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Elementary School Principals' Instructional Leadership Practices Supporting Academically Marginalized Students

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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Walden University
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Abstract

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by

Stacy Parker

MA, LeTourneau University, 2015

BS, Paul Quinn College, 2005

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

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August 2020

Abstract

The research problem addressed in this qualitative case study is the need to understand elementary school principals' instructional leadership practices supporting academically marginalized students. Instructional leadership practices to "close the achievement gap" are imperative to document, so that best practices can be highlighted and disseminated among educational institutions that face similar challenges. The conceptual framework of the principal instructional management theory is used to explore instructional leadership through 3 dimensions: managing the instructional program, defining the school mission, and fostering academic achievement. Semistructured interviews and thematic analysis were conducted to collect and analyze data from 11 elementary principals in response to research questions on supports for academically marginalized students.   Data was analyzed by reviewing interview responses and assigning codes to identify common themes. The resulting themes are: (a) principals foster academic achievement by hiring and developing teachers and data analysis, (b) principals use strategic planning and community involvement to define the school mission and vision, and (c) principals implement and monitor student instructional supports when implementing high quality curriculum in the classroom. Supporting academically marginalized students at the elementary level has implications for social change, including building a strong foundation to support increased graduation rates, reducing dropout rates, weakening school to prison pipelines, and marginalized populations that are better prepared to become productive members of mainstream society.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my sons Taj, Tariq, and Tyson. All that I do, and every goal that I set, has been to provide the best life for them.

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I would like to acknowledge Dr. Mary Hallums and Dr. Peter Kiriakidis for their encouragement and support during this process. Their knowledge of quality content and process for research pushed me to complete this dissertation and complete the program a better student. I would also like to thank my brother Amin Ojuok for his continual support and serving as my lifelong competitor to push me to my greatest potential. My sister Shenita Richmond has supported me in all my endeavors and took this process on by helping me care for my youngest son during this time. It is truly with her support that I was able to dedicate uninterrupted time to the process. I would like to give a special acknowledgement to my friend and colleague Cherron Ukpaka for entering this program with me and serving as an accountability partner all the way through. It is truly with the support of my family and friends that I am able to achieve this great accomplishment.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

In the United States, marginalized groups are groups of individuals in classes determined outside normal constructs of a mainstream society. Marginalizing factors in the United States include differences to majority in race, class, sexual orientation, and disability (Rigby, 2014). In education, the United States government has placed an increasing emphasis on raising academic achievement, particularly among groups marginalized based on race and socioeconomic background (Beard, 2018). Over the past 30 years, education reform has largely been centered around standardized measurements of achievement, fostering an inclusive educational environment for marginalized groups, and responding to advocacy for policy reform, in and out of schools, to increase achievement among these student groups. These policy efforts increased public school district leadership's access to data, increasing awareness of the educational disparities among racial and class groups (Flores & Gunzenhauser, 2018). While education reform is debated and passed at the federal and state levels, it is ultimately the responsibility of the local school principal to adapt and implement instructional leadership strategies that directly influence student achievement.

Despite national policy, such as No Child Left Behind of 2001—reauthorized as Every Student Succeeds Act of 2016—and efforts to increase achievement, the academic achievement gap that exists between marginalized and nonmarginalized student groups remain a concern in the public-school setting (Gurley, Anast-May, O'Neal, & Dozier, 2016). The causal factors and explanations of the achievement gap have been studied extensively by researchers across a variety of determining factors including economic,

racial, household, and community impact and implications. Studies showed that closing the achievement gap among a marginalized population can foster positive social change through increased graduation rates, which enriches the skilled talent pool needed to further community production and economic flow (Beard, 2018). It is in the best interest of society to increase the academic performance of all student groups.

Though there are various approaches to understanding the extant achievement gap, in this study I explored elementary principals' instructional leadership practices supporting academically marginalized students. Understanding how principals are employing instructional practices at the campus level provided insight on how academic achievement among marginalized student groups may be positively influenced. How principals serve as leaders, with a goal of making a measurable impact on student achievement using effective instructional practices, has been an ongoing focus of educational researchers (Gurley et al., 2016). The direct and indirect activity employed by principals in an elementary setting for marginalized students was the focus of this study. The literature on marginalized students, principal instructional leadership, and academic achievement gap supported the need for ongoing research.

In this study, I explored the background of the principal and marginalized student, the gap in practice, purpose for conducting research on this topic, and the foundational work on the theory of instructional leadership. Through principal interviews, I used a qualitative case study to focus on the principal instructional management theory and purpose-driven leadership frameworks to measure the instructional leadership practices shown to increase academic achievement of marginalized student groups. My analysis of

the data provided insight on elementary principals' direct and indirect instructional leadership practices supporting increased academic performance of academically marginalized students to promote social change through education.

Background

For this study, academically marginalized students were defined as minority-coded, underperforming students meeting criteria for remediation, as indicated through low achievement scores on state standardized testing in reading and mathematics. This marginalized student group has been at the center of local, state, and national government reform for years in attempts to understand and eliminate inequalities in the educational achievement between this group and their more advantaged counterparts. The principal, through both direct and indirect actions, has the responsibility of leading an entire school body to success. Research showed that principals' instructional leadership practices impact overall school effectiveness (Goddard, Skrla, & Salloum, 2017). The gap in practice was the need to examine elementary school principals' instructional leadership practices regarding academically marginalized students. According to Guskey (2005), Benjamin S. Bloom argued that instructional approach variations must exist to reduce variations in student achievement between marginalized and nonmarginalized students. Yet, despite principal leadership efforts, academically marginalized students continue to perform below their nonmarginalized peers in academics as indicated on state performance exams.

Middle management, across many organizations, supports individual operations of companies consolidated under the umbrella of major corporations. This business

model of management was likely the inspiration for the creation of the role of principal over the past 2 centuries (Rousmaniere, 2007). Shifting from the teacher leading the small schoolhouse classrooms, the principal was created in the likeness of that organizational model, serving as the bridge between district office leaders and campus teachers. Much like middle managers, earlier roles of the principal merely involved managing the day to day business operations of school, including the supervision of teachers and authoritarian for students. Students' acquisition of content knowledge and demonstration of mastery have not always been acknowledged as the result of principal leadership actions. Over the past 3 decades the increased demands on achievement through high-stakes testing has transformed the principal's role from merely managing daily school operations to that of a strategic leader playing a key role in fostering academic achievement by hiring quality teachers, setting a vision for success, motivating staff and students, and implementing/monitoring high quality curriculum in the classrooms. These practices, according to Bastian and Henry (2015), influence student academic outcomes and serve a critical role for school improvements to be effective. Such practices may involve facilitating effective professional learning communities (PLCs), providing professional learning opportunities, coaching and supporting teachers, and setting the expectations through data driven protocols and research-based practices. Through these core functions, the instructional leadership practices of principals are vital to the success of school improvements and overall effectiveness.

Problem Statement

The research problem was the need to understand elementary school principals' instructional leadership practices supporting academically marginalized students. Elementary principals, responsible for prekindergarten through fifth grade student achievement, adopt a variety of strategies to garner a collective goal of success from the school staff, students and community.

In this study, I addressed what supports elementary principals are employing to close achievement gaps between marginalized and nonmarginalized students. According to the National Center for Education Statistics' (NCES) Fall 2018 report, the number of academically marginalized students in public school grades prekindergarten to twelfth grade is approximately 26 million students (NCES, n.d.). Based on NCES's National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), data between 1990 and 2009 showed that academically marginalized students had lower state scores than their peers (NCES, n.d.). According to an academic performance report of a state in the southern region of the United States, in 2016–2017, 2017–2018, and 2018–2019academic years there was a gap in achievement of third, fourth, and fifth grade academically marginalized students in reading and mathematics compared to nonmarginalized students. Table 1 and 2 represent a comparison of the average performance of marginalized and nonmarginalized students in reading and mathematics on the state's standardized assessment.

Table 1

State Assessment Reading Performance

Third-Fifth Grade Reading Score Averages	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019
Marginalized	64%	67%	68%
Nonmarginalized	85%	87%	87%

Table 2

State Assessment Mathematics Performance

Third-Fifth Grade Mathematics Score Averages	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019
Marginalized	67%	71%	70%
Nonmarginalized	88%	89%	88%

Research on principal instructional leadership indicates principals' effective direct and indirect actions around the core functions of principal leadership supports academic achievement. These core functions include hiring quality teachers, setting a vision for success, motivating staff and students, and implementing/monitoring high quality curriculum in the classrooms support student achievement. Teachers' direct instructional practices are attributed to student achievement. Hiring and maintaining quality teachers are linked to principals' instructional leadership practices; however, extant research does not address how these actions support marginalized students.

The research site was a public-school district in which elementary school principals were responsible for leading operations that result in the academic proficiency

of all students. According to the school district administrator, at the chosen research site, state scores in reading and mathematics for marginalized students were lower than nonmarginalized students. The school district of study is in an urban school district in a southern state of the United States with a population of primarily marginalized students. It is unknown, by school leadership, how principals are addressing the needs of academically marginalized students through instructional leadership practices.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand elementary school principals' instructional leadership practices supporting academically marginalized students. I investigated service supports employed by participants and the ways in which the needs of academically marginalized students are addressed in their learning environment. Research was needed to understand how elementary school principals employ instructional leadership strategies to increase academic proficiency of academically marginalized students in reading and mathematics. To achieve this goal, I conducted semistructured interviews of 11 elementary school principals on the instructional leadership practices of fostering academic achievement, setting a vision for success, and implementing/monitoring high quality curriculum in the classrooms through the tenets of purpose-driven leadership.

Research Question(s)

The purpose of this study was to understand elementary school principals' instructional leadership practices supporting academically marginalized students. The research questions that guided this study were:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): How do elementary school principals describe the instructional leadership practice of fostering academic achievement to support academically marginalized students?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): How do elementary school principals describe the instructional leadership practice of defining the school mission and vision for success to support academically marginalized students?

Research Question 3 (RQ3): How do elementary school principals implement high quality curriculum in the classroom to increase proficiency in reading and mathematics for academically marginalized students?

Conceptual Framework

Literature on instructional leadership practices of principals emerged around the mid-1970s and explored many aspects through quantitative measures. The results of the quantitative studies on principal duties, relationship with students and staff, and leadership styles generated interest in perceptions around instructional leadership practices of principals. Studies of effective schools found that instructional leadership was a major contributor of academic success, with principals believing instructional involvement is important (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). Behaviors observed in earlier research revealed that principals continued to contribute most time attending to managerial behaviors such as discipline.

The conceptual framework for this study was based on Hallinger's (2005) principal instructional management theory in conjunction with two of the four elements of Dantley's purpose-driven leadership theory, grounded in the concept of critical

spirituality. The two elements of critical spirituality that inform how principals are supporting academically marginalized students are performative creativity and transformative action (Dantley, 2010). Performative creativity involves the leadership practices that move the school forward beyond maintaining the status quo of academic achievement to reimaging society through a deeper purpose and strategy (Dantley, 2010). Transformative action involves the instructional leader possessing a purposive quality to put thoughts and reflections into action (Dantley, 2010). Dantley's (2003) purpose-driven leadership theory suggests that in order to impact change, scientific management strategies must be coupled with a spiritual context grounded in "purpose" to meet individual and collective needs.

Hallinger, Dongyu, and Wang (2016) proposed three dimensions in the instructional leadership role: (a) managing the instructional program, (b) defining the school mission, and (c) fostering academic achievement. Managing the instructional program for principals as instructional leaders refers to working with staff in areas of facilitating the development, implementation, and evaluation of an aligned curriculum and instruction. Defining the school mission refers to principals setting a clear vision for school goals to be accomplished. Fostering academic achievement refers to stakeholders working together to improve academic achievement, including hiring and maintaining quality teachers. This framework related to understanding elementary school principals' instructional leadership practices regarding academically marginalized students. Purpose-driven leadership exists through a principal's ability to express the purpose of school, clearly define the learning process, extend beyond the traditional structures,

possess an intrinsic motivation to lead and reform, prioritize achievement, and employ leadership practices that provides students opportunities to learn and grow (Beard, 2018).

Nature of the Study

I used a qualitative case study to conduct this research. Qualitative research is employed to explore and answer the *why* and *how* questions of human behavior, experience, and opinion (Merriam, 2008). A qualitative case study is the design option of this research. The population of this study was approximately 80 elementary school principals from a public-school district in a large urban area in a southern state in the United States. I made a request for participation to the district's research and accountability department to obtain permission to contact elementary school principals to participate in the study.

I asked the principals selected for study a series of questions around the three domains of instructional leadership practices: managing the instructional program, defining the school mission, and fostering academic achievement. For screening purposes, I used archival state scores in reading and math to determine which elementary school principals I invited to participate in the study. Yin (2011) defines purposeful sampling as the selection of participants based on their anticipated relevance of information in response to the research questions. Purposeful sampling was the sampling technique used for this research study. I selected 11 elementary school principals for the study. Participation was voluntary, and I collected data via semistructured interviews. I used thematic analysis against the dimensions of the instructional management theory and two elements of the critical spirituality theory.

Definitions

The terms used in this study are defined as follows:

Academically marginalized: In this study, academically marginalized is defined as a form of acute and persistent academic disadvantage rooted in underlying socioeconomic inequalities (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016).

Achievement gap: Any significant and persistent disparity in academic performance or educational attainment between different groups of students, such as white students and minorities, for example, or students from higher-income and lower-income households (Hung et al., 2019).

Cultural responsiveness: The recognition of the importance of including students' cultural references in all aspects of learning, enriching classroom experiences and keeping students engaged (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016).

Instructional leadership: Leaders that focus on efforts to improve teaching and learning so that all students succeed academically (Shaked, 2018).

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs): A group of educators that meets regularly, shares expertise, and works collaboratively to improve teaching skills and the academic performance of students (Bastian & Henry, 2015).

