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Cherron Lynnette Ukpaka

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Walden University
2020

Abstract

How Elementary School Principals Perceive Teachers' Literacy Teaching Strategies

by

Cherron Lynnette Ukpaka

MA, University of Phoenix, 2007

BS, Oklahoma State University, 2001

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

August 2020

Abstract

Principals are expected to serve as the lead instructional leaders on the campus, ensuring academic growth for all students. The research problem of this study was the lack of understanding of the perceptions of elementary school principals regarding teachers' literacy teaching strategies. The purpose and research question of this study were to understand the instructional leadership practices of elementary school principals regarding teachers' literacy teaching strategies. The conceptual framework was based on constructivism. Ten principals participated in semistructured, face-to-face, audio-taped interviews. Thematic analysis revealed that school principals: (a) focus on how to increase literacy state scores, (b) struggle to apply instructional leadership practices, (c) need professional development to support literacy instruction, and (d) believe in professional learning communities to support literacy instruction. The research findings may be used by principals to enhance instructional leadership practices to support both literacy teachers and student learning, which, in turn, would contribute to students graduating.

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Dedication

This dedication is to those whom I love the most: God; My children, Chidozie, Eric Jr., Chisara and Emeka: My late father, James, my mother, Connie; my brothers Ryan and James Jr., you all have been my support, my rock, my encourager, my inspiration. You have helped me to keep the faith and to only strive for success. It is my family who has helped me to become the woman I am today. Through it all you have cemented the foundation of this journey with unconditional unified love and guidance.

I continue to be amazed by God's grace, it is because of my strong faith that I continue to exemplify a strong black woman who is covered in God's abounded love. You lead the path and ensured I stayed focused on the end goal. No matter what challenges I faced, you were always there. I trust you unconditionally.

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The fortitude to complete this dissertation was inspired by several individuals that supported me through this academic journey.

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To all the elementary principals who participated in this study. Thank you for your time and for sharing your knowledge around literacy to help complete this dissertation. Your dedication to both your students and staff was evident as you passionately spoke about your experience.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study....1

Background....2

Problem Statement....3

Purpose of the Study....5

Research Question....6

Conceptual Framework....6

Nature of the Study....7

Definitions of Key Terms....7

Assumptions....8

Scope and Delimitations....8

Limitations....9

Significance....9

Implications for Positive Social Change....10

Summary....10

Chapter 2: Literature Review....12

Literature Search Strategy....12

Conceptual Framework....12

Literature Review....14

School Leadership....14

Summary and Conclusions....31

Chapter 3: Research Method....33

Research Design and Rationale....33

Setting of the Study 34
Role of the Researcher 35
Methodology 36
Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection 36
Instrumentation 38
Data Analysis Plan 40
Trustworthiness 40
Credibility 41
Transferability 41
Dependability 42
Confirmability 42
Reflexivity 42
Ethical Procedures 43
Summary 43
Chapter 4: Reflections and Conclusions 45
Setting of Research Study 45
Data Collection 46
Number of Participants 46
Location of Data Collection 46
Data Collection 46
Data Analysis 47
Categorization and Theme Analysis 47
Findings of the Study 49

Theme 1: Principals Focused on How to Increase Literacy State Scores 49

Theme 2: Principals Struggle to Apply Instructional Leadership Practices 52

Theme 3: Principals Need PD to Support Literacy Instruction 54

Theme 4: Principals Believe in Professional Learning Communities (PLC) to Support Literacy Instruction 56

Evidence of Trustworthiness.....60

Credibility 60

Transferability..... 61

Dependability..... 61

Confirmability..... 62

Reflexivity..... 62

Summary 63

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations 64

Research Question 66

Interpretation of the Findings.....67

Theme 1: Principals Focus on How to Increase Literacy State Scores..... 67

Theme 2: Principals Struggle to Apply Instructional Leadership Practices 69

Theme 3: Principals Need PD to Support Literacy Instruction 71

Theme 4: Principals Believe in PLC to Support Literacy Instruction 74

Limitations of the Study.....76

Recommendations.....77

Elementary School Principals 77

Implications.....78

Positive Social Change 78

Recommendations for Practice at the School District 78

Recommendations for Further Study 79

Conclusion 79

References.....81

Appendix A: Interview Protocol.....91

List of Tables

Table 1. State Scores in Elementary Literacy 5

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

"To educate a child is to turn walls into doors" (author unknown). The pure joy of witnessing a child learn is priceless; having the ability to impact learning offers a feeling of infinite possibilities for the future. Teachers impact students and their academic outcomes; however, the principal is the key to leading teachers' professional growth. As instructional leaders, principals are tasked with ensuring the effective implementation of curriculum. Principals do this by observing them and supporting them with what they need to improve student outcomes. Literacy is embedded in all content areas are and offers the student the skills to pass all subject areas with ease. To understand a principal's impact on learning outcomes on a campus, it is critical to better understand their knowledge of teaching literacy at the elementary level.

Numerous reviews exist of quantitative studies of the effect of educational leadership on school outcomes, specifically student achievement (Taylor, Wills, & Hoadley, 2019). There are more recent large quantitative studies that found educationally significant principal effects, and the estimation of effect sizes varies notably according to estimation model assumptions (Grissom et al., 2015). When principals modeled instruction and discussed literacy, teachers reported that their own effectiveness at implementing literacy instruction had a bigger impact on student achievement (Kindall, Crowe, & Elsass, 2018). Also, when the principal exhibits core curriculum knowledge, teachers desired assurance that their principal was the curriculum leader in the building (Kindall et al., 2018).

The principal is seen as the instructional leader on campus who determines teachers' professional development (PD) plan to improve their teaching skills because they directly impact the student. Teachers have reported that when they perceive the school principal to be knowledgeable in literacy instruction, then she or he improved teachers' training—whether teacher preparation programs or professional development—into classroom practice (Kindall et al., 2018). Principals should demonstrate their interest and knowledge level by attending literacy professional development with teachers, by engaging in literacy conversations throughout their buildings, and by conducting literacy-focused observations (Kindall et al., 2018).

Background

Elementary school principals take on many roles as the leader on an elementary school campus. As the evaluator of literacy instruction, the principal should provide constructive feedback about literacy instruction. Teachers have reported that when they were given an action plan for implementation, they were more likely to apply the PD training strategies in their classroom practices (Kindall et al., 2018). Researchers have provided consistent evidence that demonstrates the potential positive and negative impacts of leadership, (Day, Gu, & Sammons, 2016). Principals face new challenges and their responsibilities have been undergoing changes (Shen, Rodriguez-Campos, & Rincones-Gomez, 2000). They must engage in a fundamental reform to (a) help formulate a shared school vision, (b) develop a network of relationships with teachers, (c) allocate resources that are consistent with the vision, (d) provide information to staff

members about literacy, and (e) promote teacher development in teaching literacy strategies (Shen et al., 2000).

As the role of the elementary principal continues to evolve in the 21st century, he or she is required to plan purchases to meet campus needs (and monitor their financial accounting), to understand and follow both state and federal laws, to lead instruction, and to improve instruction (Stringer & Hourani, 2016). Principals are seen as catalysts for change, initiating improvement by enacting roles and responsibilities that are framed by the professional standards (Stringer & Hourani, 2016). A range of leadership research conducted in many contexts over the past 2 decades has demonstrated that successful schools strive to educate pupils (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). Principals must take some time to develop professional relationships (Da Day et al., 2016). Building a collaborative environment is important to building trust and community in a school.

Problem Statement

In a public school in the southern region of the United States, teachers claimed that they did not have the curricular support of their principal. The research problem of this study was the principals' lack of understanding about teachers' literacy teaching strategies. Elementary students' literacy state scores have been low in the past 3 consecutive academic years at both the state and district levels (school district administrator, personal communication, April 13, 2019). According to a state assessment of academic readiness (STAAR), standardized state scores in literacy are below 50% proficiency. During the 2017-2018 academic school year, STAAR results of students who met grade level standards on the literacy assessment were as follows: 43% of Grade

3 students, 46% of Grade 4 students, and 54% of Grade 5 students (Education Agency, 2019). Less than 50% of elementary school students met grade level requirements (Table 1) in the past 2 years as measured by STAAR (Education Agency, 2019).

Table 1

State Scores in Elementary Literacy

Grade level	2017-2018	2016-2017
3	43%	45%
4	46%	44%
5	54%	48%

Principals' perceptions of teachers' literacy teaching strategies were examined to understand how to best support elementary teachers' literacy teaching strategies (school district administrator, personal communication, April 13, 2019). The mission of the school district is for students to improve their proficiency in literacy (district superintendent, personal communication, April 11, 2019). Principals' perceptions of teachers' literacy teaching strategies have not been examined at the research site.

- School principals are accountable for student achievement (Fuller & Hollingworth, 2017; Guerra, Zamora, Hernandez, & Menchaca, 2017).
- The principal's role is more defined in the area of instructional leadership, which includes expertise in instruction and curriculum (Guerra et al., 2017).
- Hallinger and Wang (2015) stated that a principal is an instructional leader.
- Fuller and Hollingworth (2017) stated that a principal, as an instructional leader, manages the instructional programs.

- The work of successful principals is intuitive, knowledge-informed, and strategic (Day et al., 2016).
- Successful principals raise students' proficiency levels in state tests (Day et al., 2016).
- Principals model instructional practices and provide feedback to teachers on lesson plans (Murphy, Neumerski, Goldring, Grisson, & Porter, 2016).
- One of the top instructional leadership roles of principals is to support teachers with the teaching process (Grissom, Mitani, & Woo, 2019).
- Another instructional leadership role of principals is to provide support to teachers to improve their teaching strategies (Puzio, Newcomer, & Goff, 2015).
- A principal should focus on learning-centered leadership (Squires, 2018). For example, a principal manages instructional programs and is involved in the school's curriculum, which includes supervising instruction in the classroom, managing the curriculum, and monitoring students' progress (Shatzer, Caldarella, Hallam, & Brown, 2014).
- Another example is for the principal to support teachers to teach children how to read (Chambers & Hausman, 2014).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand principals' perceptions of teachers' literacy teaching strategies. To achieve this purpose, I interviewed 10 elementary school

principals by using an interview protocol. My goal was to collect rich, qualitative interview data.

Research Question

School principals should provide expectations for implementing teaching strategies (Kindall et al., 2018). They should focus on teaching and learning (Day, Gu, & Sammons, 2016). They should be the catalysts for initiating school improvement (Stringer & Hourani, 2016). The research question that guided this study was: What are principals' perceptions of teachers' literacy teaching strategies?

Conceptual Framework

According to Grant and Osanloo (2014), a conceptual framework is used to conduct research (). It "lays out the key factors, constructs, or variables, and presumes relationships among them" (Grant & Osanloo, 2014, para 2). It is not just a string of concepts, but also a way to identify and construct for the reader an epistemological and ontological worldview and to approach to a topic of study. A conceptual framework constitutes the researchers' understanding of how the research problem is best explored, the specific direction the researcher has to take, and the relationship between the different variables in the study (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). The conceptual framework is explained as the natural progression of a phenomenon that is being studied (Grant & Osanloo, 2014).

The conceptual framework for this study was based on constructivism, a learning or meaning-making theory that helps explains the nature of knowledge and how human beings learn (Ultanir, 2012). Elementary school principals construct their own new

understandings or knowledge through their interaction with literacy teachers of what principals already believe and the ideas, events, and activities with which principals come into contact (Ultanir, 2012). I used the constructivism theory to examine how elementary school principals apply their instructional leadership practices to support teachers' literacy teaching strategies as instructional literacy leaders.

Nature of the Study

The research site was an urban public school district serving a population in which 80% of the students live in poverty. All principals had at least 1-year of administrative experience and a master's degree. Each school principal supervised a minimum of 20 teachers and four support staff. At the research site, there are 85 elementary campuses of which 82 qualify as a Title I campus meaning the majority of students receive a free or reduced price either breakfast or lunch. Each elementary school had at least one instructional leader who was the principal in the leadership role leading teachers and staff working in the school. An interview protocol was used during the face-to-face interviews. Thematic analysis was used to identify emergent themes.

Definitions of Key Terms

The following are definitions of the key terms as they are used in this study:

Instructional leadership: Supervision and evaluation typically fall under the broader umbrella of the principal (Lavigne & Chamberlain, 2014). Supervision and evaluation at the center of reform discourse and action, these new and more rigorous teacher evaluation models require more measures of teaching and more observation of teachers (Lavigne & Chamberlain, 2014).

