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Elementary Teachers' Perceptions of the Value of Collaboration with School-Based Occupational Therapists

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ELEMENTARY TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE VALUE OF COLLABORATION
WITH SCHOOL-BASED OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Occupational Therapy

Eastern Kentucky University
College of Health Sciences
Department of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy

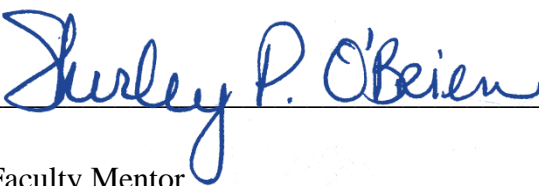
Jennifer Edick, MA, OTR/L
2021

**EASTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF HEALTH SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF OCCUPATIONAL SCIENCE AND OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY**

This project, written by Jennifer Edick under direction of Dr. Shirley O'Brien, Faculty Mentor, and approved by members of the project committee, has been presented and accepted in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

CAPSTONE COMMITTEE



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____11-02-2021____

Date



Committee Member

____11-02-2021____


Date

**EASTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF HEALTH SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF OCCUPATIONAL SCIENCE AND OCCUPATIONAL
THERAPY**

Certification

We hereby certify that this Capstone project, submitted by Jennifer Edick, conforms to acceptable standards and is fully adequate in scope and quality to fulfill the project requirement for the Doctor of Occupational Therapy degree.

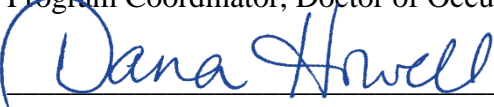
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Program Coordinator, Doctor of Occupational Therapy

__11-02-2021__

Date



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Chair, Department of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy

__11-03-2021__

Date

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Executive Summary

Background: Literature review coupled with needs assessment data indicated that collaborative practices between teachers and occupational therapists might not be happening consistently and may be in need of improvement. Further research is needed to determine elementary teachers' perceptions of the value of collaboration with occupational therapists in order to ensure maximum benefit for the students.

Purpose: This Capstone Project focused on identifying elementary teachers' perceptions of the value of collaboration with occupational therapists and validating the need for improved occupational therapy supports in the school environment.

Theoretical Framework: This Capstone Project was guided by the National Interprofessional Competency Framework (NICF), which is composed of six domains: role clarification, patient/client/family/community-centeredness, team functioning, collaborative leadership, interprofessional communication, and interprofessional conflict resolution.

Methods: An anonymous electronic survey approach was used as the data collection method. The invitation to participate and the survey link were distributed to five school administrators, within the chosen geographic area, whom forwarded the invitation and survey link to their site's teaching staff. The survey included nineteen close-ended questions and one open-ended item for additional comments.

Results: While the majority of the participants indicated having had students receive occupational therapy services (96.05%), only 36.84% (N=28) of the participants reported collaborating often with the occupational therapist to address the needs of the students. 73.68% (N=56) of the participants perceived collaboration with the occupational therapist as valuable for providing effective classroom strategies and having a positive impact on student success. 82.89% of participants reported that more education about school-based occupational therapy would be beneficial.

Conclusions: School-based occupational therapists need to explore ways to improve their collaborative practices with teachers in order to enhance practice outcomes. Occupational therapists should provide educational opportunities for school staff to learn more about their scope of practice and to provide additional classroom strategies.

Acknowledgements

The completion of this Capstone Project would not have been possible without the support of many. I want to offer my heartfelt thanks to the following, who have made the most impact on my doctoral education.

First and foremost, I would like to express my sincerest appreciation and gratitude to my capstone mentor, Dr. Shirley O'Brien, for her encouragement, patience, and guidance throughout my time in the Occupational Therapy Doctorate program. Her leadership, enthusiasm, and support have inspired me as I move forward in my career.

I would also like to thank Dr. Leslie Hardman, capstone committee member. Her insightful comments and thoughtful questions were helpful as I worked through this research project. I would also like to thank the OTD staff at Eastern Kentucky University for their dedicated investment that contributed to my growth and learning as a person and an occupational therapist. Additionally, I want to express my sincere gratitude to the peers in my OTD cohort, many of which have become good friends. These amazing occupational therapists have enhanced my educational journey.

I am especially grateful to my parents, who made this journey possible and supported me every step along the way. It is because of their continuous encouragement that I have successfully completed this Capstone Project and OTD program.

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DEPARTMENT OF OCCUPATIONAL SCIENCE AND OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY**

CERTIFICATION OF AUTHORSHIP

Submitted to (Faculty Mentor's Name): Dr. Shirley O'Brien

Student's Name: Jennifer Edick

Title of Submission: Elementary Teachers' Perceptions of the Value of Collaboration with School-Based Occupational Therapists

Certification of Authorship: I hereby certify that I am the author of this document and that any assistance I received in its preparation is fully acknowledged and disclosed in the document. I have also cited all sources from which I obtained data, ideas, or words that are copied directly or paraphrased in the document. Sources are properly credited according to accepted standards for professional publications. I also certify that this paper was prepared by me for this purpose.

Student's Signature: *Jennifer Edick*

Date of Submission: 11-01-2021

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Section One: Nature of Project and Problem Identification

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a federal law that ensures all children with disabilities have equal access to a free appropriate public education (Public Law 108-446: IDEA 2020). All students are entitled to be included with their general education peers in the school setting. The United States Department of Education (2020) states, “Improving educational results for children with disabilities is an essential element of our national policy of ensuring equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency for individuals with disabilities.” In order to enable access to the school environment and curriculum, many individuals such as teachers, paraprofessionals, and psychologists may contribute to the educational success of students. School-based occupational therapists play a critical role assisting in the social participation and learning of students with disabilities in the educational setting.

According to the American Occupational Therapy Association (2015), approximately twenty percent of employed occupational therapists are known to work in a school setting. In order to provide best practice, it is essential for school-based occupational therapists to clearly define their role for school staff and engage in consistent communication exchanges through collaboration. Occupational therapists practicing in school settings support the learning needs of the students. In order to ensure implementation and follow-through of the learning strategies, communication with the classroom teachers is essential. Interprofessional collaboration is important for the effectiveness of occupational therapy services, especially in school settings when considering the impact of consistent approaches for the students. Within the school environment, collaboration between occupational therapists and teachers, in addition to all other team members, is critical for the success of the students (Truong & Hodgetts, 2017). It is doubly

important to understand and reinforce the role of the occupational therapist at the elementary school level, where focus is on developing and reinforcing foundational skills for student learning.

Problem Statement

Needs assessment survey data collected from elementary school teachers in a western state indicated that although teachers have had students that have received school-based occupational therapy services, they are commonly not aware of the full scope of practice of the occupational therapists (Edick, 2020). In addition, most teachers feel that occupational therapists have a positive impact on student learning, however data collected revealed that collaboration between the teachers and the occupational therapists is not consistent (Edick, 2020). Even with the knowledge of the importance of these practices in the school setting, often times school staff are unaware of the occupational therapist's role and value and therefore, beneficial collaborative practices may not happen as consistently as they should. Literature review coupled with needs assessment data verified that further research is needed to understand teachers' perceptions of occupational therapy in order to provide best practice for the students.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this Capstone Project was to explore elementary teachers' perceptions of the value of collaboration with occupational therapists in the school system. This Capstone Project investigated how the teachers' understanding about the role functions of occupational therapists impacts their perceived value of collaboration with the occupational therapists. The goal of this Capstone Project was to gain knowledge of teachers' perceptions of the value of collaboration with the occupational therapists in order to ensure that occupational therapists are maximizing student success through effective interprofessional collaboration.

Project Objectives

1. Determine the perceptions of elementary teachers on their understanding of the scope of practice of school-based occupational therapists.
2. Determine the perceptions of elementary teachers on the value of collaboration with school-based occupational therapists.
3. Identify the need for improved collaborative school-based occupational therapy supports.

Theoretical Framework

This research for this Capstone Project was guided by the National Interprofessional Competency Framework (NICF). Utilizing this framework offered an approach to exploring interprofessional skills that are needed to provide best practice (Tyszka & DiLuzio, 2015). The NICF consists of six domains: role clarification, patient/client/family/community-centeredness, team functioning, collaborative leadership, interprofessional communication, and interprofessional conflict resolution (Tyszka & DiLuzio, 2015).

According to Tyszka & DiLuzio (2015), role clarification is the first domain of the NICF and describes how successful collaboration is built on all individuals understanding their own roles and the roles of the other professionals. Clinicians can use this knowledge to address the clients' goals (Tyszka & DiLuzio, 2015). School-based occupational therapists need to be clear when articulating their role to the teachers, staff, and service providers. Additionally, when role clarification is clear, there will be more respect and value for the skills of each team member (Tyszka & DiLuzio, 2015).

The second domain of the NICF is patient/client/family/community-centeredness which focuses on the clients' perspective (Tyszka & DiLuzio, 2015). By designing and implementing services through easily understood and respectful communication, the team can obtain feedback

and work together more effectively for the benefit of the client (Tyszka & DiLuzio, 2015). Occupational therapy is based on being client-centered and aiding the clients with achieving unique meaningful outcomes. By focusing on the perspective of the client and/or family, individualized meaningful activities can be designed and implemented by the team.

Team functioning is the third domain of the NICF and focuses on understanding the inner-workings of team dynamics (Tyszka & DiLuzio, 2015). Understanding team dynamics enables more effective interprofessional collaboration by successfully working together with mutual respect (Tyszka & DiLuzio, 2015). It is essential for school-based occupational therapists to understand team dynamics in order to be valued and effective members of the students' professional team.

The fourth domain of the NICF is collaborative leadership which emphasizes the team working together and sharing in the decision-making process (Tyszka & DiLuzio, 2015). Each team member is held accountable for their role and responsibilities as an individual and within the group (Tyszka & DiLuzio, 2015). When these aspects are incorporated, they will support more effective collaborative practices. School-based occupational therapists work as part of a team that shares interdisciplinary responsibility for the success of the student.

Interprofessional communication is the fifth domain of the NICF and focuses on the communication between each individual from varying professions (Tyszka & DiLuzio, 2015). It is essential for school-based occupational therapists to engage in ongoing communication with the other professionals to establish a common trust and respect for one another. Maintaining transparency and an open line of communication is important for effective interprofessional collaboration (Tyszka & DiLuzio, 2015).