Standardized testing: Any form of test that (1) requires all test takers to answer the same questions, or a selection of questions from common bank of questions, in the same way, and that (2) is scored in a "standard" or consistent manner, which makes it possible to compare the relative performance of individual students or groups of students.

Instructional management theory: A theory that offers explicit guidance toward the events and procedures involved in initiating specific activities for specific students (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.).

Assumptions

I assumed that principals govern with a goal of high academic achievement of all students. This assumption was critical to the meaningfulness of the study to understand how elementary principals employ instructional leadership practices supporting academically marginalized students, who consistently fall short in academic achievement compared to their nonmarginalized peers. I also assumed that of the population size, principals will volunteer and be honest in their responses during all correspondence.

Scope and Delimitations

I conducted this study in a southern state in the United States. There were some delimiting factors in this study. The principal population that I chose for this study work in the same public-school district and did not include assistant principals or principal interns. I based the results on participants' description of instructional leadership practices supporting academically marginalized students. Outcomes may not be applicable to other student populations. Principal participants in this study were limited to leaders of elementary campuses. I excluded secondary school principals from this study since they have different factors to consider regarding instructional practices at the secondary level.   I excluded private and charter school participants because governing structures are different from public schools.

Limitations

All studies have limitations. Participants had at least 2 years tenure in the principal role to speak to experiences with instructional practices supporting academically marginalized students. Each participant held a principal's certification and had at least a master's degree. Based on the voluntary nature of participation, some participants held a doctorate degree. Participants whom I invited to participate had a significant number of academically marginalized students on campus as measured by state accountability agency. Those invited to participate had data trends that reflected an achievement gap and between marginalized and nonmarginalized students.

As a former leader of this district, many of the participants were former colleagues of mine. I did not currently work with or supervise any participants. The professional relationships that existed between myself and some of the participants posed a risk of producing unintended biases in the study. I eliminated bias by using recorded semistructured interviews and professional transcription and review.

Significance

The achievement gap has had a profound effect on the achievement of marginalized student groups. Societal conditions such as crime, poverty, child abuse, unemployment, hunger, and homelessness are impacted by the educational attainment of its members. This gap in achievement implies that instructional leadership practices are working better for one group of students, but not as well for others (Beard, 2018). This study may contribute to the advancement of research and knowledge in the area of principal leadership.

Principals have historically been the disciplinarians of campuses, performing many managerial duties of the role. The push for academic achievement through governmental regulation increases accountability measures to monitor school district and campus success Kempa, Ulorlo, & Hendrik Wenno, 2017). Principals' need to be attuned to the instructional programs on their campuses has grown in importance over the years. Instructional leadership practices such as setting a vision of success and implementing a highly effective curriculum requires a knowledge base of researched strategies and practices that work. Principals' perception of how they lead students to success may lend to insight on which practices yield greater results for academically marginalized students.

Summary

For this study, the gap in practice was the lack of understanding elementary school principals' instructional leadership practices regarding academically marginalized students. Understanding how principals employ instructional leadership practices to support academically marginalized students is important in reducing the achievement gap that exist between marginalized and nonmarginalized student groups. In this study, I explored how principals deploy instructional leadership practices to support these students' academic achievement. I used archival assessment data in reading and math for marginalized elementary students for screening purposes, to determine which elementary school principals to invite to participate in the study. In Chapter 1, I focused on the value of instructional leadership practices of principals to support academic achievement for marginalized students. Philip Hallinger's (2005) principal instructional management theory and Dantey's (2010) theory of critical spirituality provide the contextual

framework for the study, which is guided through three research questions. Merriam and Tisdale (2015) state qualitative case studies are prevalent throughout the field of education. The qualitative case study approach was the best design based on concentrated focus on a single, contemporary phenomenon in a real-life context.

The scope of the study was elementary principals in a public-school setting in a southern region of the United States. Limitations included established relationships between participants, participants' role, tenure, and work in public-school only setting. This study provided insight on principal instructional leadership strategies and whether those practices were evident in schools with achievement gaps. New discoveries were revealed about the effectiveness of established instructional leadership practices. In Chapter 2, I will discuss my literature search strategies, existing research on the phenomenon, conceptual framework, and key variables to support this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

I focused on the need to understand elementary school principals' instructional leadership practices supporting academically marginalized students. A gap in practice exists due to lack of research regarding the supports elementary principals provide to increase achievement of academically marginalized students. I sought to understand how principals describe their instructional leadership practices based upon the dimensions of principal instructional management and purpose-driven theories. The purpose of this study was to understand elementary school principals' instructional leadership practices that support academically marginalized students.

Though there are many inputs that factor into student achievement, research has found that principals play a significant role in student academic achievement outcomes (Bastian, & Henry, 2015; Hollingworth, Olsen, Asikin-Garmager, & Winn, 2018; Royle, & Brown, 2014). In response to declining achievement of marginalized students as measured by standardized assessment instruments, education reform policy such as No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 and its successor Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 increased pressure on public school districts to drive achievement upward. Easley (2016) suggested this has placed more pressure on school principals to increase the overall student achievement results of their campuses. Flores and Gunzenhauser (2018) also found that the adoption of these policies increased the need for school principals' awareness of educational disparities among student populations, but also suggested that these policies ignore the fact that our K-12 public school system "is established within social structures that can either enable or impede any well-intentioned

policy"(p.4). Hung et al. (2019) noted that such educational disparities, also referred to as achievement gaps, have been a historical concern of such policies, families, researchers, and school officials and found that achievement gaps between marginalized and nonmarginalized student groups were largest in the south and southwest United States. Taylor, Kyere, and King (2018) found that despite funding, educational reform, and best practice efforts many have failed to close the achievement gap associated with race and class. Therefore, it is important to understand elementary school principals' instructional leadership practices supporting academically marginalized students. In this chapter I will describe the literature search strategy used, followed by the conceptual framework where the theories of principal instructional management and purpose-driven leadership will be explored to outline instructional leadership functions of principals. The chapter will conclude with a literature review of key concepts related to this study followed with the summary and conclusions drawn from the literature.

Literature Search Strategy

I conducted initial searches on the Walden University library website to access multiple articles on instructional leadership using the general search engine. I used interchangeable descriptors such as *principal leadership, elementary principal instructional leadership,* and *principal instructional leadership strategies.* Additional searches for books, articles and other text expanded to searching these descriptors using same search engine but narrowed to specific databases such as Education Source, ERIC, SAGE Journals, and Academic Search Complete. I expanded initial broad searches to explore and determine direction of research to include principal strategies for

marginalized, minority, or African American students. I searched specific databases

including Journal of African American Studies, SAGE Journals by Social Science and

Humanities discipline, Google Scholar, and NCES Publications. I found literature related

to principals' perceptions and impact on student achievement, the principals' role, and

factors for school change using databased such as ERIC, SAGE Journals, and Google

Scholar. I also found literature related to educational reform policies for closing

achievement gap using a wide range of related search terms to support the background,

problem, purpose, and research questions. I supported the conceptual framework using

terms retrieved through preliminary reading using aforementioned descriptors. Search

terms that aided in the acquiring more research to support conceptual framework included

principal instructional management theory, Phillip Hallinger, principal instructional

leadership theory, and purpose-driven leadership using primarily Google Scholar and

SAGE Journals. Lastly, I used research studies and dissertations related to elementary

principal instructional leadership, via ProQuest to assist in the organization of this study.

Seminal work provided historical context on the importance and influence of

instructional leadership supporting student achievement, however primary sources used

were within the past 5 years and included books, articles, and other texts. These searches

provided me with the information necessary to organize, plan, implement, and report

findings for this qualitative case study.

Conceptual Framework

I focused this study on elementary principals' descriptions of their instructional

leadership actions to support academically marginalized students through interviews and

analysis of archival standardized testing data on the performance of academically

marginalized students in elementary reading and mathematics. The participants

voluntarily participated in a qualitative case study to share their instructional leadership

actions to specifically support achievement of academically marginalized students.

Academically marginalized is defined as a form of acute and persistent academic

disadvantage rooted in underlying socioeconomic inequalities (Khalifa, Gooden, &

Davis, 2016). Students of African American descent are most dominant in this student

group and research around marginalized students.

Historically, principal leadership has been studied under a variety of leadership

models. Transactional leadership, transformational leadership, instructional leadership,

and teacher leadership are among the most commonly studied leadership models in

education (Cansoy, Polatcan, & Kilinc, 2019). Cansoy et al. (2019) explained the

phenomenon of instructional leadership as studied through three aspects: the lens of

effectiveness of principals comparing likeness in student profiles, gender of leaders, and

resources; instructional practices based on attributes of the organization; and the

interpersonal effect of principal leadership actions such as building trust and fostering a

strong school climate. The concept of instructional leadership was based on the premise

that a set of behaviors or actions of principals influence successful academic achievement

as measured by assessment instruments of accountability.

I supported this theoretical approach with behaviorism, the science of human

behavior, to study the actions of an individual and measure against stimuli for

effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the behavior. B.F. Skinner, a behaviorist, was among

the first to shift from the study of thinking to behavior (McLeod, 2018). His operant

conditioning method of learning involved the theory that consequences impact behavior

(McLeod, 2018). According to McLeod (2018), Skinner theorized stimuli based on

behaviors to impact change in behavior to drive different results. Hallinger and Murphy

(1985) found there must be defined, observable actions and assessment to measure the

educational leadership of principals. They identified the three dimensions to measure

principal leadership behavior as: promoting a positive learning environment, setting a

school vision, and managing the curriculum program. Hallinger and Murphy (1985) also

stated that principals' lack of understanding the curriculum, professional norms, role as

instructional leader, and district expectations serve as barriers to successfully leading in

their schools.

   The literature on instructional leadership of principals attributed these dimensions

to success for students and school improvement but didn't identify any particular student

group over another. I inferred that the belief is these dimensions are key to academic

success of all students and may not be present where there is an absence of some of all of

these behaviors. Harchar and Hyle (1996) examined the necessary elements for

successful administrative instructional leadership in elementary schools by interviewing

eight elementary principals with exemplary leadership ratings and 16 teachers from a

midwestern state. I supported this study with research by Hallinger and Murphy (1985)

on the barriers to quality instructional leadership. Their findings pinpointed seven

specific behaviors of successful instructional leadership that fall within the three

dimensions discussed by Hallinger and Murphy (1985): visioning, supervising and

evaluating, forming relationships, communicating, facilitating meetings, initiating

programs, and supporting parental involvement. Historically, teachers have been viewed

as the key instructional leader on a campus responsible for improving student

achievement (Harchar & Hyle, 1996). Harchar and Hyle (1996) based this qualitative

study on the collaborative power theory, which focuses on the collaboration between

teachers and principals through the use of behavior strategies to reduce the threat of

inequities of power to foster student academic development.

Additional factors effecting schools, such as systemic inequalities among

marginalized and nonmarginalized student groups are not addressed in the literature on

instructional leadership practices. Dantley's (2003) purpose-driven leadership theory

looks at principals' perceptions beyond students' and teachers' competencies and is

grounded in the concept of critical spirituality. Dantley's (2003) exploration challenges

educational leadership discourse and proposes that there are more effective ways to

realize genuine change in schools. Beard (2018) defined the five descriptors for

administrators exhibiting purpose-driven leadership as: leaders with a deeper

understanding and articulation of the purpose of school; leaders who critique traditional

structures and clarify the learning process; leaders who view the opportunity to lead as a

calling or purpose (spiritual context) that serves to bring about reform; leaders who

prioritize achievement; and leaders view their leadership practices as those to free

students to learn. The two elements of critical spirituality that informed how principals

support academically marginalized students are performative creativity and

transformative action (Dantley, 2010). This is based on Dantley's understanding that the

needs of communities of color are grounded in spiritual contexts and foundations that provide a sense of hope and resistance to oppressive practices and rituals hegemonically executed against them (Beard, 2018). Beard (2015) conducted a qualitative study in the United States using Dantley's purpose-driven leadership and Csikszentmihalyi's flow theory and found that the nine elements of flow and tenets of purpose-driven leadership were present in principals successfully closing achievement gaps.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variable

Instructional Leadership Overview

Instructional leadership is defined as school leaders' efforts to improve teaching and learning by promoting best practices so that all Pre-Kindergarten (PK)-12 students can succeed academically (Shaked, 2018). Through direct and indirect activities, principals play an important role in supporting students (Shaked, 2018). This influence has been studied extensively through research, with analysis of the principal's role as a school leader through the lens of multiple leadership styles, influences of policy, district leadership, parent engagement, and teacher-student perceptions. I reviewed literature for this study to analyze multi-dimensional roles of principal leaders in a variety of contexts including K-12 public schools, specialty schools and programs, and internationally. I performed an exhaustive review of the literature on how instructional leadership practices have supported student achievement over time.

Instructional leadership, also referred to as instructional management and principal leadership, is a concept of leadership that emerged over the past 40 years with the push for school effectiveness through the common dimensions of leadership: visions,

values, and influence (Murphy, Neumerski, Goldring, Grissom, & Porter, 2016; Hernandez-Amoros & Ruiz, 2018). The multiple facets of leadership in education resulted in an accumulation of studies in this area. Murphy et al. (2016) concluded through a review of 1000 articles on school leadership that there has been little time and effort given to instructional work by campus leaders. Despite research that reveals a commonality among successful school leadership practices, principals are found to hold onto the old ideal of principals as authoritarian managers of their campuses. Murphy et al. (2016) found through this research that instructional management through principal leadership is present in schools that are more effective, where principals take more ownership in instructional practices. Their extensive review of instructional leadership revealed that although leadership centered around teaching and learning is a widely accepted practice, it is not widely practiced. Hallinger (2018a) explored educational leadership through multiple contexts (cultural, community, political, economic, institutional, school improvement) through analysis to explore how they shape instructional leadership practice in schools. The analysis led to conclusions that research on school leadership practice should be examined through context with revisions to research methods to explore the response to leadership. This research supported the need to continue to study instructional leadership across contexts.

