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Secondary Principals Perceptions of Classroom Instructional Walkthroughs

Deborah Hamilton Frazier
Walden University

Walden University

College of Education

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Deborah Hamilton Frazier

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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Review Committee
Dr. Andrew Alexson, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty
Dr. Peter Kiriakidis, Committee Member, Education Faculty
Dr. Christina Dawson, University Reviewer, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2020

Abstract

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by

Deborah Hamilton Frazier

MA, Furman University, 1996

MEd, South Carolina State University, 1983

BS, South Carolina University, 1981

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Although many researchers have studied aspects of classroom instructional walkthroughs, there has been a gap in practice and research related to how middle school principals interpreted the functions and purposes of such walkthroughs and how they used them to enhance instruction. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the gap in knowledge and understanding of what middle school principals perceived as the function and purpose of classroom instructional walkthroughs. The conceptual framework was based on the 5 dimensions of teaching and learning. Research questions were derived from specific components of the framework and related to the function of classroom instructional walkthroughs and the influence of the walkthroughs on classroom instruction. Data for the study were collected through semistructured interviews with 7 secondary principals from a mid-Atlantic U.S. state. Data were coded using *in vivo* coding and Microsoft Word Doc Extract tool 1.3. Six key themes emerged: feedback to teachers, observe instructional delivery, focus on student learning, using data to improve instruction, building relationships, and professional learning to improve teaching. The key recommendation is that school division leaders explore professional development opportunities to engender a greater awareness of how principals use classroom instructional walkthroughs correctly and consistently as a strategy in their schools. Findings from the study may contribute to the knowledge on classroom walkthroughs and have implications for positive social change by identifying reflective practices, which can lead to high-quality continuous school improvement and facilitate systematic thinking in schools.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my Angels in heaven: my son, Jamil Rashad Hamilton Frazier, and my mother, Viola Wright Hamilton. Thank you for watching over me. I also dedicate my dissertation to my beautiful and loving daughters, Jasmine Monet' and Janay Amber, who have given me the motivation to persevere throughout this journey. For God's Blessings, my granddaughters Faith, Hope, and Grace. To my husband, George, who believed in me from the beginning and faithfully continues to do so every day. His love and encouragement have made it possible to realize my potential. Finally, to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who is my everything! He has given me the Strength to finish my dream of earning my doctorate!

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A special and sincere thank you to my beautiful sisters and brothers as well as the Hamilton Family of Green Pond, South Carolina. May God Bless them and keep them always. To my son-in-law Deputy Sheriff Emmett Brown, who serves our community, thank you for keeping us safe. I would also like to acknowledge Monique Raulston who introduced me to the Walden University family and helped me to accomplish this goal.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Principals can effect positive outcomes in learning through classroom instructional walkthroughs, which are done to observe instruction in classrooms and ensure their quality (Gillespie, 2016). The classroom instructional walkthrough strategy is not new (Brion-Meisels, 2015); however, the purpose, types, and outcomes of this strategy have been transformed (Stout, Kachur, & Edwards, 2013). Therefore, studies on classroom instructional walkthroughs can help principals to focus on what is essential in their roles as instructional leaders in middle schools (Stout et al., 2013). If principals share a clear understanding of the function of effective classroom instructional walkthroughs, they can develop a shared vision and promote a culture of high-quality instruction in their buildings (Stout et al., 2013). When principals observe teachers, they can encourage reflective practices that can lead to initiatives for enhancing middle school students' academic successes as well as social change (Gabriel, 2018). Social change is the process of applying ideas or strategies to promote improvement (Callahan et al., 2012), which in public education can promote insights into challenging and complex subjects for school communities. The sections in this chapter include background, problem statement, the purpose of the study, research questions, conceptual framework for the study, nature of the study, definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, significance, and summary.

Background

There is a plethora of literature related to classroom instructional walkthroughs. Peters and Waterman introduced the concept of walkthroughs (McCarley, Peters, &

Decman, 2016), but many different descriptors were used to denote classroom

instructional walkthroughs such as learning walks, instructional walks, focus

walkthroughs, data walks, data snaps, mini observations, and instructional rounds (Taylor

Backor & Gordon, 2015). Several corporations have successfully used a version of

walkthroughs to improve their management practices, which is known as visible

management (Xu & Brown, 2016). One corporation was United Airlines, which had

managers walk around to interact and engage with employees. Another leading

corporation was Hewlett-Packard, with a trademark management style known as

management by wandering around.

Using the concept of management by wandering around, early pioneer school

leaders Superintendent Tony Alvarado and Deputy Superintendent Elaine Fink of the

Community School District 2 in the New York School system implemented classroom

instructional walkthroughs. The walkthroughs were implemented as a routine practice for

a team of district principals, central office leaders, and teachers. These individuals

perceived that principals might work closely with their teachers and provide opportunities

for teachers to learn from one another (Stout et al., 2013). School leaders described their

principals as critical listeners in the school district, who were in touch with their staff and

attentive to what was occurring in their schools (Stout et al., 2013).

One of the essential characteristics of a successful instructional leader is the

knowledge of the instruction and curriculum (Hsin-Hsiange & Mao-neng, 2015). School

personnel at all administrative levels are continuously seeking ways to influence student

achievement and produce better learning in school. The teaching and learning process is

initiated correctly when the principal has a clear understanding of what students are learning in classrooms and how teachers deliver the instruction to students. With a clear understanding of what occurs in the classrooms, principals can capture the most significant data to offer constructive feedback and influence professional development. Professional development can be based on data-driven feedback from the classroom observations, which can be used to identify research-based practices to enhance instructional strategies of teachers and learning of students (Jones, 2016). Classroom instructional walkthroughs and high-quality continuous school improvement advance positive social change. Through reflection, collaboration with peers, and advocacy, positive change can occur (Selkrig & Keamy, 2015). Feedback to teachers from walkthroughs reinforces attention to effective instructional practices for teachers and contributes to collegial conversations about teaching and learning. Thus, school leaders, teachers, and educators must create a network system that will allow all to freely interact with peers and strengthen professional development opportunities. Further, professional development opportunities can facilitate meeting the needs of all learners and realizing that middle school students can benefit from educational practices such as classroom instructional walkthroughs. Professional development opportunities can support teachers in discovering better ways to personalize lessons using students' interests, cultures, and backgrounds, which makes lessons more relevant to students who may be underachieving (Gabriel, 2018).

Despite the benefit of instructional walkthroughs, a gap in practice related to classroom instructional walkthroughs has been identified. According to researchers

associated with the Center for Educational Leadership, a concern is that not all administrators may share a clear understanding of the function and purpose of classroom instructional walkthroughs (Fink & Markholt, 2017). Additionally, in middle schools across the United States, classroom instructional walkthroughs are likely to vary in structure and effectiveness (Fink & Markholt, 2017). But information gained on classroom observations can be a valuable administrative tool for instructional leaders (Stevenson, 2016).

This study was needed to engender a greater awareness in middle school principals to use instructional walkthroughs consistently as a strategy that contributes to continuous improvement focused on effective classroom instruction. Knowledge gained through this study can help close the gap in middle school principals not having a clear understanding of the function and purpose of the classroom instructional walkthroughs (Fink & Markholt, 2017; Stevenson, 2016). Further, the support of professional development and professional learning by researchers and university professors can help school leaders transform the learning environment into a warm and supportive milieu (Zepeda, Jimenez, & Lanoue, 2015).

Problem Statement

Research has indicated that principals do not possess a clear understanding of the function and purpose of classroom instructional walkthroughs (Connor, 2015; Fink & Markholt, 2017; Garza, Ovando, & O'Doherty, 2016). But principals' walkthroughs are targeted short snapshots of what is going on in the classroom, which need to be effective for instructional leaders to improve the overall academics in the middle schools

(Cherkowski, 2016; Taylor Backor & Gordon, 2015). This problem is relevant for middle school instructional leadership because findings from this exploration can help principals to (a) understand the function and purpose of conducting instructional walkthroughs; (b) use feedback from the observations to improve teaching and learning through professional development and other feedback methods; and (c) become better instructional leaders, as suggested in previous research (Cherkowski, 2016; Fink & Markholt, 2017).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore what middle school principals perceived as the function and purpose of classroom instructional walkthroughs. The gap in knowledge and understanding can influence the work of principals as they continue to refocus their efforts, time, and attention as instructional leaders (Zepeda et al., 2015). The case study methodology used to explore the gap in knowledge and understanding was guided by assumptions in the naturalistic paradigm. There were four assumptions pertinent to the study: (a) there were many differences and realities principals possess concerning classroom instructional walkthroughs, (b) knowledge and use of instructional walkthroughs by principals were inseparable, (c) thoughts and beliefs of principals pertinent to instructional walkthroughs were constantly evolving, and (d) inquiry of principals on new instructional strategies were shaped by values that were sacred to these principals.

Research Questions

The following research questions were derived from specific components of the

framework of the study.

Research Question 1: What do principals perceive as the function of classroom

instructional walkthroughs?

Research Question 2: How do principals view the influence of classroom

instructional walkthroughs on classroom instruction?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework was created using the five dimensions of teaching and

learning, which include purpose, student engagement, curriculum and pedagogy,

assessment of student learning, and classroom environment and culture (Fink &

Markholt, 2017; Van Vooren, 2018). Purpose is quality teacher instruction through the

integration of state standards and objectives in lesson plans (Van Vooren, 2018). Student

engagement has three parts: (a) intellectual growth of students (i.e., who is doing work in

the classrooms and the nature of the classwork); (b) teacher engagement strategies that

contribute to student engagement in the learning process, and (c) type of communication

between teacher and student and student and student (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015).

Curriculum and pedagogy are comprised of three components: curriculum, teaching

strategies, and scaffolding for learning (Van Vooren, 2018). The curriculum is the

alignment of instructional materials to the objectives in the lessons, and teaching

strategies refer to how well instruction is aligned with pedagogical content knowledge.

Scaffolding is the level of support provided by middle school teachers to students

throughout the entire lesson. Regarding assessment and learning, assessment of student learning is the teachers' use of multiple assessment methods to diagnose the occurrence of learning of diverse students in the classrooms (Alvoid & Black, 2014). Finally, classroom environment and culture refer to how well teachers use the entire physical environment of classrooms, quality of classroom routines, and how supportive the classroom culture is for the academic growth of students (Alvoid & Black, 2014).

The need for professional development evolving from feedback in classroom instructional walkthroughs is supported by the five dimensions of teaching and learning. According to Fink and Markholt (2017), an instructional framework can be designed from the feedback regarding instructional walkthroughs. The framework is useful to develop goals for professional learning and to implement professional development. Professional development in each of the five dimensions supports the middle school instructional leaders' vision for high-quality teaching and learning (McCarley, Peters, & Decman, 2016). Professional development supports the enhancement of teachers' and principals' instructional expertise and emphasizes continuous learning and improvement. Ongoing professional development helps teachers and principals to focus on finding optimum ways each student learn while providing insight and strategies into how to address the needs of students in the classroom (Fink & Markholt, 2017; Peguero & Bracy, 2015).

Various researchers have reported on the five dimensions and supported that the dimensions are aligned with classroom instructional walkthroughs and have improved academics in the middle schools at Grades 6, 7, and 8. Therefore, for this study, the tenets

of the five dimensions of teaching and learning supported the development of the

research questions. The tenets were also embedded in the classroom instructional

walkthrough semistructured interviews (CIWSIs; see Appendix A).

Nature of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore what middle school

principals perceived as the function and purpose of classroom instructional walkthroughs.

Qualitative research is used to describe or capture the human experiences and perceptions

related to those experiences (Daher, Carré, Jaramillo, Olivares, & Tomicic, 2017). The

environment for the study was in a natural setting, and data reflected the perceptions of

the secondary school principals. Participants in the sample were secondary principals

from a diverse suburban/rural school district in a mid-Atlantic state. A convenience

sample of middle school principals was invited to participate in one-on-one interviews.

The design was a descriptive and exploratory case study. A case study is a

research strategy and an empirical inquiry to investigate a phenomenon (classroom

instructional walkthroughs) within a real-life (middle schools in research setting district)

context (Amankwaa, 2016). Case studies are based on an in-depth investigation of a

single individual, group (middle school principals), or event to explore the causes

of underlying principles (Connelly, 2016). The case study design and qualitative

methodology were justified for the study because the study had a case (middle school

principals in the same district) and a phenomenon (classroom instructional walkthroughs;

see Amankwaa, 2016; Connelly, 2016). Additionally, the study's purpose statement and

two qualitative research questions required an in-depth exploration to collect thick and

rich interview data. Thus, a case study design was justified to guide data collection and data analysis for the study's two research questions.

Data collection occurred through semistructured, one-on-one interviews. The method of interpretive analysis for qualitative data analysis explained by Marshall and Rossman (2016) and McNiff (2016) was followed. I described and employed the six phases of interpretive data analysis. The first phase of interpretive thematic analysis was familiarization with data, and the second phase required selecting units of meaning from the text or coding. The goal of the third phase was to assign groups of common codes to thematic groups. A review of the themes occurred in the fourth phase, and the fifth phase was defining and naming the themes of Phase 5, and the culminating phase comprised of creating a presentation of the results. Member checking ensured the trustworthiness and credibility of the study. The participants' rights were protected through informed consent by providing principals with details on the purpose of the study, expectations for participation, confidentiality protocol, and their right to not participate or withdraw from the study at any time with no repercussions.

Definitions

Classroom instructional walkthroughs: Classroom instructional walkthroughs are short, informal observation of classroom teachers and students conducted by administrations, coaches, mentors, peers, and others, followed by feedback, conversation, and action (Stout et al., 2013).

Effectiveness of principals: The effectiveness of principals is the ability to be successful and produce the intended results related to teachers' instructional and students' academic outcomes to achieve desired results for schools (Selkrig & Keamy, 2015).

Feedback from instructional walkthroughs: Feedback from instructional walkthroughs is an accurate and straight-forward conversation from an evaluator or a professional on strategies (instructional walkthroughs) to help teachers improve instruction (Garza et al., 2016).

Function of instructional walkthroughs: Function of instructional walkthroughs is the purpose of walkthroughs, which is to improve the instruction of teachers and academic achievement of students (Vogel, 2018).

Perceptions of principals: Perceptions of principals are beliefs about the roles of instructional leaders concerning teachers' instructional effectiveness and students' academic achievement (Van Vooren, 2018).

Assumptions

There were three assumptions in the study. First, I assumed that all principal participants in the study possessed a similar framework regarding the importance of instructional supervision. All principals were-principals in the same school district who conducted classroom instructional walkthroughs, and the superintendent consistently emphasized that all principals should devote more time to instructional supervision. Second, it was assumed that the middle school principals in the district were actively involved in providing feedback from the walkthroughs to their teachers in a timely and convenient way through one or more of the following mediums: (a) professional

development sessions, (b) presentations at teachers' meetings, (c) e-mail, (d) technology, and (e) phone conferences. Last, there was an assumption that the participants were honest and transparent with what they shared in semistructured interviews as about their perceptions about classroom instructional walkthroughs.

Scope and Delimitations

This qualitative case study was focused on only middle school principals regarding their lack of knowledge and perceptions of the function and purpose of classroom instructional walkthroughs. The study was limited to middle school principals in one school district in a suburban/rural district a mid-Atlantic state in the United States, though one high school principal was invited to join when one potential participant did not respond to the invitation to participate. The highest number of students in the middle schools were Caucasian students, followed by African American students. The study was limited to one school district and all middle schools in the same district. There was no exclusion of a middle school principal. There was only one instrument, which was a semistructured interview instrument. Interviews were one-on-one, face-to-face interviews during a time convenient for the principals.

Transferability is equivalent to generalizability or external validity in qualitative research (O'Reilly & Parker, 2017). A qualitative study has transferability if the researcher provides readers with sufficient evidence to convey results for each of the research questions that could apply to other contexts, situations, times, and populations (O'Reilly & Parker, 2017). I endeavored to provide evidence sufficient for readers to make judgments as to whether findings could be used in their work settings. I provided a

full and rich description of the phenomenon and a robust and detailed account of

perceptions of the middle school principals related to classroom instructional

walkthroughs, as advocated by (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, & McKibbon, 2015).

Limitations

The first limitation in this qualitative study was the small participant pool used to

gather information on classroom instructional walkthroughs. The second limitation in the

study was interviewing colleagues as part of this process. I serve as a principal in the

same school division as the participants. However, I used self-reflection and member

checking of data to control potential personal and professional biases. Transferability was

also enhanced by the interviews providing a detailed and thick description of the

principals' perceptions on classroom walkthroughs.

The final limitation was that the semistructured interview instrument was a self-

report instrument. The effects of this limitation were reduced by assuring respondents of

confidentiality and by securing all research data in a locked file cabinet to which only I

possessed a key to the lock. All electronic data were and are password protected.