Leadership: Elected by a general council, consisting of teachers, staff, parents and representatives of the local authority and institutions from the community (Pina, Cabral, & Alves, 2015). A school leader expects to evaluate training, pre and postobservation conferences, observations, and the collection of supporting documentation (Lavigne & Chamberlain, 2016).

Assumptions

There were assumptions about principals' perceptions of leading literacy instruction in elementary schools. The first assumption was that all participants gave honest and truthful responses to the interview questions. The second assumption was that all school principals in the district were responsible supporting learning on their respective campuses. The third assumption was that school principals who participated in the study were actively involved in leading literacy instruction by providing feedback to teachers to improve literacy instruction. The fourth assumption was that principals had an understanding of leading literacy growth on their campus. The fifth assumption was that forecasting levels of understanding of leading literacy instruction is a consistent indicator of principals' perceptions.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study was one public school district located in southern United States. School principals contributed their perspectives during semistructured face-to-face interviews. I collected data over a 3-week period through semistructured interviews. Interviews were one-on-one, face-to-face held in a private room at each elementary

school of each participating school principal. Each interview was held during a scheduled time based on the principals' work schedules. I facilitated all interviews.

Limitations

This research was limited to the geographic boundaries within the school district. Data collection depended on principals' availability within the interview timeframe. Weakness in the study centers around the existing impression on the principal that they have of themselves. I was the researcher and served as the single individual responsible for data collection and analysis. I sought to limit any bias through self-reflections and by checking the interview transcripts with each participant. An expanded research scope including other school districts may have yielded different research findings. Another limitation is that school district administrators were not interviewed. A final limitation was that interview data from literacy teachers were not collected.

Significance

The findings have significance for these stakeholders: researchers, policymakers, administrators of principal preparation programs, and school principals. The findings may be used by school principals to better apply their instructional leadership practices as literacy instructional leaders to support literacy teachers who help students increase their literacy proficiency. The findings contribute to new knowledge regarding elementary school principals' instructional leadership practices in supporting teachers' literacy teaching strategies.

The findings could be used in the principal preparation programs to prepare potential elementary school principals regarding teachers' literacy teaching strategies. For

example, the findings could help policymakers to better prepare school leaders to lead literacy instruction before receiving a principal's certification. For the local school district administrators, the findings provide information about continued PD for principals supporting teachers' literacy teaching strategies. The local school district administrators may use the findings to help school principals to better lead literacy instruction on their campuses.

Implications for Positive Social Change

The implications for this study are significant to principals. The findings may help school principals regarding teachers' literacy teaching strategies to improve students' literacy learning by better applying their instructional leadership practices. At a local public elementary school, literacy teachers reported the challenge of student's lack of progress with improving reading skills. These literacy teachers are depending on the lead instructional leader who is the principal to lead literacy instruction on the campus. Without professional development, principals may mistakenly lead literacy teachers incorrectly on the reading instruction. The findings may contribute to positive social change by helping elementary school principals to improve their instructional leadership practices. Improving the academic needs of students can impact an ongoing social change within classrooms, schools, and communities.

Summary

The study site is a public school district located in southern United States. The research problem of this study was the lack of understanding of principals' perceptions of teachers' literacy teaching strategies. The purpose of this study was to understand the

instructional leadership practices of elementary school principals regarding teachers' literacy teaching strategies. The research question was about principals' perceptions of teachers' literacy teaching strategies. The conceptual framework was constructivism theory. For the purpose of this study, the participants who were elementary school principals construct new knowledge based on their previous instructional leadership experiences and educational background in literacy. The scope of this study was one school district. In Chapter 2, I present the literature review.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to understand the instructional leadership practices of elementary school principals regarding teachers' literacy teaching strategies. Peer-reviewed articles about elementary school principals' perceptions of teachers' literacy teaching strategies were reviewed. In Chapter 2, the instructional leadership practices of school principals and teachers' literacy teaching strategies are highlight together with the strategies used to identify relevant literature about this dissertation. The conceptual framework is described for the scope of this study.

Literature Search Strategy

This section includes literature on the leadership role and literacy instruction of school principals. The following databases were used: EBSCO, Education Source, and ERIC.. The keywords were *qualitative study*, *understanding perceptions*, *elementary school principals, teachers' literacy teaching strategies,* instructional leadership practices.

Conceptual Fra**mework**

The conceptual framework was the theory of constructivism. The conceptual framework served as the blueprint for this research study as a guide, support, and structure (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). Eisenhart stated that the framework should construct a coherent explanation of certain phenomena and relationships (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). Thinking and acting should be emphasized in relation to the selection of a topic, development of research questions, focus of the literature review, and the design approach and analysis plan for a study (Grant & Osanloo, 2014).

The conceptual framework of the constructivism theory provides a logical structure of the connected concepts that help provide a picture or visual display of how ideas in a study relate to one another within the framework (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). A conceptual framework is when the researcher understands how the research problem is best explored, the specific direction the researcher has to take, and the relationship between the different variables in the study (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). Miles and Humberman (1994) categorized a system of concepts, assumptions, and beliefs that support and guide a research plan.

The constructivism theory was used to answer the research question (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). Constructivism is a learning or meaning-making theory that offers an explanation of the nature of knowledge and how human beings learn (Ultanir, 2012). For the purpose of this study, the participants who were elementary school principals construct new knowledge based on their previous instructional leadership experiences and educational backgrounds in literacy. Elementary school principals create or construct their own new understandings or knowledge through their interaction with literacy teachers of what they already believe and the ideas, events, and activities with which they come into contact (Ultanir, 2012). For this study, the constructivism theory was used as a framework to understand the instructional leadership practices of elementary school principals regarding teachers' literacy teaching strategies.

The conceptual framework "lays out the key factors, constructs, or variables, and presumes relationships among them" (Grant & Osanloo, 2014, para 2). Grant and Osanloo (2014) stated that the conceptual framework is not simply a string of concepts,

but also a way to identify and construct for the reader an epistemological and ontological worldview and approach to a topic of a study. A conceptual framework is the researcher's understanding of how the research problem will be best explored, the specific direction the researcher has to take, and the relationship between the different variables in the study (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). The conceptual framework has been best explained as the natural progression of a phenomenon that is being studied (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). Thus, this conceptual framework was used to specify and define concepts within the research problem regarding the instructional leadership practices of elementary school principals regarding teachers' literacy teaching strategies.

Literature Review

School Leadership

Pina, Cabral, and Alves (2015) explored if there is an impact of school leadership, particularly of the principal, on student outcomes. They analyzed interviews and found that internationally, there is apprehension that school leadership is an important variable that can make a difference in schools. Some studies have shown that there is a positive, though indirect, effect of school leaders, including principals, on the students' outcomes (). These studies also concluded that this influence is mostly indirect, achieved through actions that the principals take concerning school conditions, classrooms conditions and teachers, which in turn will indirectly influence students' learning.

Guerra, Zamora, Hernandez, and Menchaca (2017) focused on strategic planning processes used to develop an educational leadership program to prepare principals in leading the 21st century schools. Guerra et al. (2017) examined the effectiveness of a

principal preparation program through strategic planning strategy approach. Strategic planning provides leaders a systematic, structured, and collaborative approach for examining current issues and future trends and their impact on the organization's capacity to attain its mission (). Strategic planning helps leaders ensure the organization is responsive to the clients it serves. Guerra et al. (2017) included a strategic plan regarding the literacy curriculum program for principal preparation to support literacy teachers. The Wallace Foundation supported six urban school districts to address the critical challenges of supplying schools with effective principals and found that field experience activities have the greatest impact when incorporated continuously throughout the program, based on course content. Principal preparation programs should become more innovative and include extensive authentic coursework and field experiences. In this era of high-stakes testing, the role of the principal has developed into an instructional leader. The multitude of preparation programs currently available have no means of evaluating how well they are accomplishing their goals due to the lack of data and support for program improvement (Guerra et al., 2017).

Lavigne and Chamberlain (2017) studied school leaders' perceptions and practices in the context of a new policy that emphasizes teacher evaluation. Lavigne and Chamberlain (2017) illustrated that school leaders spent significant time on teacher evaluation. Some school principals felt this was a good investment of time, increasing the ability for evaluations to improve instruction. Only a small portion of the workweek is dedicated to curriculum and teaching-related tasks or more specifically, supervision, and

evaluation. Lavigne and Chamberlain (2017) found principal preparation programs are outdated and irrelevant.

Fuller and Hollingworth (2018) examined school principal graduates' effectiveness in improving student state test scores, graduate job placement rates, and principal retention. Fuller and Hollingworth (2018) found studies that examined the impact of more than one principal preparation programs (PPP) on K-12 student outcomes. Fuller and Hollingworth (2018) examined the students' outcomes relative to the effect of graduates from other programs and employed multiple approaches to estimate the effect of principals on student outcomes. Fuller and Hollingworth (2018) studied the difference in schools who employed one principal preparation group versus another. The second method employed was propensity score matching to create two sets of small groups of comparison schools that were matched based on borough location, student achievement, school level student demographics, and other school characteristics (Fuller & Hollingworth, 2018). Fuller and Hollingworth (2018) compared the achievement trajectories within both groups and found neither of these approaches employed a school fixed approach as a strategy to control for the unobserved characteristics of schools. Fuller and Hollingworth (2018) found insufficient research to support the use of principal retention as one measure in a PPP accountability system. Most states have adopted student growth metrics for principal evaluation in order to effectively determine principals' impact on student achievement.

Hackmann and Malin (2016) conducted a qualitative case study to examine the impact of the Illinois principal preparation program restructuring mandates on programs

and faculty. Hackmann and Malin (2016) reported that the principal preparation candidates were poorly prepared. The National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration (NCEEA) argued:

> Because it is concerned about the great number of individuals being prepared and licensed in programs with inadequate resources and little commitment to quality, the Commission recommends that the campuses prepare fewer-better. Like other professional programs, an excellent one in educational administration will have fewer students and require greater university support. Only institutions willing to support such excellence should continue to prepare school leaders. (p. 24)

In response to these critiques, numerous states have enacted policy reforms to improve the quality of university-based leadership preparation programs, with an intent to prepare educational leaders who possess the knowledge and skills to guide improvement initiatives within their organizations (Hackmann & Malin, 2016). PPP admit those who apply, irrespective of their principal qualifications (Hackmann & Malin, 2016). Reform took place in Illinois under new regulations beginning 2014 and the new format was expansive and required proposals to include a program rationale, narrative responses containing detailed descriptions of each required component, curriculum matrices, and rubrics verifying alignment to the state standards, course descriptions and syllabi, internship assessment rubrics, student assessments to be used throughout the program, projected numbers of candidates, student recruitment and admission procedures, faculty staffing approaches and vitae (Hackmann & Malin, 2016).

George W. Bush Institute and American Institutes for Research (2016) examined the new generation of principals and their experiences they bring to the workforce. Evaluating the impact of PPP is essential to improving programming, inform policy, and provide information to consumers. Each year as many as 22% of current principals retire or leave their schools or the profession, requiring districts to either promote or hire new principals to fill vacancies at considerable district cost (George W. Bush Institute and American Institutes for Research, 2016). The new generation of principals are younger and they have less teaching experience (George W. Bush Institute and American Institutes for Research, 2016). New principals reported being underprepared to evaluate teaching, provide teachers meaningful feedback, manage conflict, and balance tasks. The George W. Bush Institute collaborated with American Institutes for Research to evaluate the impact of PPP in the United State on student outcomes. Several challenges arose from the evaluation such as many individuals who complete a principal preparation program do not immediately become a principal, which may affect achievement less directly than classroom teachers (George W. Bush Institute and American Institutes for Research, 2016). A lack of reliable and consistent data on outcomes other than achievement can limit analysis. The findings included that PPP need better student principal outcomes.

Grissom, Mitani, and Woo (2019) focused on the quality of preservice preparation programs. Principal performance varied by outcome measures. Many principal preparation programs have begun to step into the void of systematic evidence (Grissom et al., 2019). Grissom et al. (2019) did not identify principal preparation programs that consistently performed well or poorly. State and programs are starting to build up the

capacity to link PPPs to graduate outcomes, the methodological challenges to estimating PPP impacts are substantial and have not yet been fully explored. According to Grissom et al. (2019), estimation of PPP effects on school outcomes shares many of the complexities of estimating principal effects, including how to take into account how long a principal's effect will take to show up and how to disentangle the principal's effect from other factors, such as district supports.