The final domain of the NICF is interprofessional conflict resolution which emphasizes active engagement of the professionals to address disagreements constructively (Tyszka & DiLuzio, 2015). When school-based occupational therapists are able to constructively work through conflicts, it demonstrates the value of finding common positive outcomes (Tyszka & DiLuzio, 2015). Setting guidelines for addressing conflicts is helpful to create a safe place for diverse opinions (Tyszka & DiLuzio, 2015).

Significance of the Study to Practice

Occupational therapists are valuable team members in the educational setting. As school-based occupational therapy becomes more prevalent, it is important that teachers and occupational therapists are knowledgeable about the roles of one another to collaborate effectively for the benefit of the students. Occupational therapists support the students by focusing on the important occupations within the school environment (AOTA, 2020). Focusing on the elementary school collaborative relationship is especially important when considering the development of the students' foundational skills. During the primary years, children learn at a faster rate than at any other time in their lives, making it a vital period for cognitive, social, and emotional skill development (OECD, 2018). Literature examined indicated that teachers are not always aware of the role of occupational therapists in the school setting and that interprofessional collaboration is not happening consistently (Fairbairn & Davidson, 1993; Peabody & Demanchick, 2016; Truong & Hodgetts, 2017). Further study could determine how to more clearly define the role of school-based occupational therapists and how to implement consistent collaboration for best practice. With more understanding in this area of practice, educational districts will learn the value of occupational therapy in the school environment. Additionally,

more understanding in this area of practice will also highlight the importance of the teacher-occupational therapist relationship for the maximum benefit of the students' development.

Summary

According to AOTA (2020), school-based occupational therapists “help children fulfill their role as students and prepare them for college, career, and community integration.” In addition, “they utilize prevention, promotion, and intervention strategies for mental and physical health and well-being” (AOTA, 2020). For school-based occupational therapists to continue to meet the complex needs of the students, their role in the school setting needs to be clearly defined and there must be consistent interprofessional collaboration with the teachers. Results of the needs assessment concur with the examined literature that more research should be completed to explore teachers' perceptions about scope of practice of the school-based occupational therapists and their collaborative practices (Edick, 2020). The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of elementary teachers on the value of collaboration with school-based occupational therapists. An outcome of this research was to gather evidence to reinforce the need for future supports of school-based occupational therapy practices to maximize the effectiveness for the students.

Section Two: Detailed Review of the Literature

Occupational therapists have been identified as key members of the school environment since 1975 when the Education for All Handicapped Children Act was enacted (Colman, 1988). Alongside a variety of other professionals, occupational therapists add valuable input regarding how to provide an education that is appropriate and for students with disabilities. School-based occupational therapists use their role to provide effective services to students with disabilities. However, no one discipline can meet the complex needs of the students single-handedly

(Peabody & Demanchick, 2016). For this reason, it is essential that occupational therapists ensure clarity of their role and advocate for their place in school systems to safeguard effective collaborative practices.

The Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE, 2018) standards regarding interprofessional collaboration practices and advocacy are found in sections B.4.0 (Referral, Screening, Evaluation, and Intervention Plan) and B.5.0 (Context of Service Delivery, Leadership, and Management of Occupational Therapy Services). Standard B.4.25 states, “Demonstrate knowledge of the principles of interprofessional team dynamics to perform effectively in different team roles to plan, deliver, and evaluate patient and population-centered care as well as population health programs and policies that are safe, timely, efficient, effective, and equitable” (Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education, p. 33). Additionally, B.5.2 states, “Identify, analyze, and advocate for existing and future service delivery models and policies, and their potential effect on the practice of occupational therapy and opportunities to address societal needs” (Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education, p. 34). Thus, entry level practice requires strong foundational experience in interprofessional collaboration and the ability to advocate for more effective policies.

Although occupational therapists are familiar with the concepts of being part of an interprofessional team and developing service delivery models, the literature reveals that this area of practice requires more research to determine if these concepts are being applied consistently and appropriately. Utilizing these concepts effectively in daily practice not only supports the ACOTE standards, but also enhances the profession of occupational therapy and the effectiveness of occupational therapy services. The literature review for this study included searches through AOTA, Google Scholar, and PubMed, in addition to the libraries at Eastern

Kentucky University. Search terms for this review included: school-based occupational therapy, interprofessional collaboration, special education, teacher perceptions, teacher collaboration, interprofessional practice, advocacy, service model, and effective collaboration.

Scope of Practice

According to the NICF, role clarification is foundational for successful collaboration (Tyszka & DiLuzio, 2015). Knowing the roles of one's own profession coupled with being familiar with the roles of other colleagues is essential for addressing the clients' goals. School-based occupational therapists will be utilized more effectively if their colleagues are aware of their entire scope of practice.

Occupational therapists are employed in the schools to provide support for eligible students (Colman, 1988; Public Law 108-446: IDEA 2020). School-based occupational therapists support students by assisting with daily functional activities and skills. According to the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA, 2016), school-based occupational therapists "support academic and non-academic outcomes, including social skills, math, reading and writing, behavior management, recess, participation in sports, self-help skills, prevocational/vocational participation, transportation, and more." The roles of occupational therapists that work in a school setting have been developing to meet the ever-growing needs of the students. It is crucial that teachers are aware of these expanded roles, as they cover all areas of the school environment.

In a literature review conducted by Bissell & Cermak (2015), it was indicated that the role of occupational therapy has recently been expanding in the school setting with responsibilities including "general education, administration, advocacy, curriculum planning, and service delivery coordination" (pp. 50). School-based occupational therapists assist eligible

students with their participation in the general education curriculum in addition to facilitating inclusion with peers throughout the school day. With their ever-expanding roles, occupational therapists have had to adapt their practice to the evolving school systems and the complex needs of today's students (Bissell & Cermak, 2015). Ultimately, school-based occupational therapists support the needs of the students by ensuring their access to education and social participation in the least restrictive environment.

According to a survey study completed by Benson, Szucs, and Mejasic (2016), occupational therapists often face limitations in the school system, which hinders best practice. These limitations may include school staff's lack of knowledge about the scope of practice of occupational therapy, lack of time or value for communication, and/or high caseload numbers. Outcomes of this study indicated that occupational therapists need to educate school staff about their role and build awareness of the value of school-based occupational therapy (Benson et al., 2016). Occupational therapists must inform staff and personnel of their expansive role in the school setting in order to increase knowledge and understanding. With increased understanding about the role and value of school-based occupational therapy, collaborative practices and system change become more possible.

Interprofessional Collaboration

Being able to respectfully communicate and collaborate with other team members ultimately benefits the client. The NICF recognizes the importance of the team being client-centered in order to achieve meaningful outcomes (Tyszka & DiLuzio, 2015). Collaboration is most effective when everyone has a common client-centered goal and can view that goal from a wider and more inclusive lens. The team also needs to ensure positive and respectful interprofessional communication (Tyska & DiLuzio). Understanding the inner-workings of team

functioning will result in more successful interprofessional collaboration due to the mutual respect and active listening from each profession as they work together toward a common goal.

Friend and Cook (2000) defined collaboration as “a specific style of interaction characterized by a volunteer contribution and the equal status of all parties to engage in the collaborative process as they work toward a common goal.” Effective collaboration is essential when addressing client-centered goals. Collaboration between occupational therapists and teachers, in addition to all other team members, is critical for the success of the students (Truong & Hodgetts, 2017). When engaged in effective collaboration within the school environment, improvements can be noted in the outcomes of the students’ goals. According to Friend and Cook (2000), “when the parties collaborate, they will also share decision making, resources, and accountability for outcomes and will eventually appreciate each other’s interpersonal style and develop mutual trust.” With effective collaboration practices comes a decrease in potential conflicts and an increase in more efficient communication.

Kennedy and Stewart (2012) conducted a study that explored the collaborative experiences between occupational therapists and teachers. This study concluded that with adequate collaboration between the teacher and the occupational therapist, the teacher’s perception of progress increases (Kennedy & Stewart, 2012). To guarantee best practice, occupational therapists need to ensure that they have a collaborative relationship with the teachers. Effective collaboration includes adequate time for scheduled meetings, consistent communication, and flexibility (Shasby & Schneck, 2011). Existing studies have revealed that occupational therapists are not consistently utilizing best collaborative practices in school settings (Barnes & Turner, 2001; Benson et al., 2016; Peabody & Demanchick, 2016; Truong & Hodgetts, 2017). Interprofessional collaboration practices need to be explored on a larger scale to

determine how occupational therapists can maximize the quality of their services as part of a diverse team.

Service Delivery Models

The NICF identifies the importance of understanding the inner-workings of team dynamics and working together to share in the decision-making process (Tyszka & DiLuzio, 2015). In order for occupational therapists to follow best practice with teachers and other team members, they must have appropriate time to participate in formal collaboration. Service delivery models need to be examined to ensure that occupational therapists are able to provide quality best practice.

High caseloads create a significant barrier to effective communication practices and can hinder the quality of school-based occupational therapy services. Caseload models are based on the specific number of students receiving service and can produce less flexibility in the schedule in addition to decreased formal collaboration time with the teachers. Utilization of a caseload model often results in not always being able to manage all workload responsibilities (Seruya & Garfinkel, 2020). Providing services within the natural and least restrictive environment supports best practice, however school-based occupational therapists often use a pull-out model for the students' services due to limitations with scheduling and flexibility (Seruya & Garfinkel, 2018). Lack of communication coupled with pull-out services may create problems with communication, follow through, and generalization of skills within the classroom setting.

In recent years, there has been a proposed paradigm shift from caseload to workload for occupational therapy practice (Ball, 2018). Workload models allow for the appropriate apportioned time for treatment, paperwork, collaboration, and other workload responsibilities. Increased flexibility through a workload model, enables the occupational therapists to work

within the classroom more often, ultimately benefiting the teacher and the student in the natural learning environment (Casillas, 2010). This shift away from caseload numbers requires collecting relevant data reflecting how time is distributed each day, analyzing the data to determine the changes that need to be made to improve the impact of interventions, and educating the policy and decision makers (Ball, 2018). Presenting this type of data to the administrators and policy makers is essential when advocating for occupational therapy's place in the school system.