In a study of educational leadership in rural schools, Parson, Hunter, and Kallio (2016) suggested that instructional leadership practices differ from those in urban and suburban areas because rural principals do not face the same challenges. The researchers suggested that principals should be exposed to experiences in transformative leadership

(Parson et al., 2016). Parson et al. (2016) looked at the differences in instructional leadership based on gender of principal. Berkovich (2018) studied principal leadership through the context of leadership styles to gain perspective on which methods of leadership provide greater results on success of the school. Though there are many leadership styles, transformational leadership has been noted as the most popular and ideal mode of leadership in education (Berkovich, 2018). Berkovich (2018) found that instructional, transformational, and distributed leadership are the most studied (using exact term searches) in peer-reviewed publications on leadership styles of administrators in education. Berkovich claimed that transformational leadership best serves the challenges principals may face in setting goals, identifying problems, and restructuring practices to support reform needed to improve practices and achievement.

Instructional Leadership Perceptions

Over the last 5 decades, researchers have taken interest in the shift from principals' authoritarian role to that of instructional leader. To understand that shift, researchers sought to understand the role of an instructional leader and principal's perceptions around instructional leadership actions. Researchers have explored principal instructional leadership in research through the lens of the district leader, principal, teacher, parent, and student. In Spain, Hernandez-Amoros and Martinez Ruiz (2018) conducted a qualitative analysis of metaphorical expressions from 68 principals across all levels to see their view of instructional leadership. Hernandez-Amoros and Martinez Ruiz (2018) found that most principals adopted a more traditional model of principalship and demonstrated weak characteristics related to instructional leadership.

Gurley, Anast-May, O'Neal, and Dozier (2016) found through a quantitative study using the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS) that principals in some schools consistently rate themselves higher than did their teachers in enacting instructional leadership behaviors. Gurley et al. (2016) conducted the study in the southeastern region of the United States and suggested additional research to focus on why there is a variance between the perceptions of teachers and principals in how frequently principals are engaged in instructional leadership. Holmes and Parker (2018) studied the use of the oral language of principals in an at-risk elementary school in the southwestern USA by collecting teacher perception data based on the Motivating Language Theory (MLT). Over a period of three years, Holmes and Parker (2018) conducted a quantitative analysis of motivating language through the contributors: behavioral integrity, competence, goodwill, and trustworthiness. Bellibas and Liu (2018) conducted a quantitative study to investigate principals' perceived practices of instructional and distributed leadership and relationship to school climate. Using data sets from the 2013 Teaching and Learning International Survey that provided information on schools from 34 countries, Bellibas and Liu (2018) conducted linear regression models to determine if the principals' perceived leadership practices were predictors on factors of school climate. The researchers found that staffs' respect in the school is based upon the principal's perceived distributed and instructional leadership practices. Neumerski (2013) gained a deep understanding of what scholars know about instructional leadership by exploring what scholars know and do not know about instructional leadership with a focus on how the work is done and where the knowledge falls short

using a distributed lens to examine the principal, teacher leader, and coach instructional leadership literatures.

In studying principals' ability to employ instructional leadership practices, Le Fevre and Robinson (2015) found that principals demonstrated consistently low to moderate levels of skills. The researchers conducted an analysis of 27 principals' interpersonal effectiveness through conversations with an actor staging as parent and teacher complainant. The researchers concluded that principals showed low skill level across the conversations including the need to examine the skills of principals as instructional leaders. Hallinger et al. (2016) conducted meta-analysis to test differences in the perceptions of instructional leadership practices between male and female principals and found that there are significant differences in their instructional leadership styles. Hourani, Litz, and Smith (2019) gathered leader and staff perceptions on their educational leadership roles at a juvenile correctional center through semistructured interviews and found needs for educational improvement through this context. Kempa, Ulorlo, and Hendrik Wenno (2017) conducted a qualitative research using data sources that included principals, assistant principals, coordinators, and other school supervisors in an international secondary school and found that existing leadership styles of the principal was not effective. It can be inferred from the research that although instructional leadership practices supporting achievement are identified, more research is needed to support how principals employ instructional leadership practices and which specific behaviors lend to supporting all students.

Principals are not the sole leaders in the public-school setting. Many are governed by district or central office officials with titles such as executive director, assistant superintendent, or superintendent. District leadership holds influence and responsibility in the leadership behavior and style of the campus principal through district policy, allocation of resources, overall mission, and structure of governance such as centralization or decentralization. The title and hierarchy of the role that directly supervises principals depends on the organizational structure of the district. In some smaller public-school districts, principals are directly supervised by the superintendent, while in larger districts other officials directly supervise principals. How district leaders support principals have an influence on instructional behaviors at the campus level (Decman et al., 2018). Decman et al. (2018) conducted a study on the perceptions of superintendents with a focus on the key components of Educational Leadership Constituents Council (ELCC) standard three, which stated that a campus-level leader will apply knowledge that promotes the success of every student by ensuring management of the school's organization and operation. The qualitative study consisted of interviewing 18 superintendents in the southern region of the United States and found that superintendents' district leadership and perceptions of instructional leadership practices will help with decision-making that positively affect students (Decman et al., 2018). District leadership perceptions, actions, and influence around instructional leadership at the campus-level may contribute to the direct and indirect instructional leadership actions of principals based on its own beliefs and mission around student achievement.

Instructional Leadership Actions

Fostering Academic Achievement. It is believed that a set of instructional leadership practices influence a positive outcome for student achievement in schools (Hallinger, 2018b). Hiring and maintaining quality teachers are key instructional leadership practices of principals (Bush, 2018b; Harchar & Hyle, 1996; Hallinger, 2018a). Bush (2018b) stated that teachers are a key variable in student performance and their under-performance remains a challenge for principals. Hiring quality teachers is a vital role of the principal. Teachers direct instructional delivery of curriculum, and diagnostic measures to improve academic performance, is an important part of schooling.

Research also showed effective instructional leadership involves practices to motivate and maintain teachers. Bush (2018c) concluded that the motivation, confidence, and growth mindset of teachers is enhanced through the role of instructional leadership. In earlier research, Harchar and Hyle (1996) determined that principals' instructional behaviors gain the trust of teachers and encourage how teachers collaborate and support colleagues and students. Hollingworth, Olsen, Asikin-Garmager, and Winn (2018) conducted multiple case studies to examine the role of four states in the United States recognizing high-quality principals in the implementation of change initiatives in their schools and also found that ability to build trust with teachers is demonstrated in effective principals. The study explored how principals engage staff to create a positive learning environment and how their influence on organizational culture changes classroom practice. To influence academic achievement, principals must understand leading through an instructional lens to provide teachers the coaching and guidance necessary to exhibit best practices in the classroom. Another perspective in fostering academic

achievement for marginalized groups, particularly those in high poverty schools, is transformative educational leadership through critical care which involves a show of empathy, compassion, advocacy, perseverance, and embracing values (Wilson, 2016). The article written by Wilson (2016) reviewed the benefits of instructional leaders enacting transformative educational leadership rooted in critical care and found through principal interviews that it is important for educators to realize the racialized conditions and oppressive context to better support marginalized students in academic achievement.

Miller, Wargo, and Hoke (2019) explored the role of the instructional coach and how the principal and instructional coach work together to cultivate professional growth of teachers to promote positive learning experiences. This study, through the perspective of the instructional coach, was conducted in a suburban school district in the Midwest of the United States that struggled to support achievement of its marginalized student population (students with low socioeconomic status and students with disabilities). The researchers found that promoting instructional leadership among principals lead to instructional improvement and suggest that an aligned partnership with instructional coaches is a behavior that further strengthens this practice (Miller, Wargo, & Hoke, 2019).

Hollingworth et al. (2018) examined actions around successful principals and found that they built trust, communicated well, and built effective working relationships with teachers. Morgan, Diamond, Spies, Raines, and Boone (2019) implemented a two-round Delphi survey to develop a consensus around the priorities of focus between improving the academic and well-being outcomes of students and discovered that the key

focus remains on academic achievement and less on well-being. Louis, Murphy, and

Smylie (2016) conducted an analysis and synthesis of philosophy and education

literatures to explore caring principal leadership and concluded there are significant

positive correlation between caring instructional leadership, teacher motivation, and

student academic support and recommended principals understand conditions and

resources necessary to maximize learning. This supported the notion that principals must

be intentional about instructional leadership practices to support academic achievement.

     Defining the School Mission. Another key action of instructional leadership is

setting, framing, and communicating goals for the success of the school. Leaders that

foster cooperative environments and ideal working climates demonstrate effective

principal leadership (Kempa, Ulorlo, & Hendrik Wenno, 2017). Defining the school

mission involves not only setting goals for success but creating a culture that supports the

mission through key principal leadership actions. Principals must analyze data such as

accountability ratings, community feedback, district data and initiatives, students'

background, staffing, and curriculum effectiveness in identifying areas for improvement.

These factors support defining and communicating the mission of the school toward

success. How principals build a culture of open communication and stakeholder support

exemplify the mission for success. Barr and Saltmarsh (2014) emphasized the positive

affect of parents' engagement on school success and found how a principal involves

parents is important to the amount of support received. A qualitative study was

conducted in Australia with parent participants from multiple economic backgrounds and

found the correlation has implications that involving parents by communicating and factoring in establishing school goals will yield positive results in supporting students.

Building a culture of excellence supports principal leadership in nurturing success campus wide. Hollingworth, Olsen, Asikin-Garmager, and Winn (2018) studied how principals build culture to maintain positive school improvement efforts by examining the roles of four high performing principals in the Midwest of the United States. The results of this study found that defining the mission as part of managing school culture is a key function of school leadership. They identified the following leadership practices as the common thread of successful principals: intentional and explicit communication with stakeholders, knowing their staff, and building trust among teachers (Hollingworth et al., 2018).

Implementing High Quality Curriculum. Curriculum and Instruction is vital to school success. How teachers teach paired with what they teach defines the access students have to quality instructional material. Education reform and new accountability measures place pressure on district and campus leaders to yield favorable academic results. Under ESSA, student academic measures in core content areas such as reading and mathematics are a key part of principal evaluation of success (Grissom, Blissett, & Mitani, 2018). Grissom, Blissett, and Mitani (2018) studied how a new high-stakes evaluation system of principals in Tennessee impact principal practice. The findings were that although the ratings were in alignment and predictive of student academic achievement and teacher principal perceptions, raters failed to differentiate between the specific dimensions of principal practice such as curriculum implementation. Ingman,

Lohmiller, Cutforth, Borley, and Belansky (2017) explored how important engaging

students, principals, teachers, and stakeholders in the curriculum development process is

to school achievement. They found that high-stakes pressure of ESSA and federal

mandates promote more school district centralization of curriculum. The implication is

the extent to which principal instructional leadership practices can include

implementation of high-quality curriculum. Kindall, Crowe, and Elsass (2018)

conducted a mixed research study on the elementary principal's influence in the

development of literacy instruction by new teachers. The results of this study found that

novice teachers trusted information and performed better where principal instructional

knowledge was perceived to be strong.

Academically Marginalized Students

In this study, academically marginalized is defined as a form of acute and

persistent academic disadvantage rooted in underlying socioeconomic inequalities

(Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016). An ongoing problem in public schools and society in

general is the inequities marginalized populations (Black, Latino, and Indigenous racial

groups) face in comparison to their nonmarginalized counterparts. Marginalized students

continue to fall far below nonmarginalized students in academic performance as

determined by standardized testing measures (Taylor, Kyere, & King, 2018; Khalifa,

Gooden, & Davis, 2016). Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis (2016) noted that all student

populations face academic and social issues, however marginalized students do so in an

oppressive society that disproportionately disciplines and questions their integrity and

intelligence. Flores and Gunzenhauser (2018) also highlighted that academic

discrepancies of marginalized populations are viewed often as individual student problems instead of instructional or system failures. Yet despite efforts of school reform and local school district initiatives, the achievement gap has not narrowed in significance in over 50 years since public school mandated desegregation.

Research addressing marginalized students recommend dealing with the "whole child" including factors beyond instructional deficiencies such as culture responsiveness and consciousness around social justice issues (Clemens, 2019; El-Amin et al., 2017; Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016). Clemens (2019) studied the challenges school leaders face facilitating reform through a social justice-based model for students of color in a low socioeconomic and underperforming school environment and found that standardized testing measures are not sufficient alone for determining factors of success and may actually pose a barrier to student success. El-Amin et al. (2017) concluded that high school marginalized students were aware of the social injustices and systems of inequality that exist within communities and school and thus schools must address these social forces through critical consciousness to increase academic achievement. Royle and Brown (2014) conducted an analysis of principal perceptions of the achievement gap between African American and White students. The student revealed factors within the principal's role that affect academic achievement of African American students, a group considered marginalized based on ethnicity. There is a gap in research in studying elementary-aged marginalized students and principal instructional leadership practices to support this group. Based on the research, there is a need to analyze elementary-aged marginalized students and how instructional leaders support their academic achievement.

Achievement Gap

Race and poverty continue to be a major factor in schooling in the United States, where segregation for students of color, marginalized, has continued beyond Civil Rights era and Brown v. Board of Education (1954). A study conducted by Milligan and Howley (2015) explored 10 elementary principals in predominately Black urban schools in the United States staffed by a predominately White faculty to explore the perceptions and understanding of teacher-student racial differences. The study, using the critical race theory (CRT) as its framework, found that racism is interwoven into way of life in the United States and embracing a system of segregated schools in impoverished Black communities is detrimental to its students, families, and communities (Milligan & Howley, 2015). The findings of the study showed that principals should possess an understanding of the history and politics behind marginalization in the United States and receive training around being prepared for such challenges of leading marginalized students to success and working in predominately marginalized schools. An action research study conducted by Murray-Johnson and Guerra (2018) studied the elementary leadership of an elementary school in a metropolitan area of the United States and how they faced the challenges of their own deficit thinking around supporting marginalized students. The study revealed that there was a lack of cultural responsiveness on the campus and an issue leading for social justice based on their inner feelings.