Chambers and Hausman (2014) conducted a qualitative comparative case study and identified factors that distinguished between high and low performance on reading achievement in elementary rural Appalachian schools. Chambers and Hausman (2014) focused on the most effective instructional reading strategies. The principals' perceptions of the teachers took different approaches to the administrative support in relation to improving reading instruction for student in Grades K-3 (Chambers & Hausman, 2014). One participant viewed the newer teachers as lacking maturity and indicated that some may not have the sufficient educational background to be in the profession of teaching. These views affect leadership styles and how administrators interact with teachers. These interactions have implications for relationships and establishing long term sustainability of school improvement (Chambers & Hausman, 2014). Chambers and Hausman (2014) identified different theories the administrators used at each campus. Theory Y promotes effective communication and trust with principal trust of teachers to do their jobs. Theory X drives employees to work because they think they are lazy this approach insists on compliance and rigid organizational patterns with an imposed authority. Results indicated

that meaningful PD on instructional strategies are all variables that distinguish between high and low performing schools (Chambers & Hausman, 2014).

Squires (2018) examined students' working memory and auditory-verbal, visual spatial cognitive load and how it affects the decoding skills of students identified as poor readers. Squires referred to the scientific process in learning to read. Reading requires the ability to decode and comprehend and working memory impairments often implicate students who are poor decoders (Squires, 2018). Squires (2018) emphasized a language rich reading programs could be beneficial in scaffolding early reading proficiency. According to Squires (2018), the importance for training in reading instruction is key as a greater emphasis on language-rich reading programs could be beneficial in scaffolding early academic achievement and reading performance.

Wahlstrom and Louis (2008) examined how the principal is a key factor in supporting student achievement. Findings included instructional behaviors standard contemporary practice, focused instruction, and flexible grouping. The findings also included suggestions for shared leadership and professional community. According to Wahlstrom and Louis (2008), individual teacher characteristics of gender and years of experience have clear impact on instructional practice; however, there are no discernible patterns that suggest that the level of the principal have more or less influence on teacher instructional behaviors. Wahlstrom and Louis (2008) reported that the use of time and pacing are relatively easy to see and both older and new models of principal supervision assume that time is important. Wahlstrom and Louis (2008) identified that trusting the principal on instructional matters do not lead to stronger or more intense instructional

practices. Wahlstrom and Louis (2008) reported that the principal may be perceived as caring about and supportive of good instruction; however, may still not have much to say about the deliberate strategic choices that teachers make when designing or changing classroom practices.

Puzio, Newcomer, and Goff (2015) conducted a case study to investigate the role of the principal in supporting differentiated literacy instruction in three elementary schools. Principals strategically networked teachers and evaluated teachers during their literacy block when teachers were expected to differentiate their instruction. Differentiated instruction is accepted in education (Puzio et al., 2015). Puzio et al. (2015) sought to find out how principals can support teachers to differentiate instruction. Puzio et al. (2015) focused on what specific policies and practices help teachers differentiate instruction to meet the needs of their students. Although a wide variety of research has been conducted on effective leadership in general, very little is known about how school leaders can support literacy differentiation. According to Puzio et al. (2015), while many principals and district staff may want their teachers to differentiate instruction, these administrators need concrete policies and activities to inform their practice.

Bastug and Demirtas (2016) focused on reading intervention. Bastug and Demirtas (2016) examined a child-centered reading intervention that would reduce students' reading problems. Results were that reading intervention improved reading comprehension. Frijters et al. (2017) investigated the relationship among reading skills and attributions, naming speed, and phonological awareness across a wide range of reading skill. Students' problems in reading fluency emerge as the multitude of reading

mistakes, the reading rate, prosodic reading and the inadequacy of reading comprehension. Frijters et al. (2017) examined child-centered reading intervention process into the stages of a child-centered reading intervention stages process see-understand-imagine, talk, dictate, read and write-read. Frijters et al. (2017) did not mention administrator working with teachers. The results provided evidence on ability-based attributions in situations of reading success.

Gillett, Pierson, and Ellingson (2017) presented two approaches that teacher educators use to prepare preservice teachers to conduct and analyze running records and how to use the data to craft appropriate instruction for readers. Gillett et al. (2017) assumed that a principal would need to understand how to support teachers' literacy capacity. Running records provide concrete evidence of students' skills, reading levels, strategies, and progress as readers. Gillett et al. (2017) asserted that running records make systematic observation rigorous and informative. When taking a running record, the teacher listens to a student read a text and documents on a recording sheet what the student does. Words read correctly are marked with a check mark, and other oral reading behaviors such as substitutions, insertions, omissions, self-corrections, and repetitions, have their own specific conventions. Gillett et al. (2017) concluded that understanding how to make informed instructional decisions for students is critical.

Lonigan and Burgess (2017) examined data of children who completed measures of decoding, reading comprehension and three measures of listening comprehension. Lonigan and Burgess (2017) suggested that the degree to which a nominal test of reading comprehension assesses something other than what is measured by nominal test of

decoding is the result of developmental process in which comprehension emerges as a distinct construct as children's word-reading skills increase. Lonigan and Burgess (2017) assumed that decoding and reading comprehension are distinct throughout reading acquisition, that some reading comprehension tests are more heavily influenced by decoding than others, and that the utility of a reading comprehension test depends on the extent of which it is influenced by decoding. Children are acquiring and then achieving greater mastery of decoding skills, comprehension-specific processes are severely limited and that performance on measures intended to assess reading comprehension may be largely the result of the overlap between decoding skill and linguistic-comprehension skill (Lonigan & Burgess, 2017). Lonigan and Burgess (2017) concluded that there may be a developmental process wherein the distinctiveness of decoding and reading comprehension increases as children age and their reading skills increase.

Ni, Rorrer, Pounder, Young, and Korach (2019) collected data from the 2016 INSPIRE-G Survey, which gathers information form leadership preparation programs (LPP) graduates in the USA on their perceptions of program quality and leadership learning. Ni et al. (2019) suggested significant relationships between the assessed LPP attributes and leadership learning. Internships experiences and peer relationships were also important predictors of leadership learning (Ni et al., 2019). Ni et al. (2019) found that principal leadership is recognized as instrumental in ensuring overall school success. Ni et al. (2019) identified that expectations of principals completing leadership preparation programs should be to demonstrate high standards of quality and accountability and transparency with programs effectiveness data, program outcome data

(e.g., changes in practice among graduates), if they are to be relied upon as contributors to the pipeline of quality leaders who can produce positive student and organizational outcomes. Ni et al. (2019) emphasized that high-quality leadership preparation is an essential step in building the capacity of school leaders.

Perrone and Tucker (2019) examined leadership by the principal is considered the primary driver of organizational improvement efforts at the school level. Perrone and Tucker (2019) found that principals "provide the necessary guidance over time to sustain a coherent program of schoolwide development" that encourages positive relationships with parents and communities, enhances professional capacities, nurtures a student-centered learning climate, and guides instructional practices (para 2). These instructional practices, in turn, are associated with increased student achievement (Perrone & Tucker, 2019). Perrone and Tucker (2019) found that principals are second only to teachers in their impact on student learning.

Houchens, Nie, Zhang, Miller, and Norman (2018) examined principals' and assistant principals' perceptions of their roles. Houchens et al. (2018) indicated that principals and assistant principals reported different perceptions regarding teacher and school leadership. Responses that differed between principal and assistant principal were not related to student achievement. There is no previous research that compares perceptions between different roles of school leadership on teaching conditions and whether the differences between principals and assistant principals are related to student achievement. Houchens et al. (2018) reviewed 40 years of empirical research on the impact of principals on student achievement, found that structures of collaborative

decision making have a positive impact on student learning. Principal perceptions that differ from those of the principal may suggest obstacles to school-wide efforts at improving student learning outcomes. Education research demonstrated that school-level leaders indirectly influence student achievement through their role in building academic capacity and fostering teacher growth and development. Assistant principals play a role in supporting academic capacity, primarily through their role as chief disciplinarian and operational manager of the school (Houchens et al., 2018).

Medina, Martinez, Murakami, Rodriguez, and Hernandez (2014) focused on high-need schools with economic and social issues. Two principals in primary schools identified in what ways they saw their leadership as influencing. Economic issues affect learning, preventing students and their families from receiving the level of education that they deserve in schools that care. Principals in these schools not only focus on academic achievement, but also address how their scope of leadership can promote students out of socio-economic traps. What emerged was the need to focus on socio-economic issues, unaddressed academic, emotional and physical issues before focusing on students' academic success (Medina et al., 2014) Leadership methods followed the practice of community responsibility and teacher /staff cohesion as important factors in their leadership. One principal stated they believe that the leadership in a high-needs school is critical in retaining excellent staff and motivate them to continue learning to serve the students, parents, and community (Medina et al., 2014).

Morgan (2018) examined how education research has established a significant relationship between school leadership and students' achievement. Morgan (2018)

examined reported explicit gaps in the instructional leadership and school improvement practices that need to be addressed. Morgan (2018) reported that the principal is no longer an educational manager, but rather a transformational leader who creates change in the education system.

Weinstein, Azar, and Flessa (2018) examined leadership practices and the effect on education or training. Future school leader training is largely financed; however, there is a lack of evidence of their direct impact (Weinstein et al., 2018). Data collected examined an association between school leaders, formal education and training received, and the leadership practices implemented on their campus (Weinstein et al., 2018).

Campbell and Parker (2016) compared principal preparation programs internship requirements. Campbell and Parker (2016) noted in 2015 the National Policy Board for Educational Administration revised and updated the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards (1996, 2008), which describe knowledge and skills that practicing principals should possess to be effective school leaders. School collaborations emerged, for the purpose of redesigning principal preparation programs so that new school leaders would be prepared to meet the challenge of school improvement and high stakes accountability (Campbell & Parker, 2016). A study where practicing principals were interviewed regarding their perspectives of principal preparation yielded recommendations for the types of hands – on experiences that should be offered during the internship (Campbell & Parker, 2016). Campbell and Parker (2016) revealed three categories of experiences (a) planning change in areas of curriculum and teaching, including leading new initiatives or programs; (b) supporting cultures of learning, which

included experiences in the building relationships and building a nurturing a learning culture; and (c) using data to support continuous school improvement, which included experiences in leading curriculum initiatives, evaluating teaching practices, and identifying meaningful professional development. Campbell and Parker (2016) identified that universities should be called upon to redesign principal preparation program so that new school principals would be prepared to lead change.

Hvidston, McKim, and Holmes (2018) examined principals' perceptions regarding their own supervision and evaluation of teachers. The focus of that qualitative study was on improving supervision and evaluation. Hvidston et al. (2018) examined the influence of principals in regards to effective schools and student performance gains. Cantu, Rocha, and Martinez (2016) conducted a case study. Cantu et al. (2016) examined a principal as she faced challenges such as building relationships with teachers, turn over, and academic achievement. Cantu et al. (2016) reported that PPP poorly prepare future principals. Day, Gu, and Sammons (2016) examined successful leaders' transformational and instructional leadership. The 3-year mixed methods study was conducted to examine student outcomes by following the national examination and assessment results. Day et al. (2016) examined the perceptions of principals and key staff on improvement strategies to foster better student attainment.

Shen, Rodriguez-Campos, and Rincones-Gomez (2000) examined challenges urban principals face such as poverty, prejudice, disadvantages, and legislation. Shen et al. (2000) reported that urban principals are highly educated with at least 10% earning a doctoral degree. The working environment for urban principals has become more

constraining due to increasing legislation on education and their leadership roles have become diluted. Shen et al. (2000) found that principals are expected to have more leadership in school matters. Shen et al. (2000) focused on principals who work with teachers, among others, to continually improve the school, teachers are expected to be empowered in school matters (Shen et al., 2000). Shen et al. (2000) found that urban public school principals reported that they spent more years in teaching before taking principalship. Shen et al. (2000) identified that the average number of years spent in teaching before becoming a principal increased from 10.5% in 1987-1988 to 10.9% in 1990-1991, and to 11.4% in 1993-1994. Shen et al. (2000) reported that there was no data that directly measured instructional leadership. Shen et al. (2000) stated that more urban principals held curriculum and instruction-related positions before becoming principals and urban principals spent more years in teaching prior to principalship seem to support that curriculum and instructional related experiences are becoming more and more important for holding the principalship position. Principals are expected to upgrade their skills continuously through formal education such as pursuing degrees and through other PD opportunities such as joining school district sponsored programs for principals (Shen et al., 2000). There is a positive relationship between principals' instructional leadership and students' academic achievement (Shen et al., 2000). By pursuing education and professional training, principals set a good example of life-long learning for teachers and students (Shen et al., 2000). The argument for instructional leadership leads to the issue whether principals have the background for instructional leadership (Shen et al., 2000).