Advocacy

Advocating for the profession of occupational therapy in the school system is extremely important for the quality of services. According to NICF, school-based occupational therapists should demonstrate collaborative leadership and need to be able to use effective interprofessional conflict resolution to address disagreements constructively (Tyszka & DiLuzio, 2015). By actively engaging in productive discussions with diverse opinions, occupational therapists can impact policy and establish value for occupational therapy within the school environment.

ACOTE standards express that occupational therapists have a responsibility to advocate for the profession, services, and policies (2018). A study by Benson et al. (2016) found that teachers believe occupational therapists are important to the success of the students however, they expressed frustration related to school system limitations regarding the occupational therapists' minimal flexibility with time. School-based occupational therapists have a duty to advocate for systems and policies that enhance the quality of their services. Occupational therapists commonly experience high caseloads which contribute to decreased collaboration time with the teachers and other school personnel (Benson et al., 2016). In order to improve interprofessional collaboration, occupational therapists need to advocate for their place within

the school systems and the importance of having adequate formal communication time. It is crucial for occupational therapists to have a voice in the educational system in order to establish value, importance, and improved practices for the profession (Benson et al., 2016).

Conclusion

Study of the existing literature provided background information and support for the need to further explore elementary teachers' perceptions regarding the value of collaboration with school-based occupational therapists. Four distinct themes were formed from this literature review. In the first theme, the researcher explored the full scope of practice of occupational therapists within the school setting, as defined by the American Occupational Therapy Association (2016). Secondly, the theme of interprofessional collaboration was discussed and found to be essential for effectively addressing the needs of the students. The impact of service delivery models on communication and the quality of services was considered. Finally, the importance of advocacy for the profession of occupational therapy to ensure quality of service was examined.

Section Three: Methods

Project Design

The primary purpose of this quantitative cross-sectional study was to examine the perceptions of elementary teachers related to school-based occupational therapy through the use of an anonymous online survey via Qualtrics software. Creswell & Creswell (2018) explain that utilization of a survey design approach can provide information on trends in the general opinions of the sampled population. In addition, sample surveys allow for easy access to more participants, which aids in providing more generalized information (Community Toolbox, 2020). A literature review was conducted using web-based searches through Google Scholar, PubMed,

and the libraries at Eastern Kentucky University to gain useful information to formulate relevant survey questions. Prior to conducting the research, the study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at Eastern Kentucky University. The urban geographic region and population were selected for this study based on the elementary school districts directly employing full-time occupational therapists. The online survey link was distributed to elementary school site administrators in the geographic area. Administrators were requested to forward the email, containing the survey link, to their full-time teachers for completion.

This study's outcomes may contribute to further understanding of teachers' perceptions of school-based occupational therapy and their collaborative relationships with the occupational therapists. Additionally, this study's outcomes may provide important information to improve school-based occupational therapy's collaborative practices. Outcomes from this research study could also lead to increased educational opportunities for school staff and administrators as occupational therapists advocate for the value of the profession and educational policy.

Setting

Due to the study being an anonymous online survey, there was no specific setting for research or intervention. The Qualtrics software through Eastern Kentucky University was utilized to create, distribute, and analyze the survey results.

Participants

Participants for this study were full-time general education and special education elementary teachers employed within the urban public school district in a western state. Within the district in this geographic region, elementary school districts directly employ occupational therapists, while high school districts commonly contract outside of the district for related services. Teachers were included to participate in the study if they were currently teaching full-

time in a kindergarten to sixth grade classroom. Participants were excluded if they were not teaching full-time or teaching outside of the grade range. After obtaining Institutional Review Board approval, the administrators' contact information was gathered and utilized to distribute the online survey link through email.

Instrument Development

The twenty-item survey instrument was created specifically for this cross-sectional research study and was paired with Qualtrics software to distribute in an online format. Programs such as Qualtrics can aid with data collection and data analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The aim of this survey was to gather information about teachers' perceptions of the value of collaboration with occupational therapists. The survey content was developed based on data collected from a needs assessment survey, literature review, conversations with teachers, and daily clinical practice observations. The participants were asked to complete the anonymous electronic survey that contained nineteen close-ended questions, which were divided into three sections. The first section collected general demographic information of the teachers. The second section gathered information regarding their teaching experience. The final section explored information related to the research question and purpose of the study. Additionally, the last survey item was left open for optional typed comments. Upon completion of the survey, data was stored in the Qualtrics software for analysis. The teachers were given four weeks for completion with a reminder email sent to the administrators after the first two weeks.

Procedures

A recruitment email explaining the purpose of the study and containing a link to the electronic survey was distributed to five public elementary school site administrators within the urban geographic area. The administrators were requested to forward the email to their full-time

teaching staff. The participants (teachers) were asked to access the online survey via a secure link. Once the teachers entered the survey site, they were presented with a full explanation of the study's purpose and details, timelines, description of voluntary participation, and consent. Participants were also notified that completing the survey served as consent to participate.

Outcome Measures

After the four-week timeline for completion, the researcher determined the total number of participants that completed the survey. Return rate could not be predetermined because the invitation surveys were sent directly to the administrators, however at the time of the study, 104 teachers were known to be employed full-time. To maintain anonymity, a teacher list was not obtained. In order to analyze the participants' perceptions about collaboration with school-based occupational therapists, this study utilized descriptive statistics in the form of percentage values to determine the frequency and variation of the survey responses. Demographic information such as gender and age were also factored into the statistical analysis for clarity consideration.

“Descriptive statistics are used to describe the social and demographic characteristics of the study sample and are also used in descriptive studies to summarize data” (Taylor, 2017, pp. 141). The results were depicted in the form of narrative, tables, and figures for reference. The Qualtrics software was used to develop tables and figures in order to appropriately describe the outcomes of the study.

Validity

Researchers are responsible for validating the conclusions of the data analysis to determine the validity of the study (Kielhofner & Coster, 2017). Face validity refers to an assessment being relevant and meaningful to the purpose of the study (Kielhofner & Coster, 2017). The survey instrument, developed specifically for this study, consisted of items regarding

school-based occupational therapy and interprofessional collaboration, both of which coincide with the purpose of the study and the research objectives. Content validity signifies the sufficiency with which the study's assessment defines and captures the field it intends to measure (Kielhofner & Coster, 2017). In order to ensure content validity, this study's survey content was designed based on existing literature and professional review. The survey items were field tested by a group of experienced teachers prior to initiating the formal study. The survey also included an operational definition of 'collaboration' for consistency. As stated in the survey, "Collaboration will be defined as the formal and informal interactive processes among teachers and related-service personnel for planning, development, and monitoring of interdisciplinary interventions" (Barnes & Turner, 2001, pp. 83). All of the participants completed the same electronic survey and therefore, there was no difference in the content or treatment of the participants. Utilizing an electronic survey helped to increase the sample size, however the study may need to be repeated with a larger number of participants across a greater geographic area in the future to ensure generalized results for validity.

Ethical Considerations

Following the Occupational Therapy Code of Ethics (2015), this research study will provide "comprehensive, accurate, and objective information when representing the profession." Creswell & Creswell (2018) discuss the need for researchers to anticipate ethical issues that may occur throughout the duration of the study. This quantitative survey study considered the teachers' opinion of the survey and questions along with the impact of the results. In order to prevent this ethical issue, field testing and review of the survey questions were utilized. Potential risk to the participants were considered to be minimal due to the anonymity of the study. By obtaining Institutional Review Board approval from Eastern Kentucky University, the ethical

consideration of disclosing only favorable results that could harm participants was avoided. All results are reported honestly and without bias. This research study did not have a financial cost associated with it but did require participation of elementary teachers to allow for a meaningful study.

Table 1. Capstone Timeline

Completion Date	Result
July 2020	Finalized Capstone Project topic Needs Assessment Completed
October 2020	Explanation email and consent forms drafted
October 27, 2020	Survey content completed
November 3, 2020	Submitted IRB application
November 11, 2020	Received IRB approval
December 10, 2020	Survey completed in Qualtrics software
January 25, 2021	Email with survey link sent to administrators
March 11, 2021	2-week reminder email sent to administrators
March 25, 2021	Due date for survey completion
October 21, 2021	Capstone paper completed
October 22, 2021	Capstone Project presentation completed

Section 4: Results and Discussion

Introduction

The data that was collected and analyzed revealed perceptions regarding the understanding of the role of school-based occupational therapists, the impact of occupational therapy strategies on students, and the value of interprofessional collaboration. Five site

administrators distributed the survey to an estimated total of 104 teachers. A total of 84 surveys were logged as initiated, with 76 surveys being fully completed (90.4%). The 8 partially completed surveys were not included in the data analysis for this study.

Results

The Qualtrics program generated the data reports that were utilized for statistical analysis of the multiple-choice responses. Most of the participants (92.11%) were female and reported being between the ages of 31 to 60 years (84.22%) as shown in Table 2. Of 76 participants 49 (64.47%) participants noted having between 11 and 30 years of teaching experience (see Table 3). When asked about their highest level of education, 94.73% (N=72) indicated having a Bachelor's or Master's Degree (see Table 3). Additionally, 67 (88.16%) participants reported currently teaching general education while 9 (11.84%) participants reported having a primary teaching role in a special education classroom (see Table 3). As demonstrated in Table 3, the participants were asked about their current teaching grade level and 64.47% (N=49) indicated teaching in grades three to six.

Table 2. General Demographics

Demographic Component	Number of Participants	Percentage of Participants
Gender		
Male	6	7.89%
Female	70	92.11%
Other	0	0%
Age Group		
21-30 years	6	7.89%
31-45 years	32	42.11%
46-60 years	32	42.11%
61-70 years	5	6.58%
71+ years	1	1.32%

Table 3: Teaching Experience

Demographic Component	Number of Participants	Percentage of Participants
Years Employed as a Teacher		
Less than 5 years	9	11.84%
6-10 years	12	15.79%
11-20 years	25	32.89%
21-30 years	24	31.58%
More than 30 years	6	7.89%
Highest Level of Education		
Associate Degree	0	0%
Bachelor's Degree	30	39.47%
Master's Degree	42	55.26%
Post Graduate Degree	4	5.26%
Primary Teaching Role		
General Education	67	88.16%
Special Education	9	11.84%
Current Grade Level		
Kindergarten	13	17.11%
1 st – 2 nd grade	14	18.42%
3 rd – 4 th grade	24	31.58%
5 th – 6 th grade	25	32.89%

Participants were asked whether they have had students in their class that have received school-based occupational therapy services. Of 76 participants, 73 (96.05%) reported having had students that had received occupational therapy services (see Figure 1). In contrast, when asked if they had ever referred a student for an occupational therapy evaluation or occupational therapy services, 64.47% (N=49) of the participants indicated that they had while 35.53% (N=27) indicated they had not (see Figure 4).