Chitpin (2016) conducted a study in Ontario, Canada to address ongoing problem that their school faced in meeting the needs of all students. The study looked at leadership to reduce the achievement gaps among student sub-groups in their public-

school system to increase academic achievement using Karl Popper's theory of learning for school improvement. The findings revealed the variances in student achievement were correlated to variances in the schools and their leadership. Taylor, Kyere, and King (2018) explored a theoretical framework, A Gardening Metaphor (AGM), to address racial disparities in education and support rationale for closing achievement gaps. The study found that interventions that address environment efforts such as engaging parents and community stakeholders in the achievement outcomes could enhance achievement of marginalized students.

Hung et al. (2019) examined the achievement gap between White and African American students in 2,868 school districts across the United States with using pooled data from 2008-2013. This qualitative study explored grade levels from third to eighth in the subjects of math and English language using linear regressions to identify predicting factors of achievement gap and found achievement gaps were largest in south and southwestern regions of the United States. The study found that the primary factor contributing to the achievement gap is the educational attainment of the household adults in which the higher the adult level of education, the larger the achievement gaps which implied schools in high economic communities could create more barriers for marginalized students. Flores and Gunzenhauser (2018) explored the contextual understandings of opportunity gap and achievement gap through qualitative interviews of 22 principals and school district leaders in a northeastern state and found leadership responses, capacities, and articulation the gaps varied among the school leaders. The

findings suggest that principals' understanding of achievement or opportunity gaps better inform their leadership practices.

Summary and Conclusions

The literature was extensive on the topics of instructional leadership behaviors of principals for student achievement (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Shaked, 2018), marginalization (Beard, 2018), and achievement gap (Bertrand, 2018) but limited on the correlation between the three. Research provided historical perspectives on the role of principal through the lens of various leadership styles. The literature covered principalship and its role to support academic achievement across various contexts through shifts in policies impacting educational decisions. The literature's common theme was that effective instructional leadership practices support academic achievement and principals are a key role in school success.

Historical research on the role of the principal showed that various leadership styles and practices have transpired over the past four decades. The principal's dictatorship and management of school has been shown to not be sufficient to lead a school to academic success. It has been found that principals set the mission and culture of the school, employ and engage teachers, manage the instructional program, and communicate with parents and key stakeholders play a role in how successful the school will perform. The research on the academic achievement of marginalized students followed a similar trajectory but showed that instructional leadership practices beyond the standard are required to connect with these students to lead to their success.

The achievement gap, although researched thoroughly remains a problem in schools today. The research did not correlate these best instructional leadership practices with the success of marginalized students. This study explored how principals use instructional leadership practices to support academically marginalized students. The research explored for the conceptual framework of this study, along with thematic analysis of principal interviews and state archival performance data, provided information on whether instructional leadership practices are supporting the needs of academically marginalized students.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this study was to understand elementary school principals'

instructional leadership practices supporting academically marginalized students. There

is a need to examine elementary school principals' instructional leadership practices

regarding academically marginalized students. The exploration of the study investigated

service supports employed by participants and the ways in which the needs of

academically marginalized students are addressed in their learning environment. This

chapter will include the research design and rationale, role of researcher, methodology,

participant selection process, and instrumentation used to collect data. The data analysis

revealed themes to inform instructional leadership practices and implications for social

change in education for academically marginalized populations.

Research Design and Rationale

The research design was a qualitative case study. Qualitative research is

employed often to explore and answer the *why* and *how* of human behavior, experience,

and opinion (Merriam, 2008). The primary data collection method is qualitative case

study. The research questions that will guide this study are:

RQ1: How do elementary school principals describe the instructional leadership

practice of fostering academic achievement to support academically marginalized

students?

RQ2: How do elementary school principals describe the instructional leadership

practice of defining the school mission and vision for success to support academically

marginalized students?

RQ3: How do elementary school principals implement high quality curriculum in the classroom to increase proficiency in reading and mathematics for academically marginalized students?

Through the historical context and qualitative research of today, the dimensions of this paradigm that make qualitative research interesting and unique are its components: fieldwork and naturalistic engagement, descriptive and analytic, seeks complexity and contextualization, researcher as instrument, process and relationships, fidelity to participants, and meaning making (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). These components allow a researcher to explore phenomena of interest. Qualitative research is not linear and is subjective to the participants' interpretations of experiences, events, and other areas of inquiry (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

This qualitative case study will address the lack of evidence on the central phenomenon, elementary principals, and their function of using instructional leadership practices to support academically marginalized students. The process of using semistructured interviews in a bounded system to analyze elementary principals in real life context of a defined group of students, justifies the chosen qualitative case study design. A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Gathering the insights and beliefs of participants through a targeted location is best studied through a bounded qualitative approach (Merriam, 1998). A quantitative study would not provide insight on principals' beliefs around their instructional leadership practices.

The qualitative case study is the design most appropriate for this study due to its analysis of a case bounded by specific phenomena in a targeted location (Yin, 2014). The data collection and analysis using a small number of participants in the study area will provide information for potential recommendations for campus leadership of marginalized students. This type of study is ideal for recommendations, improving practice, and providing research-based solutions (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Role of the Researcher

I have served as a central office administrator in the district in which the case study will occur. I am no longer in the district but have had prior working relationships with several principals. Since leaving employment with the district, I have only maintained contact with three of the 84 elementary principals in the district. I ensured that all participants know their participation in the study is voluntary and exclude the three principals in which I have continued contact. I do not hold any authoritative power over any of the participants that will be invited to the study.

As a director of elementary curriculum and instruction, I understand the value of instructional leadership practices to support marginalized students. My upbringing as a marginalized student and passion around issues of inequality in the public-school system may serve as a factor of bias as I collect, analyze, and report data for this study. In this study, I set aside my training and knowledge of implementing and managing the curriculum program to objectively analyze what the data reveal about instructional leadership to support marginalized students.

Methodology

The school district explored in this case study is in the southern region of the
United States. The district is a large urban district with over 84,000 students, 82
elementary schools, 24 middle schools, 21 high schools, and 16 specialty campuses. The
demographics are diverse, with an 85% marginalized student population.   Principals
selected for study were asked a series of questions around the three domains of
instructional leadership practices: managing the instructional program, defining the
school mission, and fostering academic achievement. For screening purposes, archival
state scores in reading and math, along with percentages of marginalized student
populations, were used to determine which elementary school principals would be invited
to participate in the study as volunteers. The sampling technique used was purposeful
sampling (Yin, 2011). I selected 11 elementary school principals for the
study. Participation was voluntary, and data was collected via semistructured interviews.
Thematic analysis using an integrated approach was used against the dimensions of the
instructional management and purpose-driven leadership theories.

Participant Selection

The participants were selected based on their role as elementary principal and
archival state data showing academic achievement on standardized testing results in
reading and mathematics. Some participants in the study had more tenure than others,
but the minimum years of tenure to be invited to participate was two at same campus.
This criterion was based on a need to analyze principals having sufficient experience at a
campus to answer interview questions regarding instructional leadership practices.

Purposeful sampling was used based on assumption that the researcher wants to discover, gain insight, and understand the phenomenon from which the most could be learned (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Of the 84 elementary principals employed in district of study, 33 principals meeting criteria were invited to participate to allow for adequate number of volunteers needed to target the desired 10-15 participants for an in-depth inquiry. Selected participants were contacted via email, with the permission of district officials to conduct the study. A follow up phone call was made to contact selected participants that did not respond to email invitation. Based on my prior employment with district, I used my reputation and professionalism to establish an effective researcher-participant relationship. All steps were taken to protect each participant's rights, ensuring confidentiality and protection from harm by participating in study.

Instrumentation

The primary instrument for this study was the interview materials created by researcher to accommodate interview overview, questions, space for annotations, and summary. I served as the primary research instrument using a researcher-created interview guide containing the questions and opening and closing comments for each interview (Appendix A). The interview protocol was designed based on Walden University developed interview guides and materials used in various courses of study. The audio-only interviews were recorded via video conferencing software or phone interview at the convenience of the participant. All recordings were transcribed and coded for reference and emerging themes of instructional leadership practices supporting academically marginalized students.

Data was analyzed against marginalized student percentages and state data to show whether an achievement gap existed for principals interviewed. Retention guidelines will be followed for maintaining data gathered in this study by remaining available for 5 years at district of study. The draft of all instrumentation was submitted to doctoral committee members for feedback and modified based on recommendations to incorporate for final use in semistructured interview data collection (McKenzie, Wood, Kotecki, Clark, & Brey, 1999).

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Recruitment. Participants were contacted initially by email to discuss the case study. A phone call was made to set up a meeting to discuss the study to those that replied via email. The invitation to participate in the study was extended to those that are employed as elementary-school principals for a minimum of 2 years in the case study district. The names, tenure, and contact information of the participants were gathered from public databases in the case study district.

Participation. The initial meeting involved the sharing and explaining the summary of the study, IRB approval, and participant rights as study participants. Consent was obtained from each participant via email with an acknowledgement of understanding of process and rights. I confirmed criteria to participate by confirming principals' tenure and school placement. Participants were considered if they have served as a principal for at least two full school years at same campus in the school district of study. Principals must have served as a principal in an elementary school setting in the school district of study. I allowed for questions regarding the study and

their participation. Their agreement to participate was confirmed in writing by email, which will be maintained in my records per storage guidelines. Interview dates were scheduled virtually based upon an agreed date and time.

Data Analysis Plan

Collecting data in qualitative research requires ensuring validity, ethical procedures, and reliability. Creswell (2014) stated that this process includes creating a method to record data, gaining permission of the participants, having a good sampling strategy, and means to store the data. The information gathered was used to answer the research questions. Creswell (2014) outlined the three strategies for data collection: interviewing, observing, and analyzing data.

Interviews were conducted using the interview guide (Appendix A). Due to availability and convenience for the participant, interviews were conducted either online via a digital conference software program or by phone with audio recording application. The interviews were recorded using the recording option for video conference interviews and a recording application for phone interviews. An observation sheet was used to make antidotal notes during interview. Transcription software was used to transcribe the audio for analysis. Data was organized and stored electronically requiring encryption to access.

A qualitative coding software was used to support coding and conducting thematic analysis for data collected from interviews. All data collection instruments were obtained and used on computer and recording devices that require password for access. This ensures data retrieved is secure and kept confidential. Additional measures were taken to keep track of data and emerging themes through dated filed and entries. The

purposeful data selection served to address the problem, purpose, conceptual framework, and research questions of the qualitative case study.

Trustworthiness

Data are trustworthy if they can be traced back to primary source and are verifiable (Mathison, 2005). Criteria for trustworthiness are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Mathison, 2005). Trustworthiness ensures data collection methods are done appropriately, and sources for collection are reliable. Through this research, I ensured quality, trustworthiness, and credibility by following appropriate research protocols in finding participants, conducting interviews, and coding data. In qualitative research, it is important for a researcher to accurately and richly describe the phenomenon in question (Given, 2008). I actually measured what I set out to measure and I collected data that were in alignment to my focus and identified gap in practice.

Credibility. Establishing credibility is the first step of fostering trustworthiness in research, particularly in data collection (Shenton, 2004). Ensuring the review process is thorough with accountability measures promotes credibility (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, & McKibbon, 2015). I used an integrated process of coding responses into categories, combining an inductive process around broad code types, that led to themes upon which to connect to research questions. I used this process to discover common themes related to research questions and theme tenets to draw conclusions regarding instructional leadership practices supporting academically marginalized students, including

implications for social change as a required component of research for all students at Walden University (Walden University, 2017).

Transferability. Transferability occurs when research findings can be applied to other situations (Merriam, 2008). Some researchers argue that transferability is difficult to prove in qualitative case studies due to small sample environment (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, & McKibbon, 2015). Transferability was achieved through conveying in detail the data collection methods, boundaries of the research, and results of data analysis based on participant interviews. Participants were invited and selected based on tenure and archival state data results. Based on the context of the study and approach taken to analyze the data, transferability can be achieved for future research on instructional leadership practices supporting academically marginalized students.

Dependability. To ensure dependability, I took measures such as recoding the data to ensure results are consistent, using trusted colleagues to examine process and findings, and other measures to evaluate the findings to ensure it aligned to the data. The data collection through interviews and campus archival data represented triangulation of data, which supports dependability. According to Anney (2014) dependability involves "the stability of findings over time" (p. 278). Research participants received the opportunity to review transcripts for accuracy and appropriate representations, as well as the opportunity to offer recommendations for any necessary edits.

Confirmability. The degree to which other researchers can confirm the results of the study is confirmability (Anney, 2014). During the process, I maintained a reflexive journal to interpret data and note my reflections, both personally and academically in

regard to the data collection. Based on my role as an educator and knowledge of instructional leadership practices, I continued to recognize my personal bias', assumptions, and beliefs related to principal instructional leadership practices supporting academically marginalized students.

Ethical Procedures

The meaning of harm as it relates to research has been defined as 'the range of things in which that individual has a stake' (Israel, 2015). Harm in this instance goes beyond physical, but addressed psychological, social, economic, legal, and environmental damage. Privacy of the participants is important to protect because information revealed in the study could create some troubles for participants if leaked. For my research topic, interviewing principals regarding their instructional leadership approach to eliminate achievement gap between marginalized and nonmarginalized students could generate responses and openness. This openness could reveal information about teachers, other district staff, and leadership that, if revealed to others, could create an ethical challenge.