The notion of headteacher denotes the importance of instructional leadership (Shen et al., 2000).

As an instructional leader in the building, the principal is expected to understand teachers' quality instruction as well as have sufficient knowledge of the curriculum to know that appropriate content is being delivered to students (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). The principal should be capable of providing constructive feedback to improve teaching or is able to design a system in which others provide support (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). The leadership of the principal is known to be a key factor in supporting student achievement; however, how that leadership is experienced and instructionally enacted by teachers is much less clear (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). Pedagogical knowledge and skills provide the basic building blocks for instruction (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). Teachers should explicitly teach emergent readers letter sound relationships (Gates & Yale, 2011). Shen et al. (2000) stated that the job responsibility of the urban principalship has been changing. Principals must focus on facilitating and improving learning (Shen et al., 2000). Traditionally, the role of the principal ha been primarily managing the operation of the school (Shen et al., 2000). Since the 1980s, the role of the principal has changed to instructional leadership (Shen et al., 2000).

Research on school leadership revealed that principals can significantly impact student achievement by influencing classroom instruction, organizational conditions, community support, and setting the teaching and learning conditions in schools (G. W. B. I., 2016). The Alliance for the Reform of Educational Leadership (AREL), calls on states to leverage longitudinal data systems to track principals' preparation program outcome

on data on graduates such as “ability to secure jobs, retain jobs, and demonstrate an impact on student achievement” (Fuller & Hollingworth, 2017, para 2). Principals are needed to provide instructional leadership.

In the United States, researchers in the field of educational leadership have affirmed that the capacity of leadership required by school and district leaders is highly dependent on the quality of their leadership preparation experiences (Guerra, Zamora, Hernandez, & Menchaca, 2017). The University Council of Educational Administration (UCEA, 2011), researchers in the field of educational leadership have made extraordinary advancement in acknowledging the features of university-based leadership preparation programs that are identified with effective leadership practices (Guerra et al., 2017). A few principal preparation programs have been formally evaluated using students’ outcomes (G. W. B. I., 2016).

Lonigan, Burgess, and Schatschneider (2018) identified that the ultimate goal of reading is to extract and construct meaning from text for some purpose. Lonigan et al. (2018) indicated that both decoding and linguistic comprehension are important for reading comprehension across age and ability for children in third through fifth grades. Lonigan et al. (2018) found that decoding was a stronger predictor of reading comprehension for younger children than for older children, and there was evidence that vocabulary was more predictive for children with higher reading comprehension skill than it was for children with lower reading comprehension skill. Lonigan et al. (2018) identified that reading comprehension of a child with limited decoding skills is unlikely to be improved solely by an instructional focus on comprehension-specific processes

such as vocabulary, conversely, as a child begins to achieve mastery of decoding, increasing emphasis on comprehension-specific processes, like vocabulary, is most likely to enhance the child's reading comprehension.

Summary and Conclusions

The principal's role is more defined in the area of instructional leadership, which includes expertise in instruction and curriculum (Guerra et al., 2017). Hallinger and Wang (2015) stated that a principal is an instructional leader. Fuller and Hollingworth (2018) stated that a principal manages the instructional programs. The work of successful principals is intuitive, knowledge informed, and strategic (Day et al., 2016). Successful principals raise students' proficiency levels in national tests (Day et al., 2016). Principals model instructional practices and provide feedback to teachers on lesson plans (Murphy, Neumerski, Goldring, Grisson, & Porter, 2016).

Guerra et al. (2017) supports principal preparation programs that focus on outcomes on administrators beyond the completion of the principal certification programs. Principals are expected to upgrade their skills continuously through formal education such as pursuing degrees and through other PD opportunities such as joining school district sponsored programs for principals (Shen et al., 2000). Gates and Yale (2011) reported on the importance of direct explicit literacy instruction. The leadership of the principal is known to be a key factor in supporting student achievement (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). Gillett et al. (2017) assumed that a principal would need to understand how to support teachers' literacy capacity. George W. Bush Institute and American Institutes for Research (2016) examined the new generation of principals and their

experiences they bring to the workforce. Lavigne and Chamberlain (2017) stated that principal preparation programs are outdated and irrelevant; it is wise to prepare leaders to be savvy in data-driven decision-making, as more recent programs have done. Guerra et al. (2017) included a strategic plan regarding the literacy curriculum program for principal preparation to support literacy teachers. As an instructional leader in the building, the principal is expected to understand teachers' quality instruction as well as have sufficient knowledge of the curriculum to know that appropriate content is being delivered to students (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). In Chapter 3, the methodology is presented.

Chapter 3: Research Method

In this chapter, the research methodology and rationale are presented. The identification process for participants and how the data were collected and analyzed are described. The credibility, dependability, and confirmability used to establish trustworthiness are also presented. The purpose of this study was to understand the instructional leadership practices of elementary school principals regarding teachers' literacy teaching strategies.

Research Design and Rationale

The organization of the first paragraphs here seems reversed: the more detailed issues come before the broader issues. Please revise according to the following suggested order: nature of the study (qualitative/quantitative), why one versus the other, descriptions of the qualitative designs, why you chose *not* to use three or four of them; why you chose to use one of them. A case study design allows the researcher to use a small sample size in the natural environment to represent an otherwise large population of the school principals (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). "Sampling strategies should be chosen in such a way that they yield rich information and are consistent with methodological approach used" (Moser & Korstjens, 2018, para 3). Moser and Korstjens (2018) stated that the data collection plan needs to be broadly defined and "open during data collection" (para 4). The most commonly used data collection method is face-to-face interviews (Moser & Korstjens, 2018).

Principals are expected to serve as the instructional leaders on the campus, ensuring academic growth for all students. But more students at the research site are not

meeting academic expectations in reading. A case study design was appropriate to examine principals' perceptions of teachers' literacy teaching strategies. The phenomenon for this qualitative study was the instructional leadership practices of elementary school principals regarding teachers' literacy teaching strategies.

Grounded theory was not selected because the purpose of this study was not to develop a theory (Trochim, 2006). Phenomenology was not selected for this study. Ethnographic research requires 25–50 interviews and observations, including about four-to-six focus group discussions, while phenomenological studies require fewer than 10 interviews, grounded theory studies 20–30 interviews and content analysis 15–20 interviews or three-to-four focus group discussions (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). The mixed methods approach was not appropriate for this study because no quantitative data were collected for this study. Quantitative research questions were not used for this study. A large sample size was not needed to make major generalizations. The focus of this study was on the instructional leadership practices of elementary school principals regarding teachers' literacy teaching strategies. perceptions and the preferred uses of data collection will be by using an interview protocol tool therefore the qualitative approach was selected to analyze the data regarding principals' perceptions of teaching literacy instruction. The research question was about principals' perceptions of teachers' literacy teaching strategies.

Setting of the Study

At a local school district, which is located in southern United States, elementary student literacy scores have been declining consistently for the past 3 consecutive

academic years. The district administrators offered PD to school principals to help them improve state literacy scores. The setting for this study was Title I elementary schools with low state literacy scores. The participants were school principals responsible for literacy instruction on their campuses. The student population was over 84,000. The school district has 85 elementary school campuses and 85 school principals in the leadership role. Each of the 85 elementary school campuses has a principal assigned as the main point of contact. The number of female principals is 75, while the number of male principals is 10. The number of years of experience in the principal role ranges from 0 to 20 plus years. While the number of years' experience in education ranges from 3 to 30 plus years.

Role of the Researcher

According to Amankwaa (2016), qualitative researchers conduct the interviews by themselves. Castillo-Montoya (2016) stated that qualitative researchers all interview responses are collected, analyzed, and reported by the qualitative researcher. In this study, the principals served as the key informants. In this study, I was the sole researcher and the main point of contact. I interviewed principals and collected qualitative data on the principals' perceptions to answer the research question. Thus, for the purpose of this qualitative research, I was the main data collection instrument to collect interview data from school principals. The interviews were one-on-one and semistructured using the interview protocol. The participants were selected using purposeful sampling from the population of school principals at the research site. I limited researcher bias through constant self-reflection. I also accurately represented the interview transcripts. My role as

the qualitative researcher was to understand the instructional leadership practices of elementary school principals regarding teachers' literacy teaching strategies.

Methodology

The procedures for recruitment of the participants are described in this section. I conducted a qualitative study. School principal participants were selected using the purposeful sampling method. I collected qualitative data through interviews using an interview protocol. I analyzed the interview data using thematic analysis. Ethical procedures used to protect the rights and confidentiality of the participants are also discussed in this section.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

The population was school principals within one school district. Each school had one principal who was the instructional leader at the school. The participants were school principals. A sampling plan is a formal plan specifying a sampling method, a sample size, and procedure for recruiting participants (see Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Purposeful sampling was used to select the participants who met the selection criteria. The principals in the purposeful sample were identified using predetermined criteria such as: (a) being a school principal in the school district, (b) having a state certification, and (c) being a school principal for at least 2 years. School principals in the participating school district who met the criteria were invited to participate in the study.

Determining the sample size was important to have data saturation, which is needed for qualitative studies. Data saturation can be reached when there are no new data, no new codes or themes, and the study can be replicated (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I selected

building leaders from an urban school district. It was important to gather the principals' perspectives on their understanding of literacy teaching strategies as the principal is the lead instructional leader on an elementary campus. In this study, the principals served as the key informants.

The senior district administrators were contacted via phone and email to request approval to conduct this study. The email addresses of school principals were obtained from the online school district's directory of schools, which was public information and has contact information on all schools in the district. Upon IRB approval from Walden University, I sent an email to each school principal in the district inviting them to be participants in the study. The school principals were sent an invitational email to participate in the study. In the invitational email, I explained the purpose of the study and the aforementioned selection criteria. I also included the time to participate in 60-minute interview sessions. I attached to each email a copy of the informed consent form. The participants were encouraged to ask questions. Each principal was asked to reply to my email to acknowledge their interest in the study. This process was repeated with school principals in the district and 10 principals agreed to participate in the study. Thus, the sample was 10 principals.

During data collection, the intent of the interviews was to understand the principals' perceptions regarding literacy instruction in elementary schools. Qualitative data were collected to answer the research question. The interview protocol was used. As the researcher, I used the interview questions found in the interview protocol. The focus of the interviews was on gaining a solid understanding of the principals' perceptions of

teachers teaching literacy instruction at the research site. I used an expert review, consisting of my chair to review my protocol and questions for the interview. In addition, I used district leadership (principals' evaluators), experts in the field of literacy, and the district's literacy curriculum team to review the interview questions. Thus, I developed the interview questions and used the interview protocol as a guide to ask the participants questions based on their perceptions regarding literacy instruction.

Instrumentation

I served as the sole researcher and conducted the interviews. Each participant was provided with a copy of the consent form, which included information regarding confidentially, being a willing participant, and criteria to participate. All participants were encouraged to ask clarifying questions. Upon acceptance of the consent forms by the participants, the interview process commenced. The participants were informed that there were no retributions or undesired consequences for their participation in the study. The participants were also assured of confidentiality and that their interview data would be kept confidential. Interviews were scheduled via a telephone call after a confirmed email of acceptance was received from each participant.

Rapport with the participants was established. Building a rapport with the participants was the first step between the interviewee and this researcher. As the researcher, I presented a short presentation about my experience and the work I am currently leading. Specifically, I gave a short presentation on the research study and any experiences I have had working at a school district as a literacy teacher and administrator. I created professional relationships with all elementary principals who participated in the

study and the professional relationship was not in the role of their supervisor.