Figure 1: Number of Participants That Have Had Students Receive Occupational Therapy Services

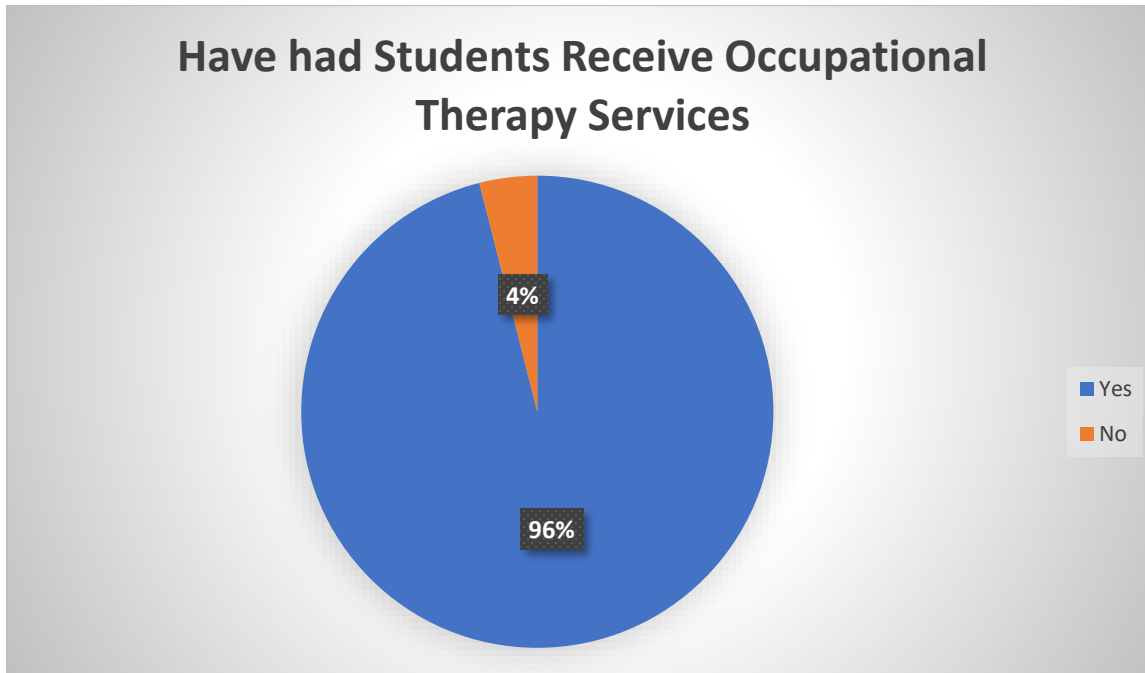
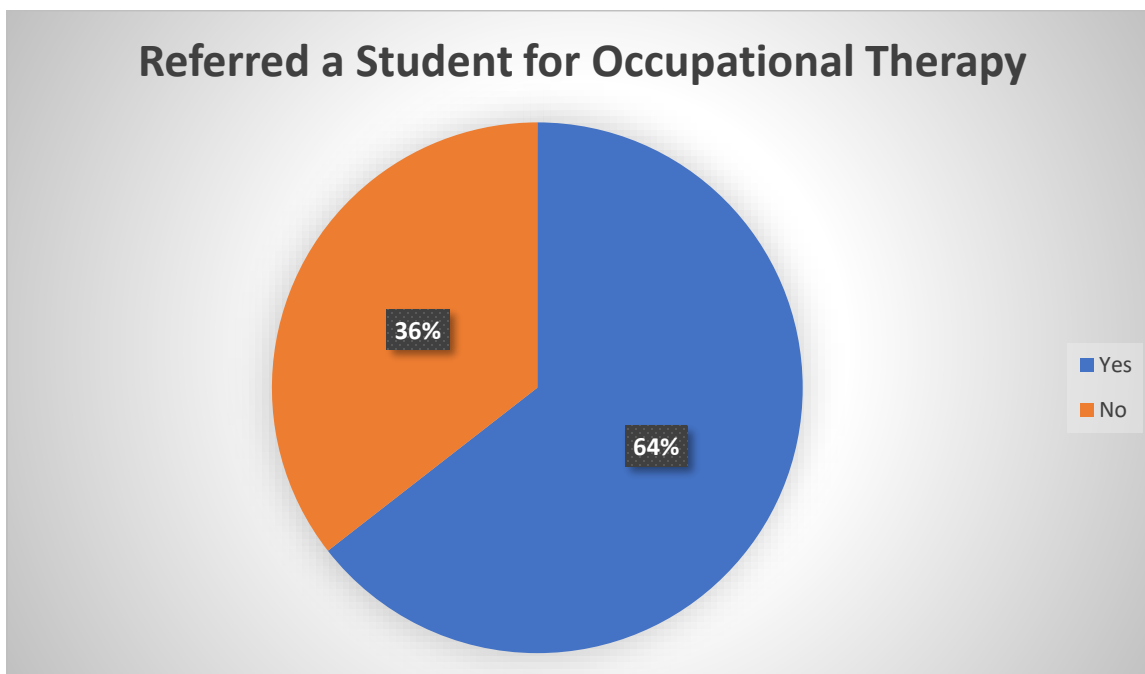


Figure 2: Number of Participants That Have Referred a Student to Occupational Therapy



Participants were asked about their understanding of the role of occupational therapists in the school setting. Of 76 responses, 46 (60.53%) indicated that they often understand the role of school-based occupational therapists (see Figure 3). Participants were asked about the availability of the occupational therapists to provide consultation for suggestions. Approximately half (51.32%) of the participants noted that the occupational therapists are available for consultation often, while 11.84% (N=9) of participants responded that the occupational therapists are rarely or never available for consultation as summarized in Figure 4. When asked about how often they collaborate with the occupational therapist to address the learning needs of their students, 36.84% (N=28) of the participants revealed that they collaborate with the occupational therapist often. In contrast, 26.32% (N=20) of the participants indicated that they collaborate with the occupational therapist rarely or never (see Figure 5). Participants were asked if the amount of time they collaborate with the occupational therapist is adequate. Of 76 responses, 59 (77.63%) participants noted that the amount of collaboration time was often or sometimes adequate, while 27 (22.37%) participants indicated that the amount of collaboration time was rarely or never adequate as shown in Figure 6.

Figure 3: Understanding of the Role of Occupational Therapists in the School Setting