Summary

This qualitative case study used methodology in accordance with research guidelines and standards of practice. This study was focused on principals' instructional leadership practices to support academically marginalized students and involved interviewing a group of principals in a southern United States public school district. The study was limited to principals of elementary schools in a large urban district. The role of the researcher was described along with the methodology to illustrate how and why the participants were selected. The rationale was detailed along with instrumentation plan for

collecting data. The data analysis plan was provided to describe how the interview and

archival data will be recorded and coded. Explanations for trustworthiness and ethical

procedures concluded the chapter. Chapter 4 will include results of the study.

Chapter 4: Reflections and Conclusions

The research problem was the need to understand elementary school principals' instructional leadership practices supporting academically marginalized students. Prior to this research, it was unknown how elementary school principals, in a large urban public-school district in southern region of United States, used instructional leadership practices to support academically marginalized students.

This study sought to address what supports elementary principals employ to close achievement gaps between marginalized and nonmarginalized students. There is a growing body of research supporting causal factors as poverty, systemic racism, and oppressive practices (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016; Flores & Gunzenhauser, 2018). Researchers have suggested understanding these gaps to inform leadership practices and recommend actions such as employing interventions beyond academia to support academically marginalized students. Despite these suggestions and research around principal actions supporting academic success, studies have shown the achievement of marginalized students in a public-school system has remained lower than nonmarginalized peers for decades (Gurley, Anast-May, O'Neal, & Dozier, 2016). Hence, there was a need to explore the specific instructional leadership actions of elementary principals supporting marginalized students in a large urban school district to address gap in practice and literature.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand elementary school principals' instructional leadership practices supporting academically marginalized students. The exploration of the study investigated service supports employed by

participants and the ways in which the needs of academically marginalized students are addressed in their learning environment. Principals' direct and indirect actions impact overall school effectiveness (Goddard, Skrla, & Salloum, 2017). Research was needed to understand how elementary school principals employ instructional leadership strategies to increase academic proficiency of academically marginalized students in reading and mathematics, as evident by state standardized test scores. This study revealed specific strategies aligned to three core functions of principal leadership: fostering academic achievement, defining school mission and vision, and implementing high quality curriculum.

The research questions guiding this qualitative study were designed to reveal specific instructional leadership practices and philosophies connected to conceptual framework around principal management and purpose-driven leadership theories. The questions were also intended to address the need to understand elementary school principals' instructional leadership practices supporting academically marginalized students. This study included the research questions, where RQ1 is the overarching research question, and the supporting research questions are RQ2 and RQ3.

RQ1: How do elementary school principals describe the instructional leadership practice of fostering academic achievement to support academically marginalized students?

RQ2: How do elementary school principals describe the instructional leadership practice of defining the school mission and vision for success to support academically marginalized students?

RQ3: How do elementary school principals implement high quality curriculum in the classroom to increase proficiency in reading and mathematics for academically marginalized students?

The primary data collection method is qualitative case study. Qualitative research is unique in that it is not linear and is subjective to the participants' interpretations of experiences, events, and other areas of inquiry (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). This case study design was based on Yin's definition of a case study as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (elementary principals) within its real-life context (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Gathering the insights and beliefs of participants through a targeted location is best studied through a bounded qualitative approach (Merriam, 1998). This supported qualitative case study as the design most appropriate for this study.

To answer the research questions, data was gathered from two sources. The first data source was semistructured virtual interviews of 11 elementary principals in district of research. The second data source was state standardized assessment data retrieved from state education agency website. The data collection through interviews and district assessment archival data will represent triangulation of data, which supports dependability. According to Anney (2014) dependability involves "the stability of findings over time" (p. 278). The triangulation of data in this study improved study trustworthiness (Yin, 2014).

Chapter 4 presents a thorough explanation of the findings of this qualitative case study. The chapter explains the setting, collection methods, thematic analysis method

used to analyze data, results of finding, and evidence of trustworthiness. This section

provides a narrative of the setting, type and amount of data collected. A purposeful

sample of 11 principals was selected from a team of elementary school principals in the

research district to participate in the study. The elementary principals selected to

participate in the study included those that met the criteria of serving at least 2 years as

principal at the same elementary school campus within the research site. Although this

study was limited to participants in the elementary grade level setting within this large,

urban district in a southern region of the United States, principals with marginalized

student populations benefitted the most from this research,

Setting

The study was conducted in the southern region of the United States. This region

is significant based on the historical stigma and influence of extreme injustices toward

marginalized individuals in the South. Marginalization, the process of regulating or

confining to a lower standard, has impacted educational outcomes for students in this and

other regions across the United States. The research site used to conduct the study was a

large, urban public-school district with approximately 130 campuses, 81,000 students,

and over 10,000 teachers and staff. Eighty-seven percent of this district's student

population are considered marginalized. Like other public-school districts in this region,

this district is held to its state's academic standards in core content areas and required to

demonstrate levels of mastery for students via standardized testing at the end of each

academic school year.

I conducted each interview in a private room with no visitors to ensure privacy. All potential background distractions were silenced, and I ensured confidentiality in the physical interview space, as well as within the virtual software program. The Zoom conference software had features that allowed researcher to turn off camera view, require password entry, and other security measures to prevent any unauthorized access from others. Upon consent to interview, a specific time and date was scheduled, and participants were emailed Zoom access code and password for entry. The participants were told the interview would be audio only but had access to turn on their cameras if they chose. During the interview, I could not see the participant or participants' setting, therefore recordings captured audio interview only. Audio recording devices recorded all interviews with participants.

Data was gathered from elementary school principals with at least 2 years of experience at the same elementary campus in the school district. It was initially intended to utilize the district's directory and public information to contact elementary principals by phone at their campuses to explain study and offer invitation to participate. However, prior to data collection, the COVID-19 pandemic affected the United States and altered the way business was conducted across all industries. School districts across the world closed, with a new expectation of principals, teachers, staff, and students to engage in school functions remotely. This pandemic impacted the original method of contact and changed the way school operated. As a result, an email was sent to the district's executive directors of principals to ask for the names and email addresses of principals meeting this criterion. Emails were sent out to elementary principals individually to

request participation. The informed consent form was sent to all participants, and participants responded to email with confirmation of their receipt an agreeance to participate in the study.

The 11 elementary principals that agreed to participate in the study were assigned study codes to protect their identity and ensure confidentiality. Each participant was assigned a code of P1 to P11 and was referenced as such in documentation and saved records. Transcribed data was analyzed, and any identifiers were redacted so that no data in study was associated with any of the participants' names or identifying information. Each participant possesses a principal certification, has served as principal a minimum of 2 years at same campus, and responsible for the academic achievement of all elementary students. Table 3 shows the job title, gender profile, and campus tenure for each participant.

Table 3

Participant Profile

Participant	Job Title	Gender	2-4 years on campus	5+ years on campus
P1	Principal	Female	X	
P2	Principal	Female		X
P3	Principal	Female		X
P4	Principal	Male		X
P5	Principal	Female		X
P6	Principal	Male	X	
P7	Principal	Female		X
P8	Principal	Female	X	
P9	Principal	Male	X	
P10	Principal	Female	X	
P11	Principal	Female		X

Data Collection

Two different data sources were used in this qualitative case study. The primary

source of data was open-ended, semistructured individual audio interviews. The second

data source was state standardized testing data related to academically marginalized

student achievement performance for state and district research site. Interviews served as

the main source of data for answering research questions and capturing participants'

instructional practices supporting achievement (Creswell, 2014). I developed the

interview guide and protocol to support participants in answering research questions.

Conferences were held virtually at the convenience of the volunteer participant. As the

researcher, I conducted interviews using Zoom conference software on an encrypted

laptop.

Virtual interviews. The framework, supported by literature, and focus of study

inspired the development of the interview protocol. Due to the vast amount of

information on the topic of principal instructional leadership, the questions were designed

to align to conceptual framework to better understand the research problem. These

interview protocols supported remaining focused on the problem, staying consistent in

gathering the same data from all participants. Interviews are a reliable method for

probing participants for deeper responses to support capturing enough information for

analysis and results (Creswell, 2014).

I scheduled interviews to last no longer than 30 minutes via virtual audio

conferencing. The time of each interview was dependent upon the depth of the answers

provided. Probing questions, as listed on the interview guide, were asked to gain deeper

responses from each participant. The preferred method was using a video conferencing

program, Zoom, which provided option for audio only meetings with recording

capability. Some participants opted to participate by phone. In those cases I used a phone

recording application on mobile device. The recording of the interview allowed for the

researcher to focus on the participant and responses without trying to capture notes from

the interview. Interview recordings were transcribed using the transcription software

Nvivo to ensure accuracy and saved as text file on a password encrypted laptop.

There was a total of 34 pages of transcripts generated from the recorded

interviews. A backup of the interview recordings and transcriptions were uploaded to a

cloud-based storage requiring password for access. I used the audio recordings to replay

words misspelled in transcription or any areas of unclarity. To prevent loss of data,

multiple copies of original recordings and transcribed notes were made and saved to both

hard drive and two cloud accounts, all password protected. All notes from interviews

were stored digitally and no paper documentation was recorded for this study. Table 4

shows the number of pages of transcripts from each interview. Each text file was single

spaced in Menlo, font size 11 and averaged three pages in length. The table also shows

the date, time and duration of each interview. Each transcript was thoroughly reviewed to

identify key descriptors that contributed to codes and formation of overarching themes

present in the data.

Table 4

Virtual Interviews of Study Participants

Participant	Date and Time of Interview	Duration	Number of Pages of Transcripts
P1	March 22, 2020	30 minutes	6
P2	March 22, 2020	25 minutes	5
P3	March 30, 2020	20 minutes	3
P4	April 10, 2020	15 minutes	2
P5	April 10, 2020	10 minutes	1
P6	April 11, 2020	15 minutes	2
P7	April 16, 2020	20 minutes	3
P8	April 16, 2020	25 minutes	4
P9	April 16, 2020	20 minutes	4
P10	April 16, 2020	15 minutes	2
P11	April 17, 2020	10 minutes	2

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand elementary school principals' instructional leadership practices supporting academically marginalized students. The study focused on understanding how principals define their instructional leadership practices supporting academically marginalized students based on Hallinger et al.(2016) proposed three dimensions in the instructional leadership role: (a) managing the instructional program, (b) defining the school mission, and (c) fostering academic achievement. The researchers proposed that these three dimensions support the increase in academic achievement for all students. Archival state and district data gathered on student achievement in reading and mathematics, as determined by state standardized testing, revealed deficient academic performance of marginalized students as compared to nonmarginalized peers.

I sought to explore, understand, and interpret the phenomenon of instructional leadership practices employed specifically to support academically marginalized students. I was provided a deep understanding of the phenomenon under investigation through the data received through interviews, which was supported by archival state data.

As the researcher, I used a professional transcription program, Happyscribe.co, to obtain transcripts of audio recorded interviews. I downloaded and saved the transcripts as Text Edit (.txt) files to thoroughly review the files to ensure they were accurate and complete. I listened to audio and read the transcriptions repeatedly to align transcripts with participants' statements. I transcribed audio files for immediate access using the Happyscribe.co program. The transcribed files were organized and named in accordance with pseudonyms of participants. I then imported the files into NVivo software for thematic analysis and coding (Saldana, 2016).

Data Analysis

I used thematic analysis to analyze interview data. Nowell, Norris, White, and Moules (2017) defined thematic analysis as a qualitative research method using the process of identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting out themes interpreted within the data set. This process is done by reviewing data and assigning codes to identify common themes. Saldana (2016) stated, "A code in qualitative data is a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute to a portion of language-based or visual data" (p.2). Codes are then organized by similar codes to identify emerging themes in the responses to research

questions to describe the data. There are mixed perspectives on coding in qualitative

research as it is a researcher-generated translation of the data (Saldana, 2016).

In this study, I coded transcribed interview data for deeper analysis (Creswell,

2014). These codes were words or short phrases highlighting the ideas and concepts

embedded within the data. I created categories and aligned them to the central idea of

each research question. I used the creation of categories to organize and group similar

codes from participant responses. The categories I created served as descriptive labels for

each question to analyze similar responses, ideas and concepts in the data. I used in vivo

coding, by extracting exact words and phrases to create codes (Saldana, 2016).

I used thematic analysis using a priori, open, and axial codes to analyze interview

data. I used a priori coding based on the conceptual frameworks and literature. Open and

axial coding were used in forming high-level categories from coded data. In alignment

with the thematic analysis' purpose of discovering themes and meaning in relation to the

research questions, the researcher used Creswell's six steps of data analysis. The six

steps are to (a) review all the data, (b) organize data, (c) code the data, (d) apply emerged

themes, (e) report the findings, and (f) ensure accuracy using validation procedures.

Step 1: Reviewing all the data. The first step in data analysis is to review the

data and ensure it is organized for easy analysis (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010).

Qualitative researchers review all the data thoroughly to ensure sufficient information has

been collected for analysis (Creswell, 2014). This process may require multiple reviews

and readings to understand the structure of the data. I reviewed all the data to ensure

complete responses to questions were captured, as well as central ideas within the

responses.

Step 2: Organizing the data. Decisions must be made in how to organize large

amounts of data (Saldana, 2016). I organized the data by participants in the order of

interview date and time using pseudonym P1 through P11. Second, I organized the

transcribed interviews by using hierarchical categories-fostering academic achievement,

defining mission and vision, and implementing high quality curriculum. I based the

hierarchical categories on research questions as aligned to the conceptual framework. I

used the NVivo qualitative data analysis software to download and organize all

transcribed interviews.

Step 3: Coding the data. After uploading transcriptions to NVivo, I reviewed

each document against the a priori codes, created as hierarchical categories, based on

Hallinger's conceptual framework on principal instructional leadership. I began with first

category, and used open coding to code each participants' response, pulling exact words

and phrases to create codes. I searched for repetition of words and phrases to identify

patterns and relationship. I used axial coding to generate high-level categories to merge

common codes.