Significance

Protocols are increasing as a collaborative way to improve schools, and one

research-based protocol is classroom instructional walkthroughs (Selkrig & Keamy,

2015). While conducting walkthroughs, principals can identify classroom organizational

and management issues that might detract from the learning process of middle school

students and reduce standardized test scores (Christensen & Knezek, 2015). These

walkthroughs can also sustain instructional practices and promote accountability for

professional development (Draper, 2015). Instructional walkthroughs are best practices that assist school leaders in planning or suggesting professional development leading to a cycle of continuous improvement (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017; Mentoring Minds, 2019). The information gained in classroom observations is a valuable administrative tool for instructional leaders (Wygal & Stout, 2015).

There are significant benefits to principals, teachers, and students from conducting classroom instructional walkthroughs in middle schools in the research setting school district. When walkthroughs occur frequently, there could be positive outcomes for all stakeholders, such as building trust, enhancing communication, and improving classroom instruction (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017; Jones, 2016). Classroom walkthroughs foster collaboration more often with teachers and students. Collaboration walkthroughs help instructional leaders to understand middle school students' instructional needs better and function as a guide to collect data on effective and ineffective instructional practices.

Findings from the study may have significance for at least three essential stakeholders: middle school principals, teachers, and students. For principals of middle schools, findings from the study can facilitate principals being more knowledgeable on the function and purpose of instructional walkthroughs, as well as how to use feedback from walkthroughs to improve all classroom teachers' instruction and all students' academic achievement. Findings from the study may contribute to the knowledge on classroom instructional walkthroughs and may have implications for positive social change. Classroom walkthroughs or learning walks can create a positive change and

facilitate school leaders transitioning the focus of classroom instruction on learning instead of teaching in the classroom (Owens et al., 2016).

Summary

Researchers have suggested that when principals observe teachers, the observation process can translate into reflective practices that can promote problem-solving initiatives for enhancement of middle school students' academic successes as well as social change (Gabriel, 2018). The purpose in this case study was to explore what middle school principals perceived as the function and purpose of classroom instructional walkthroughs. Findings from the study contribute to the knowledge of classroom instructional walkthroughs and may have implications for social change by identifying reflective practices, which can lead to high-quality continuous school improvement and facilitate systematic thinking in schools. Principals and teachers may create a network system that would allow all to freely interact with peers and strengthen professional development opportunities. Professional development on effective classroom instructional walkthroughs can facilitate educational practices that could meet the needs of all learners.

In Chapter 2, I provide a synopsis of the current literature that established the relevance of the problem. Also within Chapter 2, I review and synthesize studies on classroom instructional walkthroughs related to the overall scope of the research and helped conveyed why the instructional walkthrough strategies were meaningful and required further investigation by researchers.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In the study, I explored a problem in a diverse suburban/rural school district in a mid-Atlantic state. There was a lack of understanding regarding the function of classroom instructional walkthroughs, which negatively influenced the work of principals as they continued to refocus and allocate their efforts, time, and attention as instructional leaders (Zepeda et al., 2015). Thus, the purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore what middle school principals perceived as the function and purpose of classroom instructional walkthroughs. The knowledge gained from the study may assist principals to facilitate continuous classroom instruction improvement from middle school teachers. Likewise, findings in the study may support professional development and professional learning for teachers and school administrators to assist in a positive transformation of the learning environment of the middle schools in the district, consistent with the writings of (Zepeda et al., 2015).

In my exploration, I thoroughly reviewed current primary sources in the literature on various constructs (e.g., principal leadership, classroom instructional walkthrough, academic engagement, curriculum and pedagogy, effective pedagogy, curriculum and theory, middle school curriculum, assessment of student learning, formative assessment, summative assessment, high stakes tests, instructional rounds, visible learning walkthrough, the theory of action framework for teaching and learning (TAFTL), and classroom environment and culture) related to aspects of the problem, and the constructs are pertinent to the phenomenon of classroom instructional walkthroughs.

The current literature established the relevancy of the gap and conveyed how the gap influenced the work of principals as instructional leaders. For instance, Zepeda et al. (2015) investigated principals' awareness of best practices that influenced student learning and student achievements such as walkthroughs by principals and veteran teachers. Findings suggested that an essential job of principals was to conduct classroom instructional walkthroughs, which improves student learning and enhances the capacity of teachers and school leaders in schools to achieve state-mandated accountability goals (Zepeda et al., 2015).

Consistent with Zepeda et al. (2015), Fink and Markholt (2017) discovered that classroom instructional walkthroughs were cost-effective strategies to inspire growth among principals and other leaders in middle schools to include the school leadership teams, deans, and assistant principals. The researchers stated that building on five key components is necessary for establishing new standards for conducting classroom instructional walkthroughs: (a) common language and shared vision for high-quality instruction; (b) nonjudgmental methods for observing and analyzing instruction; (c) enhanced skills to provide targeted feedback and professional development; (d) creation of a broader, deeper culture of public practice; and (e) implementation of a collaborative supportive learning community. These components became the foundation of the five dimensions of teaching and learning, which was the conceptual framework for this study. Additionally, based on a study that included interviews with principals, teachers, and students in a mid-Atlantic state related to walkthroughs, this instructional strategy can lead to positive outcomes like fostering collaboration between principals and teachers and

teachers and teachers (Mentoring Minds, 2019). Further, walkthroughs can help

instructional leaders to better understand the instructional needs of teachers and students

as well as facilitate viable data collection on instructional practices (Mentoring Minds,

2019). Additionally, while conducting walkthroughs, principals can identify and address

classroom organizational and management issues that might detract from the learning

process. Thus, walkthroughs help identify schools' ineffective instructional planning,

support professional development, and result in continuous academic improvement for

schools (Mentoring Minds, 2019).

Other researchers have also established the relevancy of the problem in this study.

For example, Derrington and Campbell (2015) surveyed 617 rural elementary school,

middle school, and high school principals in Southern California. Survey responses

revealed that most principals perceived walkthroughs were a good example of leadership

practices that can improve classroom grades and school standardized test scores.

However, due to the role of principals being redefined, school leaders did not devote

sufficient time to work on instructional leadership compared to the time spent on

classroom management issues and routine administrative tasks (Derrington & Campbell,

2015). In a similar study, Bascia, Carr-Harris, Fine-Meyer, and Zurzolo (2015) found that

principals thought that walkthroughs improved pedagogical skills of teachers, increased

student achievement, and helped school leaders meet and exceed state and federal

accountability requirements. Classroom instructional walkthroughs created a culture of

reflective inquiry when all participants (i.e., teachers, school administrators, and staff)

possessed a profound understanding of the process and there were collegial support and collaboration for classroom walkthroughs (Bascia et al., 2015; Stout et al., 2013).

The literature also indicated that most studies reported classroom walkthroughs as instructional supervision and not as teacher evaluation, as supervision versus evaluation is a new concept for instructional leadership, and educators often misinterpret the definitions (Mette & Riegel, 2018). Supervision might be perceived as a strategy to provide feedback to teachers such as through classroom instructional walkthroughs (Palmer et al., 2016). In contrast, evaluation of teachers is more of a summative process that documented teacher performance and offered little opportunity for teacher reflection and growth (Palmer et al., 2016). Thus, systematic change to frequent classroom instructional walkthroughs can foster an environment and a culture with teachers empowered to create change and facilitate a cycle of continuous school improvement (Palmer et al., 2016).

In Chapter 2, I describe the library databases and search engines used to research constructs and key terms of the study. The phenomenon/concept (classroom instructional walkthroughs) in the study is also defined. I also discuss key components of the five dimensions of teaching and learning that framed the phenomenon/concept (walkthroughs by principals). There is also an exhaustive review of the literature on the constructs of interest as well as the methodology (case study) that guided the qualitative research questions in the study.

Literature Search Strategy

I searched a variety of significant databases to locate primary, current, and

relevant sources on my phenomenon of classroom instructional walkthroughs. My focus

was to locate primarily peer-reviewed and academic journals on classroom instructional

walkthroughs. The goal of classroom instructional walkthroughs is to gather information

pertinent to what the principal or his or her team members observed in lessons being

instructed by teachers. In my search of the literature, I used Walden University databases

of EBSCO Host and Google Scholar online database. Other databases included ERIC,

FirstSearch, Oxford Education Bibliographies, and ProQuest.

To guide my literature search, I reviewed the major components of my study to

include the problem statement, purpose statement, phenomenon, and research questions.

Next, I identified the primary constructs associated with the major components, which

included *principal leadership, classroom instructional walkthrough, academic*

engagement, curriculum and pedagogy, effective pedagogy, curriculum and theory,

middle school curriculum, assessment of student learning, formative assessment,

summative assessment, high stakes tests, instructional rounds, visible learning

walkthrough, Theory of Action of Framework for Teaching and Learning, and classroom

environment and culture. I entered the key search terms in the databases and used key

terms to identify and organize headings and subheadings in Chapter 2.

Conceptual Framework

The phenomenon of classroom instructional walkthroughs was conceptualized

and framed using the five dimensions of teaching and learning, which includes purpose,

student engagement, curriculum and pedagogy, assessment of student learning, and classroom environment and culture (Fink & Markholt, 2017). Relevant dimensions were defined, discussed, and related to the walkthroughs in the research setting school district. My conceptual framework is organized into four sections. The first two sections are phenomenon of classroom instructional walkthroughs and theoretical foundations. The latter two sections are five dimensions of teaching and learning and theorists and researchers who explained the benefits of walkthroughs based on the TAFTL.

Phenomenon of Classroom Instructional Walkthroughs

The phenomenon or concept of interest in the study is classroom instructional walkthroughs. Classroom instructional walkthroughs are a type of professional development for teachers where a team of school administrators, veteran teachers, or members of the school leadership team observe classrooms and provide feedback to teachers designed to enhance instruction of teachers (Moss & Brookhart, 2015). Members of the team might promptly provide instructional feedback to teachers and feedback may be monitored by the principals (Moss & Brookhart, 2015).

The policy in the research setting school district is for the team to observe the classrooms for signs of student learning, student engagement, and effective lesson plans. Rather than focusing on a single classroom, the policy is to engender a schoolwide picture made up of many small snapshots (see Moss & Brookhart, 2015). The goal is to improve the overall academic growth at the school and not an individual teacher (Fischer & Frey, 2014; Garza et al., 2016). The improvement in academic growth is accomplished through observing instruction and providing positive and relevant feedback about what

was good and what was bad regarding instruction at the school (Moss & Brookhart, 2015). In the research setting school district, a principal, an assistant principal, and several veteran teachers walk through classrooms in a school once or twice a week. Before walkthroughs, members of the team identify and review the purpose of the observations in the middle school. After the walkthroughs, the team conference, review, and the positive and negative feedback were shared with teachers and benefited the entire middle school (Fischer & Frey, 2014; Garza et al., 2016).

Theoretical Foundation

The phenomenon (classroom instructional walkthroughs) in the study was conceptualized and framed using the five dimensions associated with the TAFTL. The TAFTL guided the development of the study's research questions, methodology, and organization of the reviewed literature in this chapter. The TAFTL is comprised of five dimensions of teaching and learning: (a) purpose, (b) student engagement, (c) curriculum and pedagogy, (d) assessment of student learning, and (e) classroom environment and culture (Van Vooren, 2018). The dimensions are aligned with classroom instructional walkthroughs and have improved academics in the middle schools at Grades 6, 7, and 8.

Five Dimensions of Teaching and Learning

The five dimensions of teaching and learning further framed the study. In the five dimensions, purpose refers to quality teacher instruction through the integration of state standards and objectives in lesson plans (Van Vooren, 2018). In instructional walkthroughs in the research setting school district, the principal or a team member may determine the scope and sequence related to teachers addressing state standards and

objectives in their lesson plans. Lessons plans must be reviewed by a team member, and the number of objectives and amount of time devoted to each objective in the activities of the lesson plans (Van Vooren, 2018).

The next dimension, student engagement, has three parts: (a) intellectual growth of students, (b) teacher engagement strategies that contribute to student engagement, and (c) type of communication between teacher and student and student and student (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). In the setting school district, the policy is that a principal or team member monitors students and checks for on-task students, distracted students, and bored students. The number and type of questions asked by teachers and time allowed for students to formulate responses to the questions are recorded. Research-based strategies to maintain student engagement are assessed to include proximity of teachers to students during the instructional process, the willingness of teachers to help students who are experiencing problems, and enthusiasm of teachers while instructing the lessons, as suggested in the writings of Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015).

Further, the dimension curriculum and pedagogy is comprised of three components: curriculum, teaching strategies, and scaffolding for learning (Van Vooren, 2018). The curriculum is the alignment of instructional materials to the lesson objectives, and teaching strategies are the alignment between instruction and pedagogical content knowledge. Scaffolding for learning means the level of support provided by the middle school teachers to the students throughout the entire lesson. In the school district in this study, there may be a recording of teaching strategies that are effective and ineffective for

academic growth in middle schools. Teachers are expected to follow the state-mandated curriculum and standards and provide support for struggling students.

Further, assessment of student learning is the teachers' use of multiple assessment methods to diagnose the occurrence of learning of diverse students in the classrooms (Alvoid & Black, 2014). In the research setting, the emphasis in instructional walkthroughs may be on the proper assessment of learning for high and low-achieving students in the classrooms. This type of assessment is expected using the questions of teachers, quizzes, tests, computer-assisted feedback, and other technologies. There may be a variety of formative and summative assessments. Teachers are expected to monitor all students in the classrooms for signs of understanding and not comprehending the lessons. Teachers are required to follow appropriate corrective actions for students who are not comprehending the lessons. Teachers need to allow students to have input into their assessment process (Alvoid & Black, 2014; Gabriel, 2018).

Finally, classroom environment and culture refer to how well teachers use the entire physical environment of classrooms, quality of classroom routines, and how supportive the classroom culture is for the academic growth of students (Alvoid & Black, 2014). In the research setting, the focus in instructional walkthroughs may be on the efficient and effective arrangements of seating and psychomotor instructional activities during the class period that is supportive of the lesson plan. Teachers' classroom environment is assessed by a team member to determine if the environment is warm and supportive of academic growth. Teachers are expected to have structured procedures and

rules for students to follow to facilitate the smooth operation of classroom routines,

(Alvoid & Black, 2014); Epstein & Willhite, 2015; Thomas & Warren, 2015).

Benefits of Walkthroughs Based on Theory of Action Framework for Teaching and

Learning

Fink and Markholt (2017) advocated for school leaders to acquire an in-depth

knowledge of the teaching and learning processes in their middle schools, using of

nonjudgmental methods for observing and analyzing instruction that can help them

discover familiar elements in the lessons and create awareness of how to identify these

common elements. Fink and Markholt contended that the TAFTL was designed to

develop goals regarding professional development for teachers, and the goals would

benefit the overall academics in schools. Some goals were a vision for high-quality

teaching and learning and an opportunity for a common language within and across

school systems as well as in individual schools. Benefits include the enhancement of

teachers' and principals' instructional expertise and continuous learning and

improvement from middle school students and teachers. Additional benefits are

facilitating teachers and principals to be focused on ways students learn while providing

insight and strategies into how dilemmas around classroom learning could be addressed

(Fink & Markholt, 2017; Nelsen, 2015).

The TAFTL has been widely applied and discussed, with studies explaining the

benefits of using this theory. For example, Allen and Topolka-Jorissen (2014) conducted

a study to determine how classroom instructional walkthroughs could be used as a

training strategy in professional development to benefit middle schools by improving the

overall academic achievement of students. Principals from eight middle schools were observed conducting walkthroughs for one year. A major conclusion from the findings was that the optimum way to enact the cycle of continuous improvement in middle schools was to create a culture of collective responsibility among educators using the feedback from the walkthroughs in professional development sessions and informal and formal collegial conversations between middle school teachers. Professional development and collegial conversations would enhance classroom instruction and student achievement.

Stout et al. (2013) stated that through collaborative practices, such as instructional walkthroughs or learning walks, teachers had more opportunities to reflect on the teaching and learning process. In their qualitative case study, the findings of Stout et al. (2013) revealed that the process of learning walks could be accomplished differently from middle school to middle school with teams of administrators and teachers, teacher-leaders and teachers, and teachers observing colleague teachers. Themes from this qualitative case study conveyed that when teachers were engaged in learning walkthroughs, reported being less isolated. Additional themes suggested that by being exposed to different instructional practices, teachers benefitted through opportunities to gain knowledge and change some of their outdated instructional strategies. Teachers perceived their schools benefited through the development of a culture that was more invitational, reflective, collaborative, and supportive of the academic achievement of all students in the middle schools.

A critique of the studies conducted by Allen and Topolka-Jorissen (2014) and Stout et al. (2013) revealed two different research designs. The former study was guided by observational research design and the latter study had a qualitative case study design. Both studies focused on classroom instructional walkthroughs in the middle schools and showed positive results for middle schools that implemented classroom instructional walkthroughs.

Literature Review Related to Key Constructs, Concepts, and Variables

In this section I present additional literature on key constructs, concepts, and variables. Constructs were based on the Five Dimensions of Teaching and Learning. Major concepts addressed included student engagement, curriculum and pedagogy, assessment of student learning, and classroom environment and culture. The discussion on each concept of interest was related to the study's phenomenon of classroom instructional walkthroughs and featured the walkthroughs at the research setting district middle schools.