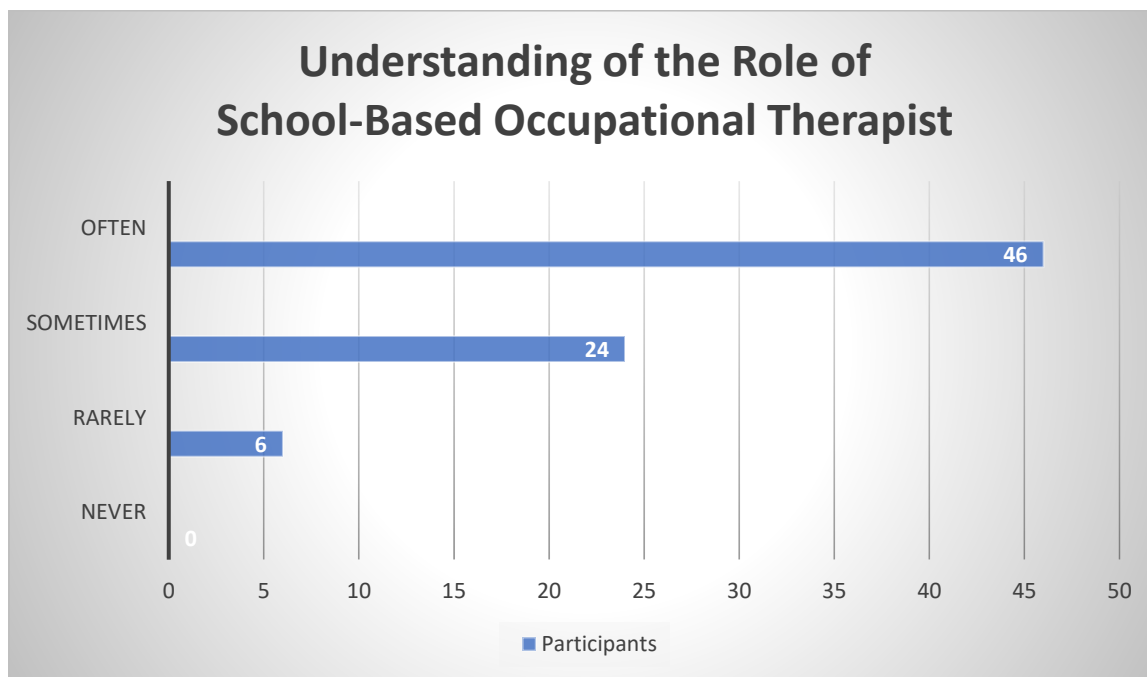


Figure 4: Availability of Occupational Therapists for Consultation

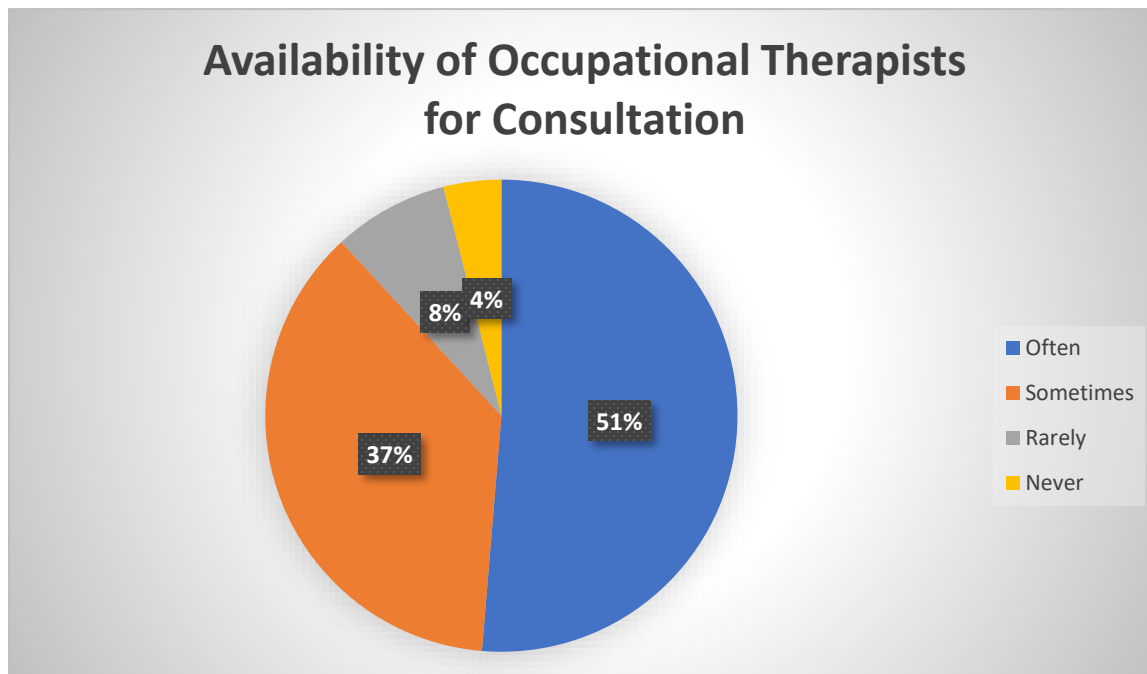


Figure 5: Collaborate with the Occupational Therapist to Address Student Learning Needs

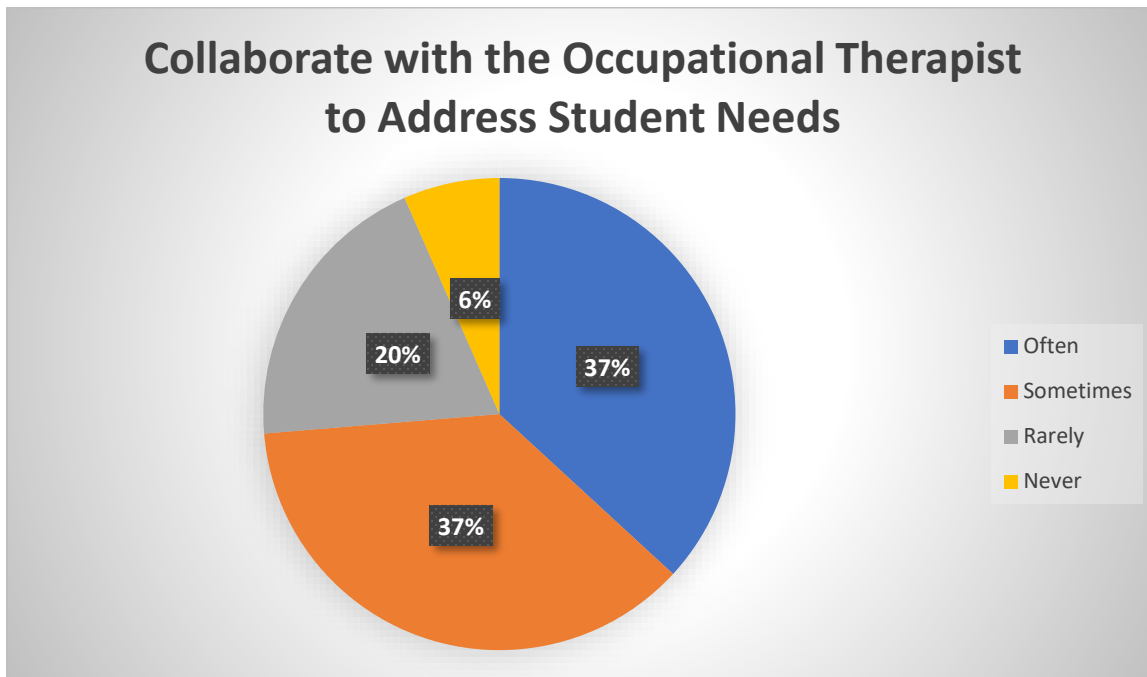
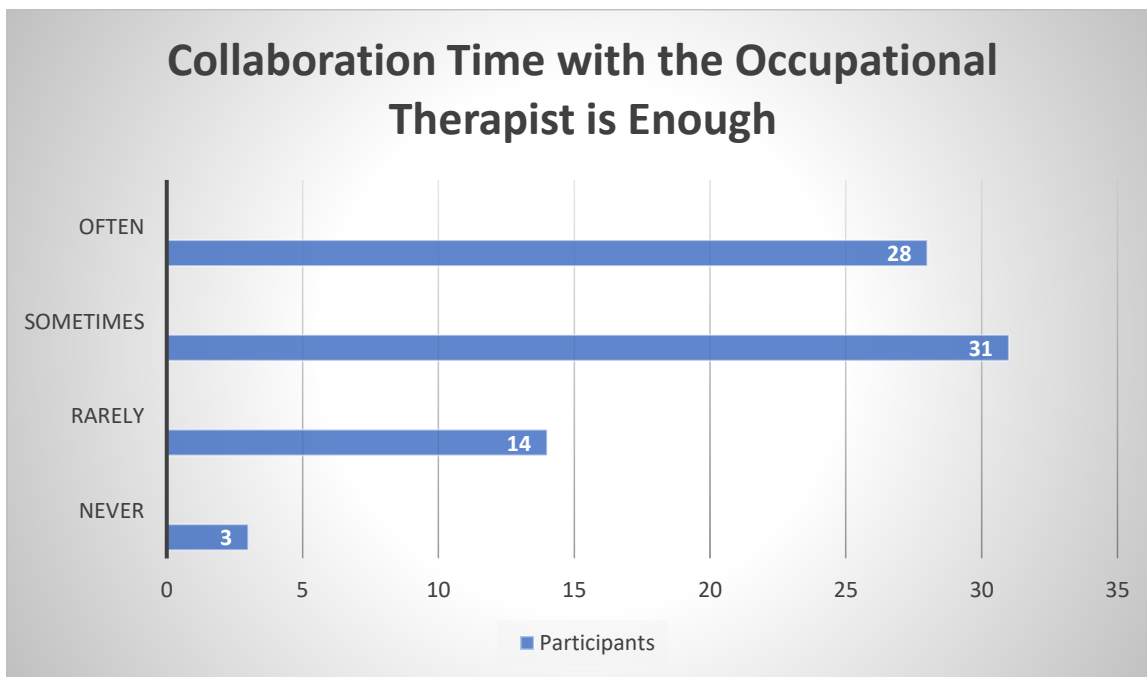


Figure 6: Collaboration Time with the Occupational Therapist is Enough



When asked about collaboration with occupational therapist for providing effective classroom strategies, 73.68% (N=56) of participants reported that the collaboration is often valuable (see Figure 7). Similarly, 73.68% (N=56) of participants often feel that collaboration with the occupational therapist has a positive impact on the success of the students (see Figure 8). 82.89% (N=63) of participants felt that it would be beneficial to learn more about the role of occupational therapists in the school setting (see Figure 9). 84.21% (N=64) of participants stated that they would like to learn more classroom strategies from the occupational therapists (see Figure 10). Overall, 65.79% (N=50) of participants reported a need for more formal collaboration time with the occupational therapist (see Figure 11).

Figure 7: Collaboration with the Occupational Therapist is Valuable for Providing Effective Classroom Strategies

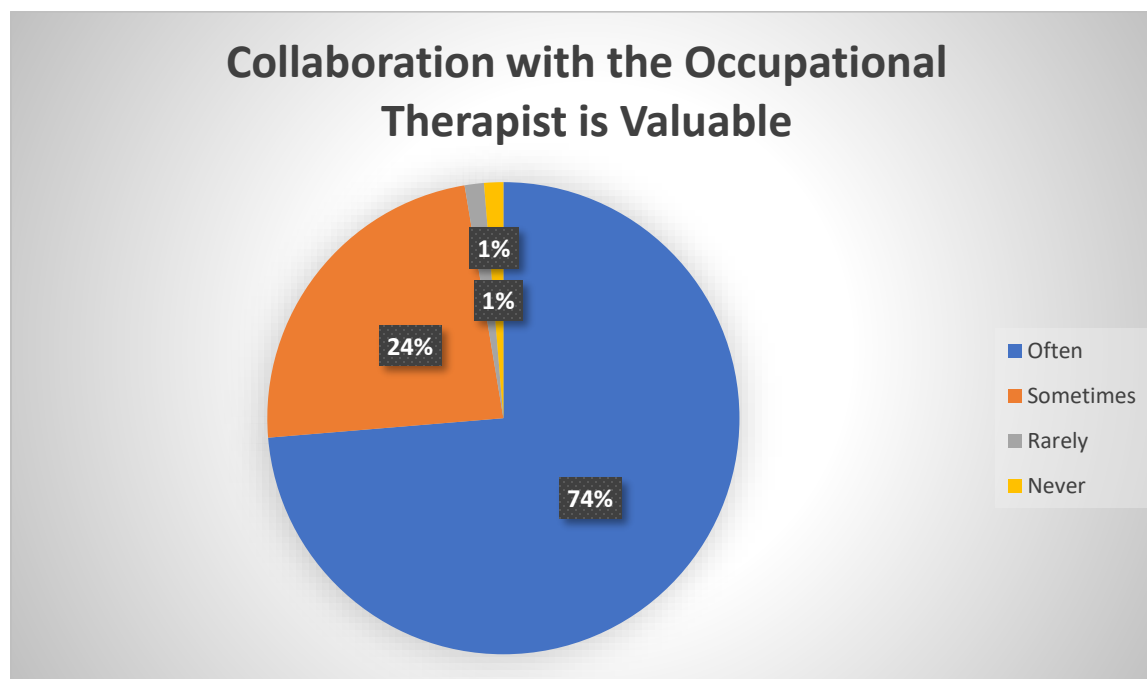


Figure 8: Collaboration with the Occupational Therapist has a Positive Impact on Student Success