Step 4: Apply emerged themes. I looked at the axial codes and developed

broader themes relevant to the inquiry. These themes emerged based on relationships

among the codes. The number of codes were reduced further and themes were identified

to accurately describe the data holistically. The data was reviewed thoroughly to ensure

the coded data was appropriately aligned to themes. I created a thematic map to provide

a visual of the themes. I remained consistent with this process in alignment with Saldana's thematic analysis approach of using codes, categories, and broad themes to guide the data analysis for this study. I showed, in Figure 1, how this process was used with the interview data gathered in the study.

  Step 5: Report the findings. I reported the findings based on the emerged themes. A concept map was created to represent the themes that emerged from data in connection to the framework. The results were organized by research questions to support findings.

  Step 6: Validation. I promoted the validity of the study through saturation to ensure results are accurate. I ensured triangulation by seeking multiple perspectives from principals at different campus locations to support the validity of the study. I did not address discrepancies in cases, as all interviews contributed to the results and conclusions of the study. I supported the research's credibility and accuracy through evidence of trustworthiness.

Step 1: review all data

Interview Transcripts

Step 2: organize the data

| Fostering academic achievement | Defining school mission/vision | Implementing high quality curriculum |

Examples of codes identified
- Visibility
- Monitor teachers
- Interventions
- Individualized support
- Defining goal
- Setting high expectations

Examples of codes identified
- Visibility
- Set strategic goals
- Collaboration with staff
- Collaboration with family
- Align to district vision

Examples of codes identified
- Use district curriculum
- Student support
- Teacher capacity
- Professional development
- Standards

Step 3: code the data

Building culture
Family and community partnerships
Teacher and staff development
Data analysis and interpretation

Strategic Collaboration
Focus on students
Alignment to district

Data alignment
State standards
Resources

Step 4: apply emerged themes

Hiring and developing teachers
Understanding and analyzing data
Strategic planning
Implementing and monitoring student instructional support
Family and community involvement

Step 5: report findings
Step 6: ensure accuracy

Reviewing quotes supporting themes
Reflecting on emerged themes and
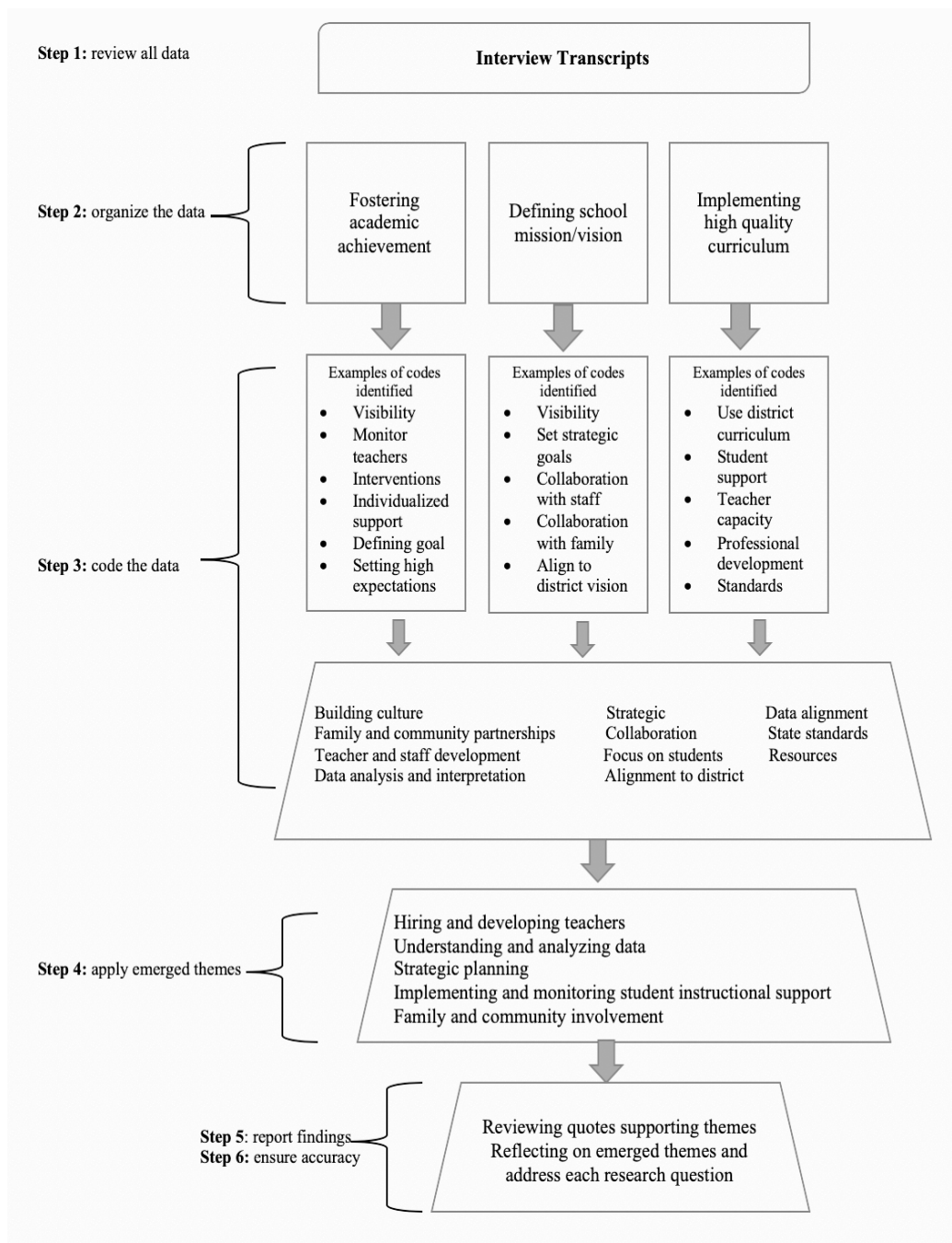address each research question

Figure 1. This is an illustration of the thematic analysis process used in the study.

Results

The results of this study are based on interview transcriptions from open-ended interview data from elementary school principals. The participants were asked questions related to their statements of instructional leadership supports provided to enhance achievement of academically marginalized students. The interview data was evaluated and analyzed using thematic analysis with coding using a priori, axial, and open strategies. There were not any discrepant cases in this study.

Principals employ many instructional leadership strategies to increase the academic achievement of all students. Due to high stakes testing and accountability, principals face the challenge of supporting academically marginalized students to perform well in core content such as reading and mathematics. The selected site exhibited an achievement gap in reading and mathematics. Research around principal leadership provided insight to strategies necessary for academic achievement of all students, while research on achievement gap revealed specific characteristics and level of awareness principals need to support marginalized students, There was a need to understand existing supports, because marginalized students continue to perform low on grade level state assessments. The following research questions were created to evaluate elementary principals' instructional leadership strategies supporting academically marginalized students.

RQ1: How do elementary school principals describe the instructional leadership practice of fostering academic achievement to support academically marginalized students?

RQ2: How do elementary school principals describe the instructional leadership practice of defining the school mission and vision for success to support academically marginalized students?

RQ3: How do elementary school principals implement high quality curriculum in the classroom to increase proficiency in reading and mathematics for academically marginalized students?

Elementary principals were interviewed using open ended questions that allowed them to describe their instructional leadership practices supporting academically marginalized students. The responses were transcribed using a transcription software program. Responses were sorted and analyzed by research questions, using a priori codes based on conceptual frameworks and literature, in three steps. First, I analyzed the data by research question, reviewing each participant's answers and coding based on common responses. I then looked for high-level themes among the codes for each question. Lastly, I reviewed each participant's answers and high-level codes of all questions and applied emerged themes to the overall data.

Research Question 1. For this question, I analyzed instructional leadership to foster academic achievement using four probing questions (PQ) to determine extent of marginalization as well as the participant's understanding of instructional leadership and practices. Participants answered the main research question, "How do elementary school principals describe the instructional leadership practice of fostering academic achievement to support academically marginalized students?" The probing interview questions were:

PQ1: What is your definition of instructional leadership?

PQ2: What is the percentage of your economically disadvantaged student population?

PQ3: How many students on your campus are considered marginalized?

PQ4: How would you describe the instructional leadership practices used to support academically marginalized students?

The participants provided a variety of responses, such as principals being visible, taking a hands-on approach, and monitoring teacher performance. Principals provided common responses around student achievement, teacher capacity, and setting expectations of growth while leading with intent. The answers principals provided to RQ 1 and PQ4, to describe instructional leadership practices used to support academically marginalized students, were similar. I asked this probing question to have participants focus on specific practices used in the event the main question would produce more theory than action. I found other commonalities in participants' definition of instructional leadership (PQ1). I asked this probing question to determine whether principals had a common definition in alignment to research literature. Participant 1 made the statement that "any student is supposed to learn", while Participant 3 noted,

So, first of all, my definition of instructional leadership has to do with student mastery of objectives and percentage of mastery, and completion along the student's instructional journey. So, first, in being in a school district as [name redacted], with the high socioeconomically disadvantaged population, then we

have to consider reteach efforts and methods. We consider the written, tested, and

taught when instructional planning.

Table 5 shows the participants' campus marginalization, including the percentage of

students considered economically disadvantaged, and definition of instructional

leadership. In terms of marginalization, all participants but one provided a percentage.

Participant 8 (P8) expressed disdain for term "marginalized", recognized that children of

color would be considered marginalized, and declined to acknowledge marginalization

for the campus.

Table 5

Participants' Campus Marginalization and Instructional Leadership Definition

Participant	Academically Marginalized	Economically Disadvantaged	Instructional Leadership Definition Excerpt
P1	90%	91%	Must have knowledge of what effective instruction is and that it should lead to student progress
P2	89%	93%	Principal teacher that sets example by learning and teaching.
P3	90%	84%	Meeting students where they are and taking then further than where they began with year plus growth
P4	94%	94.6%	Knowing curriculum and able to teach and coach teachers
P5	96%	96%	Managing the instruction and curriculum, modeling, resourceful
P6	91%	91%	Manages the curriculum and instruction, goal setting, resourceful, grow staff performance
P7	100%	80%	Centered around instruction that produce outcomes
P8	----	92%	Hands on and purposeful approach to selecting and leading academic programs for students, professional development, coaching teachers
P9	100%	98%	Understanding the best curriculum, programs, and resources with ability to close achievement gaps
P10	63%	63%	Acting as a coach to help teachers access curriculum, ability to unpack curriculum documents
P11	80%	80%	Described attributes such as ability to use data to address needs of students and employing classroom supports for struggling students

Following a priori coding for the main and probing questions, I open coded the participants' responses to this question. I probed each transcript for word and phrase repetition. Using Nvivo, a qualitative study software, I created open codes and organized interview data by labeling the common words and phrases with a term to define the open code. Using this process, I created 27 open codes for this research. Figure 2 shows an example of the open coding applied to the transcripts for this question.

Foster Academic Achievement		
Code	*Participant*	*Excerpt*
Hands on approach	P10	Hands-on, with students and parents
Building relationships	P10	Let the students and teachers know you really care and have their best interest
Being accountable for achievement	P1	We must hold ourselves accountable
	P8	Leading with intent
Support Academically Marginalized Students		
Code	*Participant*	*Excerpt*
Use data	P1	Know what success look like at the end and understanding where student is academically
	P8	Leaders must understand there are multiple data point to assess positive outcomes and academic programs
	P9	You begin with your data
Teacher capacity	P2	Make sure the teachers are the experts
	P7	Support team in producing results
Good fit analysis	P5	Utilize teachers with those innate beliefs and skills as exemplars
Interventions Family involvement	P3	We can remediate while we accelerate
	P3	Follow up with families as support system with strategies teachers are using.

Figure 2. Open Coding Example for Research Question One

Research Question 2. For this question, I analyzed the instructional leadership practice of defining the school mission and vision as a quality of effective instructional leadership. Following the same process of coding for question one, I open coded the participants' responses to this question. In describing instructional leadership practices of defining the school mission and vision, participants provided responses such as setting strategic goals, collaborating with staff and community, and focusing on student leadership. Only participant stated they align the mission and vision to the district's vision. Most participants stated they set expectations for success. Participant 7 stated, "we start with student outcomes". Participant 8 noted,

> Well, in our leadership team, we do use what's called a continuous improvement process and we use multiple student achievement data points. Then students will be engaged in the process throughout the year beyond just the state standard data points.

Figure 3 shows an example of the open coding applied to the transcripts for this question.

	Defining School Mission and Vision	
Code	*Participant*	*Excerpt*
Visibility	P5	Mission and vision should be visible around the school
Set strategic goals	P10	Draw out strategic goals and make it specific on one thing
	P10	Let the students and teachers know you really care and have their best interest
Set expectations for success	P4	Create needs assessment based on data and create a system that will support all learners
	P7	Start with what they want as overall outcome
	P8	Use multiple data points and follow continuous improvement process
Collaboration with staff	P4	Staff is included in studying the campus data
	P9	Guide and facilitate conversations; redefined mission, vision, and values with team; collective effort
Collaboration with family and community	P1	Family may be a part of process
	P4	Invite parents inside the classroom

*Figure 3.*Open Coding Example for Research Question Two

Research Question 3. For this question, I analyzed implementing high quality curriculum as a quality of effective instructional leadership. The consensus among participants centered around employing and training quality teachers. Participants named multiple strategies to support this practice including participating in professional learning communities (PLC), following best practices, and understanding the state standards. Over half of the participants noted that they aggressively monitor progress as a part of implementing high quality curriculum supporting academically marginalized students.

Participants 11, 3, and 5 use the specific term "monitoring." Participant 11 stated, "we

must aggressively monitor student progress" and Participant 3 noted,

> We subscribe to various academic programs and intervention programs for
>
> reading. But as far as higher quality instruction in the classroom, we always want
>
> to start with the state standard and build out our student expectation for the team
>
> with the success criteria. I guess that's really just the gist of how we operate with
>
> our instruction, and it's always progress monitoring.

Following the same process of coding for questions one and two, I open coded the

participants' responses to this question. Figure 4 shows an example of the open coding

applied to the transcripts for this question.