Student Engagement

Reading ability is important for middle school students to have success in all subjects. Consequently, there was a discussion on engagement in the learning process and reading achievement. Some middle school students were poor academic achievers who were disengaged from the academic process, as discussed in the last part of this section on the variable of academic disengagement in the learning process. Student engagement was an important part of classroom instructional walkthroughs in the research setting school district. The concept was justified for the study because it was one of the five

dimensions that composed the theory of action framework of teaching and learning that framed the problem statement, purpose statement, and research questions in the study.

In their quantitative causal-comparative research study, Martinek, Hofmann, and Kipman (2016) investigated the academic engagement of five classes of 127 suburban middle school students in a school district in Minnesota. Data in the findings showed students who enjoyed academic success and were competent students in the middle school classrooms demonstrated a greater proclivity of enhanced levels of academic engagement in the learning processes. Martinek et al. defined academic engagement as concerned and enthusiastic involvement in the learning process with a behavioral component, emotional component, and cognitive component. Similar to Martinek et al. (2016), Gnambs and Hanfstingl (2016) conducted a quantitative causal-comparative study on two classes of 53 urban middle school students. This study concluded positive academic and behavioral engagement for middle school students who were actively involved in classroom instruction. These students demonstrated positive conduct, compliance with class routines and rules, attentiveness to the teachers' instruction, and asked questions. Gnambs and Hanfstingl stated that emotional engagement in middle school students was characterized by those students who displayed an interest in the lesson, enthusiasm, intrinsic motivation, and enjoyment in-class academic activities. A critique of the studies conducted by the researchers showed both studies were similar to quantitative methodology and comparative research design. Both studies investigated middle school students. A shortcoming of the study by Gnambs and Hanfstingl is the

small sample size of 53 urban middle school students. The small sample size limits generalizability to a population and different settings (Creswell, 2017).

Schaefer, Malu, and Yoon (2016) conducted an extensive review of the literature on elementary and middle school students' student engagement in the academic process. Schaefer et al. investigated the middle school movement and effective ways some teachers kept students highly engaged in the learning process. The three researchers focused on the cognitive engagement construct, which was comprised of four components aligned with the tenets of the engagement theory. The four components are: (a) self-motivation, (b) self-regulation skills, (c) academic goal setting, and (d) relevance/value. A primary conclusion of Schaefer et al. was middle school students with cognitive engagement tended to be self-motivated and demonstrated self-regulation skills to achieve self-determined academic objectives pertinent to academic success. Self-motivation, self-regulation, and cognitive engagement were positively correlated constructs, according to Schaefer et al. (2016) that helped researchers understand the process through which middle school students initiated and sustained high levels of investment and engagement in the middle school learning process. Conversely, student engagement could be threatened by standardized tests and a rigid curriculum and stress on some middle school teachers to maintain high academic engagement. Another major conclusion in the research of Schaefer et al. that applies to the middle school research setting school district is that academic engagement of middle school students is not fixed and could be positively enhanced with research-based intervention strategies introduced

by teachers and school administrators in the middle school environment, such as classroom instructional walkthroughs.

Classroom instructional walkthroughs in the middle school were conducted to observe students in the classrooms; to collect data about actions that suggested high and low behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement; and to provide feedback to all teachers on the results of the observations. The purpose of the feedback from this type of instructional walkthrough was to enhance the overall academic engagement of middle school students in the school district and thereby increase overall academic achievement (Gillespie, 2016).

Stevenson (2016) contended reading is an important subject in the middle school curriculum because proficiency in reading, in large part, determined how well students performed in other subjects to include history, mathematics, and science. Middle school students who are not simply sitting in their seats and passively absorbing reading instruction delivered by teachers but are part of the learning process (actively thinking, speaking, and participating in the classroom activities) are academically engaged students. There were strategies shared by researchers that supported middle school students' active engagement in the reading lessons. Parsons, Malloy, Parsons, and Burrowbridge (2015) stated that middle school teachers could plan reading lessons to be challenging enough so students will not become bored or distracted while showing students that success on the objectives in the lessons was feasible and achievable. Parsons et al. suggested that middle school teachers might plan reading lessons to facilitate students making personal connections to informational text. Likewise, Gaston, Martinez,

and Martin (2016) contended creating positive and strong interpersonal relationships in the classrooms between teachers and students and students and students was supportive of high academic engagement.

Boerman-Cornell (2015) reported that middle school students became more actively engaged in the learning process when they were introduced to reading material relevant to them, either through a character connection or an understanding of why the reading material applied to the lessons and their future. Boerman-Cornell contended students became more engaged when presented with the opportunities to read with a partner or to work independently with the choice to self-select reading materials.

Academic disengagement.   Brion-Meisels (2015) conducted an observational study with Grade 8 students in five classrooms in Alabama. The students resided in low socio-economic status families. The researcher observed high academic disengagement, which was troublesome to the middle school principal and school leadership team. Brion-Meisels (2015) stated that most school principals realized high disengagement contributed to low school interest, low academic motivation, and high off-task behaviors. The high off-task behaviors lowered the academic achievement of other students across the five Grade 8 classrooms. Brion-Meisels (2015) suggested lower academic engagement was correlated with poor student and teacher relationships in middle schools, because unlike elementary school teachers, Brion-Meisels (2015) discovered some Grade 8 teachers were more likely to interact with their students from only an academic perspective. These teachers perceived concerns outside of the academic arena, and concerns in the home and communities of the students were not a function of their job

responsibilities. Also, the number of students in middle school classrooms tended to be far greater than the number of students in elementary school classrooms (Brion-Meisels, 2015).

Butz and Usher (2015) stated that regardless of whether middle school teachers' and students' low relationships were caused by a large number of students they instructed, size of school or lack of university and district professional development, some middle school teachers might be less inclined to provide either academic or social-emotional support compared to what was provided to elementary school students by elementary teachers. The lack of support facilitated the middle school student disengagement in the academic process. Booth and Gerard (2014) conducted a descriptive-survey study, where they surveyed rural, urban, and suburban middle school teachers. Teachers revealed in their survey responses fewer opportunities for positive teacher interactions in middle school classrooms than what the teachers experienced when they taught students in the elementary classrooms. Booth and Gerard (2014) discovered that when students transitioned from elementary to middle school, they interacted with many educators to include various content area specialists. The instructional spaces became more isolated and some students began to feel an overall sense of disengagement and alienation in the middle school environment.

Positive and meaningful relationships with teachers and students supported students' engagement with schools in myriad and diverse ways. Booth and Gerard (2014) concluded from their findings that middle school students demonstrated more favorable attendance when their teachers created classrooms with warm, supportive, and caring

milieus. Students with good relationships with middle school teachers reported feeling more connected to the school and some researchers (Cheon & Reeve, 2015) reported school connectedness was positively correlated with enhanced academic motivation and academic achievement. Brown, Kanny, and Johnson (2014) and Cheon and Reeve (2015) indicated positive adolescent and adult connections significantly, and positively influenced adolescents' identity development and the positive identity had a positive and high correlation with academic learning (Brown et al., 2014). Also, Brown et al. suggested middle school students who struggled in school perceived support as more beneficial when it came to adults with whom they had a trusting relationship.

Curriculum and Pedagogy

Curriculum and teaching were a vital part of classroom instructional walkthroughs in the research setting school district. The concept was justified for the study because it is one of the five dimensions that composed the theory of action framework of teaching and learning that will frame the problem statement, purpose statement, and research questions in the study. Findings from numerous researchers, who investigated this construct of interest, were presented in this section. Findings were organized in the six areas of curriculum and theory, middle school curriculum, curriculum enhancement with instructional walkthroughs, current studies focusing on curriculum and instructional walkthroughs, effective pedagogy, and culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP). Curriculum and theory.

Middle school teachers, including teachers in the research setting district middle schools, appear to differ in their interpretations of the middle school curriculum (Lavenia,

Cohen-Vogel, & Lang, 2015). The difference in interpretations (positive or negative) needs to be identified and discussed in classroom instructional walkthroughs. Likewise, some teachers are not cognizant of theories of curriculum that govern effective teaching practices. Lavenia et al. (2015) contended some middle school teachers might not have acquired a profound understanding of theories introduced in the university teacher preparation courses. They may recall names such as Piaget or Vygotsky, but do not remember the tenets of the theorists' theories and how the tenets apply to the middle school curriculum. Lavenia et al. emphasized that all middle school teachers are involved in curriculum making in their classrooms through the choices they made regarding class activities, books, and supplementary materials. These personal choices happened only in their classrooms and were not policies mandated by the schools or districts.

Consistent with the premise of Lavenia et al. (2015), Pense, Freeburg, and Clemons (2015) suggested when planning a curriculum, middle school teachers must know the purpose and theory behind curriculum development and planning processes, as well as the research-based pedagogy for delivering the information to middle school students. Pense et al. explained that the goals of curriculum theory are to guide the development of the curriculum and to facilitate middle school teachers to determine what knowledge is most appropriate to convey to middle school students. Curriculum theory guides the teachers on key issues relative to what needs to be taught and how to teach the content (Porter, Fusarelli, & Fusarelli, 2015). Porter et al. (2015) promulgated three major types of curricula: formal, teacher-created, and hidden. Each of the three types may be observed in classroom instructional walkthroughs. The formal curriculum is what

middle school teachers teach in the classrooms related to state standards, which are the specific concepts that must be taught, especially for middle school students to pass standardized tests from the state. Teacher created curriculum is the teacher deciding what may be taught and the scope and sequence of the instruction in the lessons. The hidden curriculum is the knowledge that is not purposely instructed but happens as a result of daily interactions and inquiries made by middle school students (Chauvot & Lee, 2015; Porter et al., 2015). In classroom instructional walkthroughs, team members must observe all versions of the curricula implemented by teachers in the classrooms. Prompt feedback may be shared on what is working correctly and what instructional strategies require enhancement. Team members can determine if the curriculum used in the classrooms supports state standards and objectives. Team members can provide feedback to teachers on how to improve the curriculum and provide praise to middle school teachers who implement a curriculum that enhances the academics of students.

Middle school curriculum.

Young (2015) stated that middle school curricula have different goals and learning outcomes from goals and outcomes associated with elementary and high schools. Classroom instructional walkthroughs can educate middle school teachers on the rationale and theory that underlie the middle school curricula. Young explained that the middle school curricula were centered around middle school students learning content that combined students' interests with societal expectations, while intellectually empowering students and supporting them to acquire requisite skills and knowledge needed to achieve academic goals.

Shanahan (2015) suggested that middle school students are at the age and stage of development where they are becoming more cognizant of their surroundings, and the curriculum must reflect learning activities designed to address their questions about the surroundings. Middle school students' academic successes can best be assured by addressing the students' developmental needs and interests. Shanahan contended that middle schools required competent middle school teachers and less detailed textbook content.

Curriculum enhancement with instructional walkthroughs.

Dewey (2015) noted that the curriculum had a significant role in the day-to-day work of educators and policymakers, as well as researchers and school leaders who were interested in exploring the teaching and learning of middle school students. Concurring with Dewey, Van Vooren (2018) indicated that the process of curriculum design changed as educators interacted with the learning standards mandated by the state, and state officials required the principals to ensure teachers had current knowledge of standards through research-based procedures such as classroom instructional walkthroughs. The researcher used a multi-phased approach (quantitative surveys, qualitative data from shadowing principals, and interviews) in data collection with 18 West Coast elementary school principals. The rationale of Van Vooren (2018) was the use and knowledge of the curriculum are vital to support the learning of teachers and the learning of students. Other findings were principals devoted more time to network with other principals on the curriculum, professional development, and program evaluation. Principals did not want to

perform administrative or paperwork tasks during school hours to have a greater focus on curriculum and instruction.

Taylor Backor and Gordon (2015) stated that professional development for middle school teachers through instructional walkthroughs was an important function of instructional leadership and appropriate curriculum implementation. Professional development must be a long-term strategy that focuses on making a difference in the entire middle school regarding the enhancement of academics of middle school students. Taylor Backor and Gordon suggested that curriculum development and instructional improvement were critical elements of a cyclical process for effective instructional leadership. For instance, walkthroughs may occur at least once each week for the entire school year. Supportive of the premise of Taylor Backor and Gordon (2015), Freidus and Noguera (2017) contended principals must understand that a well-developed curriculum resulted in good instruction in middle school classrooms, and the curriculum must be frequently assessed throughout the school year with classroom instructional walkthroughs. The policy in the research setting school district is to employ weekly classroom walkthroughs to ensure that curriculum development and implementation will contribute to effective instruction in the classrooms and successes in student learning. Principals assume responsibility for school-level instructional decisions and must ensure, through strategies such as walkthroughs, that teachers demonstrate knowledge of how to plan, deliver, and assess state and district standards, as advocated (Taylor Backor & Gordon, 2015).

Current studies focusing on curriculum and instructional walkthroughs. Brown et al. (2014) suggested that when principals and teachers work together and cooperate in instructional walkthroughs much could be accomplished to strengthen the instruction within middle schools. A successful example of the collaboration and cooperation shared by the two researchers was the Kent School District project. District leaders established an evaluation team that was trained by researchers associated with the Washington Education Association. The team used observation procedures developed by the University of Washington Center for Educational leadership, based on the Five Dimensions of Teaching and Learning that framed this proposed study (Brown et al., 2014).

The evaluation team used a rubric aligned with the five dimensions to observe instruction, analyze depth of instruction, assess the growth and development of teachers, assess the principal's capacity for instructional leadership, and determine the professional learning needs of principals and teachers. The team aimed to help the middle school teachers in Kent School District ascertain core elements required to maintain a cycle of continuous improvement in the middle schools. Brown et al. (2014) concluded that the outcome of efforts of the evaluation team was the improvement of academics for many struggling middle school students in the district's middle schools.

Vogel (2018) conducted a qualitative study with 50 principal participants. The researcher explored principals as instructional leaders. Vogel (2018) aimed to determine the experiences essential for principals to be successful, as they assumed their roles in the area of supervision, evaluation, and use of data to inform instructional practices. The

researcher wanted to show how principals discover value in their daily work. The epistemology that guided the study was constructivism. In constructivism, meaning for events are constructed by human beings these humans engage in the world they are interpreting. Vogel (2018) indicated optimum times to share instructional feedback with teachers were explored in her qualitative case study. A conclusion from the investigation was professional learning community (PLC) meetings and middle school faculty meetings were important times to share feedback and to contribute to the growth of teachers, and therefore, the success of middle school students Nelsen (2015); Newton (2015). The meetings were excellent times for principals to share feedback from walkthroughs, and this feedback was targeted to improve the academics of all students in the schools.

Another conclusion was curriculum planning and implementing were important for good instructional leadership (Bolyard, 2015; Vogel, 2018; Xin & Johnson, 2015). Curriculum planning and implementation were important strategies that supported the needs of middle school students. The conclusion from the investigation of Vogel was when teachers were given opportunities to experience success, they felt valued and performed more efficiently in the classrooms. It was important to share feelings and effective instructional strategies of successful middle school teachers with all teachers (Dewey, 2015; Vogel, 2018). Shaha, Glassett, and Copas (2015) findings in their observational research investigation concluded that when reframing an observation or evaluation as an instructional and feedback procedure, leaders created a culture of learning around this procedure. The concept of reframing an observation fostered

opportunities to support teacher growth and development. Shaha et al. (2015) indicated that during classroom observations, evaluators could gather data on how teachers asked questions and strategies used to encourage critical thinking in large and small group discussions with middle school students. A conclusion from the observational research of Shaha et al. (2015) was that creating a tool or rubric for classroom instructional walkthroughs facilitated middle school principals to focus more on what was being observed during the classroom instruction (Shaha et al., 2015).

Effective pedagogy (good teachers).

A primary aim of classroom instructional walkthroughs in the research setting school district is to ensure effective teaching exists in each classroom in the middle schools. Supportive of the theme of effective teaching, Wygal and Stout (2015) reported the following characteristics of effective teachers: creative, efficient, interactive, safe, fun, flexible, reflexive, engaging, collaborative, enthusiastic, spontaneous, and warm. Wygal and Stout (2015) suggested that determining what makes a good teacher is dependent on the composition and culture of the community, school, and classroom. Yet, there is general agreement among researchers (Wygal & Stout, 2015) that good teachers could create a warm and supportive learning environment where students are encouraged to take risks and learn from their failures.

Good teachers possess a caring attitude for all students. These teachers are not boring but are kind, respectful, and able to maintain control of the classrooms (Seng & Geertsema, 2018). Good middle school teachers hold high expectations for student achievement and practice culturally relevant pedagogy. Teachers who are effective in

working with non-English learners are just as effective in working with English learners (Nguyen, 2016).

Culturally responsive pedagogy.

CRP is a strategy for teaching diverse learners using cultural experiences of students, course content which enhances students' academic achievement, and research-based instructional strategies supportive of high academic achievement (Ladson-Billings, 2015). The paramount aim of CRP is to create a learning milieu for diverse learners that fosters excellent learning using cultural elements, to include teachers' cultural capital or prior knowledge from personal experiences to improve learning experiences at the middle schools (Ladson-Billings, 2017). Ladson-Billings reported three propositions in CRP: (a) students must experience academic success, (b) students may be allowed to maintain cultural competence, and (c) students may be encouraged to challenge the current status quo.