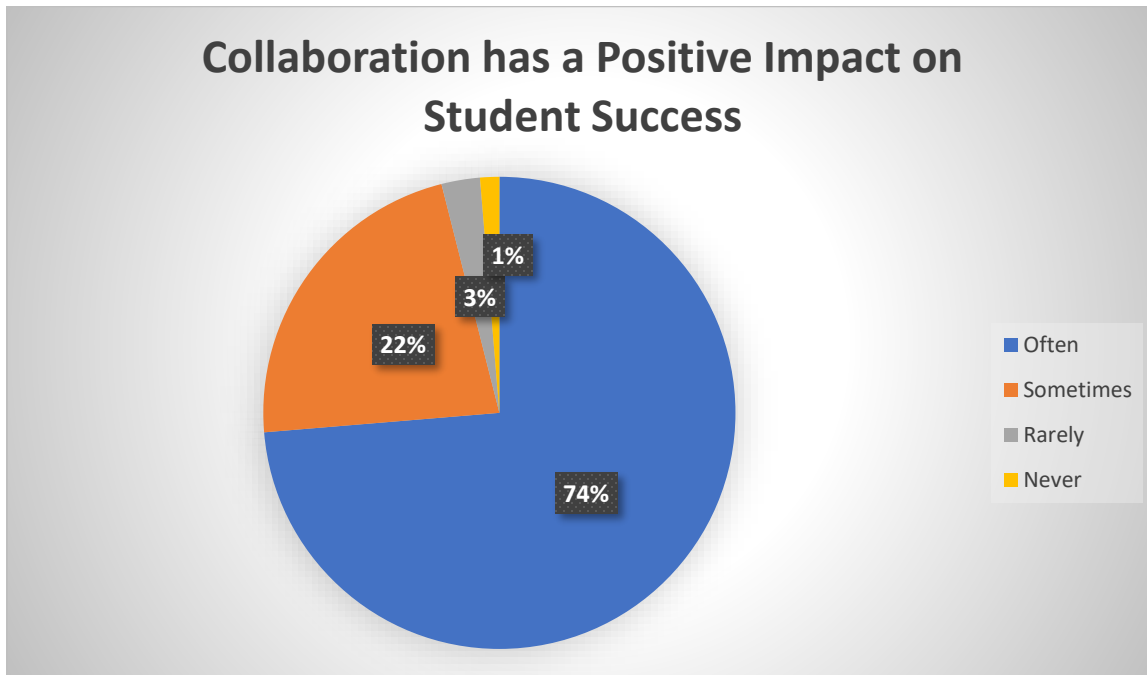


Figure 9: Would be Beneficial to Learn More About the Role of School-Based Occupational Therapist

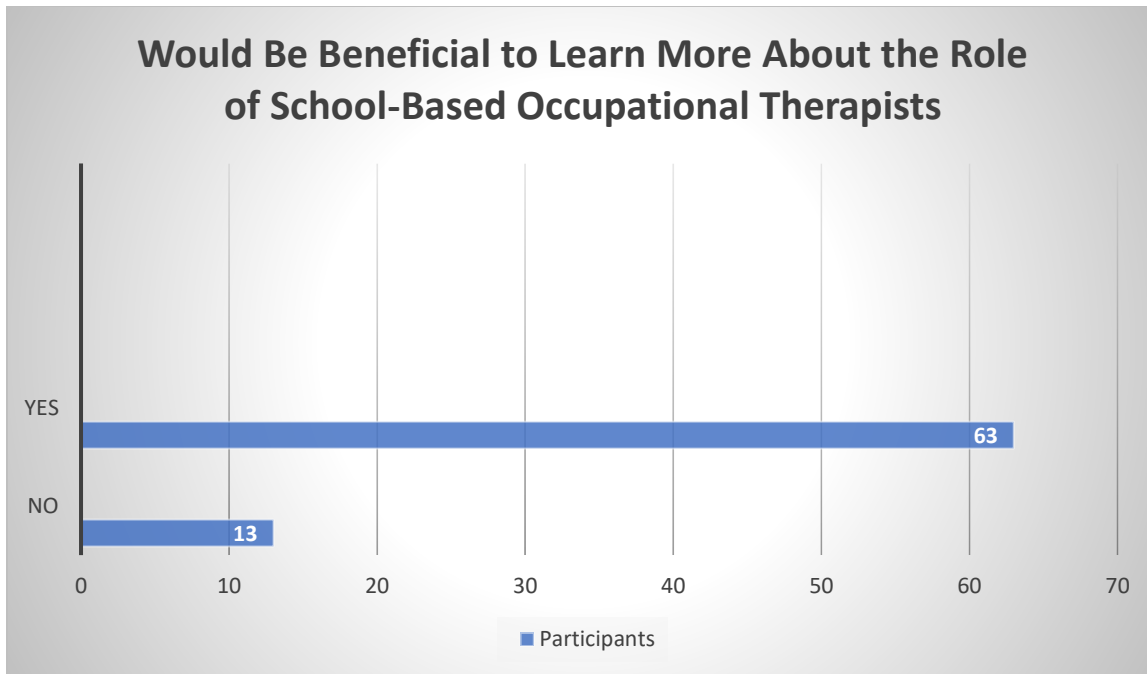


Figure 10: Interested in Learning More Classroom Strategies from the Occupational Therapist

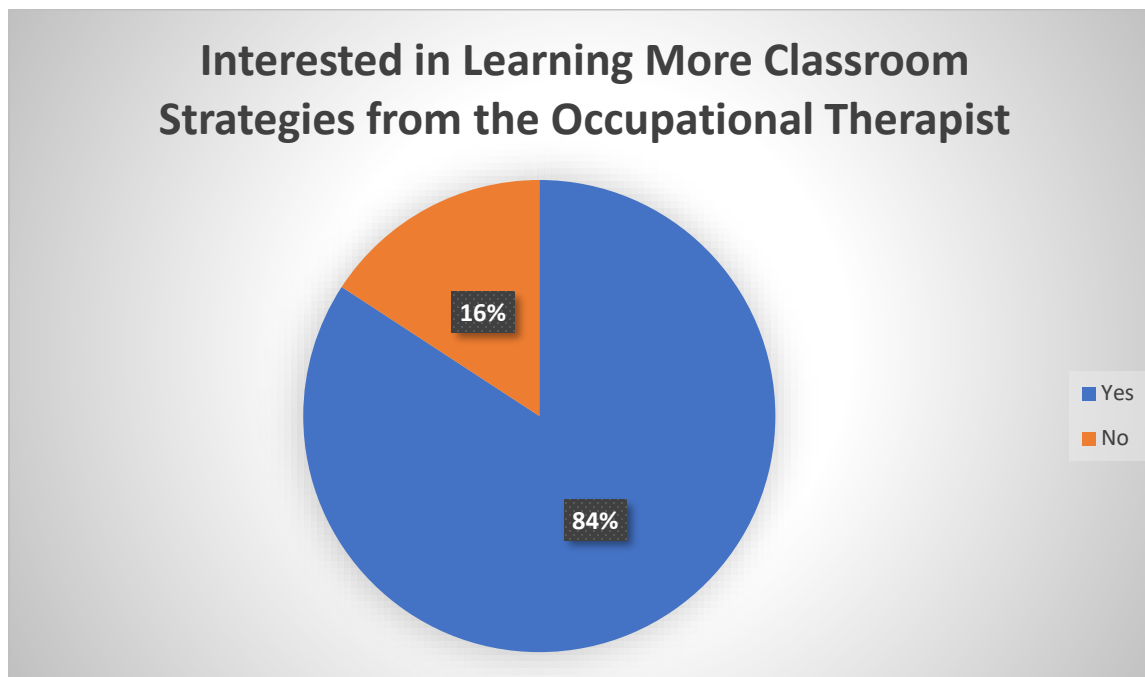


Figure 11: Need for More Formal Collaboration Time with the Occupational Therapist



Chi Squared analyses were completed to explore relationships between years of teaching experience, understanding of the role of school-based occupational therapists, and responses to the perceived value of collaboration. Data analysis revealed statistical significance between

teachers that have referred a student for school-based occupational therapy services and their understanding of the role of occupational therapy in the school system ($p=0.002$). This finding shows that of the 49 teachers that have referred a student for occupational therapy services, all 49 (100%) teachers reported understanding the role of the occupational therapist often or sometimes. In contrast, of teachers that had not referred a student for occupational therapy services ($N=27$), 55.5% ($N=15$) reported sometimes or rarely understanding the role of the occupational therapist (see Figure 12). Crosstabulation also found statistical significance between the number of years employed as a teacher and the desire to learn more strategies from the occupational therapist ($p=0.04$). 100% ($N=21$) of teachers with up to ten years of teaching experience indicated they would like to learn more strategies from the occupational therapist, while of teachers with more than ten years of teaching experience ($N=55$), 15.8% ($N=12$) expressed that they would not like to learn more strategies from the occupational therapist (see Figure 13). Additionally, statistical significance was discovered between having referred a student for school-based occupational therapy services and the perception that collaboration with the occupational therapist is valuable for providing effective classroom strategies ($p=0.03$). Of 49 teachers that have referred students for occupational therapy services, 100% ($N=49$) reported feeling that collaboration with the occupational therapist is often or sometimes valuable for providing effective classroom strategies, while of the 27 teachers that have not referred a student for occupational therapy services, 12 (44.4%) teachers indicated that collaboration with the occupational therapist is sometimes, rarely, or never valuable for providing effective classroom strategies (see Figure 14).