Implementing High Quality Curriculum		
Code	*Participant*	*Excerpt*
Teacher professional development	P11	Must train our teachers
	P8	We must know the needs of our teachers including their strengths and weaknesses
Student support	P3	Students knowing when and where to go for help
		Through small group instruction
Instruction for student needs	P6	
Following best practices	P11	Implement strategies to target reading and mathematics; implementing small group instruction and learning stations
	P10	Following best practices
Aggressively monitor progress	P6	Teachers must check progress of the identified students
	P3	Progress monitoring aligned with success criteria

*Figure 4.*Open Coding Example for Research Question Three

After open coding each question, I used axial coding to make connections between all the

data collected and the open codes. Some of the data fit within multiple categories, so I

looked for relationships among the open codes to form categories from similar codes.

Figure 5 shows examples of how axial coding was applied to the interview data by

research questions.

Research Question	Axial Code	Participant	Except
Fostering academic achievement	Building culture	P8, P1	Academic leadership begins with culture; all students can learn
	Family and community partners	P3	Connect with PTA and other outside organizations
	Hiring and developing teachers	P9	Teacher having skill set
	Data analysis and interpretation	P8, P9	Data driven; collect data; analysis
	Targeted student support	P6, P3, P11	Ongoing interventions; tutorials; remediate
Defining school mission and vision	Strategic	P10, P8	Draw out strategic goals; continuous improvement
	Collaboration	P10, P2	Everyone's a leader; involve team
	Focus on students	P4, P7	High expectations for students; build confidence
	Alignment to district vision	P8	Schools shouldn't have separate vision
Implementing high quality curriculum	Teacher development	P10, P11	Conferences and workshops, PLC, needs assessment
	Data alignment	P5	Driven by data
	Strategic plan for learning	P8	Road map for student goals for success
	State standard focus	P1, P2	Understand knowledge and skills
	Resources	P2, P3	Secure resources for programs

Figure 5. Axial Coding Example for Interview Data

After analyzing the axial codes, I looked for overarching themes across questions. Themes are an analysis that combines codes to organize ideas in a way that allows the researchers to ascertain what's been learned from the study (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). I reviewed the transcripts again to analyze for intent to support coding and evidence of purpose-driven leadership tenets. Two themes emerged from the first research question: "How do elementary school principals describe the instructional leadership practice of fostering academic achievement to support academically marginalized students?" The themes were:

1. Principals foster academic achievement to support academically marginalized students by hiring and developing teachers.

2. Principals foster academic achievement to support academically marginalized students by understanding and analyzing data.

There were two themes that emerged from research question two: "How do elementary school principals describe the instructional leadership practice of defining the school mission and vision for success to support academically marginalized students?" The themes were:

1. Principals use strategic planning in defining the school mission and vision for success to support academically marginalized students.

2. Principals view family and community involvement as an important part of defining the school mission and vision for success to support academically marginalized students.

There was one primary theme that emerged from the third research question: "How do elementary school principals implement high quality curriculum in the classroom to increase proficiency in reading and mathematics for academically marginalized students?" The theme was:

1. Principals implement and monitor student instructional supports for academically marginalized students when implementing high quality curriculum in the classroom to increase proficiency in reading and mathematics.

Although some themes were more prevalent to a particular research question, some of the themes are interrelated and appeared in responses throughout the interview. For example, participants noted, in various responses, implementing student supports, hiring high quality teachers, and strategic planning were important in fostering academic achievement and implementing high quality curriculum. Principals also indicated that collaboration, analysis of data, and building teacher capacity were strategies for fostering academic achievement and setting the mission and vision of the school to support academically marginalized students.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

The researcher is able to convince readers that the research information and findings are worthy of attention through establishing trustworthiness (Nowell et al., 2017). Nowell et al. (2017) stated that credibility can be thought of as the "thin line" between the respondents' views and the researchers' representation of them. Establishing credibility is the first step of fostering trustworthiness in research, particularly in data

collection (Shenton, 2004). Ensuring the review process is thorough with accountability measures promotes credibility (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, & McKibbon, 2015). To gather descriptions of the instructional leadership practices used to support academically marginalized students, I interviewed elementary school principals who have the direct responsibility of leading schools, and all its students, to success. I used an integrated data analysis process to organize data by research questions and generate categories from codes and themes from categories.

I achieved transferability through conveying in detail the data collection methods, boundaries of the research, and results of data analysis based on participant interviews (Shenton, 2004). I selected participants from 11 different elementary campuses within the study district to gain a wide perspective on the instructional leadership strategies elementary principals use to support academically marginalized students. Based on the context of the study and approach taken to analyze the data, transferability can be achieved for future research on instructional leadership practices supporting academically marginalized students. The participant variance, along with the integrated approach to data analysis, will allow for transferability for future studies on this topic.

Dependability occurs when researchers can ensure the process is clearly documented, logical, and traceable (Nowell et al., 2017). To ensure dependability, I took measures such as recoding the data to ensure results are consistent, using trusted colleagues to examine process and findings, and other measures to evaluate the findings to ensure it aligned to the data. According to Anney (2014) dependability involves "the stability of findings over time" (p. 278). I provided research participants the opportunity

to review transcripts for accuracy and appropriate representations, as well as the opportunity to offer recommendations for any necessary edits. Each participant reviewed within a day of receiving and agreed with the responses. Saturation was reached on the topic with inclusion of seminal works as current as 2019.

The degree to which other researchers can confirm the results of the study is confirmability (Anney, 2014). I established confirmability through continuous reflection, note taking, and keeping attuned to my personal bias', beliefs, and assumptions related to instructional leadership strategies and practices for marginalized students. From one interview to the next, I reflected and noted similarities in responses from prior interviews. I ensured I remained focused on the purpose of research, to obtain elementary principals' statements of their strategies to support academically marginalized students, and not allow my personal or professional opinions impede upon the collection. Based on my role as an educator and knowledge of instructional leadership practices, I used peer debriefing with an uninvolved third party and no notes of conflicts were found in my interpretations of codes.

Summary

I explored elementary principals' instructional leadership practices supporting academically marginalized students. I used the research questions to analyze these practices against the conceptual framework of the principal instructional management theory through three dimensions: managing the instructional program, defining the school mission, and fostering academic achievement. I found that elementary principals used core instructional leadership practices around hiring and developing teachers, data

analysis, strategic planning, focusing on student support services, and involving family and community in processes to support academically marginalized students. Participants expressed strong beliefs around intensive focus on needs assessment, quality team efforts, and individualized student plans for this student group to be successful. I concluded, through an analysis of the archival data, that these practices have not resulted in significant decreases in academic gaps between these students and their nonmarginalized peers. Elementary principals, based on interview responses, appeared optimistic that the instructional leadership practices used to support academically marginalized students would result in overall increase in their academic achievement.

In chapter 5, I will detail the interpretation of the data, as well as implications of the results. Study limitations and recommendations will be explained based on the collected data. Finally, positive social change and influence as a result of this study will be described in the section to follow.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to understand elementary school principals'
instructional leadership practices supporting academically marginalized students. The
exploration of the study investigated service supports employed by participants and the
ways in which the needs of academically marginalized students are addressed in their
learning environment. Research was needed to understand how elementary school
principals employ instructional leadership strategies to increase academic proficiency of
academically marginalized students in reading and mathematics. A key finding was that
the ability to hire and develop quality teachers was a critical practice of principals for
supporting academic success. Other key findings were centered around understanding
and analyzing data, strategic planning, and involvement of family and community in the
process of creating a school environment conducive to learning for academically
marginalized students. The key finding that was most direct in terms of principal
instructional leadership was the implementation and monitoring of student instructional
supports. The one challenging finding identified through the data analysis was the lack of
innovative practices beyond traditional structures of leadership. Chapter 5 includes
interpretation of the findings, study limitations, recommendations, implications, and
conclusions.

Interpretation of the Findings

Research around marginalized students indicates that beyond standard
instructional leadership responses, elementary principals should employ elements of
critical spirituality (Dantley, 2010). Dantley's purpose-driven leadership is said to exist

through a principal's ability to express the purpose of school, clearly define the learning process, extend beyond the traditional structures, possess an intrinsic motivation to lead and reform, prioritize achievement, and employ leadership practices that provides students opportunities to learn and grow (Beard, 2018). The two elements of critical spirituality that will inform how principals are supporting academically marginalized students are performative creativity and transformative action (Dantley, 2010). I drew conclusions for this study through notetaking, coding, categorizing, generating themes, and writing based on the data. Findings in this study contribute to the knowledge of elementary principals' instructional leadership strategies supporting academically marginalized students. I analyzed the data using the conceptual frameworks of Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) principal instructional management and Dantley's (2010) purpose-driven leadership.

Key Finding 1

The ability to hire and develop quality teachers was a critical instructional leadership practice of principals for supporting academic success of academically marginalized students. It was evident that participants felt that fostering academic achievement involved securing the "right fit" for their campuses to adequately support student achievement. Each participant provided responses around teacher hiring, capacity building, and sustaining through professional development activities to have teachers qualified to make a difference in the success of students. Teacher development was emphasized in asking about fostering academic achievement and in implementing high quality curriculum.

Hiring and maintaining quality teachers are key instructional leadership practices of principals (Bush, 2018b; Harchar & Hyle, 1996; Hallinger, 2018a). Bush (2018b) stated that teachers are a key variable in student performance and their under-performance remains a challenge for principals. Hiring quality teachers is a vital role of the principal. Teachers direct instructional delivery of curriculum and diagnostic measures to improve academic performance is an important part of schooling.

Research also showed effective instructional leadership involves practices to motivate and maintain teachers. Bush (2018c) concluded that the motivation, confidence, and growth mindset of teachers is enhanced through the role of instructional leadership. In earlier research, Harchar and Hyle (1996) determined that principals' instructional behaviors gain the trust of teachers and encourage how teachers collaborate and support colleagues and students, which supports the data around the value in hiring and supporting quality teachers in supporting academically marginalized students.

Key finding 2. Participants emphasized an understanding and analyzing data as an instructional leadership practice of principals necessary to foster academic achievement, set a vision for success, and implement a high-quality curriculum. It was evident through the data that principals used multiple forms of data, such as state testing results and needs analysis, to inform their goal setting for success of their campus. Principals noted that data analysis allow them to prioritize achievement. In fact, I referred to the archival data as a primary data source for determining actions to support this student population, although earlier research indicated standardized testing measures

are not sufficient alone for determining factors of success and may actually pose a barrier to student success (Clements, 2019).

Setting the expectations through data driven protocols and research-based practices, according to Bastian and Henry (2015), influences student academic outcomes and serves a critical role for school improvements to be effective. Education reform has largely been centered around standardized measurements of achievement, fostering an inclusive educational environment for marginalized groups, and responding to advocacy for policy reform, in and out of schools, to increase achievement among these student groups. These policy efforts increased public school district leadership's access to data, increasing awareness of the educational disparities among racial and class groups (Flores & Gunzenhauser, 2018).

Principals must analyze data such as accountability ratings, community feedback, district data and initiatives, students' background, staffing, and curriculum effectiveness in identifying areas for improvement (Kempa, Ulorlo, & Hendrik Wenno, 2017). These factors support defining and communicating the mission of the school toward success. Principal interviews, and the archival data, revealed a high value on the opportunities to make transformative decisions based on data sources available.

Key finding 3. Principals identified strategic planning as a core principal instructional leadership practice in both setting the mission and vision of success and implementing a learning plan for academically marginalized students. Participants identified strategies such as setting expectations for success, analyzing existing mission, goal setting, content focus, and collaboration as key for setting the mission and vision of

the elementary campus. In terms of the learning environment, participants agreed that creating a system plan for learning around the data and individual needs of the students is necessary implement a high-quality curriculum. Time and effort can be maximized using a systemic approach to review school processes such as teaching and learning, safety, resources, and communication (Milligan, 2015). Milligan's (2015) research aligns with interview responses around systemic planning to set mission and vision of campus for success.

Strategic management is an effective form of management used in business organizations (Onan, Bal, & Bayam, 2016). The use of strategic management includes setting a company's vision and mission, analyzing the organization's current position, and evaluation of results (Onan et al., 2016). Onan et al. stated that this form of qualitative data, coupled with quantifiable data, is said to make a whole system process approach to student achievement. Principal indicated they implement strategic management strategies for defining the mission and vision of their schools, as well as implementing high quality curriculum for supporting academically marginalized student populations.

Principals' use of these strategies should be combined to outline a strategic plan for success. The plan should involve goals and areas of focus, as well an implementation strategy of different processes, and measures for success. The interview responses revealed principals used a variety of instructional leadership practices to support student achievement across each element of principal management theory.

Key finding 4. Principals provide direct instructional leadership support when implementing and monitoring student support services on their campuses. Under ESSA, student academic measures in core content areas such as reading and mathematics are a key part of principal evaluation of success (Grissom, Blissett, & Mitani, 2018). The data collected revealed that principals placed the greatest emphasis on instructional support practices to increase academic achievement of marginalized students. Principals emphasized prioritizing instructional leadership strategies based on students' needs, providing interventions for academic support, using individualized plans such as flexible grouping, and procuring the right curriculum resources.

To influence academic achievement, principals must understand leading through an instructional lens to provide teachers the coaching and guidance necessary to exhibit best practices in the classroom. Participants said that they ensure the right fit with teachers and students and facilitate practices on campus to support student achievement. Principals also stated understanding state standards, providing teachers adequate training, securing resources, and monitoring progress through data sources are the ways they support student learning.

Cansoy, Polatcan, and Kilinc (2019) explained the phenomenon of instructional leadership as studied through the aspect of instructional practices based on attributes of the organization. The concept of instructional leadership is based on the premise that a set of behaviors or actions of principals influence successful academic achievement as measured by instruments that are used to assess accountability. Principals noted that they

used constant assessment measures, such as benchmark exams, to determine students'

needs around instruction.