One-on-one interviews were conducted in each of the principals' natural settings. Specifically, the one-on-one interviews took place at each elementary school in the principals' office or where the participant was most comfortable such as a private room in the library. I encouraged each participant to select a space that is comfortable to them and allows uninterrupted thinking. The elementary school setting assisted in setting the mood and providing a sense of comfort for each participant. All interviews took place during a time selected by each participant. A unique number was assigned to each participant to protect their confidentiality. Letter P was assigned to each participant followed by a unique number. For example, P1 was assigned to the first participant, P2 was assigned to the second participant, and so forth. I used research-based interviewing techniques such as nonjudgmental, reflective strategy. I did not provide any clues for a preferred or expected response from each participant to each interview question. Each interview was about 60 minutes.

In conclusion, I used an interview protocol and the interview questions were designed to accurately identify the participants' perceptions regarding this study. I conducted the interviews and recorded them with the permission of each participant by using an audio recorder. The interviews appointment times each corresponded with the participants' daily intervals over 3 weeks. All physical data collected during the interviews were locked in a filing cabinet in the office. I will keep the data for 5 years.

Data Analysis Plan

I conducted each interview and collected all interview data. I also audio-recorded each interview and transcribed the interview data. I organized all interview transcripts by interview question. After all interviews, I scheduled a follow-up meeting with the participants to review and confirm the accuracy of the interview transcripts.

After the participants confirmed that the interview transcripts were accurate. I used coding to identify common words and phrases. I charted similar terms and phrases. I used axial coding to identify subcategories by using a constant comparative model. A continual process of analyzing information assists in bringing the data to the point of saturation (see Sutton & Austin, 2015). I examined the participants' responses in conjunction with the literature review and conceptual framework to identify repetitive phrases and words from the interviews. During the axial coding process, I extrapolated thematic words, phrases, responses, and sentences from the interviews. I identified common words and phrases during the coding process.

Trustworthiness

Data collected via interviews provide important sources of information (Yin, 2014). An expert review panel should review the interview protocol to increase the validity and reliability of the findings (Yin, 2014). A review of the interview protocol was vital for the reinforcement of trustworthiness of this study. I collected data through interviews with individual participants using interview questions. I recorded each interview and made notes on a notepad during each interview noting the participants' perceptions of literacy instruction in elementary schools. I used interviews to ensure

trustworthiness. I scheduled each interview and the follow-up meetings for member checks for each participant to examine their responses for accuracy. During the reviewing of the interview transcripts, I was committed to focusing on trustworthiness and adherence to ethical procedures to assure that every response was an authentic representation of the participants' perceptions.

Credibility

I maintained a reflexivity journal during the interviews. I recorded predispositions, emotions, and reactions during data collection and analysis in order to minimize researcher's biases. I facilitated credibility through member-checking where the participants reviewed their responses for accuracy after the interviews were transcribed. I triangulated the data by comparing and combining the participants' responses. I was able to minimize personal biases and reactivity.

Transferability

I conducted member checks to ensure the accuracy of the interview transcripts. The findings can be transferred to other similar public high school districts based on reasonable explanations of the findings in Chapter 4. I interviewed 10 participants and collected enough interview data to reach data saturation, which strengthened the transferability of the findings. This study has transferability because I provide the readers with sufficient evidence that the findings could apply to other contexts, situations, times, and populations. The findings of this study could be used in similar work settings.

Dependability

I strategically and consistently included in the findings the contributions of each participant. I followed the standards of qualitative research to achieve dependability by ensuring consistency regardless of existing variables, conditions of the interview location, or timeframes. I interviewed 10 participants in different location using the interview protocol. Although the interviews were held in different locations within one school district, I was maintained consistency in the way I asked the interview questions, recorded the interviews, and transcribed each interview.

Confirmability

I believe the findings can be confirmed by other researchers. Interview data were collected and diligently analyzed to ensured that the findings of this study precisely reflect a synopsis of the participants' perspectives. I ensured that the views and opinions of the participants were an accurate representation of the participants by listening to the recordings of the interviews, reading the interview transcript, and reading the notes during the member checks.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity encourages a researcher to self-reflect about their motives before conducting a study. Researcher's biases, preconceptions, and preferences should be considered and recorded before the study to curtail any predispositions. Throughout this study, I was constantly reflecting on the education experience to ensure personal biases did not influence the findings. I have many years of education experience, various academic degrees, and certifications in education.

Ethical Procedures

Approval from the IRB (No. 03-10-20-0979081) confirmed that I complied with the ethical standards for recruitment, interviewing, and the data collection process. Ethical practices in research adhere to practices and policies mandated under federal law (Connelly, 2016). During each interview, each participant was reminded that they can stop the interview at any time. As the researcher, the goal was to listen, think and ask follow up questions to gather data on principals' perceptions of leading literacy.

Principals were informed regarding confidentiality. All participants were informed that their names would not be included in the findings. Instead, they were assigned a unique number. Participants were asked for their permission to audio-taped. Each interview was transcribed within 48 hours of the interview. Participants were also informed that they can withdraw from the study. All collected data are kept in a locked file that is password protected. After 5 years, all data will be deleted and paper copies will be shredded and discarded.

Summary

I interviewed elementary school principals in one school district. The perceptions of the school principals leading literacy instruction were analyzed to answer the research question. The research question was about principals' perceptions of teachers' literacy teaching strategies. As the researcher, I served as the data collection instrument. Interviews were scheduled based on the principals' selected date, location, and time to ensure their comfortability. As the researcher, I ensured the trustworthiness of the study.

No incentives were provided to the participants to participate in the study. All data that were collected were transcribed verbatim. In Chapter 4, I present the findings.

Chapter 4: Reflections and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to understand the instructional leadership practices of elementary school principals regarding teachers' literacy teaching strategies. In Chapter 4, I present the findings. I collected data from 10 elementary school principals. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis for emergent themes. The findings may contribute to positive social change by helping elementary school principals improve their instructional leadership practices regarding teachers' literacy teaching strategies to help students graduate from school.

Setting of Research Study

The research site was a school district in the southern United States. The student population exceeded 84,000. Because the literacy scores of these Title I elementary schools had been declining for 3 consecutive academic years, the district administrators offered PD to school principals to help them improve state literacy scores. The participants were elementary school principals responsible for literacy instruction on their campuses.

The school district had 85 elementary school campuses and all 85 school principals of which 75 were female principals and 10 were male principals. The number of years of experience in the principal role ranged between zero and 20 plus years. The number of years' experience in education ranged from 3 to 30 plus years. The student-to-teacher ratio was 23:1 for Grades K–6.

Data Collection

Number of Participants

Approval from the IRB confirmed that I complied with the ethical standards for the recruitment, interviewing, and the data collection process. I then sent invitation emails to 15 elementary school principals and 10 agreed to participate: five women and five men. I conducted the interviews over 3 weeks in March, 2020. I also scheduled follow-up meetings for member checking

Location of Data Collection

I facilitated all interviews. Before the interviews were conducted, I reviewed the consent letter with each participant to ensure they had a clear understanding of the study. An interview protocol was used to ask each participant open-ended interview questions. Their responses were the sources of data.

Data Collection

During the interviews, the participants were asked for their permission to audio-tape the interviews. Participants were also informed that they can withdraw from the study. Open-ended interview questions were asked from the interview protocol. Interviews were one-on-one, face-to-face, held in a private room at each elementary school of each participating school principal. Each interview was held during a scheduled time based on the principals' work schedules.

All participants were informed regarding confidentiality and that their names would not be included in the findings because each participant was assigned a unique number. The interviews were recorded digitally and uploaded to a password-protected

computer. Each interview was transcribed within 48 hours of the interview. I transcribed the interviews. I met with the participants for a second time to conduct member checks. The participants reviewed the interview transcripts for accuracy. The participants agreed with the accuracy of the interview transcripts and no changes were made. All interview data will be retained for 3 years after the completion of the study. After 5 years, all data will be deleted and paper copies will be shredded and discarded.

Data Analysis

Categorization and Theme Analysis

A case study design was appropriate to examine principals' perceptions of teachers' literacy teaching strategies. The phenomenon for this qualitative study was the instructional leadership practices of elementary school principals regarding teachers' literacy teaching strategies. Qualitative interviews were used to describe the meanings of central themes. I conducted each interview, collected all interview data, audio recorded each interview, and transcribed the interview data. I organized all interview transcripts by interview question.

Qualitative coding software was used to support coding and conducting thematic analysis for data collected from interviews. Additional measures were taken to keep track of data and emerging themes through dated filed and entries. I coded transcribed interview data. Codes were words or short phrases. Categories were created and were aligned to the research question by extracting exact words and phrases to create codes. Thematic analysis using a priori, open, and axial codes was used to analyze interview data. Open and axial coding were used in forming categories from coded data.

After all interviews, I scheduled a follow-up meeting with the participants to review and confirm the accuracy of the interview transcripts. After the participants confirmed that the interview transcripts were accurate, I used coding to identify common words and phrases by charting similar terms and phrases. I used axial coding to identify subcategories by using a constant comparative model. I also used a continual process of analyzing information to have data saturation.

I examined the participants' responses in conjunction with the literature review and conceptual framework to identify repetitive phrases and words from the interviews. During the axial coding process, I extrapolated thematic words, phrases, responses, and sentences from the interviews. I identified common words and phrases during the coding process. Common words and phrases were the following.

Theme 1: The common words were focus and increase. The school principals focus on: (a) literacy scores, (b) district literacy scores, (c) state literacy scores, (d) literacy scores in general, and (e) scores have been low for at least 2 years on the average. The school principals aim at increasing: (a) literacy scores, (b) district literacy scores, (c) state literacy scores, and (d) literacy scores in general. From these sets of words and phrases Theme 1 emerged. The participants reported that they focus on how to increase state scores in all academic subjects.

Theme 2: The common words were struggle, apply, instructional leadership practices, support, and literacy instruction. The school principals struggle to apply their instructional leadership practices to support literacy instruction. From these sets of words and phrases Theme 2 emerged.

Theme 3: The common words were PD, support, literacy, instruction, strategies, apply, instructional leadership practices, and teachers. The participants need PD to learn how to support literacy instruction by applying their instructional leadership practices to support literacy teachers. From these sets of words and phrases Theme 3 emerged.

Theme 4: The common words were PLC, support literacy instruction, administrators, literacy teachers, share best teaching practices. PLC could be used to support literacy instruction at the school. From these sets of words and phrases Theme 4 emerged.

Findings of the Study

In this section, I present the themes. I also present excerpts from the interview transcripts. Each theme includes excerpts from the participants. The following themes emerged.

Theme 1: Principals Focused on How to Increase Literacy State Scores

All of the participants reported that they focused on how to increase state scores in all academic subjects. P1 said that literacy state scores have been low for the past 3 consecutive academic years. P1 attempted to balance her instructional leadership practices to support teacher instruction at the school. P1's priority has been to "ask strong literacy teachers to share teaching strategies with other teachers regarding literacy instruction." P1 revealed that she struggles to help literacy instruction because she "lacks literacy teaching strategies." P1 stated that sharing teaching literacy strategies with literacy teachers is "truly challenging." P2 has been trying for 4 academic years to increase literacy state scores. P2 provided examples to illustrate how teachers need

"different teaching strategies to teach poetry, inferencing, and summary." For instance, P2 stated that there are many teaching strategies for literacy instruction and the challenge is that "teachers focus on literacy content and not on using effective teaching strategies." P2 reported, "Every teacher is a reading teacher or literacy teacher but we don't provide them with the support they need on the campus level simply because we as instructional leaders struggle to support them." P3 has been trying for 6 academic years to increase literacy state scores. P3 said, "Teachers are unprepared to teach literacy and literacy is the hardest to teach." P3 also stated that she "like the teachers is unprepared to support literacy instruction." Thus, P1, P2, and P3 have been trying to increase literacy state scores.