In CRP, according to Borrero and Sanchez (2017), the inclusion of the child's culture must be incorporated into the child's learning experiences. Borrero and Sanchez explained that teachers in middle schools must be employed who are culturally and linguistically diverse because students and communities will benefit from diverse teachers. A significant focus in CRP is on teacher professionalism, culture, ethics, and creativity using the best practices of teaching.

In CRP, when academic knowledge and skills reflect students' experiences and interests, lessons become personally relevant with more appeal for students. Lessons are learned more easily (Byrd, 2016; Howard, 2016). For pedagogy to be culturally relevant,

four criteria must be met. The criteria are (a) collective empowerment, (b) academic success, (c) cultural competence, and (d) critical consciousness. Teaching diverse populations requires CRP teachers to work toward understanding the cultural aspects shared among students and between teachers and students (Maxwell, 2014; Milner, 2017; Smith, Mack, & Akyea, 2016).

Milner (2017) indicated that middle school teachers may be nonjudgmental and inclusive of the cultural differences within their diverse population of students. The teachers are intentional about accessing students' cultural knowledge and linking the knowledge to the middle school curriculum, especially where the cultural context of the teachers does not align with that of the students (Noguera, 2017). Noguera explained that CRP teachers genuinely believed in their students' intellectual potential and understand that it is their responsibility to facilitate the unveiling of the potential of students by guiding them to critical consciousness without ignoring their students' ethnic and cultural identities. Planned activities are implemented to develop students' self-efficacy by focusing on their strengths before moving on to more rigorous and challenging material (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). If possible, effective CRP middle school teachers establish flexible schedules for their students to have access to the teachers during various times of the day. At all times, the teachers work for high levels of learning for all students and strive to engender nurturing and cooperative learning environments. Cunningham (2016) and Irvin and Darling (2015) indicated culturally relevant teachers maintain high expectations by immediately enforcing classroom rules when and if they were violated, refraining from arguments with students, and facilitating an environment focused on learning.

In the research setting school district in the study, the policy of the district was for the team conducting walkthroughs to observe classrooms and determine if middle school teachers were using culturally relevant pedagogy. Feedback from the walkthroughs was shared with all teachers in the schools to support all teachers in the consistent use of culturally relevant pedagogy, as suggested by Ladson-Billings (2017). The feedback aimed to improve academics for all students in middle schools.

Assessment of Student Learning

Assessment of student learning was a critical aspect of classroom instructional walkthroughs in the research setting school district. The concept was appropriate for the study because it is one of the five dimensions that composed the theory of action framework of teaching and learning framing the problem statement, purpose statement, and research questions in the study. Findings from various researchers who investigated this construct of interest were presented in subsequent topics on formative assessment, summative assessments, and high stakes testing. Evidence of use of effective formative and summative assessments by middle school teachers was one of the major emphases of an instructional walkthrough of team members in the research setting middle schools because the assessment of learning is positively correlated with middle school students' academic achievement (Karim, 2015; Maxwell, 2014; Xu & Brown, 2016; Yao, 2015). Formative assessment. Formative assessments in the research setting district middle schools were conducted to monitor and support instructional decisions to help enhance the academic progress and growth of middle school students. Middle school teachers in the district were required to give formal assessment students in their classrooms to

determine students' true knowledge and skill levels (beginning points) and where

students were in various stages of the journey towards meeting objectives of the lessons

or units. Data from formative assessments may be the foundation of daily planning in the

classrooms, as advocated by Box, Skoog, and Dabbs (2015) and Curry, Mwavita, Holter,

and Harris (2016). Box et al. (2015) indicated two basic purposes of assessments in

middle schools. One purpose is to gather information about students' achievement, while

the second purpose is to inform instructional decisions and motivate students to strive to

perform better.

Many researchers (Curry et al., 2016; Karim, 2015; Maxfield & Williams, 2014;

Maxwell, 2014) concur that assessment encompasses all activities by teachers and

students with data collection that is useful for diagnostic decision making designed to

enhance teaching and learning. Karim stated assessments come in various forms and at

different times in the middle school classrooms. Examples of assessments provided by

Karim included observations of students by teachers, comments in school records,

classroom discussions, and students' self-evaluation of their work (i.e., classwork and

homework). Consequently, formative assessment of student learning means more than the

administration of tests and quizzes. All types of formative assessments may inform and

guide the classroom instruction delivered by middle school teachers (Quinn, 2017).

In their writings, Quinn (2017) and Xu and Brown (2016) stated that middle school

teachers could employ formative assessments to ascertain the effectiveness of their

instruction, coursework, and whether or not students are achieving the objectives of the

lessons. Quinn and Xu and Brown suggested when teachers used data in the form of

specific, descriptive, and immediate feedback to adjust or modify their instruction to

better meet the learning needs of middle school students, the assessment has become

formative. Xu and Brown (2016) contended that formative assessment data may be

shared with middle school students to enhance their cognizance of any learning gaps

students' might possess between classroom learning goals and current knowledge,

understanding, and skills. Yao stated middle school teachers could design supplementary

instruction and strategies to help students navigate through actions required to support

students in their academic goal attainment. Xu and Brown (2016) suggested middle

school teachers may expect students to achieve at the highest possible academic levels,

and teachers must expose students to rigorous academic lessons.

In their research, Stanley and Alig (2015) provided directions for principals to

properly execute formative assessment practices. These two researchers advocated for

middle school principals to select middle school teachers who are interested in working

with formative assessments and principals may endeavor to understand teachers'

perspectives about using data and evidence from the formative assessments to modify

instructional strategies throughout the school. Also, a formative assessment PLC may be

established with a facilitator as chair of PLC meetings. Stanley and Alig also suggested

the facilitator could lead a discussion on each component of the formative assessment

process and train middle school teachers on how to use data from formative assessments.

Stanley and Alig stated the rationale are when middle school teachers are properly trained

and understand formative assessment procedures, students will realize academic gains.

Principals must not assume all teachers know how to analyze formative data. To increase

teacher capacity ongoing professional development and frequent discussions on the use of formative data in PLCs may occur.

Summative assessment. According to Brookhart and Chen (2015), a summative assessment is typically mandated by external agencies. Examples of the external agencies include local, state, and federal entities who request academic accountability reports on the progress of students. Brookhart and Chen (2015) indicated that typically middle school students are administered a summative assessment (i.e., state-mandated standardized tests) at one point in time to document the amount of learning that occurred during a specific period, such as a six-week grading period or an academic school year. These assessments are frequently state assessments, national exams, end of course exams, and final exams (Brookhart & Chen, 2015; Maxfield & Williams, (2014) assessments can provide decision making. Summative assessments provide agency data and evidence on program success, curriculum alignment, and course alignment. The information concerning whether or not students could advance to an enrichment program or whether students needed intervention in an after-school or Saturday program to help remedy academic deficiencies (Bright & Joyner, 2016). Bright and Joyner also suggested summative assessments for state accountability which address state standards; scores on standards are summed to provide a single overall proficiency score. The proficiency score is used to gauge student learning and grade the school based on students' abilities to achieve state or district mandated standards. Compared to many formative assessments, the cost for state and federal accountability tests are expensive and have minimal feedback for educators, according to (Conley, 2015).

Though standardized tests are the most common type of summative assessments, other summative assessments might encompass teacher-made tests, quizzes, projects, performance assessments, and anything that can be objectively graded and is based on the curriculum standards and objectives (Conley, 2015). Some, not all, summative assessments account for differences in students due to varying ability levels, learning styles, and areas of interest.

With the introduction of the No Child Left Behind legislation, there was a greater emphasis on high stakes testing in the United States. Most researchers and educators are opponents of over-reliance on high-stakes tests. Under No Child Left Behind, accountability became more objective and required greater evidence-based methods of assessing the performance of teachers and school leaders (Rembach & Dison, 2016). Rembach and Dison postulated that the idea of the accountability business model was to *weed out* weak teachers to increase academic achievement in ineffective schools. Retnawati, Djidu, Kartianoml, Apino, and Anazifa, (2018) reported four negative effects of high-stakes testing in K-12 schools that evolved from the literature. One negative effect is that curriculum and classroom teacher effectiveness suffer from the influence of high stakes tests (Retnawati, et al., 2018).

Commenting on this negative effect, Retnawati, et al. (2018) contended that classroom teachers have little time and energy during the school day to use research-based instructional approaches because teachers devote a tremendous amount of time preparing for and worrying about the high-stakes test. The high stakes testing culture limit the curriculum to only tasks that may be mastered on the test. Unfortunately,

important decisions that shape the futures of teachers and students are based on one-time, high-stakes tests.

These high stakes tests, according to Pretorius, van Mourik, and Barratt (2017), determine the middle school curriculum because middle school teachers revise lesson plans to reflect standards and objectives required on standardized tests. The standardized tests limit the curriculum about what may be and what is taught, which affects the quality of classroom instruction. High stakes tests force teachers to teach to the low-level skills required to move upgrade levels, while not emphasizing the more challenging aspects a curriculum has to offer (Pretorius, et al., 2017).

Another negative effect of a high stakes test is the questionable validity of standardized tests (Haolader, Avi, & Foysol, 2015). Haolader et al. (2015) stated that often these tests are misaligned with curricula outcomes prescribed by local school districts. Validity of creating a unified accountability system with different methods of achieving accountability is being questioned by researchers and educators. According to Haolader et al. (2015) there is a concern with instructional decisions mostly made based on standardized test scores. Further, proficiency levels promulgated by state departments of education sometime do not coincide with proficiency levels required for real-world application. Some researchers (Draper, 2015; Haolader et al., 2015; Hassel, 2015) advocated for use of more authentic tests with open-ended questions and a grade-appropriate scoring rubric to provide a more accurate picture of a child's future success.

The third negative effect is school funding because the costs of standardized testing are astronomical (Draper, 2015). Draper estimated that high stakes testing costs

American schools up to $60 billion per year, which is comparable to the gross national product of small undeveloped countries, such as Haiti and Guatemala. Some researchers (Draper, 2015; Hassel, 2015) and educators contend that the money devoted to high-stakes testing might be better applied to improve the infrastructure of outdated schools and resources supportive of curriculum standards. Many schools devote most of the curriculum budget on test preparations which causes school leaders to abolish or reduce important programs. Examples of eliminated programs in some school districts might include programs supporting gifted and talented students, programs in the arts and sciences, music programs, and physical education programs. Initiatives such as technology in the classrooms and project-based learning approaches, in some cases, are not being fully implemented because of the unavailability of funds for the programs (Maxwell, 2014).

The last negative effect is that school culture sometimes suffers because of standardized testing (Haynes et al., 2016). In their research, Haynes et al. contended teachers and principals have more accountability under No Child Left Behind legislation. There is pressure for schools to perform up to proficiency levels or suffer negative consequences and labeled as low-performing schools. Teachers in low-performing schools evaluation scores are lowered; they become less motivated and more frustrated. Retention of young teachers suffers, particularly in urban, rural, and low-income districts (Raiyn & Tilchin, 2016). Raiyn and Tilchin (2016) suggested good young middle school teachers are being dissuaded from continuing with their jobs in public schools due to the significant pressure of high-stakes tests and minimum instructional freedom. School

culture is created where the paramount purpose of learning is solely preparedness for standardized tests (Lam, 2017).

Classroom Environment and Culture

Observation of classroom environment and culture was a vital part of classroom instructional walkthroughs in the research setting school district. Minimum learning occurs in a classroom that is not inviting and is not warm and supportive. The concept is justified for the study because the concept of interest is one of the five dimensions that composed the theory of action framework of teaching and learning framing the problem statement, purpose statement, and research questions in the study.

The research on classroom walkthroughs shifted from focusing more on teaching behaviors to a student focus relative to engendering and maintaining a supportive classroom environment and culture (Stout, Kachur, & Edwards, 2013). In a supportive classroom environment that considers the culture of all students, students are motivated, engaged, and learning (Stout et al., 2013). One best practice of classroom instructional walkthroughs is to create a culture of reflective inquiry where all middle school teachers experience a profound understanding and appreciation of linking to collegial collaboration (Stout et al., 2013). Owens et al. (2016) were adamant that classroom walkthroughs or learning walks created a positive change facilitating school leaders to transition the focus of classroom instruction on learning and classroom climate instead of teaching in the classrooms.

Howell, Faulkner, Cook, Miller, and Thompson (2016) conducted an observational research study and investigated a school district buddy system with the

buddies being a school district administrator and a middle school principal. Buddies frequently shared research-based teaching strategies and middle school teachers. After the implementation of the buddy system, 3-minute walkthroughs were conducted to monitor instructional practices and to generate a plan for all middle school students to succeed in their schools. Howell et al. (2016) concluded that the buddy system enhanced the school environment and culture. A conclusion of the researchers is when schools are embedded in a community of professional learning, principal leadership in the schools creates a holistic environment where students thrive and are excited while learning. A school with collaboration by district and school leaders that are committed to the success of students becomes a community of learners.

Marsh, Bertrand, and Huguet (2015) concluded that collaboration between school leaders and instructional walkthroughs heighten leadership visibility on the school grounds and contributed to the school environment being perceived as a safe environment supportive of academic achievement. Also, a conclusion of Marsh et al. (2015) is when principals conduct walkthroughs, the walkthroughs support the establishment of high academic expectations and a school culture that promotes greater student success in all classrooms, consistent with the school vision. Also, principals become more acquainted with the day-to-day school activities and routines in the classrooms.

Concurring with Marsh et al. (2015), Schaefer (2015) emphasized thst if classroom instructional walkthroughs were not an integral part of the school's culture, then teachers could be missing opportunities to be engaged in continuous learning. Continuous learning opportunities are imperative to sustain instructional practices and

promote accountability for professional development. Shaha, Glassett, and Copas (201*5)*

extended the research of Marsh et al. (2015) and Schaefer (2015) by suggesting that

during classroom instructional walkthroughs, team members may gather assessment data

on how teachers ask questions and encourage critical thinking in large and small group

discussions. Creating a tool or rubric for classroom instructional walkthroughs helped

principals focus on what was being observed during the classroom instruction.

Van Vooren (2018) provided support for professional development through their

involvement in principals' preparation programs and encouraged data collection from

walkthrough observations. The finding of the researchers resulted in two approaches to

walkthroughs: Bureaucratic approach and Collaborative approach. In the Bureaucratic

approach, the principal possessed the sole expertise and authority to recommend actions

for teachers to improve instruction in the classrooms. In the Collaborative approach,

power was shared between teachers and school administrators; there was the active

engagement of shared responsibility. Administrators, instructional coaches, as well as

teachers worked as a team to embrace the common purpose of enhancing classroom

instruction. The Collaborative approach is used in many middle schools (O'Malley,

Voight, Renshaw, & Eklund, 2015) to include the middle schools in the study's research

setting school district. Mette and Riegel (2018) suggested collaborative classroom

instructional walkthroughs promoted a positive culture and environment of continuous

improvement in middle schools. This approach resulted in improved practices and

contributed to teachers being more ready to adapt to new and different instructional

strategies to help them improve their professional growth and support a culture of

collaboration. Mette and Riegel contended that as principals continued to share their perceptions of leadership and observations with each other and with teachers, it was critical for all involved to embrace an approach of change. Embracing an approach to change fosters an environment and culture with middle school teachers being empowered to create change and facilitate the cycle of continuous school improvement.

Hsin-Hsiange and Mao-neng (2015) in their study on school culture hypothesized that perceptions of what is occurring in the classroom could influence the environment and culture of middle schools. The two researchers explored the kinds of high-leverage practices that fostered equitable leadership with schools. A discovery from the findings was classroom environment and culture, related to the principal's perceptions of what is occurring in the classrooms, influenced the dynamics of instruction and learning in middle school classrooms. A conclusion from the finding was developing high leverage practices, such as classroom instructional walkthroughs, facilitated a culture of high expectations and collective responsibility in the school environment. Another conclusion of Hsin-Hsiange and Mao-neng (2015) is teachers and the leadership team must be intentional as they build an organization of continuous improvement. A conclusion is all members of the school community may be invested in responsibility for the success of all students.

Summary and Conclusions

Through my research I found that using classroom instructional walkthroughs was characterized as a strategy used by principals, school leaders, and teachers to improve instruction in the classroom. Several studies have suggested classroom instructional

walkthroughs promote student engagement, enhance the curriculum, and improve scores on standardized assessments. In chapter 2, I have offered an extensive review of the literature on various constructs (i.e., principal leadership, classroom instructional walkthrough, academic engagement, curriculum and pedagogy, effective pedagogy, curriculum and theory, middle school curriculum, assessment of student learning, formative assessment, summative assessment, high stakes tests, instructional rounds, visible learning walkthrough, Theory of Action of Framework for Teaching and Learning, and classroom environment and culture) related to aspects of the problem. All constructs were pertinent to the phenomenon of classroom instructional walkthroughs. Current literature was presented that established the relevancy of the gap and conveyed how the gap influenced the work of principals, as principals continued to refocus their efforts, time, and attention as instructional leaders. For instance, in their writings, Zepeda et al. (2015) stated principals were becoming more aware of best practices that influence student learning and student achievements, such as walkthroughs by principals and veteran teachers.