Key finding 5. Principals revealed the use of family and community partnerships

in fostering academic achievement and defining the school's mission and vision.

Participants stated that parents should be involved in the learning process. Participants

believed that teachers should communicate with parents to form a partnership in

supporting students' academic progress. Principals also stated they used parents and

community partners in the designing of the school mission by inviting them into the

classrooms and events. They believed that building a culture of open communication and

stakeholder support exemplifies the mission for success.

Barr and Saltmarsh (2014) emphasized the positive affect of parents' engagement

on school success and found that how a principal involves parents impacts the amount of

support received. Hollingworth et al., 2018 stated involving parents by communicating

and including them in the process of establishing school goals will yield positive results

in supporting students across multiple economic backgrounds. Intentional and explicit

communication with stakeholders have been found to be the common actions of

successful principals (Hollingworth et al., 2018).

Limitations of the Study

Due to voluntary nature of study, there are limitations. Participants had at least 2

years tenure in the principal role and could speak to experiences with instructional

practices supporting academically marginalized students. Each participant held a

principal's certification and at least a master's degree. Assistant principals, who hold

principal certifications and are also responsible for leading teachers and students, were excluded from this study. I invited principals that had a significant number of academically marginalized students on campus as measured by state accountability agency to participate in this study. I extended an invitation to those principals that had data trends that reflected a wider achievement gap with some marginalized groups than other groups when compared to nonmarginalized students.

Limitations of the study included the sample size of 11 participants. Creswell, 2018 states that a smaller sample size allows for a deeper dive into the research questions to all for saturation in responses. I achieved saturation in responses as I began recording very similar responses from each participant to the research questions. Trustworthiness of the study was not compromised, although the small size may limit the generalization of the study's findings, due to saturation.

As a former district leader of the research district, many of the participants were former colleagues of mine. I did not work with or supervise any participants at time of the study and had not held a supervisory position over any participant. The professional relationships that existed between some of the participants and me posed minimal risk of producing unintended biases in the study. I took appropriate steps by conducting the study using recorded semistructured interviews, professional transcription, and review to remove bias from this study. I consistently monitored bias throughout the research, and ensured all processes were followed to keep interviews securely stored and confidential.

Recommendations

Due to the right to a free public education in the United States, all students must be given equal educational opportunity no matter their race, ethnic background, gender, or socioeconomic status. However, academic and opportunity gaps still exist between marginalized and nonmarginalized students and it is important that schools are equipped with effective leaders to oversee instructional programs for universal student success. Further research on the instructional leadership practices of elementary principals to support marginalized students is needed. The following recommendations may contribute to the body of research on the topic of principal leadership, with practical implications for public K-12 institutions in supporting academically marginalized students.

First, future researchers can extend the participant pool to include participants with similar marginalized student demographics who achieved state assessment mastery comparable to nonmarginalized peers. Extending research to gather this data may provide insight on whether any variances exist between principals with minimal achievement gaps to those with larger gaps. This similar study will allow for a deeper analysis on the effectiveness of instructional leadership practices, which could benefit the body of research by providing more generalizable results.

Also, principals' statements of instructional leadership practices supporting academically marginalized students can be analyzed deeper for specific examples and criterion of success. Participants in this study provided general responses that aligned to the research for instructional leadership practices for all students but did not provide in-

depth examples or scenarios to elaborate on the variance in techniques for marginalized students compared to nonmarginalized peers. Dantley (2003) suggests that in order to impact change in achievement of marginalized students, scientific management strategies must be coupled with a spiritual context grounded in "purpose" to meet individual and collective needs. A deeper analysis of the practices employed by elementary principals may provide a deeper view of effective strategies to support academically marginalized students.

Additionally, all participants noted the importance of having qualified, competent teachers for effective collaboration around fostering academic achievement, defining mission, and implementing high quality curriculum. This coincide with Kindall, Crowe, and Elsass' (2018) research around the need to hire and develop quality teachers to support direct instructional practices supporting student achievement. Teachers are generally responsible for implementing curriculum and forming instructional practices to support academically marginalized students. Gurley et al. (2016) suggested additional research to focus on why there is a variance between the perceptions of teachers and principals in how frequently principals are engaged in instructional leadership. Including teachers' perceptions and instructional actions as result of principal instructional leadership practices could provide opportunity for understanding of how principal leadership influence more direct action in the instructional program for this student population.

Lastly, several principals noted systemic planning using collaboration of all staff as important in implementing high quality curriculum and defining school mission and

vision for success. Principals, however, didn't specifically name the support of assistant

principals in supporting campus success or academically marginalized students. Kempa,

Ulorlo, and Hendrik Wenno (2017) conducted a qualitative research that included

assistant principals and found that their perception was ineffective principal leadership

styles. Including assistant principals in the research could further support the data

collected from principals regarding principal instructional leadership practices. Their

response could also validate the cohesion principals noted in leading through

collaborative means. Based on Creswell (2018) and Yin's (2014) recommendations

around sample sizes for saturation in qualitative research, I believe a deeper collection

from participants other than campus principals could increase the body of research and

practical applications from findings.

Implications

Closing the achievement gap among a marginalized population can foster positive

social change through a successful school experience with increased graduation rates,

which enriches the skilled talent pool needed to further community production and

economic flow (Beard, 2018). It is in the best interest of society to increase the academic

performance of all student groups. Because principals' instructional leadership practices

impact overall school effectiveness, it is important to understand principals' descriptions

of their instructional leadership practices to support marginalized student groups

(Goddard, Skrla, & Salloum, 2017; Bastian & Henry, 2015; Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014;

Dantley, 2010; Hallinger, 2005). The findings in this study support the need for greater

exploration into detailed processes of general strategies noted by principals for a deeper immersion into practices supporting academic achievement of marginalized youth.

Positive Social Change at the Policy Level

The study results indicated that principals, while connecting to data available, could benefit from exploring additional leadership practices to address the educational disparities among racial and class groups. Over the past three decades, education reform has largely been centered around standardized measurements of achievement, fostering an inclusive educational environment for marginalized groups, and responding to advocacy for policy reform, in and out of schools, to increase achievement among these student groups (Flores & Gunzenhauser, 2018). Creating policy, to include connecting practice to success, supports principals' ongoing exploration of instructional leadership strategies that yield positive results for all students. The literature is immersed in defining the local school principal's responsibility to adapt and implement instructional strategies that directly influence study achievement despite evolving policy in education reform.

Positive Social Change at the Organizational Level

The data from this study indicated that principals place a high value on working in a collaborative environment to support student achievement. An emphasis was placed on fostering a positive culture by building strong professional relationships with colleagues, students, families, and community stakeholders. The organizational change that could be supported by this study is the need for an increase in family and community involvement in the learning process. Positive change at the organizational level could also occur if

principals exhibit specific behaviors and beliefs are explored to their forming

relationships, communicating, facilitating meetings, and supporting parental involvement.

Participants stated collaboration and communication with families were an instructional

leadership practice used to support academically marginalized students but didn't

elaborate on how or how often this practice is utilized.

Methodological Implications

Due to the small sample size and qualitative case study design of this study,

consideration could be given to a quantitative approach of a similar study. A quantitative

study could allow for varied perspectives, via survey, from a broader range of elementary

principal participants in the study region. This type of study could compare principals

with low and high gaps in achievement among marginalized and nonmarginalized group

against their principal instructional leadership practices. A quantitative comparison

between the two would be beneficial in helping explore the usefulness or effectiveness of

specific instructional leadership practices of principals based on statistical data. This may

provide principals with information necessary to inform leadership practice decisions for

supporting academically marginalized students.

Theoretical Implications

Behaviorism, the science of human behavior, supports this theoretical approach to

study the actions of an individual and measure against stimuli for effectiveness or

ineffectiveness of the behavior. Principal management theory confirms the importance

leadership through three main dimensions: managing the instructional program, defining

the school mission, and fostering academic achievement.   In each of these dimensions,

the participants outlined their instructional leadership practices and were consistent in statements of leading with a focus on students, strategically planning for learning, and developing teacher capacity. Principals interviewed also all incorporated the use of assessment and data, family communication, and resources to support the learning process for these students.

Purpose-driven leadership theory is grounded in the importance of using scientific management strategies, such as those outlined by the principal management theory, with a spiritual context grounded in purpose, called critical spirituality. Information learned through the interviews revealed a passion for success and a drive to create a learning environment for all students to be successful. Performative creativity, which looks beyond using leadership strategies to meet status quo achievement to bigger purpose of reimaging society through purpose and strategy, was not as evident through participant responses. Although participants' answers didn't reveal a connection to purpose on a societal level, answers were aligned to qualities of transformative action where principals expressed designing a plan and placing into action as outlined by Dantley (2010).

Recommendation for Practice

This study provided data on elementary principals' instructional leadership practices supporting academically marginalized students within one large urban school district. The student demographics of public schools in this region, as indicated in archival data, is comprised largely of marginalized student populations. There is opportunity in large districts to explore principal instructional leadership practices supporting academically marginalized students to increase overall performance in the

standardized areas of reading and mathematics at the elementary level. Research addressing marginalized students recommend dealing with the "whole child" including factors beyond instructional deficiencies such as culture responsiveness and consciousness around social justice issues (Clemens, 2019; El-Amin et al., 2017; Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016).

A recommendation for practice related to the key findings one, two, and three is to develop and incorporate the use of a cultural inventory for both community and organizational awareness. This process will allow for principals to use this data to understand and identify specific resources within the school community to support marginalized student achievement. Organizationally, this process can support how teachers and staff interact with one another to support building a culture for success under a unified vision. Incorporating this practice as a precursor to the strategic planning process, may strengthen principal instructional leadership practices to mirror transformative educational leadership through critical care which involves empathy, compassion, advocacy, perseverance, and embracing values (Wilson, 2016).

A recommendation for practice related to key findings four and five is to apply performative creativity, as indicated in research, to think outside the traditional remedies for implementing and monitoring student instructional support and involving family and communities in the educational process. Participants identified standard remediation practices such as reteaching material, using instructional program resources, and structuring smaller group instruction and tutoring sessions for academically marginalized students. Most participants expressed centering education around state academic

standards to achieve successful assessment results on the summative, end of year state exam. Practice should evolve instructional leadership practices to looking at expectations for success, student support services beyond instructional support, and different modalities for engagement and access to learning material. Involving parents in the planning of these structures would be a recommendation to strengthen involvement and tailor needs to the students for academic success.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to understand elementary school principals' instructional leadership practices supporting academically marginalized students. The exploration of the study investigated service supports employed by participants and the ways in which the needs of academically marginalized students are addressed in their learning environment. Research revealed decades of studies on principals and their evolving role as instructional leaders of the campus. In the wake of Civil Rights and desegregation of schools, increasing research has also emerged to analyze marginalized students and the ongoing achievement gap, that remains evident through archival state assessment data measuring academic success of students in core content areas. Research on marginalized students and achievement gap revealed theories around instructional leadership practices needed to support academic success of marginalized students. An article written by Wilson (2016) reviewed the benefits of instructional leaders enacting transformative educational leadership rooted in critical care and found through principal interviews that it is important for educators to realize the racialized conditions and oppressive context to better support marginalized students in academic achievement.

It is revealed, through this study, that principals use scientific management practices, as outlined in Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) instructional management of principal behavior theory. It is not clear, however, through this study whether principals truly embody the tenets of Dantley's (2010) purpose-driven leadership to go beyond the traditional instructional leadership practices to support academically marginalized students. This theory supports the notion of using critical spirituality, a spiritual context grounded in purpose, in leading schools to academic success among all student populations. Therefore, continuing the instructional leadership practices outlined in the study could be more impactful in supporting academically marginalized students if partnered with performative creativity and transformative action practices.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

Date:
Time:
Interviewee Code #:
Location of Interview:

Parts of the Interview	Interview Questions and Notes
Introduction	• Hi, my name is_____. Thank you very much for participating in this interview today. As you know, the purpose of this interview is to gather data on principal instructional practices to support academically marginalized students. This should last about 30-40 minutes. After the interview, I will be examining your answers for data analysis purposes. However, I will not identify you in my documents, and no one will be able to identify you with your answers. You can choose to stop this interview at any time. Also, I need to let you know that this interview will be recorded for transcription purposes. • Do you have any questions about the information shared or process? • Are you ready to begin?
Question 1	How would you describe your instructional leadership practice of fostering academic achievement to support academically marginalized students? Probing Questions: a. What is your definition of instructional leadership? b. What is the percentage of your economically disadvantaged student population?

	c. Of that percentage, how many students on your campus are considered marginalized? d. How would you describe the instructional leadership practices used support academically marginalized students?
Question 2	How do you describe your instructional leadership practice of defining the school mission and vision for success to support academically marginalized students on your campus?
Question 3	How do you implement high quality curriculum in the classrooms to support academically marginalized students on your campus?
Question 4	How do you describe your instructional leadership practices to increase proficiency in reading for the academically marginalized students on your campus?
Question 5	How do you describe your instructional leadership practices to increase proficiency in mathematics for the academically marginalized students on your campus?
Close	Thank you for your answers. Do you have anything else you'd like to share? Do you have any questions for me? Thank you for your time, goodbye.

Appendix B: End of Program Survey

	Strongly Agree	**Agree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**
The school's vision and mission for success supports a culture of academic success for academically marginalized students on your campus.				
The instructional leadership practices employed supports the achievement of academically marginalized students.				
The implementation of a high-quality curriculum resulted in increased STAAR Reading scores for academically marginalized students.				
The implementation of a high-quality curriculum resulted in increased STAAR Mathematics scores for academically marginalized students.				
Overall, instructional leadership practices supporting academically marginalized students can be distinctly defined.				
You were satisfied with the instructional leadership practices supporting academically marginalized students.				
Teachers can define instructional leadership practices to support academically marginalized students.				