Participants P4, P5, and P6 reported that literacy teachers do not apply best teaching practices for the state scores in literacy to increase. P1-P6 stated that they focus on how to increase state scores. According to P4, "Teachers are unprepared to teach literacy and state scores in literacy are low." P4 admitted that teachers know how to prepare lesson plans to teach literacy; however, "teachers do not use effective teaching strategies for literacy state scores to increase." P4 implied that teachers teaching literacy "are teaching in general because they lack of training on effective teaching strategies." P5 stated that teachers are "not using best teaching practices to increase state scores in literacy." Both P4 and P5 said that they work with the literacy coaches to support literacy teachers; however, when they evaluated literacy teachers' instructional practices, both principals found that teachers are "not using the best practice to teach literacy." P6 provided the same responses are P1-P5 that "teachers are not trained to teach literacy and

to help students increase their proficiency in literacy to increase the state scores in literacy." P6 said that she "has been unprepared to support literacy instruction and the literacy teachers do not apply best teaching practices to increase the state scores in literacy. Thus, P4, P5, and P6 believe that literacy teachers do not apply best teaching practices to support students for state scores in literacy to increase. P7 stated that state scores are low because teachers do not support the students with deficiencies in reading. P7 also stated that "teachers teach the standards instead of teaching students how to read." P8 provided similar phrases like P1-P7 that "teachers are not using best practices to teach literacy." P8 discovered via classroom observations that teachers "don't know how to teach literacy." For instance, P8 said "When a student lacks basic phonemic awareness, teachers are not focusing on that individual student." P9 provided a plethora of teaching resources to teachers who teach literacy. According to P9, resources included teaching materials on decoding words for students to learn how to read. Although P9 provided literacy teachers with reading resources, state scores in literacy continue to be low because teachers do not apply best teaching practices. For instance, P9 provided the example of teachers not using "small group instruction to support students who have difficulties in reading." P9 stated, "Early literacy deficiency at my campus is challenging. Teachers are not incorporating writing and reading comprehension with phonics in the lower grades. Teachers are not using best teaching practices." P10 said, "Teachers are not using best teaching practices." In conclusion, all of the participants reported that they focus on how to increase state scores and acknowledged that literacy teachers are not using best teaching practices in the classroom.

Theme 2: Principals Struggle to Apply Instructional Leadership Practices

All of the participants reported that they struggle to apply their instructional leadership practices to support literacy instruction. The first three participants revealed that they do not know how to apply their instructional practices to support literacy teachers given that their specializations are in other teaching subjects other than literacy. P1 said that literacy affects learning in all content areas and because literacy impacts every student, school principals should support literacy teachers. P2 had expertise in mathematics and felt that supporting literacy teachers was a major struggle. Both P1 and P2 revealed that literacy state scores are low and "literacy teachers need administrative support" to better support literacy students. P3 admitted that they need to know how to support literacy teachers. Thus, P1, P2, and P3 did not know how to apply their instructional practices to support literacy teachers because they specialize in other teaching subjects such as mathematics and science.

Participants P4, P5, and P6 reported that they know that literacy teachers need their support for state scores in literacy to increase. P4 stated that literacy is the foundation of all academic subjects. P4 knows that literacy teachers need her support as the instructional leader in the elementary school, but "I do not know how to support them." P4 revealed that she needs to know how to apply her specialization in science to support literacy teachers. Although P4 had tried to improve her instructional leadership practices in literacy, she needed training to know how to apply general instructional practices to literacy. P5 said that she needs to know how to apply their instructional practices to support literacy instruction at the school. P5 is concerned about the low

literacy state scores and recognized her struggles to use best instructional literacy practices. P5 reported that she had difficulties in applying instructional leadership literacy strategies to better support literacy instruction at the school. P6 noticed that more students enter the elementary school with reading deficiencies. P6 stated, “I came from a district where students’ reading was on grade levels and now, I am in a situation where that is not the case. I see the need for literacy intervention for students who are struggling.” P6 also mentioned that literacy state scores are low. P6 revealed that she does not know what to do given the literacy needs of students. P6 believed that students with deficits in literacy are struggling in math with word problems and in science with concepts. Thus, participants P4, P5, and P6 reported that they know that literacy teachers need their support for state scores in literacy to increase; however, they do not know how to apply their instructional practices to support literacy.

P7-P10 reported that they struggle to support literacy instruction. P7 reported that she was not prepared to support literacy teachers. P8 had literacy background as a teacher and was also a literacy coach for 2 years; however, in her job as a principal, she struggled to support literacy teachers to ensure that students improve proficiency in literacy. P8 was worried when she was a second-grade teacher because even then she had many nonreaders. In her role as a principal, she struggles to support literacy teachers for students to improve proficiency in literacy. P9 also had literacy background as a language teacher. P9 focused on expecting literacy teachers to help students to develop literacy skills. P9 also focused on students’ academic achievement in all academic subjects. P9 felt that she struggles to support literacy instruction. As a principal, P9 revealed that she

has difficulties in supporting literacy instruction. P10 reported that she was not prepared to know how to support literacy teachers. P10 did not have any training in literacy because she was a science teacher. P10 stated that she struggles to apply instructional leadership practices to better support literacy teachers. P7-P10 said that they were not prepared to know how to support literacy teachers and as a result in their current roles as principals they struggle to support literacy instruction. In conclusion, all of the participants reported that they struggle to apply their instructional leadership practices to support literacy instruction.

Theme 3: Principals Need PD to Support Literacy Instruction

All of the participants reported that they need PD to support literacy instruction because they struggle to apply their instructional leadership practices to support literacy instruction. Specifically, the participants revealed that they do not know how to apply their instructional practices to support literacy teachers and as a result they need PD. The content of PD should include strategies on how to apply instructional leadership practices to support literacy instruction. P1 had no expertise in literacy and stated that PD is needed in order to know how to support literacy teachers. Both P1 and P2 revealed that literacy state scores are low and literacy teachers asked them for guidance on literacy instruction. P3 had no experience in literacy instruction. P3 had asked senior district administrators for PD on how to support literacy instruction at the school. Thus, P1, P2, and P3 reported that PD on how to apply instructional leadership practices to support literacy teachers could be beneficial to them as administrators because they specialize in mathematics and science.

Participants P4, P5, and P6 stated that they need to know how to support literacy teachers in order for students to increase their proficiency in literacy. P4 stated that PD on literacy instruction could help her with strategies to support literacy teachers. P4 implied that PD on literacy instruction could help her improve her practices as an instructional leader in the elementary school. P4 emphasized that with PD she may be able to better understand literacy teachers. P4 needs PD on how to apply her specialization in science to support literacy teachers. Therefore, P4 believed that with PD she could better apply general instructional leadership practices to literacy instruction. P5 needed PD to better apply her instructional leadership practices to support literacy instruction for students to improve state scores in literacy. P5 stated that PD could help her with her difficulties in applying instructional leadership literacy strategies to better support literacy instruction at the school. P6 reported that she did not have the skills for the implementation of literacy intervention in the school for students who are struggling in literacy. Thus, P4, P5, and P6 reported that they need PD on how to support literacy instruction.

P7-P10 reported that they struggle to support literacy instruction because the lack literacy instruction skills. P7-P10 reported that PD could be beneficial to them to know how to support literacy instruction. P7 reported that she was not prepared to support literacy teachers. Although P8 had literacy background and experience as a teacher and as a literacy coach, she experienced difficulties in supporting literacy teachers to help students to improve proficiency in literacy. P8 experienced difficulties in supporting literacy teachers and asked senior district administrators for PD sessions at the school district. P9 had literacy background and although she encouraged literacy teachers to help

students to develop literacy skills, she reported that PD could help her improve her instructional leadership practices. P9 revealed that she did not know how to support literacy teachers. P10 lacked PD on literacy instruction because she has been a science teacher. P10 stated that PD on how to apply instructional leadership practices to better support literacy teachers will be beneficial to her to improve her instructional leadership practices. Thus, P7-P10 reported that PD content on how to support literacy teachers was needed because they struggle to support literacy instruction. In conclusion, all of the participants reported that they need PD to support literacy instruction because they struggle to apply their instructional leadership practices to support literacy instruction and they were not prepared to know how to support literacy teachers in their current roles as principals.

Theme 4: Principals Believe in Professional Learning Communities (PLC) to Support Literacy Instruction

All participants reported that they believe in creating PLC at the school to support literacy instruction because both administrators and literacy teachers can share best practices. The participants also reported that with PLC teachers can learn how to apply their best teaching practices to support students who may improve their proficiency in literacy. P1 has expertise in using PLC to have literacy coaches work with literacy teachers. Specifically, P1 stated that PLC is needed at the school in order to know how to support literacy teachers. P1 revealed that by having “literacy teachers use PLC with literacy coaches and administrators, students could increase their literacy state scores.” P2 also has experience in PLC and reported that with “PLC curriculum and instructional

coaches could help literacy teachers to improve their teaching practices." P2 is concerned that literacy state scores are low and the literacy teachers are not using best teaching practices. P2 has assigned the literacy coach to all literacy teachers believing that teachers will share ideas and teaching strategies. P3 has no experience in PLC; however, she "needs to support literacy instruction." P3 has assigned coaches to literacy teachers and expects literacy state scores to be better in the near future. P3 strives to support all teachers in all academic subjects; however, "literacy state scores are low and literacy teachers need administrative support to guide them as instructional leaders." Thus, P1, P2, and P3 reported that PLC could be used to support literacy instruction at the school in order to better apply teaching practices to support students.

P4 stated, "I think the best way to support literacy teachers is to know their teaching strengths and weaknesses." P4 supports PLC and has attended seminars on how to implement PLC at the school. When P4 conducts classroom visits, she identifies the teachers who are struggling to "use best teaching practices." P4 has informed her literacy teachers of the importance of PLC in order to know how to encourage all students to participate in the lesson. P4 leads literacy teachers by helping "literacy teachers to work with literacy coaches for teachers to improve their teaching practices." P5 leads literacy teachers by sharing with them strategies to "better know the strengths and weaknesses of students though PLC." P5 used PLC with mathematics teachers in her former school and state scores in mathematics improved by 1%. P5 strives to implement PLC at her current school to support literacy teachers. P5 emphasized that literacy teachers need to know how to teach both reading and writing in ways that "students improve proficiency in

literacy." Although P5 struggles to apply her own instructional leadership practices to support literacy instruction, she is aware of the benefits of PLC and "strives to encourage literacy teachers to participate in PLC." As an advocate of PLC, P5 believes literacy teachers can talk about the instructional practices with other teachers who have more experience in applying best teaching practices. P6 also believes that "with PLC literacy teachers may have a better understanding of instructional practices and apply those practices in their teaching." P6 provided an example that she as the principal and the assistant principal work together with the instructional literacy coach to provide literacy teachers with feedback from their interactions with literacy teachers. P6 revealed that the principal preparation program did not provide examples to know how to apply their instructional leadership practices; however, her experience as a secondary school principal helped her transition to being an elementary principal, which was "a learning curve and challenging." P6 has received support from a senior school district administrator to understand how to lead by example; however, her specialization is not in literacy. P6 also revealed that instructional feedback and monitoring and observing of teachers are good instructional leadership practices; however, she lacks literacy instruction practices. P6 asserted that via PLC literacy teachers may benefit because PLC is like additional training, staff development, and professional development. P6 also asserted that via PLC literacy teachers may meet literacy standards and she as a school leader needs to hold literacy teachers accountable; however, she is unsure how to support literacy teachers at the school and what literacy practices to recommend to literacy teachers. Thus, P4, P5, and P6 support the implementation of PLC for literacy teachers to

improve their teaching practices by working with literacy coaches and the administrative team.

P7 also supports the implementation of PLC. P7 believes that the more teachers communicate with the administrative team the easier to support each other. P7 has tried to meet with each literacy teacher individually; however, time is a negative factor and as a result PLC may prove more beneficial to the teaching staff. P8 is a new school principal and stated that supporting literacy teachers is her priority because the state scores are below average. P8 has received feedback from literacy teachers and the instructional literacy coaches in the school district and has been using PLC to provide some support to literacy teachers. Because P1 has expertise in PLC, she works with the literacy coaches to help literacy teachers. P9 supports PLC because curriculum and instructional coaches may work with literacy teachers to help literacy teachers improve their teaching practices. P10 strives to support literacy teachers. Thus, P7, P8. P9, and P10 reported that PLC could be implemented at the school to support literacy teachers for teachers to better prepare students in literacy. In conclusion, the participants believe in implementing PLC at the school to support literacy instruction for school leaders and literacy coaches to share best practices with literacy teachers. The participants also believe that PLC should be implemented to provide literacy teachers with opportunities to learn how to apply best teaching practices to teach literacy to students in order for students to improve their proficiency in literacy.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

I used interviews to ensure trustworthiness. Data were collected through interviews with school principals who were purposefully selected. An interview protocol was used to ask the same interview questions to the participants. I recorded each interview and made notes on a notepad during each interview noting the participants' perceptions of literacy instruction in elementary schools. During the reviewing of the interview transcripts, I focused on trustworthiness.