The phenomenon (instructional walkthroughs) in the study was conceptualized and framed with the TAFTL. Guiding the study were five dimensions of this theory, which are (a) purpose, (b) student engagement, (c) curriculum and pedagogy, (d) assessment of student learning, and (e) classroom environment and culture. The TAFTL was widely applied and discussed in the research of theorists and researchers who explained the benefits of using this theory to frame their studies. The reviewed literature was organized around the constructs of classroom instructional walkthroughs, student

engagement, curriculum and pedagogy, assessment of student learning, and classroom environment and culture.

The literature in Chapter 2 helped guide the methodology for Chapter 3. In Chapter 3, I discuss the research design (case methodology), and my role as a qualitative researcher is explained. I present information about the participants and the data collection and analyses, including the procedures for recruiting the principals and procedures for analyzing the qualitative data. Ethical steps I took are presented, and they were designed to protect the confidentiality of middle school participants.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Research has suggested that principals do not possess a clear understanding of the function and purpose of classroom instructional walkthroughs (Garza et al., 2016), which can influence principals' work as instructional leaders (Zepeda et al., 2015). Thus, the purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the gap in understanding of what middle school principals perceived as the function and purpose of classroom instructional walkthroughs. The study was guided by two research questions that explored the perceptions of middle school principals regarding classroom instructional walkthroughs. Chapter 3 includes the research design and rationale, the role of the qualitative researcher, and how the principal participants were selected for the study. Other topics are semistructured interview instruments, data analysis, trustworthiness of data, and ethical procedures. The research sample of middle school principals, method of data collection, procedures for data management, data analysis methods (interpretive analysis for qualitative data analysis), and concerns with ethical considerations for the protection of confidentiality of research participants were all essential elements of this chapter (Yazan, 2015).

Research Design and Rationale

The research design is used to guide researchers systemically from the research problem to the research question to data collection and data analysis (Creswell, 2017). The research design for this study was a qualitative case study designed to explore what middle school principals perceived as the function and purpose of classroom instructional walkthroughs. A qualitative research approach was chosen because it gave me a deeper

understanding of a situation (Lewis, 2015). The research questions were framed by the five dimensions of teaching and learning:

Research Question 1: What do principals perceive as the function of classroom instructional walkthroughs?

Research Question 2: How do principals view the influence of classroom instructional walkthroughs on classroom instruction?

This qualitative case study was conducted in the natural setting (district middle schools) with seven middle schools located in a diverse suburban/rural school district in a mid-Atlantic state. The qualitative approach was an in-depth exploration of the interview data on classroom instructional walkthroughs. A qualitative approach was the most appropriate approach to investigate the study's phenomenon and to construct meanings from interview responses of middle school principals. A strength of the qualitative approach to research is the exploration of perceptions, opinions, and views of participants on critical issues (i.e., classroom instructional walkthroughs) worthy of exploration (Gentles et al., 2015). This approach helped to understand how middle school principals interpret meaning related to open-ended research questions (see Gentles et al., 2015).

Numerous studies were reviewed and commonly used approaches (quantitative and mixed methods) were considered before the selection of the qualitative approach. But the quantitative approach was not appropriate because there was no testing of null or alternative hypotheses, collecting numerical data from tests or Likert-scale surveys, using large sample size, or conducting experimental studies (Glesne, 2014). The mixed-methods approach was also not appropriate because there was no quantitative component

in the study to merge or compare with findings from the study's qualitative component. There were no quantitative research questions and a large sample size for generalizing to a population (Hyett, Kennedy, & Dickson-Swift, 2014). Therefore, the qualitative approach was selected to obtain rich and in-depth interview data from middle school principals. I collected, organized, and summarized themes that evolved from the interview data, which explained classroom walkthroughs from the perspectives of principals regarding teachers' pedagogy and students' academic achievement.

A case study allows a researcher to collect meaningful data on real-life events (Lewis, 2015). In the study, the case was middle school principals who participated in one-on-one, face-to-face interviews in their natural settings (middle schools). The case study research design facilitated responding to two research questions and contributing to the literature on the middle school curriculum and classroom instructional walkthroughs (Kornbluh, 2015).

Before finalizing the decision to use the case study research design, I reviewed other commonly used qualitative research designs (narrative, grounded theory, ethnography, and phenomenology). A grounded theory research design is for researchers who want to formulate an emergent theory, and ethnography is appropriate for qualitative researchers concerned with cultural descriptions of observations, communications, and interactions with participants (Kornbluh, 2015). However, grounded theory and ethnography did not align with the study's purpose statement, problem statement, and two research questions. The purpose statement and research questions were not designed to generate an emergent theory or explore cultural descriptions of middle school

principals. Further, the narrative research design would have required collecting and investigating stories from principals about their broad experiences in the middle schools, and phenomenological design would enable the researcher to explore life experiences of participants comprehensively and to gather in-depth descriptions of the lived experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). But the purpose of this study was to explore interview data from principals on instructional walkthroughs.

Role of the Researcher

In this qualitative case study research, I was the main data collection instrument (Amankwaa, 2016; Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Qualitative researchers conduct the interviews, review all information, and compile data themselves (Amankwaa, 2016). As the primary data collection instrument, all interview responses are collected, analyzed, and reported by the qualitative researcher (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). The role that I followed as the qualitative researcher in the study was to collect interview data from approximately seven principals with one-on-one interviews at their middle schools with the semistructured interview instrument (see Appendix A). Participants were selected using purposeful sampling from the population of principals in the research setting school district. The selection criteria included (a) being a middle school principal in the research setting school district, (b) having conducted classroom instructional walkthroughs at a middle school, and (c) expressing a willingness and time to participate in a 60-minute interview session before or after regular school hours. Participants were invited to participate and were not offered incentives to participate in this study.

I was a middle school principal in the research setting of the mid-Atlantic state that was the focus of this study. There was a professional relationship with potential participants in the study because all middle school principals collaborated and worked together to improve the instruction of middle school students in the research setting. However, I limited researcher bias through constant self-reflection and by accurately representing the data that I collected. My role as the qualitative researcher was to get to know as much about the participants' perceptions of classroom instructional walkthroughs as feasible without interfering with the day-to-day routines of principals, teachers, and students in the schools and causing stress or becoming a burden.

Methodology

The following sections include a discussion and description of the principal participants in the study who were selected using purposeful sampling. The semistructured interview instrument (Appendix A) is also described. Procedures for recruitment of the participants are also discussed along with data collection procedures. The data collection procedures are delineated in a detailed and step-by-step manner. Additionally, the plan to analyze data is presented, which revolved around the six phases of interpretive thematic data analysis. There is also a section on trustworthiness of data using procedures such as triangulation, member checking, and peer checking. Ethical procedures used to protect the rights and confidentiality of the participants are included. The last section is a summary of the main points in the previous sections.

Participant Selection

The population was all 31 principals in a diverse suburban/rural school district in a mid-Atlantic state. Each of the 31 schools had one principal who was the instructional leader at the school. The highest number of principals (15) served between 3-6 years as principals in the school district. Choosing the right participants for inclusion in the purposeful sample was a crucial decision in my study. Purposeful sampling involves selecting participants who can help understand the research problem and questions (Creswell, 2017) p. 19). Identifying the correct participants is a critical task in any study (Saldaña, 2015). Thus, I used criterion sampling.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

The superintendent of the school district was contacted to request approval to send an e-mail to the middle school principals in the district, inviting them to be participants in the study. Middle school principals were sent an e-mail to determine if they were interested in participating in the study. E-mail addresses of principals were obtained from the online school district's directory of schools, which was public information and had contact information on all schools in the school division. Interested principals were encouraged to ask questions and seek clarification on the study, the requirements, and/or the consent form. They were asked to e-mail me to acknowledge their interest and acceptance of the terms of the informed consent agreement before any data were collected. The consent form included a statement that all information would be coded, stored under locked conditions, and only I would possess a key to the lock. Principals were also informed that there were no retributions or undesired

consequences for them for their participation in the study. Participants were assured of

confidentiality and the use of pseudonyms and codes and that their interview data would

be kept confidential.

Once informed consent forms were received, the interview process commenced. Prior to

the interviews, rapport was established with each of the participants by introducing

myself and giving a short presentation on the research project and experiences working as

a middle school principal in the school district. I have a professional relationship with the

principals who participated in the study.

Before starting interviews, the principals were reminded of confidentiality and

demographic information collected from them. Principals were also reminded that the

interviews were about classroom instructional walkthroughs, based on perceptions and

knowledge acquired by them as principals of middle schools and that the interviews were

digitally recorded. One-on-one interviews were then conducted in each of the principals'

natural settings. The interviewing was guided by the interview questions in Part II of the

CIWSI. Follow-up interviews occurred for clarification or amplification after 4 days,

following my review of my transcribed notes from the initial interview session.

Research-based interviewing techniques were employed, which included a

nonjudgmental, reflective strategy. I was cautious of an interview environment that

permits appropriate reflective response time. No clues were provided for a preferred or

expected response. If a principal felt uneasy or threatened by a topic or question, they did

not have to answer the question, and I returned to the topic or question later after

paraphrasing. I conducted each interview after or before regular school hours convenient

for the principals so as not to inconvenience participants and to allow a broader range of

participation that was not limited by geographical location. Interviews were expected to

last approximately 60 minutes.

Codes or Letters A to G were assigned to the participants to maintain the confidentiality

of identities. Letters A to G referenced the interview responses of participants to include

findings in any narratives, graphs, or tables. For example, with Interviewee A, the words

Principal A was assigned to all of his or her analyzed data; for Interviewee B, the words

Principal B was placed on all of his or her analyzed data, and so forth. Interview

procedures in the interview protocol on the interview instrument were carefully followed.

Sampling

Criterion sampling strategy involves selecting cases that meet predetermined

criterion of importance (Park & Park, 2016). Criterion sampling is beneficial for

identifying and understanding cases that are information rich (Park & Park, 2016). The

principals in the purposeful sample were identified using predetermined criteria, which

were (a) being a middle school principal in the school district, (b) having conducted

classroom instructional walkthroughs at a middle school, and (c) expressing a willingness

and time to participate in a 60-minute interview session before or after normal school

hours. Middle school principals in the district who met the criteria were invited to

participate in the study.

Determining the appropriate sample size is imperative because it helps determine

data saturation, which is important for qualitative studies (Lewis, 2015). In qualitative

research, a specific number of cases is not applicable; data saturation can only be reached when there are no new data, no new codes or themes, and the study can be replicated (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Fusch & Ness, 2015). Data saturation in qualitative research exists when the data are rich, and richness means the quality of the data rather than the quantity; thus, a large sample size may not indicate saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Data saturation occurs when the qualitative researcher no longer captures any new data (Amankwaa, 2016). The number of participants required to reach data saturation is reliant on the situation (Amankwaa, 2016). However, researchers have suggested Fusch and Ness (2015) indicated a sample size of about 10 (Fusch & Ness, 2015) or a minimum of six participants (Connelly, 2016). The selected sample size for the study of principals to support saturation was justified by previous research (see Connelly, 2016).

The superintendent designee of the school district was contacted via phone and e-mail, and approval was requested to invite middle school to be participants in the study. The middle school principals were sent an invitation e-mail to determine if they were interested in participating in the study. The e-mail addresses of principals were obtained from the online school district's directory of schools, which was public information and has contact information on all schools in the district. The invitational e-mail explained what the study was about and the requirements of the study. In the email was an explanation that participants should meet three criteria: (a) be a middle school principal in the research setting school district, (b) possess experience conducting classroom instructional walkthroughs at a middle school, and (c) possess a willingness and have the time to participate in a 60-minute interview sessions before or after normal school hours.

If any of the principals did not meet the criteria or refused to participate in the study, I planned to contact the six high school principals to determine if any high school principals were interested in participating in the study. In fact, I needed one high school principal who met my criteria to participate.

Each principal was given a copy of the informed consent form for review. Potential participants were encouraged to ask questions and seek clarification on the study, the requirements, and/or the consent form. They were asked to e-mail me to acknowledge their interest and acceptance of the terms of the informed consent agreement. No data were collected without informed consent.

Instrumentation

The CIWSI, with researcher-developed interview questions, was used during the interview process. The CISWI is in Appendix A. CIWSI has two parts. Part I was the interview protocol while Part II had the eight interview questions. An example of an interview question was, from your perceptions as a principal, briefly share your thoughts on the functions of classroom instructional walkthroughs in your middle school. The protocol provided guidance on conducting interviews.

The protocol (Part I) came from a valid and reliable instrument (Preferred Practices for Semistructured Interview [PPSI]) used by Oguntola (2019). Oguntola indicated that the PPSI had acceptable validity and reliability because it was stringently critiqued by a Retention Committee composed of administrators and educators. Verbal permission in a phone call was granted by Oguntola to modify and used the PPSI in this study and written permission was granted (Appendix C). The eight interview queries

(Part II) came from statements based on the research literature (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017; Jones, 2016; Taylor Backor & Gordon, 2015). The sufficiency of the data collection instrument was adapted to answer the research questions. The interview questions were open-ended questions designed to collect data. The data collected was used to explore the middle school principals' perceptions of the function and purpose of classroom instructional walkthroughs.

Data Analysis Plan

Research Question 1 was, what do principals perceive as the function of classroom instructional walkthroughs? Research Question 1 was answered with data collected with Interview Questions 1 and 2 in Part II of the CIWSI. Research Question 2 was, how do principals perceive classroom instructional walkthroughs the influence on classroom instruction? Research Question 2 was answered with data collected with Interview Questions 3, 4, and 6 in Part II of the CIWSI.

I collected and stored all data electronically. The recorded data and notes were transcribed after each interview. The basic method of data analysis followed the interpretive thematic analysis procedure advocated by Amankwaa (2016), Castillo-Montoya (2016), and Connelly (2016). In the interpretive thematic analysis procedure, Amankwaa delineated six phases of data analysis and suggested qualitative researchers follow as many of the six stages as feasible. The first phase is to become profoundly acquainted with the interview data by reading and rereading the transcribed interview data. The second phase is to identify units of meaning from the interview responses and commence coding the response. Coding or using fictitious names for the interview

responses to protect the confidentiality of data will follow the guidelines of O'Reilly and Parker (2017). Data for each of the six principals were assigned a code from A to G. An example is Principal A, Principal B, Principal C, Principal D, Principal E, Principal F, and Principal G. In the second phase, according to Castillo-Montoya (2016), the qualitative researcher may assign concise labels for specific units of meaning within the interview data, followed by evaluating each chunk of data to ensure the chunk of data is pertinent to the study and a specific research question. The third phase of interpretive thematic analysis is to assign groups of common codes to thematic groups (Connelly, 2016). Supportive of the premise of Connelly, Creswell (2017) stated common codes may be identified, collated, and evaluated for overarching themes. Creswell explained that in the fourth phase, the qualitative researcher may review the overarching themes to confirm if the overarching themes are consistent and prevalent in the full set of transcriptions.

The fifth phase involves giving definitions and names to themes (Connelly, 2016). In the fifth phase, Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2015) suggested that the qualitative researcher may examine the story that each idea conveyed and how each theme related to an overall story. The sixth phase is to create an organized, coherent, and clear presentation of the findings (Connelly, 2016). To accomplish the sixth phase, Gentles et al. (2015) stated the qualitative researcher can describe each extracted theme using supporting quotes from the participants' narratives to define what each theme meant across participants. If there are discrepant responses, and these responses are not relevant to the study or research questions, the discrepant responses will either be tabulated and placed in a table for the

readers to review or discarded, depending on the number and severity of discrepant responses.

I collected the digital recording of all interview data. I transcribed the data. The written transcription was given to participants, so they could review the transcript and corroborate that it reflected what they intended to convey through the interviews. Each comment from the participants was carefully assessed, and I made changes to the transcriptions.

Trustworthiness

For qualitative researchers, the credibility and trustworthiness of the research are important in the study (Saldaña, 2015). The four elements of trustworthiness for qualitative research are credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Data collected in the study was accurately represented to reduce the researcher's bias. I collected the data from interview participants in different school settings. I only used the interview questions related to the content of my study.

Credibility

In the study, I created and maintained a reflexivity journal for the entire process of interviewing the middle school principals and analyzing the interview responses. Lewis (2015) described reflexivity as a procedure to examine the qualitative researcher's thinking and feeling, as the researcher proceeds through the stages of the study. I used the reflexivity practices to record predispositions, emotions, and reactions while data were collected and analyzed to notice, reduce, and avoid biases and reactivity. O'Reilly and

Parker (2017) explained that reactivity happens when middle school principals' responses are influenced by data collection instruments including the interviewer, or the researcher is influenced by the interview responses of participants. Also, I facilitated credibility through member-checking (Yazan, 2015).

