not to participate. If you have any questions, please ask.

Why are you being asked to be in this research study?

You are being asked to be in this study because you are a practicing School Psychologist in the state of California working within a public-school district in Los Angeles County with no more than two years as a practitioner. You must be 18 years of age or older to participate.

What is the reason for doing this research study?

The purpose of this study is to determine the challenges Early Career School Psychologists face when entering the field, as well as the strategies they use to overcome these challenges. This research seeks to understand the experiences of ECSPs and what challenges they face as a new School Psychologist. This study set out to determine several issues concerning the experiences of Early Career School Psychologist. The first was to identify the challenges that early career School Psychologists face in their line of work. Secondly, discover the successful strategies and

practices Early Career School Psychologists employ to complete their job duties. Gain an understanding of how Early Career School Psychologists measure their success. Lastly, discover recommendations that ECSPs would make for students that are in the preservice phase of their school psychology training.

What will be done during this research study?
You will be asked to complete a 60-minute semi structured virtual interview via Zoom which will be audio recorded using Otter.ai. The PI will ask you a series of questions aimed at figuring out what strategies are used by leaders in your field. While the research will take approximately 26 to 52 weeks, your interview will only take 60 minutes.

How will my data be used?
Your interview responses will be transcribed, analyzed, and aggregated in order to determine the findings to the established research questions. All recordings will be deleted immediately after the transcription process.

What are the possible risks of being in this research study?
This research presents minimal risk of loss of confidentiality, emotional and/or psychological distress because the interview involves questions about your leadership practices. You may also experience fatigue, boredom, or anxiety as a result.

What are the possible benefits to you?
You are not expected to get any benefit from being in this study.

What are the possible benefits to other people?
The benefits to society may include better understanding of leadership strategies used within your industry. Other emerging leaders might also benefit from any additional recommendations that are shared through this process.

What are the alternatives to being in this research study?
Participation in this study is voluntary. There are no alternatives to participating, other than deciding to not participate.

What will participating in this research study cost you?
There is no cost to you to be in this research study.

Will you be compensated for being in this research study?
There will be no compensation for participating in this study.

What should you do if you have a problem during this research study?
Your welfare is the major concern of every member of the research team. If you have a problem as a direct result of being in this study, you should immediately contact one of the people listed at the beginning of this consent form.

How will information about you be protected?
Reasonable steps will be taken to protect your privacy and the confidentiality of your study data. The data will be deidentified and stored electronically on a password protected desktop computer and will only be seen by the researcher during and until the study is complete.

The interview session will be conducted via the researcher's Pepperdine Zoom account. In order to ensure participants are unidentified, virtual interviews will be conducted via Zoom, and interviews will be recorded via audio. The researcher will use Otter.ai to transcribe recordings. The audio files will be stored on a password-protected desktop computer until transcription is complete and then recordings will be permanently deleted.

The only persons who will have access to your research records are the study personnel, the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and any other person, agency, or sponsor as required by law. The information from this study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings but the data will be reported as group or summarized data and your identity will be kept strictly confidential.

What are your rights as a research subject?
You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study.

For study related questions, please contact the investigator(s) listed at the beginning of this form.

For questions concerning your rights or complaints about the research contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB):
Phone: 1(310)568-2305
Email: gpsirb@pepperdine.edu

What will happen if you decide not to be in this research study or decide to stop participating once you start?

You can decide not to be in this research study, or you can stop being in this research study ("withdraw') at any time before, during, or after the research begins for any reason. Deciding not to be in this research study or deciding to withdraw will not affect your relationship with the investigator or with Pepperdine University.

You will not lose any benefits to which you are entitled.

Documentation of informed consent
You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to be in this research study. Signing this form means that (1) you have read and understood this consent form, (2) you have had the consent form explained to you, (3) you have had your questions answered and (4) you have decided to be in the research study. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

Participant Name: _____

(First, Last: Please Print)

Participant Signature: _____

Signature Date

APPENDIX D

Interview Protocol

1. What would you say was the single most difficult professional challenge you faced early in your career?

   [Follow-up: Tell me what happened and how it affected you.]
2. How did you overcome that challenge?
3. What other challenges did you face early in your career?
4. What strategies and practices did you use to overcome these challenges?

   [Follow-up: Were there institutional resources that you used? Were there opportunities for mentoring? Did local, state, or national school psychologist associations play a role in supporting you?]
5. What are some common strategies, tools, or resources you use outside of work to help overcome the challenges of being an early career school psychologist?
6. Are you aware of challenges faced by others early in their careers?
7. How have they dealt with their challenges?
8. What would have made your early career as a psychologist even more successful?
9. How would you measure and track that?
10. Knowing what you know now, what strategies, tools, or resources would you recommend to other early career school psychologists?
11. What advice would you have for school psychologists who are just starting their careers?

APPENDIX E

Recruitment Script

Hello [NAME],

My name is Edyn Fion, and I am the doctoral student at Pepperdine University who e-mailed you about my study. I am conducting a research study examining the challenges that are faced by Early Career School Psychologist.

You replied to my e-mail and expressed your interest in participating. Do you mind if I ask you a couple questions and schedule a time for our interview?

I want to confirm that you are a practicing School Psychologist, working within a public-school district in Los Angeles County. Are you currently employed in a public-school district? Do you work within Los Angeles County? Have you been practicing for no more than two years?

Thank you for answering those questions. I would like to move forward with scheduling an interview.

I would like to invite you to an online video-based interview through the Zoom platform. I'd like to schedule on (**DATE) at (TIME)**. Does this work for you? The Zoom Link is (LINK) (Meeting ID: ### ### ####).

I want to remind you that your participation in this study is voluntary. **Your identity as a participant will remain confidential during and after the study.** All audio recordings and interview transcripts will be password protected, transcribed, and subsequently deleted. Neither your name nor any identifiable information will be used in the research study.

Thank you for your participation, and I look forward to meeting with you on (**DATE**) at (**TIME**). If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me via phone or e-mail.

Sincerely,

Edyn Fion
Pepperdine University, GSEP
Doctoral Candidate