Credibility

I scheduled each interview and the follow-up meetings for member checks for each participant to examine their responses for accuracy. A reflexivity journal was kept during the interviews. I facilitated credibility through member-checking for accuracy. The predispositions, emotions, and reactions were recorded during data collection to minimize researcher's biases by including details regarding data collection and analysis, recruitment, and privacy protection procedures. Data were triangulated by comparing and combining the participants' responses. I sought multiple perspectives from school principals at different campus locations to support the validity of the study. I reviewed the highlighted and annotated sections from the interview transcripts, field notes, and observations made during the interviews to triangulate the interview data from all participants to create codes organized by the interview questions. I was able to minimize personal biases and reactivity.

Transferability

I used IRB guidelines to conduct this research. The procedures that I used to collect data and to interact with the participants were in line with Walden University's IRB process. I interviewed 10 elementary school principals. I also conducted member checks to ensure the accuracy of the interview transcripts. I collected enough interview data to reach data saturation, which strengthen the transferability of the findings. The findings can be transferred to other similar public school districts based on reasonable explanations of the findings. The findings of this study could be used in similar work settings. This study has transferability because I provided the readers with sufficient evidence that the findings could be applied to other contexts, situations, times, and populations. Transferability was enhanced by interviewing multiple participants. Other researchers who may replicate this research may find comparable results.

Dependability

I included in the findings the contributions of each elementary school principal. I followed the standards of qualitative research to achieve dependability by ensuring consistency regardless of existing variables, conditions of the interview locations, or timeframes. I interviewed 10 elementary school principals in different locations using an interview protocol. Although the interviews were held in different locations within one public school district, I maintained consistency in the way I asked the interview questions, recorded the interviews, and transcribed each interview. I conducted member checks to ensure the accuracy of the interview transcripts. I collected enough interview data to reach data saturation. The aforementioned process was used to reinforce

dependability by evaluating the quality of the data collection process, analysis, and interpretation of the findings.

Confirmability

Interview data were collected and diligently analyzed to ensured that the findings of this study precisely reflect a synopsis of the participants' perspectives. I ensured that the views and opinions of the participants were an accurate representation of the participants by listening to the recordings of the interviews, reading the interview transcript, and reading the notes during the member checks. I believe the findings can be confirmed by other researchers because I categorized phrases based on the participants' responses and identified patterns and similarities in the participants' responses. I triangulated the data by comparing and combining the participants' responses. I was able to minimize personal biases and reactivity with professionalism and without emotions or reactions to the participants' responses.

Reflexivity

I have many years of education experience, various academic degrees, and certifications in education. Throughout this study, I was constantly reflecting on the education experience to ensure personal biases did not influence the findings. Reflexivity encourages a researcher to self-reflect about their motives before conducting a study. Researcher's biases, preconceptions, and preferences should be considered and recorded before the study to curtail any predispositions.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented the data collection and analysis procedures. I also presented the themes. I discussed credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Data were collected from 10 elementary principals during face-to-face semistructured interviews. Data were coded for emergent themes. Four themes emerged. Theme 1: principals focus on how to increase state literacy scores. Theme 2: principals struggle to apply instructional literacy practices. Theme 3: principals need professional development to support literacy instruction. Theme 4: principals believe in PLCs to support literacy instruction. In Chapter 5, I discuss the conclusions and make recommendations.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The research problem of this study was the lack of understanding of principals' perceptions of teachers' literacy teaching strategies. The purpose of this study was to understand the instructional leadership practices of elementary school principals regarding teachers' literacy teaching strategies. The research site was an urban public school district serving a population in which 80% of students live in poverty. There were 85 elementary campuses, of which 82 qualified as a Title I campus. Each elementary school had at least one instructional leader who was the principal in the leadership role leading teachers and staff at the school.

All participants were state-certified administrators, held a master's degree, and had at least 1 year of administrative experience. Each principal supervised at least 20 teachers and four support staff. At the research site, located in the southern region of the United States, literacy scores had been low in the past 3 consecutive academic years at both the state and district levels (school district administrator, personal communication, April 13, 2019). According to a STAAR, standardized state scores in literacy were below 50% proficiency. During the academic school year 2017-2018, STAAR results of students who met grade level standards on the literacy assessment were 43% of Grade 3 students, 46% of Grade 4 students, and 54% of Grade 5 students (Education Agency, 2019). Less than 50% of elementary school students met grade level requirements (Table 1) in the past 2 years as measured by STAAR (Education Agency, 2019). Principals' perceptions of teachers' literacy teaching strategies were examined to understand how to best support elementary teachers' literacy teaching strategies (school district

administrator, personal communication, April 13, 2019). Principals' perceptions of teachers' literacy teaching strategies had not previously been examined.

Ten principals participated in semistructured, face-to-face, audio-taped interviews. Themes emerged by way of thematic analysis. The findings may contribute to positive social change by helping elementary school principals improve their instructional leadership practices regarding teachers' literacy teaching strategies so that students can graduate from school. The following themes emerged:

- Theme 1: Principals focus on how to increase literacy state scores.
- Theme 2: Principals struggle to apply instructional leadership practices.
- Theme 3: Principals need PD to support literacy instruction.
- Theme 4: Principals believe in PLCs to support literacy instruction.

In Theme 1, all of the participants reported that they focus on how to increase state scores in all academic subjects. The participants revealed that literacy state scores have been low for at least 2 years on the average. The participants also revealed that they struggle to provide literacy instruction to literacy teachers because they are unprepared to support literacy instruction. The participants believe that literacy teachers do not apply best teaching practices to support students for state scores in literacy to increase.

In Theme 2, all of the participants reported that they struggle to apply their instructional leadership practices to support literacy instruction. The participants revealed that they do not know how to apply their instructional practices to support literacy teachers because their specializations are in other teaching subjects other than literacy. The participants also reported that they know that literacy teachers need their support for

state scores in literacy to increase; however, they do not know how to apply their instructional practices to support literacy instruction.

In Theme 3, all of the participants reported that they need PD to support literacy instruction. The content of PD should include strategies on how to apply instructional leadership practices to support literacy teachers. The participants specialize in mathematics and science, and not in literacy. The participants felt unprepared to know how to support literacy teachers in their current roles as principals.

In Theme 4, all of the participants reported that they believe in creating PLC at the school to support literacy instruction because both administrators and literacy teachers can share best practices. The participants also reported that with PLC teachers can learn how to apply their best teaching practices to support students who may improve their proficiency in literacy. PLC could be used to support literacy instruction at the school in order to better apply teaching practices to support students. The participants support the implementation of PLC for literacy teachers to improve their teaching practices by working with literacy coaches and the administrative team. The participants also believe that PLC should be implemented to provide literacy teachers with opportunities to learn how to apply best teaching practices to teach literacy to students in order for students to improve their proficiency in literacy.

Research Question

The research question that guided this study was: What are principals' perceptions of teachers' literacy teaching strategies?

Interpretation of the Findings

Theme 1: Principals Focus on How to Increase Literacy State Scores

The participants reported that they focus on how to increase state scores in all academic subjects. Literacy state scores have been low for at least 2 consecutive academic years. The strategy P1 used to support literacy instruction was to have literacy teachers share teaching strategies with other teachers regarding literacy instruction. P1 struggled to help literacy instruction because sharing teaching literacy strategies with literacy teachers is challenging. According to P2, there are many teaching strategies for literacy instruction and the challenge is that teachers focus on literacy content and not on using effective teaching strategies. P2 struggled to support literacy teachers due to lack of knowing how to support those teachers. P3 reported that for 6 academic years state scores in literacy are low and that teachers are unprepared to teach literacy. The participants reported that literacy teachers do not apply best teaching practices for the state scores in literacy to increase. According to P4, “Teachers are unprepared to teach literacy and state scores in literacy are low.” P4 added, “Teachers do not use effective teaching strategies for literacy state scores to increase.” P4 implied that teachers “lack of training on effective teaching strategies.” P5 stated, “Teachers are not using best teaching practices to increase state scores in literacy.” Although P4 and P5 said that they work with the literacy coaches, “teachers are not using the best practice to teach literacy.” P6 stated, “Teachers are not trained to teach literacy.” P6 implied that literacy teachers do not know how to help students increase proficiency in literacy. P6 felt “unprepared to support literacy instruction” and “literacy teachers do not apply best teaching practices to increase

the state scores in literacy." P7 implied that state scores are low because "teachers do not support the students with deficiencies in reading." P8 said, "Teachers are not using best practices to teach literacy" because "teachers do not know how to teach literacy." P9 gave literacy teachers "teaching resources to teach literacy" in order for "students to learn how to read." Although P9 provided literacy teachers with reading resources, "state scores in literacy continue to be low because teachers do not apply best teaching practices." P9 reported that teachers are not using "small group instruction to support students who have difficulties in reading" implying that "teachers are not using best teaching practices." P10 reported, "Teachers are not using best teaching practices." In conclusion, the participants said that although they focus on how to increase state scores, they believe that literacy teachers are not using best teaching practices in the classroom.

These findings are in line with current literature review. Ado (2016) teacher leadership regarding the potential of teachers in either formal or informal leadership roles to contribute to increasing student outcomes. Ado (2016) found that public schools are faced with increasing pressure to increase accountability measures and teacher evaluations by school principals are linked to student outcomes. Tang, Cheng, and Wong (2016) examined student teachers' learning experiences in initial teacher education in relation to competence to work in schools. Tang et al. (2016) found that competence to work in schools was characterized by student teachers' deep contextualized learning. Tang et al. (2016) suggested that school officials should support initial teacher education through development of their competence to work in schools. Pina et al. (2015) stated that principals' actions influence students' learning. Guerra et al. (2017) examined the

effectiveness of a principal preparation program and concluded that a strategic plan regarding literacy curriculum programs for principal preparation is needed to support literacy teachers.

Wahlstrom and Louis (2008) said that the principal is a key factor in supporting student achievement. Gillett et al. (2017) wrote that principals need to understand how to support teachers' literacy capacity. Lavigne and Chamberlain (2017) wrote that school leaders spent significant time on teacher evaluation. Hackmann and Malin (2016) stated that the principal preparation candidates were poorly prepared. Chambers and Hausman (2014) reported that principals' perceptions of the teachers took different approaches to the administrative support in relation to improving reading instruction for student in Grades K-3. Perrone and Tucker (2019) found that principals are second only to teachers in their impact on student learning.

Theme 2: Principals Struggle to Apply Instructional Leadership Practices

The participants reported that they struggle to apply their instructional leadership practices to support literacy instruction. Specifically, the participants said that they do not know how to apply their instructional practices to support literacy teachers given that their specializations are in other teaching subjects other than literacy. For example, P1 said that literacy affects learning in all content areas" and that "school principals should support literacy teachers." P2 struggled to support literacy teachers. Although P2 stated, "Literacy teachers need administrative support" this principal implied that "teachers need to better support literacy students."

In line with what P1 and P2 reported, P3 stated, “I need to know how to support literacy teachers.” P1, P2, and P3 revealed that they do not know how to apply their instructional practices to support literacy teachers. P1, P2, and P3 also revealed that they specialize in other teaching subjects such as mathematics and science and struggle to support literacy instruction. According to P4, “literacy teachers need the principals’ support because the principal is the instructional leader in the elementary school. P4 clearly stated, “I do not know how to support literacy teachers.” P4 also clearly stated, “I need to know how to apply my specialization in science to support literacy teachers.”

P5 has been concerned about the low literacy state scores and has recognized her own struggles to apply instructional leadership literacy practices. P5 stated, “I need to know how to apply my instructional practices to support literacy instruction at the school.” According to P6, more students enter the elementary school with reading deficiencies. P6 has been very concerned that literacy state scores are low. P6 believed that students with deficits in literacy are struggling in math with word problems and in science with concepts. P6 concluded, “I do not know how to support the literacy needs of students. P7 reported, “I was not prepared to support literacy teachers.”