Dependability

Internal validity is a strength of qualitative research, and I enhanced internal validity through the process of assuring dependability of data (Kornbluh, 2015). Park and Park described dependability in qualitative research as the stability of data over time and over conditions. The stability can occur with an external audit conducted by professionals who are not associated with the research study. Park and Park explained that in qualitative research, dependability of data is analogous to reliability in quantitative studies. I facilitated dependability of interview data by using effective interviewing skills and a nonjudgmental, reflective approach guided by the interview protocol in Part I of the CIWSI. At all times, I was thoughtful of an interview process that provided a reasonable reflective response time. No clues were given of a preferred or expected response, and all principals notified me that if they when they felt uncomfortable or intimidated by a specific interview question; the principals did not have to respond to the interview question. I returned to the question later with a paraphrasing of the question. Last, I strengthened dependability of the interview results by checking in with middle school principals during all aspects of the interview process and giving all participants an opportunity to review the transcripts of the interview to confirm accuracy (Lewis, 2015).

Confirmability

Lewis (2015) stated a violation of trustworthiness is when the qualitative researcher altered findings and analysis to coincide with the beliefs of the qualitative researcher. Confirmability was established in the study through the responses from the interviews of the different participants. During the process of data analysis, I investigated alternative explanations and competing rationales for the results through the organization of the information collected using varied methods in the coding process (Saldaña, 2015). To strengthen the trustworthiness, reliability, and consistency of findings for this research study, I maintained an audit trail, as suggested by Amankwaa (2016). Careful documentation of processes permits other researchers to replicate the process of data collection and analysis. The audit trail categories I pursued were (a) electronically recorded material, written field notes and unobtrusive measures, such as transcribed notes from digitally recording; (b) data reduction and analysis products to include write-ups of interview notes, condensed notes, and theoretical notes; (c) data reconstruction and synthesis products, structure of categories (themes); (d) findings and conclusions and a final report, with connections to the existing literature; (e) process notes (methodological, trustworthiness, and audit trail notes); and (f) material relating to intentions and dispositions (inquiry proposal and personal notes).

Transferability

A different challenge in qualitative case study research is the trustworthiness of findings being generalized or transferred to other situations (McNiff, 2016). I addressed

concerns of rival explanations by interviewing multiple participants. Interviewing enough

participants (7) to reach saturation helped strengthen the trustworthiness and

transferability of the findings. In addition, I established transferability by using the

interview data to provide a thick description of the data, which supported external

validity, as suggested by O'Reilly and Parker (2017). I described the phenomenon

(classroom instructional walkthroughs) in the study in enough detail, so readers of the

study could evaluate the extent to which the conclusions drawn were transferable to other

times, settings, situations, and people. O'Reilly and Parker (2017) explained that

transferability is equivalent to generalizability, or external validity, in quantitative

research and a study has transferability if the researcher provides readers with sufficient

evidence to convey if results for each of the research questions could apply to other

contexts, situations, times, and populations. Following the guidance of O'Reilly and

Parker, I endeavored to provide evidence enough for readers to make judgments as to

whether findings in the study could be used in their work settings. I provided a robust and

detailed account of the interview responses of the middle school principals related to

classroom instructional walkthroughs, as advocated by (Gentles et al., 2015).

Ethical Procedures

The rights of all participants were safeguarded by informed consent,

confidentiality, and the absence of any identifying data that could reveal the participant or

his/her school, school division or county (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). All identifying

information such as participants' names, schools, or school division remained

confidential. I am a middle school principal in the same school division as the secondary

principal participants in the study. There was no conflict of interest because there was no supervisory role over the principals and no incentives given to principals to participate in the one-on-one interview sessions. In the interview sessions, I asked probing questions, listened, thought, and asked more probing questions to obtain a profound insight into the thinking and feelings of the middle school principals. Simultaneously, to be objective, I endeavored to eliminate any potential personal and professional biases and maintaining high ethical standards. There was constant self-reflection throughout the study.

Ethical practices in this research adhered to practices and policies mandated under federal law (Connelly, 2016) and aligned with the code of ethics for the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences (Box et al., 2015). For instance, approval of the school district and Walden University Institutional Review Board were obtained before collecting any interview data. There was an analysis of the potential harm to middle school principal participants. Their involvement was limited to 60-minute interviews, conducted before or after regular school hours at a time convenient for them.

Principals were informed that the interviews would be digitally recorded, and they would be allowed to consent to the recording. Only principals who agreed to be recorded were invited to participate in the study. Each interview was transcribed within 48 hours. Principals were notified that they could withdraw from participation in the study at any time and may elect not to answer any questions which threatened or intimidated them. Interview sessions were confidential and there were no recorded individually identifiable characteristics of the participants' identities. All recruitment and research data collected were kept in a locked file cabinet in my home office. Only I have a key to the lock. All

electronic data were password protected and I have the password. All research data gathered will be retained for five years after the completion of the study. After 5 years, all electronic documents will be deleted, and paper copies shredded and discarded.

Summary

In Chapter 3, I identified the research design and methodology of this research study. The qualitative case study used semistructured interviews with middle school principals in one school district. The phenomenon studied was classroom instructional walkthroughs by middle school principals. The significance of the research questions was supported in the research of Galloway and Ishimaru (2017), Jones (2016), and Taylor Backor and Gordon (2015). I used the Five Dimensions of Teaching and Learning framework to help frame the questions.

The role that I pursued as the qualitative researcher was mainly to collect interview data from the principals with one-on-one interviews at their middle schools with the semistructured interview instrument. Participants in the research study were selected using the purposeful sampling method from the population of principals in the research setting school district. The selection criteria included: (a) being a middle school principal in the research setting school district, (b) having conducted classroom instructional walkthroughs at a middle school, and (c) expressing a willingness and time to participate in a 60-minute interview session before or after regular school hours.

Trustworthiness of data was established using varied strategies to include credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. I worked as a middle school

principal in the same district as the middle school principal participants in the study.

There was no conflict of interest because there was no supervisory role over the

principals and no incentives given to principals to participate in the one-on-one, face-to-

face interview sessions. To be objective, I endeavored to eliminate any potential ethical,

trustworthiness, and confidentiality issues during the data collection and data analysis

phases of this research study.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore what middle school principals perceived as the function and purpose of classroom instructional walkthroughs. The research questions were developed using components of the five dimensions of teaching and learning and related to principals' perceptions of the function and influence of classroom instructional walkthroughs. I collected data through semistructured interviews from seven secondary principals about their perceptions of the function and purpose of classroom instructional walkthroughs. All participants were secondary principals who have conducted classroom instructional walkthroughs in their schools. From the data collected, I developed themes that may contribute to the knowledge of classroom instructional walkthroughs. These themes may have implications for social change by identifying reflective practices that can lead to high-quality continuous school improvement and facilitate systematic thinking in schools. The results from the study may help principals be more knowledgeable on the function and purpose of instructional walkthroughs as well as how to use feedback from walkthroughs to improve all classroom teachers' instruction and all students' academic achievement.

In Chapter 4, I present the findings of the data collected in this qualitative case study. I also outline a description of the methods used for collecting, recording, and analyzing data. This chapter highlights the results and reviews Fink and Markholt's (2017) theory of action framework, which is composed of five dimensions of teaching and learning: purpose, student engagement, curriculum and pedagogy, assessment of student learning, and classroom environment and culture.

Setting

The setting for the study was a school division in a mid-Atlantic state. The research site was a diverse suburban/rural school district with less than 35 elementary, middle, and high schools. The total student population was between 20,000 and 25,000 in Grades K-12. Six of the principals interviewed were middle school principals in the division for less than 10 years, and one was a high school principal with middle and high school experiences who had been in the division for more than 20 years. Five of the seven principals had served as assistant principals in the division. Two of the principals are considered probationary administration. The probationary status means that they have been principals for less than 3 years and will reach continuous status at the beginning of the fourth year as a principal. Three principals have the highest degree of doctorate, and four principals have master's degrees.

The selection of participants was limited because the study was focused on only middle school principals. I interviewed seven secondary principals from one school division who have conducted classroom instructional walkthroughs. The selection criteria included (a) being a secondary principal in the research setting school district, (b) having conducted classroom instructional walkthroughs, and (c) expressing a willingness and time to participate in a 60- minute interview session. One of the middle school principals did not respond to my invitation to participate; therefore, I invited a selection of high school principals, and I selected one high school principal who consented to participate in the study.

During the study, the division had several days for professional development and teacher workdays. Principals were also planning special activities in preparation for one of the state's tests. The principals shared time for the interview that was convenient for them. All interviews took place in the middle school setting in a private conference room. The demographic information of the participants is in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic of Sample of Secondary School Principals (N = 7)

Demographic	Frequency
Highest degree awarded	
Doctorate	3
Master's	4
Years working as a principal in district	
0-2	1
3-6	2
7-10	3
11-14	0
15-18	1
Total years working as middle school principal	
0-2	1
3-6	2
7-10	3
11-14	0
15-18	0
Greater than 18	1

Data Collection

I interviewed seven participants who met the selection criteria for the study. I received IRB approval from Walden University on January 24, 2020 (approval #01-24-20-0753445). After receiving IRB approval, the school division permitted me to conduct

my research and interview principals. My goal was to reach saturation by interviewing

seven principals. Interviewing enough participants to reach saturation helps strengthen

the trustworthiness and transferability of the findings.

Middle school principals were sent an invitation e-mail to determine if they were

interested in participating in the study. E-mail addresses of principals were obtained from

the online school district's directory of schools, which was public information and had

the contact information of all personnel in the school division. The e-mail that was sent to

the participants included the leader consent form, which outlined information about the

study and highlighted their rights as a participant in the study. Once the potential

participants replied to the e-mail and gave their consent to participate, a follow-up

communication by e-mail or phone was conducted to show appreciation for participation

in the study, to review interview requirements, and to schedule a time for the interview.

One of the principals did not reply to my request for an interview, so I contacted the high

school principals to see if any high school principal was interested in participating in the

study. A high school principal who met the criteria agreed to participate in the study.

Once the principal gave the consent, I began to schedule the interviews. Scheduling was

done to accommodate the needs of the principals. The principals gave a date that worked

best for them. There were several professional workdays during this time frame, which

allowed more flexibility in scheduling the interviews.

All interview data were collected face-to-face in a private conference room. The

interviews for all participants were conducted for over 2 weeks. Each interview lasted

approximately 30-45 minutes. I selected an alphabetical coding system of A-G to identify

the participants and to keep their information confidential. Each principal was interviewed about classroom instructional walkthroughs conducted in their current school with questions written before the interviews. The interviews were digitally recorded on my phone using the Voice Memos App with permission from each participant. I originally used two devices to record my data; however, I was paying more attention to the devices than the interview, so I decided to use one device, which was my cell phone. At the beginning of the interview, I gave each participant an additional copy of the interview protocol and the interview questions. I shared the purpose of the study, reminded the participant that the interview was voluntary, and adjustments or discontinuation of the interview would occur if any questions made them feel uncomfortable.

After each interview, I uploaded the recordings to my computer. I also uploaded the data to a Voice Recorder & Audio Editor app to safeguard the data. After each completed transcription, I forwarded the exact transcription to create a Microsoft Office Word document. I listened to the recording, reviewed my personal notes, and reviewed the transcription for clarity and to become more familiar with data. Once I completed the transcribed data in Word document, I shared a copy with the participants for verification and validation. The process of reviewing the data multiple times gave me the opportunity to interpret them more accurately. The participants were also allowed to change anything or add additional information to their transcribed answers. For example, one of the participants shared some additional comments on the transcribed data for Questions 3 and 4.

Data Analysis

Once the interviews were completed, the digital recordings were reviewed and

saved in multiple places using passwords that I kept safe and protected. The primary

method of data analysis was the interpretive thematic analysis procedure advocated by

Amankwaa (2016), Castillo-Montoya (2016), and Connelly (2016). The first round of

data analysis was to transcribe data using the feature on a digital voice recorder and

transcription program. After each interview, I uploaded the data to my computer in a

Voice Recording audio application and Audio Editor application to transcribe the data. I

forwarded the exact transcription to create a Microsoft Office Word document.

I printed a copy of each transcription and began the process of underlining keywords and

phrases. Once I completed the transcribed data in Word document, I shared a copy with

the participants for verification and validation. The process of reviewing the data multiple

times allowed me to interpret the data more accurately. I then became acquainted with the

transcriptions by reading and rereading the transcribed interview data. I identified units of

meaning from the interview responses and commenced coding the responses. Data for

each of the seven principals were assigned a code from A to G: Principal A, Principal B,

Principal C, Principal D, Principal E, Principal F, and Principal G. I used the in vivo

coding to identify words, phrases, and sentences that represented characteristics of the

data as well as to capture the essence of features of the data (Saldaña, 2015). Some of the

common phrases and words are included in Table 2.

Table 2

Common Codes

Interview	Common in vivo terms
1	Timely. Follow-up with feedback to teachers. Suggestions to go from good to great. Feedback as quickly as possible. Specific feedback in area for growth. Feedback to teachers. Gather information to help teachers. Feedback to improve instruction. Tips on how to improve instruction. Feedback on the taught, written and assess curriculum. Feedback to gather data.
2	Look at the instructional delivery. What is being taught at a particular time. Types of instruction being delivered. Big ideas presented. Quickly hear class discussion. See instruction in the classroom. Monitoring instruction. Check on instructional delivery.
3	Students accountable for their learning. Student prepared for learning. Students a share learning. Students understand concepts. Students know the guiding questions. Behavior of students. See what students are doing. Students understand learning. Base learning on what is best for students. Students engaged in the class and learning. Students moving in the classroom.
4	Gathering data. Capturing different kind of data. Students are improving. Students performance data. Monitoring student progress. Goalsetting using data. Conversation on data. Data behind the student. Improve accountability through data. Teacher analyzing data. Teacher using relevant data.
5	Teachers observe other teachers. Areas of growth for teachers. Offer coaching assistance Support teachers with concerns. Talking instruction. High quality instruction. Collaboration and working together. Stronger Professional Learning Community. Strong focus on professional development. Informed conversation.
6	Frequency is more individual. Based on more global professional development. It is established at the beginning of the year. Professional learning based on area of focus. Professional learning pedagogy and best practices. Data-driven. Professional Learning Community. Creates better focus. Teacher leaders. Teachers led faculty meetings.
7	Best practices. Data-driven Professional Learning Community. Creates better focus. Teacher leaders. Teachers led faculty meetings. Clear understanding of professional goal. Professional development of different types of feedback sessions for teachers using data from the observations. Negative feedback immediately. Using words to build trust. Using positive word choices. Written feedback. Set up a time to meet. Timely. Electronically. Face-to-face.
8	Time. Alignment. Clarity. Teaching and learning. Success for students. Collecting data. Quick and focus.

I proceeded to highlight in vivo words and themes looking for common and similar statements given by the participants. I also highlighted chunks of data and created a list of the data for each participant. I used the Microsoft Word Doc data extract tool 1.3 to create categories. I transferred the information to an Excel spreadsheet organizing the data for all participants under each interview question, by highlighting similar words and common phrases. This process helped me key in on common themes and eliminate words or phrases that were not common or similar.

I assigned concise labels for specific units of meaning within the interview data. For the third phase of interpretive thematic analysis coding, I assigned groups of common codes to thematic groups (Connelly, 2016) and developed overarching themes. In the fourth phase, I reviewed the overarching themes to confirm that they were consistent in the full transcription. In the fifth phase, I began to develop names and definitions for the themes (Connelly, 2016). Fink and Markholt 's (2017) five dimensions of teaching and learning served as the conceptual framework of this study, which includes the following dimensions: purpose, student engagement, curriculum and pedagogy, assessment of student learning, and classroom environment and culture. After reviewing the categories as well as my transcriptions, initial coding, notes, and reflections, I identified common themes and patterns. I conducted further member checking by asking each participant to review the themes I had identified from my findings and analysis of the data to ensure that these results were aligned with their perceptions, practices, and beliefs.

Results

This qualitative case was conducted to explore the perceptions of middle school

principals concerning the function and purpose of classroom instructional walkthroughs.

The results of this study were based on my analysis of the data I collected from seven

interviews. The interview questions were focused on the function and purpose of

effective classroom instructional walkthroughs. From the responses of the participants,

the following six common themes emerged: feedback to teachers, observe instructional

delivery, focus on students, using data, building relationships, and professional learning

opportunities.

Theme 1: Feedback to Teachers

Based on participants' responses, principals' feedback to teachers should be

timely, should be used to improve instruction, and could be positive or negative.

Principals' feedback to teachers is essential and has a positive influence on student

academic achievement. Principals shared the significance they place on providing

feedback to teachers, which was a reoccurring theme throughout the interviews. Further,

principals shared that feedback should be timely, which is supported by previous research

indicating the importance of principals devoting adequate time in the classrooms and

providing timely feedback for teachers to influence student achievement (Haynes et al.,

2016). All seven principals shared that timely and or immediate feedback was a necessary

aspect of teacher growth and improvement. For example, Principal B shared that

providing feedback as quickly as possible helps to identify areas of growth. Prompt

feedback may be shared on what is working correctly and what instructional strategies

require enhancement of teaching. Principal F also reported that prompt feedback allows concerns to be clarified immediately.

Fink and Markholt's (2017) five dimensions of teaching and learning defined the dimension of purpose as quality teacher instruction through the integration of state standards and objectives in lesson plans. This aligns with the principals reporting how feedback to teachers is an essential function and purpose to improve instruction. For example, Principal C explained that feedback was an opportunity to gather data to help teachers deliver better instruction.