Figure 12: Crosstabulation Between Having Referred a Student for OT Services and Understanding the Role of School-Based Occupational Therapists

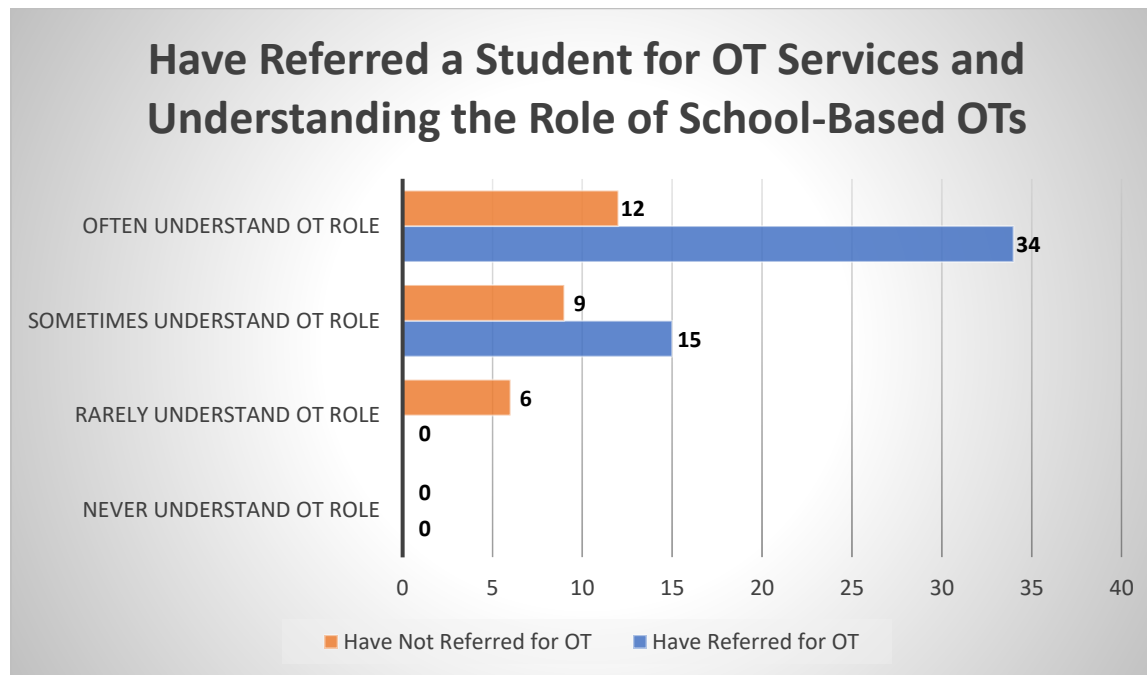


Figure 13: Crosstabulation Between Years Employed as a Teacher and Wanting to Learn More Strategies from the Occupational Therapist

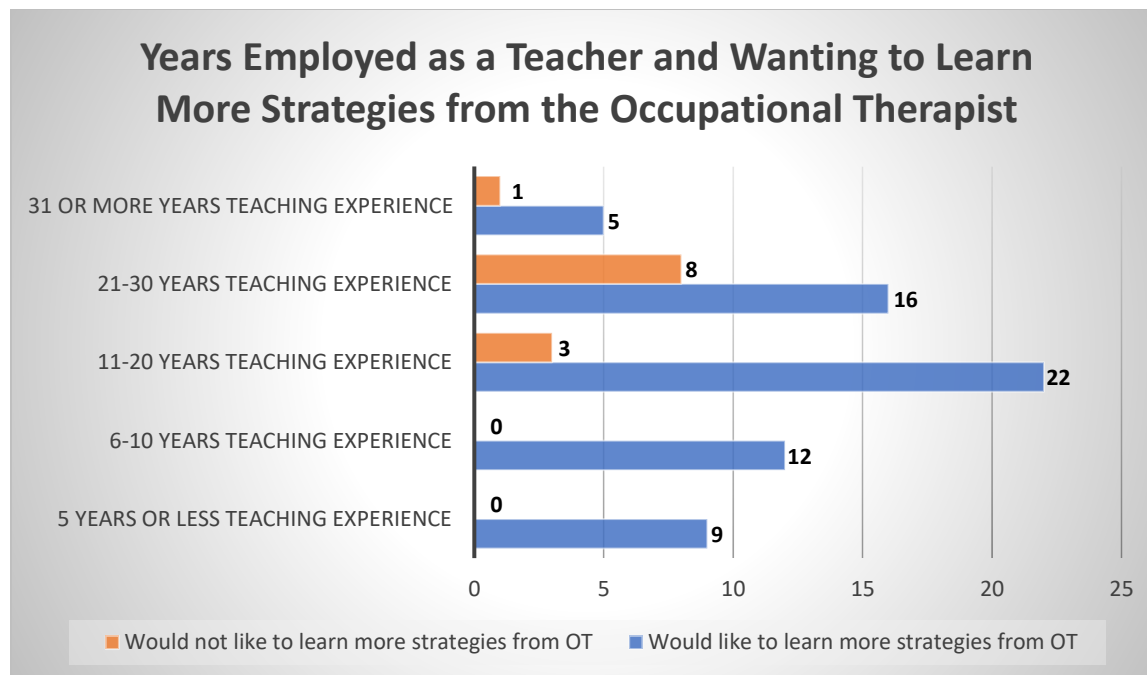
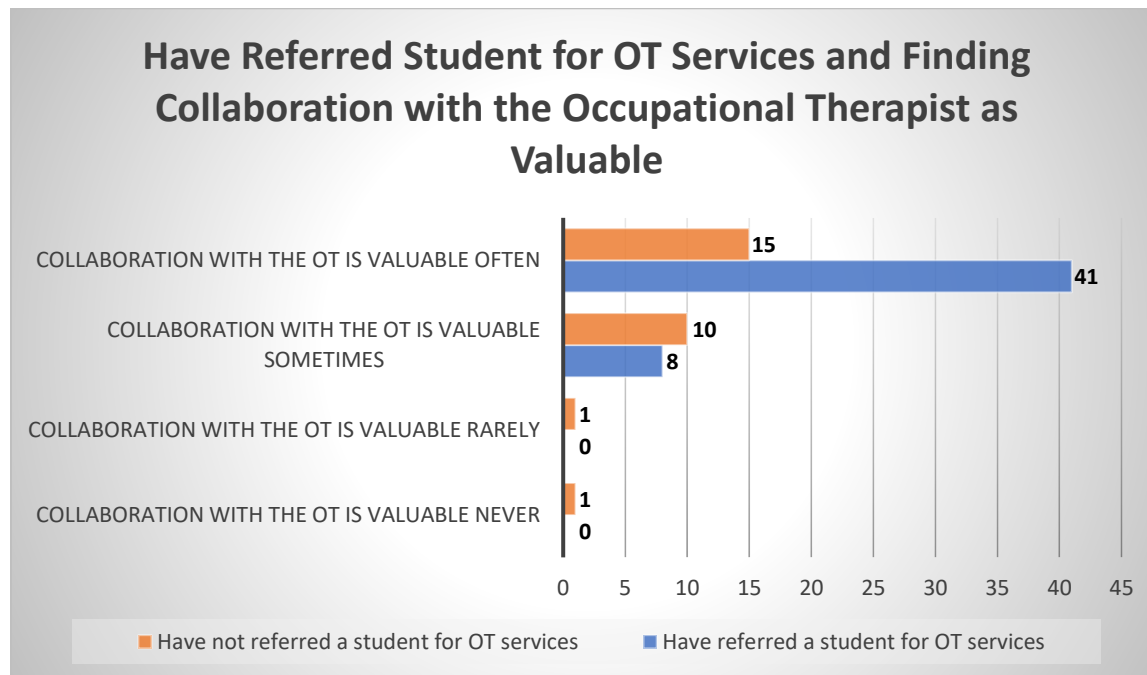


Figure 14: Crosstabulation Between Having Referred Students for OT Services Versus Finding Collaboration with the Occupational Therapist as Valuable



The final item on the survey was left open-ended for comments from the teachers (participants). Of the 76 completed surveys, 14 participants shared a final comment at the end of the survey (18.42%). These responses were collated and analyzed descriptively. Three broad themes emerged from the open-ended comments. First, participants acknowledged a lack of formal collaboration time provided by the school district (N=6). Secondly, participants commented on the importance of more students gaining access to occupational therapy strategies and services within the classroom (N=5). Lastly, participants recognized that school-based occupational therapists have much expertise to offer and expressed a desire to learn more about occupational therapy (N=6).

Discussion of Findings

The purpose of this Capstone Project was to determine elementary teachers' understanding of the scope of practice of school-based occupational therapists, determine

elementary teachers' perceptions of the value of the collaboration with school-based occupational therapists, and identify the need for improved collaborative school-based occupational therapy supports. In alignment with the role clarification domain of the NICF, the majority of teachers reported having an understanding of the role of school-based occupational therapists and perceive them as valuable assets to the school setting. Additionally, most teachers have had students that have received occupational therapy services. Findings revealed information in the areas of collaboration and education.

Finding Collaboration Time is Difficult

As Truong and Hodgetts (2017) explained, collaboration is essential for best practice and maximizing student success. The findings in this study indicate the need for improved collaborative practices between occupational therapists and teachers, as shown in Figures 4, 6, and 11. Overall, the majority of participants (65.79%) agreed that there is a need for more formal collaboration time, as reinforced by Shasby and Schneck (2011). The NICF acknowledges that having interprofessional communication is essential for successful interprofessional collaboration practices. Consistent collaboration can be provided through a variety of predetermined and mutually agreed upon ways including: face-to-face meetings, virtual meetings, emails, text messages, and/or phone calls. Shasby and Schneck (2011) found that effective collaboration requires adequate amount of time, however, lack of time is often the largest barrier to formal collaboration.

Occupational therapists should stress the importance of having a schedule based on workload rather than caseload in order to avoid the limitations of scheduling and flexibility as discussed by Seruya and Garfinkel (2018). Following a workload model, school-based occupational therapists could allocate time to provide service, collaborate consistently, and spend

more time offering strategies within the classroom. In addition, a workload model could allow occupational therapists to provide preventative consultation services for general education students that do not formally qualify for special education, which was a concern of 35.71% (N=5) of the participants that left an additional comment on the survey. Initiating a workload model, as suggested in literature (Casillas, 2010; Ball, 2018), could be beneficial for the collaborative working relationship between the occupational therapist and the teachers for the ultimate benefit of the student in their natural learning environment. Additionally, the workload model could provide occupational therapists with more time for collaboration and in-class consultation to improve client-centered practice and team functioning.

Advocacy Through Education

Occupational therapists need to advocate for the viability of the profession in the school setting by educating teachers and other school personnel. The NICF acknowledges collaborative leadership as a necessity for interprofessional collaboration practices. The findings in this study indicate that teachers would like to learn more about occupational therapy, as shown in Figures 9 and 10. Occupational therapists should provide school staff with training presentations that include the scope of practice of school-based occupational therapists and classroom strategies. In agreement with Benson et al. (2016), occupational therapists must have a voice within the educational system. This is essential for establishing value and ensuring best practice. By educating school personnel about the role of the occupational therapists, the occupational therapists, in turn, would open the door for improved collaborative relationships that could lead to increased student success.