Although P8 had “literacy background” as a teacher and was also a literacy coach for 2 years, P8 added, “I want to ensure that students improve proficiency in literacy.” P8 stated, “I struggle to support literacy teachers” and “students need to improve proficiency in literacy.” P9 also had “literacy background” as a language teacher. P9 expected “literacy teachers to help students to develop literacy skills.” Like P1-P8, P9 stated, “I struggle to support literacy instruction as a principal.” P10 stated, “I was not prepared to

know how to support literacy teachers" and "I was a science teacher." Like P1-P9, P10 stated, "I struggle to apply instructional leadership practices to better support literacy teachers." Thus, all participants stated that they struggle to support literacy teachers. In their current roles as principals, the participants know that literacy teachers need their support. The participants struggle to support literacy instruction and state scores in literacy have not improved. In conclusion, all of the participants reported that they struggle to apply their instructional leadership practices to support literacy instruction.

Houchens et al. (2018) reported that principals have different perceptions regarding school leadership. Morgan (2018) examined instructional leadership and school improvement practices and reported that the principal should be a transformational leader who creates change in the education system. Campbell and Parker (2016) reported that universities should redesign principal preparation program in order for new school principals to be prepared to lead change. Cantu et al. (2016) also reported that principal preparation programs poorly prepare future principals. Shen et al. (2000) reported that urban principals are highly educated and the working environment has become more constraining due to increasing legislation on education and their leadership roles have become diluted.

Theme 3: Principals Need PD to Support Literacy Instruction

The participants need PD to support literacy instruction because they struggle to apply instructional leadership practices to support literacy teachers. The participants stated that they do not know how to apply their instructional practices to support literacy teachers. The content of PD should include strategies on how to apply instructional

leadership practices to support literacy instruction. P1 stated, “I need PD in order to know how to support literacy teachers.” P2 also stated, “Literacy state scores are low and literacy teachers are asking for guidance on literacy instruction.” P3 stated, “I have no experience in literacy instruction.” P3 also stated, “I have asked senior district administrators for PD on how to support literacy instruction at the school.” The participants stated that they need to know how to support literacy teachers in order for students to increase their proficiency in literacy. P4 stated, “I need PD on literacy instruction to support literacy teachers by improving my instructional leadership practices and by better understanding literacy teachers’ needs.” P4 also stated, “I need PD on how to apply specialization in science to support literacy teachers.”

P5 stated, “I need PD to know how to better apply instructional leadership literacy strategies to support literacy instruction.” P6 reported, “I do not have the skills for the implementation of literacy intervention programs and need PD.” P7 said, “I am not prepared to support literacy teachers.” P8 experienced difficulties in supporting literacy teachers and asked senior district administrators for PD sessions at the school district. P9 reported that “PD could help improve my instructional leadership practices because I do not know how to support literacy teachers.” P10 stated, “I need PD on how to apply instructional leadership practices to better support literacy teachers” and “I need to improve my instructional leadership practices. Thus, all participants reported that PD content on how to support literacy teachers was needed because they struggle to support literacy instruction. The participants struggle to support literacy instruction because they lack literacy instruction skills. Through PD, the participants could benefit by knowing

how to support literacy instruction. The participants acknowledged that students are struggling in literacy. In conclusion, participants need PD because they struggle to apply instructional leadership practices to support literacy instruction and they were not prepared to know how to support literacy teachers in their current roles as principals. All of the participants strive for students to improve state scores in literacy. PD on how to apply instructional leadership practices to support literacy teachers could be beneficial to the participants in their current roles are school principals because they specialize in mathematics and science. PD is needed by the participants in order for them to better apply general instructional leadership practices to literacy instruction.

According to Houck and Novak (2017), found that little has been done to examine the specific knowledge that principals need regarding literacy teaching and learning or how districts can build literacy leadership capacity. Houck and Novak (2017) stated that literacy classroom visits are brief, frequent, informal, and focused visits to classrooms by observers whose purpose is to gather data about teaching practices and engage in collaborative follow-up. Greenleaf, Katz, and Wilson (2018) found varied and complex way that literacy leaders are working to improve outcomes for literacy learners. Bean (2015) stated that the roles have changed and require more focus on leadership. Sharp, Raymond, and Piper (2020) explored literacy leadership and how to address literacy teacher educators. Sharp et al. (2020) encouraged professional organizations to align their resources and services with the current needs of literacy teacher educators and to continually evaluate their effectiveness.

Soto (2015) stated that the traditional concepts of teaching do not train students for the present job market. Desimone and Garet (2015) stated that teachers are motivated to integrate skills learned from training when they were initiated by school leadership. Educators have reported that they benefit most from the training that is practical and that they can immediately incorporate within their lessons (Matherson & Windle, 2017). Aiken et al. (2017) stated that collaboration has shown to be an effective way to improve professional development. With training throughout the school year, educators could better align the curriculum (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) stated that educators greatly benefit when professional developments identify skills targeted toward specific improvements. Administrators must alleviate barriers to training (Badri, Alnuaimi, Mohaidat, Yang, & Al Rashedi, 2016).

Theme 4: Principals Believe in PLC to Support Literacy Instruction

The participants said that creating PLC at the school could support literacy instruction. Via PLC, school principals and literacy teachers could share best teaching practices. With PLC, literacy teachers can learn how to apply their best teaching practices to support students to improve proficiency in literacy. P1 used PLC to have literacy coaches work with literacy teachers. According to P1, PLC is needed at the school in order to know how to support literacy teachers. P1 stated, “Literacy teachers can use PLC with literacy coaches and administrators in order for students to increase their literacy state scores.” P2 said, “PLC curriculum and instructional coaches could help literacy teachers to improve their teaching practices.” P3 reported, “I need to support literacy instruction and assign coaches to literacy teachers aiming to increase literacy state

scores." P3 admitted, "I am trying to support all teachers in all academic subjects." P4 stated, "I think the best way to support literacy teachers is to know their teaching practices and I do support PLC at the school." P4 "encourages literacy teachers to work with literacy coaches for teachers to improve their teaching practices." P5 strives to implement PLC to support literacy teachers. P6 stated, "With PLC literacy teachers may have a better understanding of instructional practices and apply those practices in their teaching." P7 reported, "PLC may prove more beneficial to the teaching staff." P8 has been using PLC to provide support to literacy teachers. P9 supports PLC because curriculum and instructional coaches may work with literacy teachers to help literacy teachers improve their teaching practices. P10 strived to support literacy teachers via PLC. The participants believed in implementing PLC at the school to support literacy instruction for school leaders and literacy coaches to share best practices with literacy teachers.

Elementary school principals create or construct their own new understandings or knowledge through their interaction with literacy teachers (Ultanir, 2012). According to Grissom et al. (2019), principals' performance varied by outcome measures. Squires (2018) stated that training of educators is key in academic achievement. Wahlstrom and Louis (2008) stated shared leadership and professional community. According to Wahlstrom and Louis (2008), principals influence teacher instructional practices. Puzio et al. (2015) stated that school administrators need apply their practices. Bastug and Demirtas (2016) stated that literacy reading interventions help students. Frijters et al. (2017) reported that reading interventions should be done by administrator working with

teachers. Perrone and Tucker (2019) stated, “Principals should guide instructional practices” (para 2).

Limitations of the Study

The first limitation of this study was that a larger sample of elementary school principals could have yielded more robust interview data. The second limitation was that the research site was an urban public school district consisting of 85 elementary campuses of which 82 qualify as a Title I campus meaning the majority of students receive a free or reduced price either breakfast or lunch. The third limitation was that during the interviews, the participants could have been reluctance to provide honest responses. By extending the semistructured face-to-face interviews to K-12 school principals, I may have been able to gain a better understanding of the instructional leadership practices of school principals regarding teachers’ literacy teaching strategies. Also, by extending the semistructured face-to-face interviews to K-12 school principals to other school districts may have yielded different results. Another limitation was that I did not review state scores in literacy that could have provided further insight into the research phenomenon. This research was limited to the geographic boundaries within the school district. This research was also limited to how the participants perceive their understanding of leading literacy instruction. Another limitation was that school district administrators and literacy teachers were not interviewed. The final limitation of the study was the interpretations of the semistructured face-to-face interviews.

Recommendations

Elementary School Principals

The first recommendation for the school principals is to continue to focus on how to increase state scores in all academic subjects. The participants revealed that although they focus on how to increase state scores, literacy teachers are not using best teaching practices in the classroom. The second recommendation for the school principals is to improve their instructional leadership practices to support literacy instruction. The participants said that they do not know how to apply their instructional practices to support literacy teachers given that their specializations are in other teaching subjects other than literacy. The third recommendation is for the school principals to seek PD to learn how to support literacy instruction because they struggle to apply instructional leadership practices to support literacy teachers. The participants stated that they do not know how to apply their instructional practices to support literacy teachers. The content of PD should include strategies on how to apply instructional leadership practices to support literacy instruction. The fourth recommendation is for the school principals to create PLC at the school to support literacy instruction. Via PLC, school principals and literacy teachers could share best teaching practices. With PLC, literacy teachers can learn how to apply their best teaching practices to support students to improve proficiency in literacy.

The recommendation for school district administrators is to help school principals to improve their instructional leadership practices to support literacy instruction. School district administrators could provide the PD resources for school principals to attend PD

to learn how to support literacy instruction by learning about leadership strategies on how to apply instructional leadership practices to support literacy instruction. School district administrators could provide PLC resources to school principals to create PLC at the schools in order to support literacy instruction by expecting school principals to work together with literacy teachers for teachers to improve their teaching practices.

Implications

Positive Social Change

The findings are principals: (a) focus on how to increase literacy state scores, (b) struggle to apply instructional leadership practices, (c) need PD to support literacy instruction, and (d) believe in PLC to support literacy instruction. These findings may support school principals and literacy teachers to help student learning by assisting school principals to better apply their instructional leadership practices. Improvements in the school principals' instructional leadership practices can help to support literacy teachers and student learning. The findings promote positive social change through enhanced school principals' instructional leadership practices that support both literacy teachers and student learning that may contributes to student success by graduating from school.

Recommendations for Practice at the School District

Senior district administrators could provide resources and schedule times for school principals to attend PD in order for school principals to better apply their instructional leadership practices to support literacy teachers. PD planning should be conducted throughout the academic year. Providing PD to school principals could help them improve their instructional leadership practices. Senior district administrators could

also provide resources to create a PLC program within the school district. A PLC program could increase collaboration between school principals and teachers not only in literacy but also in other academic subjects. Through PLC, literacy instruction could be improved.

Recommendations for Further Study

Future scholars, willing to replicate this study, should interview more participants. I interviewed 10 elementary school principals in different locations within one public school district using an interview protocol. Scholars should interview K-12 principals.

Conclusion

The research problem of this study was the lack of understanding of principals' perceptions of teachers' literacy teaching strategies. The purpose of this study was to understand the instructional leadership practices of elementary school principals regarding teachers' literacy teaching strategies. All participants were elementary school principals who had at least 1-year of administrative experience. In Theme 1, the participants revealed that literacy state scores have been low for at least 2 years on the average and that they struggle to provide literacy instruction to literacy teachers. In Theme 2, the participants reported that they know that literacy teachers need their support for state scores in literacy to increase; however, they do not know how to apply their instructional practices to support literacy instruction. In Theme 3, the participants reported that they need PD to support literacy instruction. In Theme 4, the participants believe in creating PLC at the school to support literacy instruction.

A larger sample of elementary school principals could have yielded more robust interview data. By extending the semistructured face-to-face interviews to K-12 school principals to other school districts may have yielded different results. A limitation was that school district administrators and literacy teachers were not interviewed. School principals should continue to focus on how to increase state scores in all academic subjects and should improve their instructional leadership practices to support literacy instruction. PD for school principals can be helpful for principals to know how to support literacy instruction because they struggle to apply instructional leadership practices to support literacy teachers. The content of PD should include strategies on how to apply instructional leadership practices to support literacy instruction. PLC should be created at the school to support literacy instruction. The findings may support school principals and literacy teachers to help student learning by assisting school principals to better apply their instructional leadership practices. Senior district administrators could provide resources for school principals to attend PD and to create a PLC program within the school district.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

The following interview questions were asked of each participant.

1. Tell me your perceptions regarding literacy.
2. Tell me your perceptions regarding teachers teaching literacy.
3. Tell me your perceptions regarding teachers teaching strategies.
4. What are your instructional leadership practices regarding teachers' literacy teaching strategies?
5. What is your understanding of how to apply instructional literacy practices regarding teachers teaching literacy strategies?