The principals also conveyed that feedback can be positive or negative. It is also essential that the feedback has a positive influence on student academic achievement (Selkrig & Keamy, 2015). Using classroom instructional walkthroughs, principals can conduct classroom observations in a culture that is safe and trusting for classroom teachers. Principal G suggested leaving a positive sticky note for a teacher is positive feedback that might leave teachers feeling good about lesson. Positive and relevant feedback is perceived to be essential about what is good and what is bad regarding instruction at the school (Moss & Brookhart, 2015). Team members can provide feedback to teachers on how to improve the curriculum and give praise to middle school teachers who implement a curriculum that enhances the academics of students. For example, Principal A shared,

> Finding positive words to complement teachers creates less tension and build
> trust. Feedback suggestions could take teachers from good to great. The principal
> perceived that helping teachers to improve through feedback and then facilitating

an informal post conversation was a way motivate teachers to grow and develop

teaching skills. Teachers are often asked to reflect on the walkthrough comments

to see the bigger picture for improving instruction.

Principal B also conveyed,

Feedback should be given as quickly as possible to teachers regarding what is

seen in terms of the areas of growth. Teachers need to feel good about the

teaching process. Highlighting effective teaching in the classroom should be

noted by the principal to build teacher confidence. The principal and teacher

review expectations and develop an action plan together for addressing the

negative feedback or areas needing improvement. At the time of the feedback, the

principal might also discuss other concerns noticed in the learning environment

that needs improvement. Typically, the goal is to yield positive results from

classroom instructional walk-throughs. Feedback would be given or provided to

teachers within the 24 to 48-hour time frame to clarify aspects of the lesson.

Principal C shared,

Effective instructional walk-throughs are walk-throughs that would provide the

teacher with feedback that allows them to make necessary changes for their

students' learning. The principal noted that walkthroughs are done at a variety of

times. Walkthrough should be done at different times such as beginning, middle,

or the end of various lessons.

Principal D shared,

The functions of classroom instructional walk-throughs tend to be shorter than formal walkthroughs. The principal felt that walkthroughs in the past were not effective and did not provide an opportunity to give relevant feedback to teachers. The perception now is that the feedback given to teachers is more authentic and is based on what teachers can do to improve the instruction in the classroom. The function of classroom walkthrough is to inform the principal's knowledge of classroom instruction. When providing negative feedback, the principal believes that it should always be done face-to-face.

In conclusion, the data highlighted how principals provided feedback to teachers. Principals elaborated on the significance of providing feedback to the teachers. Principals shared that feedback to teachers could be a positive influence on student academic achievement. Principals perceived that timely and immediate feedback was necessary for teacher growth and improvement. Principals also perceived that feedback to teachers could be a factor in meeting yearly goals.

Theme 2: Observe Instructional Delivery

Principals observe the alignment of the curriculum and observe ways to improve instruction. Fink and Markholt (2017) identified curriculum and pedagogy as one of the Five Dimensions of Teaching and Learning. The curriculum is the alignment of instructional materials to the purpose and objectives in the lessons, while teaching strategies refer to how well instruction aligns with pedagogical content knowledge. Scaffolding for learning is the level of support provided by teachers to students throughout the entire lesson.

Principals expressed that looking at instructional delivery during the walkthrough is an important function of the walkthrough process. The principals observed the alignment of the curriculum. Principal C noted that looking first at alignment during instructional delivery is important. Principal G perceives that standards come alive through teaching and delivery of the lesson. Classroom instructional walkthroughs and high-quality continuous school improvement facilitate systematic thinking. Principal F reported that walkthroughs are quick ways of checking on instructional delivery. The improvement in academic growth is accomplished through observing instruction (Moss & Brookhart, 2015).

Principal A further stated,

> Classroom instructional walkthroughs are a good way to check the pulse of what is going on in the classroom. This process allows principals to see if plans are being executed effectively in the classroom. Administration Teams can determine if the curriculum used in the classrooms support state standards and objectives.

Principal B also perceived,

> That the functions of classroom instructional walkthroughs are ways of looking at the clarity of the lesson. This provides an opportunity for the principal to observe how the lesson is being delivered at that particular time. When principals observe what is happening in the classroom, it is a way to make sure that students understand what is being taught during the lesson.

Principal D conveyed,

The greatest impact on the school climate and culture will be the impact on teaching and learning. An effective lesson is when instructional strategies and instructional delivery are present in the classroom environment. These qualities of high-quality instruction may influence student's success in the classroom.

Principal E stated,

That teacher feedback to students is part of the delivery of the instructional process. An effective classroom instructional walkthrough is one that allows for feedback regarding alignment between what is the written, taught, and assessed curriculum. For the level of clarity in the instruction to be effective, the walk-through should be efficient and should involve talking to students to find out the real impact of a lesson on student learning. The principal perceived that alignment, teachers planning in the PLC, and the review of data could help to guide the instruction in the classroom. The principal sets the expectation of using the curriculum frameworks, looking at the instructional strategies, looking at instructional data to meet the individual needs of the students. The process helps the school to set goals and determine growth for students.

Finally, Principal F perceived,

An effective classroom instructional walkthrough is a process in a school environment. Walkthroughs could be subject matter specific and goal-oriented based on what the principal has identified as the goal of improved instruction in the school. This process could also help determine the curriculum needed to promote students' growth and success.

In summary, Van Vooren (2018) referred to curriculum as the alignment of instructional materials to the purpose and objective of the lesson. The delivery of instruction may impact the academic success of students in the classroom. When principals observe the delivery of instruction it allows them to see how teachers scaffold the learning for students. The Principals noted that during the walkthrough process looking at instructional delivery is an important function for student success. Principals also noted that observing the delivery of the curriculum allowed them to provide substantive feedback to teachers for professional learning and growth.

Theme 3: Focus on Students' Learning

Principals conduct walkthroughs to focus on student learning. Classroom instructional walkthroughs have transformed into a more student-focused approach when observing what is going on in the classroom. Fink and Markholt (2017) identified student engagement as one of the Five Dimensions of Teaching and Learning. Martinek et al. (2016) noted that students who enjoyed academic success and were competent students in the classrooms demonstrated a greater proclivity of enhanced levels of academic engagement in the learning processes.

Principals observed the signs of student learning and student engagement as traits of student success. Principal C stated that students should understand concepts and be able to tell you what they are doing or learning. Principal D shared that during the walkthrough was a chance to observe what students are doing in class. Principal F perceived that it is important for students to have the ability to identify a purpose for learning. Principal E was passionate about creating a classroom centered around what is

best for students. Principal G noted when students are being engaged in class activities learning happens. Principal G also shared that seeing students moving in the classroom is important. The perception of movement in the classroom may create more engaged students thus promote academic success.

Principal A also expressed,

> Classroom walkthroughs are now more focused on what the students learning as opposed to what teachers are doing. The goal is to observe opportunities for visible learning during the walkthrough. The signs of students being engaged in the lesson to indicate more opportunities for students to experience success in the classroom.

Principal B further shared,

> Students should know the guiding questions and should be prepared for learning. The principal also perceived that students should be able to share what they are learning and to be accountable for their learning. The focus in the classroom was for students to understand what was being taught during the lesson. The students in the classroom should be able to share what they were learning on that particular day and also transfer that concept to other aspects of learning.

Finally, Principal E reported,

> Classroom instructional walkthroughs were essential to observe student engagement in the classroom. The principal perceived that during the walkthroughs students and learning should be the focus. Students should be able to share what they are learning and why they are learning it. In conclusion,

students have become the focus of classroom instructional walkthroughs. Students should understand what they are learning and why they are learning the content. Principals perceived, when students shared what they are learning, they were more accountable for their academic success. Student engagement could be an important trait that contributes to the learning process.

Theme 4: Using Data to Improve Instruction

Principals gather data to improve instruction. Fink and Markholt (2017), which identified assessment of student learning as one of the Five Dimensions of Teaching and Learning. Alvoid and Black (2014) described assessment of student learning as the teachers' use of multiple assessment methods to diagnose the occurrence of learning of diverse students in the classrooms. Principals gathered data to help determine learning goals for students. Assessment of student learning is a critical aspect of classroom instructional walkthroughs.

All seven principals clearly spoke about the data they used in their schools. Principal C shared that conducting classroom walkthroughs, was a way to gather data about student learning. Principal C took information data from walkthroughs to improve instruction. Principal B reported that looking at data was a way to see if students were improving or making growth. Principal B suggested goal setting based on using students' performance data was an important aspect of school improvement. Principal D noted that the assessment of student learning was an ongoing conversation on data. Principal E stressed that the data behind the student guided the instruction and helped to meet the individual needs of students. Principal F has seen accountability for teachers through

assessment data. Principal G perceived when teachers analyzed data, they used the relevant data to improve instruction and focus on monitoring students' progress. Additionally, Principal A shared,

> The goal of an instructional walkthrough was to collect data to guarantee success for all students. The principal noted capturing different kinds of data was a way to measure the effectiveness of the instruction as well as to monitor the materials being used in the classroom. The focus of this principal was to monitor small group instruction in the school. This provided an excellent way to gather data on the school's initiatives. This principal was also looking at ways to collect data on walkthroughs and data on time management. In terms of assessment data, the administrators were looking at ways to includes students in those conversations about data in the school. Classroom instructional walkthroughs was a process to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the school.

Principal B also expressed,

> Teachers and students sharing data from common assessments was a good practice in their school. Teachers and students focused this past year and a half on goal setting using reading data. Students wrote goals at the beginning of the year and then they monitored those goals after each quarter based upon their reading assessments. The school principals and teachers made sure that students were improving based on data.

Principal G further conveyed,

The function of classroom instructional walkthroughs was to monitor how teachers used and analyzed data relevant to teaching and student achievement. The principal perceived that when teachers use relevant data in their teaching, they understand the needs of their students and find creative ways to help them to be successful.

To conclude, principals stated that the use of data to help define the learning goals for students. Assessment of student learning could be considered critical data to classroom instructional walkthroughs. Data used from class instructional walkthroughs may help to improve the overall academic success of all students.

Theme 5: Building Relationships

Principals conduct walkthroughs to help build relationships with teachers and students. Fink and Markholt (2017) identified classroom environment and culture as one of the Five Dimensions of Teaching and Learning. Alvoid and Black (2014) refer to classroom environment and culture to show how well teachers use the entire physical environment of classrooms, quality of classroom routines, and how supportive the classroom culture is for the academic growth of students. Marsh et al. (2015) noted when principals conduct walkthroughs, the walkthroughs support the establishment of high academic expectations and a school culture that promotes greater student success in all classrooms, consistent with the school vision.

Principal G stated the climate and culture of a school is meeting the needs of all students. Principals become more acquainted with the day-to-day school activities and routines in the classrooms. connections with students help build connections to the

content as well. Principal F perceived that fair and consistent opportunities for students should be a part of the school culture. Principal D perceived that classroom instructional walkthroughs help to maintain a positive school climate. Principal G reported that walkthroughs have helped to establish consistent routines from class to class.

Additionally, Principal A shared,

When administrators are out visiting classrooms, they are building relationships with staff and students within the school. The principal's visibility creates a welcoming environment where staff and students feel comfortable. The relationship between principal and teacher encourages open communication. Open communication makes it easier for teachers to receive feedback. The principal shared that teachers are also receptive to feedback from the coaching staff as well. It is important for teachers to develop a relationship with students that will enhance the teaching and learning process. The principal has noticed an increase in positive relationships when conducting classroom instructional walkthroughs in the school. The importance of listening to students builds the culture and climate in the school. This open communication with students helps to build relationships and makes it easier to deal with discipline issues in the school.

Principal B also noted,

Discipline expectations should be schoolwide with frequent reminders for students. The principal further noted that the use of Town Hall meetings helped with student buy-in. Students should have a clear focus, which could help to establish a calm learning environment.

Principal C further shared,

>Creating an environment of trust is important within a school. When the principals conduct walkthroughs, they are more visible in the school. The visibility of the principal through the walkthrough process helps to create an environment of trust.

Finally, Principal E expressed,

>The walkthroughs process has helped build trust among all staff members in the school. The relationships within the school exist among principals, staff, and students. Feedback also helped to build a sense of collaboration among the staff as well. Feedback should never come across as an opportunity to create tension with the staff. The classroom walkthrough feedback is an opportunity to help teachers improve their skills as a teacher. The school should be an environment of collaboration.

To conclude, Gaston, et al. (2016) contended creating positive and strong interpersonal relationships in the classrooms between teachers and students and students and students was supportive of high academic engagement. When walkthroughs occur frequently, there could be positive outcomes for all stakeholders, such as building trust, enhancing communication, and improving classroom instruction (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017; Jones, 2016). Principals concluded that walkthroughs helped to build trust between all staff and the students. Principals spoke to the importance of positive and meaningful relationships with teachers and students to create a supportive school environment.

Theme 6: Professional Learning to Improve Teaching

  Principals conduct walkthroughs to focus on professional learning and development. Zepeda et al. (2015) advocated for the support of professional development and professional learning by researchers and university professors to help school leaders transform the learning environment into a warm and supportive milieu. The need for professional development evolving from feedback in classroom instructional walkthroughs is supported by the Five Dimensions of Teaching and Learning. Professional development on each of the Five Dimensions will support the middle school instructional leader's vision for high-quality teaching and learning McCarley et al. (2016) and Gabriel (2018) stated that professional development opportunities would support teachers in discovering better ways to personalize lessons using students' interests, cultures, and backgrounds. Cheon and Reeve (2015) reported that school connectedness was positively correlated with enhanced academic motivation and academic achievement.

  Principal C contended that teachers observe other teachers learn strategies on how to establish a productive learning environment. Principal C also noted that teacher-led discussions on instructional strategy are a powerful professional learning tool. Professional learning opportunities can be a powerful tool used by principals and staff. Principal D perceived that professional learning community in action part of the routine. Principal G noted that Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) make sure that we keep our good in mind, including our goal for instructional walkthroughs. Principals

perceived that professional learning and development keep teachers involved in the process of continuous improvement.

All seven principals suggested that have an intense focus on professional development is based on the shared or common goal in the school. The perception of principals suggested that classroom instructional walkthroughs create the opportunity to have informed conversations about best practices and continuous school improvement within the school community. Principal B noted,

> Professional development is delivered monthly for the whole staff. The principal utilizes current walk-through data to guide any professional learning regarding needs within the school. The principal shared that grade level discussions are ways that teacher gives input about professional learning. When the grade level sees a need, the action is taken by the administrative and coaching teams. Department meetings are another way that teachers help to decide professional learning needs for the school. Sharing walkthrough data allow teachers to see commonalities in areas of focus. The school uses a Google Docs form to gather data from walkthroughs and determine professional development for the staff.

Principal E also conveyed,

> During the Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) meetings are critical to the school improvement phase. The school tries to be more proactive instead of being reactive about the students' needs within the school. Teachers often struggle with providing students with a clear understanding of what students are learning.

Therefore, the focus of the school has been on differentiated instruction and the

alignment of the curriculum.

Howell et al. (2016) concluded, when schools are embedded in a community of

professional learning, principal leadership in the schools creates a holistic environment

where students thrive and are excited while learning. A school with a collaborative

environment becomes a school of learners. The perception of the principals was that

having a strong focus on Professional Development was based on the shared or common

goal in the school. Principals also shared that professional learning on instruction

observed during instructional walkthroughs, allowed principals and teachers to have

informed conversations about best practices and continuous school improvement.

In Table 3 is the relationship between the six identified themes and Fink and Markholt's

(2017) Five Dimensions of Teaching and Learning.

Table 3
Similarities Between Identified Themes and Five Dimensions of Teaching and Learning

	Purpose	Student Engagement	Curriculum Pedagogy	Assessment of Student Learning	Classroom Environment and Culture
Theme 1	X				
Theme 2			X		
Theme 3		X			
Theme 4				X	
Theme 5					X
Theme 6	X	X	X	X	X

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was established by examining the four elements which are

important in the study (Saldaña, 2015). The four elements of trustworthiness for

qualitative research are credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Data collected has been accurately represented to reduce researcher basis. I only used the interview protocol, interview question transcriptions, and member checks to help establish credibility. The transcriptions of interviews were sent to each participant to member checks and to respond with changes that validated responses.

Dependability was strengthened by member checking interview results and giving all participants an opportunity to review the transcripts of the interview to confirm accuracy (Lewis, 2015). Validity is a strength of qualitative research, and I enhanced internal validity through the process of assuring dependability of data (Kornbluh, 2015). Member checking was used to validate the principals' perceptions of effective classroom instructional walkthroughs. Principals were asked to respond within five days of sending the transcriptions to them.

Confirmability was highlighted through my detailed notes. During the process of data analysis, I investigated alternative explanations and competing rationales for the results through the organization of the information collected using varied methods in the coding process (Saldaña, 2015). As the researcher, I constantly focused on keeping my thoughts on this topic separate from the perceptions of the participants by reviewing and analyzing my data before, during, and after the participant interviews. This process helped me to minimize my personal bias.

Transferability is another way to establish trustworthiness of qualitative research. O'Reilly and Parker (2017) explained that transferability is equivalent to generalizability, or external validity, in qualitative research. I addressed concerns of rival explanations by

interviewing multiple participants. Interviewing seven participants to reach saturation helped strengthen the trustworthiness and transferability of the findings. I used the data collected to provide a detailed description of the data, which supported external validity.

Summary

I explored the gap in knowledge and understanding of what middle school principals perceived as the function and purpose of classroom instructional walkthroughs. I found six themes related to the principals explanations: (a) feedback to teachers, (b) observe instructional delivery, (c) focus on student learning, (d) using data to improve instruction, (e) build relationship, (f) provide professional learning to improve teaching. The study further shows that the function of classroom instructional walkthroughs may influence classroom instruction. All principals seemed to identify feedback to teachers as the essential function of classroom instructional walkthroughs. The principals expressed that looking at instructional delivery during the walkthroughs is an important function of the walkthrough process. Many principals shared that looking at the types of instructions being delivered to students can also help them to identify areas of growth for teachers and help focus professional learning on areas of focus. In chapter 5, I focus on the interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, implications, and conclusions.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the gap in knowledge and understanding of what middle school principals perceived as the function and purpose of classroom instructional walkthroughs. Improving this understanding can influence the work of principals as they continue to refocus their efforts, time, and attention as instructional leaders (Zepeda et al., 2015). This study has helped me to explore what principals perceive as the functions and purpose of effective classroom instructional walkthroughs and how they view the influence that classroom instructional walkthroughs on classroom instruction. The research questions addressed the principals' perceptions and added to the literature. Fink and Markholt (2017) Five Dimensions of Teaching and Learning—purpose, student engagement, curriculum and pedagogy, assessment and learning, and classroom environment and culture—were explored and six themes emerged as a part of this study:

- Theme 1: Feedback to teachers. Principals' feedback to teachers should be timely, should be used to improve instruction, and could be positive or negative.

- Theme 2: Observe instructional delivery. Principals observe the alignment of the curriculum and observe ways to improve instruction.

- Theme 3: Focus on students' learning. Principals conduct walkthroughs to focus on student learning.

- Theme 4: Using data to improve instruction. Principals gather data to improve instruction.

- Theme 5: Building relationships. Principals conduct walkthroughs to help build relationships with teachers and students.

- Theme 6: Professional learning to improve teaching. Principals conduct walkthroughs to focus on professional learning and development.

Interpretation of the Findings

The conceptual framework for this study was the five dimensions of teaching and learning: purpose, student engagement, curriculum and pedagogy, assessment of student learning, and classroom environment and culture (Fink & Markholt, 2017). It was evident from the perceptions shared by principals that effective classroom instructional walkthroughs may have a direct influence on classroom instruction. My findings identified the ways principals use classroom instructional walkthroughs in their schools. The next sections address the findings related to the following research questions:

Research Question 1: What do principals perceive as the function of classroom instructional walkthroughs?

Research Question 2: How do principals view the influence of classroom instructional walkthroughs on classroom instruction?

Research Question 1

What do principals perceive as the function of classroom instructional walkthroughs?

The three themes that emerged were feedback to teachers, instructional delivery, and professional learning. The themes aligned with Fink and Markholt's (2017) five dimensions of teaching and learning, which highlighted purpose and curriculum and pedagogy. Purpose refers to quality teacher instruction through the integration of state

standards and objectives in lesson plans (Van Vooren, 2018). Curriculum and pedagogy are comprised of curriculum, teaching strategies, and scaffolding for learning and professional learning contributes to the growth of teachers and therefore the success of students (Nelsen, 2015; Newton, 2015). The principals with whom I spoke articulated their perceptions about the function and purpose of effective classroom instructional walkthroughs. Further, the principals in the study spoke clearly about feedback to teachers. They shared that feedback to teachers should be timely, should be used to improve instruction, and could be positive or negative. Principals perceived that feedback to teachers is an essential influence and has a positive impact on student academic achievement, sharing the significance they place on providing feedback to teachers. This instructional practice theme was mentioned as a recurring theme throughout the interviews. Previous research has also suggested the importance of principals devoting adequate time in the classrooms and providing timely feedback for teachers to influence student achievement (Haynes et al., 2016). For example, PLC meetings were excellent times for principals to share feedback from walkthroughs, targeted to improve the academic success of all students in the schools.

In relation to curriculum and pedagogy, principals seek to observe instructional delivery to improve instruction. The curriculum is the alignment of instructional materials to the purpose and objectives in the lessons, while teaching strategies refer to how well instruction aligns with pedagogical content knowledge. Scaffolding for learning is the level of support provided by middle school teachers to students throughout the entire lesson. Principals expressed that looking at instructional delivery during the walkthrough

is an important function of the walkthrough process. They spoke about observing the alignment between the taught, written, and assessed curriculum, which allows students to have clarity of classroom instruction. The walkthrough process also allows administration teams to determine if the curriculum used in the classrooms supports state standards and objectives. Additionally, the principals perceived that classroom instructional walkthroughs provide them with the opportunity to see the different types of instructions being delivered to students and identify areas of growth for teachers. Classroom instructional walkthroughs and high-quality continuous school improvement facilitate systematic thinking (Moss & Brookhart, 2015). When principals observe teachers, the observation process can translate into reflective practices that can promote problem-solving initiatives for enhancement of middle school students' academic successes as well as social change (Gabriel, 2018).

Principals conduct walkthroughs to focus on professional learning and development. Zepeda et al. (2015) advocated for the support of professional development and professional learning by researchers and university professors to help school leaders transform the learning environment into a warm and supportive milieu. The need for professional development evolving from feedback in classroom instructional walkthroughs is supported by the five dimensions of teaching and learning. Professional development on each of the five dimensions will support the middle school instructional leader's vision for high-quality teaching and learning (McCarley et al., 2016). Principals spoke about the shared responsibility of professional learning. They perceived that if teachers are given opportunities such as teachers observing other teachers on how to

establish a productive learning environment and teacher-led discussions on instructional

strategies are powerful professional learning processes. Principals perceived that

professional learning communities' inaction should be part of the routine in schools.

Principals spoke about weekly discussions around alignment and differentiated

instruction is a part of the professional learning in their school. Principals perceived that

professional learning and development keep teachers involved in the process of

continuous improvement. Principals noted that a strong focus on professional

development is based on the shared or common goal in the school. Professional learning

on instruction observed during classroom instructional walkthroughs allowed principals

and teachers to have informed conversations about best practices and continuous school

improvement.

Research Question 2

How do principals view the influence of classroom instructional walkthroughs on

classroom instruction?

The three themes that emerged were focus on student learning, using data, and

building relationships. The themes aligned with Fink and Markholt (2017) five

dimensions of Teaching and Learning: *student engagement, assessment of student*

learning and classroom environment, and culture. Martinek et al. (2016) noted that

students who enjoyed academic success and were competent students in the middle

school classrooms demonstrated a greater proclivity of enhanced levels of academic

engagement in the learning processes. Alvoid and Black (2014) described assessment of

student learning as the teachers' use of multiple assessment methods to diagnose the

occurrence of learning of diverse students in the classrooms. Alvoid and Black (2014) refer to *Classroom environment and culture* to how well teachers use the entire physical environment of classrooms, quality of classroom routines, and how supportive the classroom culture is for the academic growth of students.

Principals conduct walkthroughs to focus on student learning. Classroom instructional walkthroughs have transformed into a more student-focused approach when observing what is going on in the classroom. Principals observed the signs of student learning and student engagement as traits of student success. It was shared that to focus more on what the students are doing as opposed to what teachers are doing is what should be taking place in schools. Principals shared the importance of students understanding what they are learning. Self-motivation, self-regulation, and cognitive engagement were positively correlated constructs. According to Schaefer et al. (2016) the constructs helped researchers understand the process through which students initiated and sustained high levels of investment and engagement in the learning process.

Principals gather data to improve instruction. As the instructional leaders, principals gather data to help determine learning goals for students. Assessment of student learning is a critical aspect of classroom instructional walkthroughs. All seven principals spoke about the data they use in their schools. It was noted that gathering goals to assess student growth could gather data to guarantee success for all students. One principal shared that capturing different kinds of data to measure the effectiveness of instruction and as well as the materials being used. Assessment of student learning was a critical aspect of classroom instructional walkthroughs. Formative assessment of student

learning means more than the administration of tests and quizzes. All types of formative

assessments may inform and guide the classroom instruction delivered by middle school

teachers (Quinn, 2017).

Goal setting based on using students' performance data is another practice used

by principals. Principals spoke clearly about the assessment of student learning must be

an ongoing conversation among the teachers in a school. Principals perceived that the

data behind the student helps guide the instruction. In addition, they perceived that data

collected from classroom instructional walkthroughs could also help to meet the

individual needs of students. When schools focus on the use of relevant data to improve

instruction the process may have an impact on students' academic achievement.

Principals conduct walkthroughs to help build relationships with teachers and

students. Marsh et al. (2015) noted when principals conduct walkthroughs, the

walkthroughs support the establishment of high academic expectations and a school

culture that promotes greater student success in all classrooms, consistent with the school

vision. Principals felt passionate about the climate and culture of their schools. Climate

and culture were a very comfortable topic when interviewing the principals and listening

to their stories. The vision of doing what is best for all students resonated loud and clear.

Conducting classroom instructional walkthrough allows principals to become more

acquainted with the day-to-day school activities and routines in the classrooms. The

principal also suggested it is important for teachers to develop a relationship with

students that will enhance the teaching and learning process. One principal noted that

building connections with students help build connections to the content as well. It was

consistently noted that fair and consistent opportunities for students should be a part of the school culture. All principals spoke to the importance of positive and meaningful relationships with teachers and students create a supportive school environment.

Limitations of the Study

The first limitation in this qualitative research study was the small participant pool used to gather information on classroom instructional walkthroughs. The second limitation in the study was interviewing colleagues as part of this process. I serve as a principal in the same school division as the participants. I used self-reflection and member checking of data to control potential personal and professional biases. Transferability was enhanced by the interviews providing a detailed and thick description of the principals' perceptions on classroom walkthroughs.

The final limitation was that the semistructured interview instrument was a self-report instrument. The effects of this limitation were reduced by assuring respondents of confidentiality and by securing all research data in a locked file cabinet to which only I possessed a key. All electronic data were and are password protected.

Additionally, an unexpected limitation was that one of the middle school principals did not respond to my request for an interview, therefore a high school principal was selected as a participant for the study. All interview protocols and all interview questions where presented in the same manner for all participants.

Recommendations

In this section I present research and practice recommendations. Further research could be conducted in other settings and with more participants. Settings of interest could

include locations in the same state and in different states across the United States. Studies

could be conducted across settings with similar and different demographics.

Partnerships between researchers and practitioners could support changes in

practice. It is recommended that school division leaders explore professional

development opportunities to engender a greater awareness of how principals use

classroom instructional walkthroughs correctly and consistently as a strategy in their

schools. This strategy may contribute to continuous school improvement with a focus on

effective classroom instructional walkthroughs. The findings of this research study

identified six themes that principals perceived were the functions of effective classroom

instructional walkthroughs in their schools. The knowledge gained from this study may

help middle school principals gain a clear understanding of the function and purpose of

classroom instructional walkthroughs. The research of Van Vooren (2018) and of Mette

and Riegel (2018) suggested collaborative classroom instructional walkthroughs

promoted a positive culture and environment of continuous improvement in middle

schools. The second recommendation could be for researchers, school division leaders,

and university leaders to advocate for the support of professional development for

principals. The last recommendation could be to create professional learning

opportunities by helping principals to understand the function and purpose when

conducting instructional walkthroughs.

Implications

Findings from the study could contribute to the knowledge of classroom

instructional walkthroughs and may have implications for positive social change for all

stakeholders. First, school division leaders could explore professional development to identify reflective practices that influence student engagement and may also lead to academic success for students. Secondly, classroom instructional walkthroughs may enhance a process of reflection, collaboration with peers, and advocacy, which could promote high-quality continuous school improvement and facilitate systematic thinking in schools. Lastly, capturing a variety of data could be a way to measure the effectiveness of the delivery of instruction in the classroom. School division leaders, principals, and teachers could benefit from data collected from classroom instructional walkthroughs to guarantee success for all students.

Conclusion

Classroom instructional walkthroughs are frequent, brief, and focused; they allow the principal to give feedback, observe instructional delivery, focus on student learning, use data, and implement professional learning. My qualitative case study identified the perceptions that seven secondary principals shared regarding classroom instructional walkthroughs. Fink and Markholt's (2017) *five dimensions of teaching and learning* was used as the conceptual framework for this qualitative study. The five dimensions are (a) purpose, (b) student engagement, (c) curriculum and pedagogy, (d) assessment of student learning, and (e) classroom environment and culture. These five dimensions are embedded in the six themes of classroom instructional walkthroughs that I identified through the data analysis process. Stout et al. (2013) stated that if principals share a clear understanding of the function of effective classroom instructional walkthroughs, they would be able to develop a shared vision and promote a culture of high-quality

instruction in their buildings. As principals, findings from the study contribute to the knowledge on classroom walkthroughs and may have implications for positive social change by identifying reflective practices, which can lead to high-quality continuous school improvement and facilitate systematic thinking in schools.

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Appendix A: Classroom Instructional Walkthrough Semistructured Interview (CIWSI)

Part I. Protocol for CIWSI

The protocol provides guidance on conducting interviews using the CIWSI with middle school principals.

1. The protocol came from an instrument, PPSI, used in the study of Oguntola (2019). The PPSI will be critiqued and pilot tested with two professional colleagues Verbal permission in a phone call was granted by Oguntola to modify and used the PPSI in this study and written permission is forthcoming (Appendix B). After the critique and help from professional colleagues, pertinent adjustments will be made to the protocol and interview questions to ensure validity, reliability, clarity, and appropriateness of CIWSI.

2. Rapport will be established with middle school principal participants in the main study by this qualitative researcher introducing herself and giving a short presentation on the research project and her experiences working as a middle school principal in the school district. Rapport will be established in a conference with the principals.

3. Before starting interviews, principals will be reminded of confidentiality and demographic information gathered. Principals will be reminded the interview is about classroom instructional walkthroughs, based on perceptions and knowledge acquired by them as principals of middle schools. The reminder is designed to prevent them from *parroting back* to the mission and vision statements of the school district.

4. One-on-one interviews will be conducted in each of the principals' natural setting (middle school), and interviews will be audio taped. If follow-up questions are required

for more clarity, follow-up interviews will be conducted in a format requested by each

principal.

5. One-on-one semistructured interviews will be conducted utilizing the interview

questions in Part II of the CIWSI. Follow-up interviews will occur for clarification or

amplification after 4 days, following a review by me on transcribed notes from the initial

interview sessions.

6. Research-based interviewing techniques will be employed, which include a

nonjudgmental, reflective strategy.

7. I will be cautious of an interview environment that permit appropriate reflective

response time.

8. No clues will be provided for a preferred or expected response.

9. If a principal feels uneasy or threatened by a topic or question, the principal may skip

the question; I will return to the topic or question later after paraphrasing.

10. Each interview will be conducted by this researcher in an agreed location before or

after normal working hours, so as not inconvenience participants and to allow a broader

range of participation that is not limited by geographical location.

11. Interviews are expected to last approximately 60 minutes.

Part II. CIWSI Questions

Question 1: Briefly describe what you perceive to be effective classroom instructional walkthroughs.

Question 2: From your perceptions as a principal, briefly share your thoughts on the functions of classroom instructional walkthroughs in your middle school.

Question 3: From your perceptions as a principal, briefly list in priority order and comment on at least three different ways classroom instructional walkthroughs in your middle school improved the instruction of your teachers.

Question 4: From your perceptions as a principal, briefly list in priority order and comment on at least three different ways classroom instructional walkthroughs in your middle school improved the academic achievement of your students.

Question 5: From your perceptions as a principal, briefly list in priority order and comment on at least three different ways classroom instructional walkthroughs in your middle school improved your school climate and culture.

Question 6: What is the type and frequency of professional development opportunities implemented for teachers from the results of classroom instructional walkthroughs?

Question 7: How and when do you provide feedback to teachers on the positive and negative results from classroom instructional walkthroughs?

Question 8: Is there anything you else you want to share concerning the walkthroughs in your middle school?

Appendix B: Permission for Interview Protocol

Gmail

Deborah Frazier ███████████████

Permission to use Protocol

Andy Oguntola ████████████████   Tue, Sep 3, 2019 at 11:44 AM
To: Deborah Frazier ██████████████

Deborah,

Thanks for reaching out! I would be honored to let you use my research. I will have to get you the letter by Thursday, as I am working in education and we are dealing with storm protocols right now in Florida. Also, what is your dissertation on and how did you hear or find my research.

Dr. O

Sent from my iPhone
Please disregard any grammatical errors, as I am replying from my cell phone.

On Sep 1, 2019, at 10:23 PM, Deborah Frazier ██████████████████████ wrote:

> **CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.**
>
> [Quoted text hidden]
>
> <Letter to Dr. Oguntola.docx>

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