Crosstabulations indicated that teachers that have referred students for occupational therapy services perceive themselves as understanding of the role of the occupational therapists

more often than teachers that have not referred students ($p=0.002$). Through increased education of the teachers, occupational therapists can level the playing field to ensure that all teachers are aware of the role of school-based occupational therapists. The correlation between years of teaching experience and the desire to learn more from the occupational therapist, indicated that the more years of experience a teacher had, the less they desired to learn more strategies from the occupational therapist ($p=0.04$). By continuously collaborating and educating teachers, in addition to sharing classroom strategies, hopefully the entire teaching staff will find value learning more from the occupational therapists, despite the number of years of teaching experience they have.

Strengths and Limitations

This Capstone Project collected elementary teachers' perceptions related to school-based occupational therapists in one geographic area gaining information to achieve the proposed study objectives. This allowed for focused data within the confines of one school district. The time of year was given consideration before releasing the survey. February was chosen for initiation due to all teachers being in session within the chosen geographic area. Additionally, the chosen area is known to directly employ occupational therapists within their schools. By distributing the survey via email, the teachers were given the freedom to complete it at a convenient time.

While exploring the results of this Capstone Project, the limitations must be considered. The small sample size of this study impacts its ability to be generalized. Although 84 surveys were initiated, only 76 surveys were fully completed and included in the study, which was 73% of the approximate total of 104 full-time teachers. Another limitation to this study was its limited transferability due to the restricted geographic area. As a result of these limitations, the data collected in this study may not represent the general perceptions of all elementary teachers.

Implications for Practice

Potential clinical implications from this study focus on the need for occupational therapists to educate and advocate for their role within the school-based setting. School-based occupational therapists can enhance their practice effectiveness in a number of ways. First, occupational therapists must educate school personnel on their expansive scope of practice. When the personnel have an understanding of the role of occupational therapists, they may be more inclined to seek consultation and suggestions for their students. Secondly, occupational therapists must find ways to improve consistent collaboration practices and establish collaborative relationships with the teachers. Formal consistent collaboration is needed for implementation of best practice. Thirdly, occupational therapists must advocate for a workload model to appropriately support the teachers and students. By implementing a workload model, as opposed to a caseload model, occupational therapists will have more time for formal collaboration and consultation for general education and special education students. Additionally, the workload model will allow the occupational therapists to be more present and accessible around the school environment and within the classrooms. Finally, school-based occupational therapists need to approach teachers and school personnel with a growth mindset. As the needs of the students become more complex and the school situations continue to evolve, occupational therapists can utilize a growth mindset to help the teachers believe in their ability to create successful learning environments.

Future Research

The results of this study provided data to support the need for further research and investigation into teachers' perceptions of the value of collaboration with school-based occupational therapists. By conducting additional research covering a greater geographic area

(urban and rural) and including a variety of school settings (public, charter, private), occupational therapists can ensure best collaborative practices with school personnel. Additionally, future research should explore the need for more staff education about the role of occupational therapists within the school system.

Summary

The purpose of this Capstone Project was to determine elementary teachers' perceptions of the value of collaboration with occupational therapists. Findings indicated that school-based occupational therapists need to find ways to improve their collaborative practices with teachers. Teachers would like to learn more about the role of occupational therapists and the classroom strategies that they can offer. Through education of the school staff, occupational therapists can build value for the profession. Additionally, occupational therapists can advocate for a workload model in order to improve practice outcomes and provide more in-class support.

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Appendix A: IRB Approval

Application
Management

Hello Jennifer Edick,

Congratulations! Using a limited review process, the Institutional Review Board at Eastern Kentucky University (FWA00003332) has approved your request for an exemption determination for your study entitled, "Elementary Teachers' Perceptions of the Value of Collaboration with School-Based Occupational Therapists" This status is effective immediately and is valid for a period of three years as long as no changes are made to the study as outlined in your limited review application. If your study will continue beyond three years, you are required to reapply for exemption and receive approval from the IRB prior to continuing the study.

As the principal investigator for this study, it is your responsibility to ensure that all investigators and staff associated with this study meet the training requirements for conducting research involving human subjects and comply with applicable University policies and state and federal regulations. Please read through the remainder of this notification for specific details on these requirements.

Adverse Events: Any adverse or unexpected events that occur in conjunction with this study should reported to the IRB immediately and must be reported within ten calendar days of the occurrence.

Changes to Approved Research Protocol: If changes to the approved research protocol become necessary, a Protocol Revision Request must be submitted for IRB review, and approval must be granted prior to the implementation of changes. If the proposed changes result in a change in your project's exempt status, you will be required to submit an application for expedited or full review and receive approval from the IRB prior to implementing changes to the study. Changes include, but are not limited to, those involving study personnel, subjects, recruitment materials and procedures, and data collection instruments and procedures.

Registration at ClinicalTrials.gov: If your study is classified as a clinical trial, you may be required by the terms of an externally-sponsored award to register it at ClinicalTrials.gov. In addition, some medical journals require registration as a condition for publication. In the case of journals with membership in the International Committee of

Medical Journal Editors, clinical trials must be registered prior to enrolling subjects. It is important that investigators understand the requirements for specific journals in which they intend to publish. In the case of sponsored project awards, timeline requirements will vary for awards that require registration. Approved consent forms must be uploaded in the system for all Federally-funded clinical trials after subject enrollment has closed, but earlier registration is not required for all agencies. If you have questions about whether a sponsored project award requires registration and on what timeline, please send an email to tiffany.hamblin@eku.edu before beginning recruitment so that the specific terms of the award can be reviewed. If you have a need to register your study and do not have an account in the system, please send an email to lisa.royalty@eku.edu and request to have a user account created.

If you have questions about this approval or reporting requirements, contact the IRB administrator at lisa.royalty@eku.edu or 859-622-3636.

For your reference, comments that were submitted during the review process are included below. Any comments that do not accompany an "I approve" response have been provided to you previously and were addressed prior to the review process being completed.

Appendix B: Email for Site Administrators

Elementary Teachers' Perceptions of the Value of Collaboration with School-Based Occupational Therapists

To Whom It May Concern:

I am a school-based occupational therapist and reside in Santa Clarita, California. As I pursue the Doctor of Occupational Therapy degree through Eastern Kentucky University, I am conducting a research study to explore elementary school teachers' perceptions of school-based occupational therapy. By completing this study, I hope to improve future school-based occupational therapy practice and ensure best practice for all students within the Santa Clarita Valley.

I have chosen to include the elementary schools in the Santa Clarita Valley, knowing that all districts in the area directly employ occupational therapists.

I would appreciate your assistance with helping me make an impact by forwarding this email with the survey link to your full-time teachers.

https://eku.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_cBGljxwu3VbJ781

Thank you for your participation!

Jen Edick, MA, OTR/L
Occupational Therapist
jennifer_edick@mymail.eku.edu

Appendix C: Teacher Survey

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE VALUE OF SCHOOL-BASED OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

Informed Consent

You are being invited to take part in a research study exploring elementary school teachers' perceptions of the value of school-based occupational therapy. The goal of this research study is to gain information about elementary school teachers' perceptions about school-based occupational therapy practice in order to make future improvements to ensure best practice. This study is being conducted by Jennifer Edick, Occupational Therapist, at Eastern Kentucky University.

If you decide to participate in the study, you will be asked to complete an anonymous online survey consisting of 20 questions. Your participation is expected to take no more than 10 minutes.

This study is anonymous. You will not be asked to provide your name or other identifying information as part of the study. No one, not even members of the research team, will know that the information you give came from you. Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When we write up the results of the study, we will write about this combined information.

We will make every effort to safeguard your data, but as with anything online, we cannot guarantee the security of data obtained via the Internet. Third-party applications used in this study may have terms of service and privacy policies outside the control of Eastern Kentucky University.

Participating in this study may not benefit you directly, but it will help us gain information that will be helpful to ensure best practice of school-based occupational therapists. If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to volunteer. You will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer. You can stop at any time during the study and still keep the benefits and rights you had before volunteering.

Please note: You must be 18 or older to participate in this study.

This study has been reviewed and approved for exemption by the Institutional Review Board at Eastern Kentucky University. If you have any questions about the study, please contact Jennifer Edick at jennifer_edick@mymail.eku.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, please contact the Division of Sponsored Programs at Eastern Kentucky University by calling 859-622-3636.

By completing the activity that begins on the following screen, you agree that you (1) are at least 18 years of age; (2) have read and understand the information above; and (3) voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

By completing this survey, you are consenting to participate in this study.

Demographic Information

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Other

Please identify your age group.

- 21 - 30 years
- 31 - 45 years
- 46 - 60 years
- 61 - 70 years
- 70 years +

How many years have you been employed as a teacher?

- Less than 5 years
- 6 - 10 years
- 11 - 20 years
- 21 -30 years
- More than 30 years

What is your highest level of education?

- Associate's Degree
 - Bachelor's Degree
 - Master's Degree
 - Post Graduate Degree
-

Employment Status

Are you currently employed as a full-time teacher?

Yes

No

Is your primary role a general education teacher?

Yes

No

Is your primary role a special education teacher?

Yes

No

What grade level do you currently teach?

Kindergarten

1st Grade - 2nd Grade

3rd Grade - 4th Grade

5th Grade - 6th Grade

Research-Based Content

Throughout your teaching career, have you had any students in your class that have received occupational therapy services?

Yes

No

Have you ever referred a student for an occupational therapy evaluation or occupational therapy services?

Yes

No

I understand the role of the occupational therapist in the school setting.

Often

Sometimes

Rarely

Never

I collaborate with the occupational therapist to address student learning needs.

Often

Sometimes

Rarely

Never

The occupational therapist is available for consultation when I need suggestions.

Often

Sometimes

Rarely

Never

The amount of time I collaborate with the occupational therapist is adequate.

- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

I believe that collaboration with the occupational therapist is valuable for providing effective classroom strategies.

- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

I feel that collaboration with the occupational therapist has a positive impact on the success of the students.

- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

I feel it would be beneficial to learn more about the role of the occupational therapist in the school setting through professional development.

- Yes
- No

I would like to learn more classroom strategies from the occupational therapist through professional development.

Yes

No

I feel there is a need for more formal collaboration time with the occupational therapist.

Yes

No

Additional Comments:
