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Administrators' and Teachers' Perceptions of Leadership Behaviors and Impacts on Student Outcomes

Kenya Walker
Walden University

Walden University

College of Education

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Kenya Walker

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Review Committee
Dr. Mary Hallums, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty
Dr. Peter Kiriakidis, Committee Member, Education Faculty
Dr. Mary Givens, University Reviewer, Education Faculty

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

Walden University
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Abstract

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Student Outcomes

by

Kenya Walker

M.Ed. in Reading Education, National-Louis University, 2011

B.S. in Elementary Education, National-Louis, University, 2008

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Despite more than 4 decades of school leadership research, a significant knowledge gap remains on how school leaders provide instructional practices to improve student outcomes. The purpose of this qualitative research study was to identify administrators' and teachers' perceptions of school leaders' instructional practices and the key characteristics that influence student outcomes. Weber's model of instructional leadership was the conceptual framework for the descriptive case study. The research questions centered on principals' and teachers' perceptions of how school leaders provide instructional leadership to improve student outcomes. Data collection occurred through interviews and document reviews. Four principals and six teachers were interviewed. The selection criteria included having knowledge of the instructional leadership role, be elementary level working in Title I schools, and demonstrated academic success at their school site, as principals and teachers. Documents included performance evaluations, tools for coaching teachers, leadership and teacher meeting agendas, teacher provided feedback data, tools used for classroom observations and walkthroughs, and school improvement data. Thematic analysis yielded 5 emergent themes related to administrator and teacher leadership behaviors and student outcomes: creating a shared vision, creating a positive climate, cultivating leadership in others, managing data and processes, and improving instruction. The study supports positive social change by providing insight into the progress of principals as they implement instructional leadership practices for the teachers of their respective schools that lead to improved student outcomes.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my parents, my daughter and grandson, sisters and brothers, including my extended sisters and brothers, and the rest of my family and friends who supported me throughout this doctoral journey. I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to my best friend Sherrie Edwards Cobb who always supported and encouraged me. I wish she were still here to celebrate this accomplishment with me. Most of all, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my God for His guidance and steadfast love that enabled me to push through despite the many setbacks and obstacles I encountered.

Additionally, I dedicate this work to every student I have encountered during my tenure as an educator and every educator I have had the privilege to work with. In every lesson I taught as a teacher and every decision I made as an administrator, I gave you my best and tried to be a positive example for each of you. Together, we defied the stereotypes that naysayers placed on us; we overturned stumbling blocks that were placed in our paths and excelled because it was personal. You are forever a part of me, and I am forever a part of you.

Finally, I dedicate this to current and future school leaders everywhere! I hope this study can be a resource to you as we continue to learn and grow in this work for the betterment of the school communities and students we serve. This is a challenging yet rewarding and fulfilling profession we have chosen, and I thank you for saying "Yes" to the calling.

Acknowledgments

All praises and thanks to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, for giving me the strength, courage, perseverance, and fortitude to climb this "mountain" I refer to as the doctoral program. Throughout this rigorous journey, life continued to happen which was filled with the good, bad, and ugly. I thank my friends and colleagues for their continued prayers and encouragement along this journey; your constant words of encouragement and support have offered me the inspiration I needed to complete this goal. I know there were many times that I struggled and complained, but you were always positive and reassuring. Thank you for encouraging me to achieve my dream.

I would like to take the time and acknowledge my committee members, Dr. Mary Hallums and Dr. Peter Kiriakidis, who both played an instrumental part in helping me to accomplish my goal of obtaining a doctoral degree at Walden University. I am extremely blessed to have met both of you, and I am grateful for your wise guidance and feedback. Your support and perseverance have helped make a dream come true.

To every teacher, professor, and administrator who interacted with me, whether positively or negatively, you had a hand in my development as an educator. Finally, I acknowledge Colette Teasley and Bridget Miller for being true examples of great school principals, which has had a very influential impact on my career and life.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

School leadership is a noteworthy factor influencing the success of school improvement efforts. Effective leaders must develop and build upon policies, procedures, and relationships in a manner that is supportive and conducive to the school culture in which they exert influence (Manuel, 2016). How a leader continues to improve and transform an organization will establish the climate for the school and its students. In schools across the United States, individuals have served school populations for decades as building leaders (Manuel, 2016). Campbell and Parker (2016) expanded on the idea of a comprehensive and systemic plan for building principal capacity by adding that such plans should be aligned to national standards and experiences for aspiring principals to be better positioned to become effective principals in their first year (see also Lynch, 2012). Some are placed in leadership positions; others work their way through the system to a building principal role (Rockette, 2016). Each aspiring leader has his or her vision or definition of leadership, and each one wants to enable teachers to assist their students to achieve personal and academic achievement (Johnson, 2016). In addition to supporting teachers' success, the building principal is key to a successful operation, including professional or academic growth and social or emotional development of all constituent groups (Brabham, 2017).

Creating and maintaining effective school leadership practices in schools has been a topic of concern for numerous years. The role of the principal includes instructional leadership comprised of data analysis, facilitation of professional learning for teachers, and teacher evaluation and coaching, as well as more traditional skills related to

communication and management of a school's day-to-day operations (Miller & Martin, 2014; Reid, 2017). From the onset of the 20th century, school leadership has been the subject of extensive studies in which researchers and practitioners have attempted to define leadership (Manuel, 2016). Defining leadership and understanding the roles and responsibilities of a school leader need clarification given the demands and expectations of student achievement. With the demands of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 and student test scores determining the amount of federal funds districts and schools will receive, it is no longer adequate or acceptable for building principals to merely implement hopeful initiatives or reform efforts; their students must now consistently demonstrate improved academic performance in all content areas (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Effective leaders are expected to know not only what to do, but also how, when, and why to do it to support and lead improved student achievement (Manuel, 2016).

As the demands for accountability and higher test scores have continued to mount for U.S. schools, researchers have strongly promoted a focus on instructional leadership as the primary role of a school leader (Brabham, 2017). Brabham (2017) also emphasized the importance of understanding curriculum, instructional practices, and assessments and working effectively with teachers to improve techniques and solve problems related to the responsibilities of a principal. Leadership today requires that leaders begin with their values and inner beliefs and, from those values and beliefs, be able to create a compelling vision to galvanize people to implement the vision that will ultimately influence student achievement (Rockette, 2016). Rockette (2016) also stated that leadership in the

educational industry of the 21st century requires courage. In the school climate, leadership requires the courage to build leadership capacity, work collaboratively toward goals, and sustain academic excellence, even in the face of external threats or political pressures, for the betterment of student achievement (Rockette, 2016).

In other studies of school principals, findings indicated that administrators who rely on building instructional practices and attaining shared goals are effective in increasing student achievement (Boudreaux & Davis, 2019). Building leaders who know instructional practices and who use continuous monitoring to ensure students are receiving effective instruction and experiences maintain a level of accountability that positively affects student achievement (Boudreaux & Davis, 2019). By effectively using information, time, and resources, building leaders have the potential to increase student achievement from outside of the classroom through the way they exert their influence over the school community--teachers, staff, and children (Boudreaux & Davis, 2019). Although considerable research is available on how to affect student achievement through instructional leadership practices, children in Title I settings, schools that receive federal funding because they have a high percentage of children from low-income families continue to fail, underachieve, and drop out of school compared to the overall student population (Hagel, 2014).

I begin Chapter 1 by providing background and contextual information for the study. These sections are followed by statements of the problem and purpose, the research questions, and overviews of the conceptual framework and research design. The assumptions, parameters, limitations, and significance of the study are also considered,

and definitions of key terms are provided. This chapter concludes with a summary and transition to Chapter 2.

Background

School leaders play an important role in student achievement. Instructional leadership has been linked to improved student achievement and improved school reform (Rockette, 2016). As the instructional leader, the principal secures the climate of the school, which is a key determinant of student achievement (Boudreaux & Davis, 2019). Principals lead change within the school by garnering the support of teachers (Manuel, 2016). Instructional leadership provided by principals supports teachers and builds teacher competence which impacts student achievement (Sebastian, Huang, & Allensworth, 2017). Principals who provide instructional leadership to support teacher development improve their own capacity (Sebastian et al., 2017).

A unified definition of effective leadership does not exist in the literature, and distinguishing teachers' and principals' views of effective leadership must be considered within the context of their own school setting (Crimmins-Crocker, 2018). If a school leader's instructional leadership practices are going to be evaluated, the perceptions of teachers must be compared to those of the principal. Studies suggest that instructional leadership effectiveness depends on both the leader's behavior and the match of the teacher's perception to that of the principal's (Crimmins-Crocker, 2018). The way principals perceive their own leadership practices impacts their approach to the work. Similarly, the way teachers view principals' leadership practices may determine the nature of the relationship between teachers and principals (Gentilucci, Denti, &

Guaglianone, 2013). In fact, teachers' perceptions of principals' instructional leadership behaviors can provide a valid source of feedback that principals can use to improve their own instructional leadership effectiveness. Furthermore, principals' and teachers' perceptions of the principals' instructional leadership behaviors contribute directly to student achievement (Crimmins-Crocker, 2018).

Educational leadership in the United States has undergone a far-reaching transformation over the past 20 years due to accountability and education reform efforts (Franklin, 2016). Since the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA) in 1994 and again in 2015 with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the public has demanded that school systems raise their standards for improving the academic performance of all students; however, a gap in practice remains in that little direction has been provided to principals about how to work effectively to address these mandates (Pollitt, 2016).

According to Brabham (2017), principals report feeling overwhelmed, unable to accomplish operational duties and still make time to focus on improving student achievement. Boudreaux and Davis (2019) examined leadership roles of school leaders before and after accountability legislation and found that principals are assuming responsibility for a wider range of leadership areas than ever before: instruction, school culture, management, human resources, strategic development, micropolitics, and external development. Several researchers have linked the leadership effectiveness of schools not only to the leadership structures being employed but also to the individual leadership ability of those in leadership roles (Mason, 2016). The instructionally focused

leader prioritizes their leadership practices and behaviors in ways that allow them to create and implement structures, operations, procedures, and practices that links their responsibilities as building manager to their practices as school instructional leader.

Problem Statement

Despite more than four decades of school leadership research, how leadership systems connect to teaching and learning is still understood (Oladimeji, 2018). Whereas early school leadership research focused on the role of the school principal, recent research has focused on school leadership more broadly to include roles of teachers and other personnel (Fisher, 2017). However, there are few empirical studies regarding how instructional leadership systems are linked to student outcomes (Oladimeji, 2018), and a significant knowledge gap remains on how school leaders provide instructional practices to improve these outcomes (Sebastian et al., 2017). School leaders have heralded the potential value of instructional practices as a means to school improvement particularly in the areas of (a) capacity building, (b) teacher instructional practices, and (c) improvements in student outcomes. School leaders incrementally increased the use and subsequently the value placed on instructional practices over a period of 3 years between 2015 and 2018, according to a district administrator for the school district examined in this study.

Student outcomes in Title I schools are negatively affected when looking specifically at what is known and not known about (a) interactions among instructional leaders and instructional staff; (b) the relationship between instructional leadership and context; and (c) the relationship among instructional leadership, teaching, and learning

(Sebastian et al., 2017). Test scores published on the district website show that more than 20% of students in Grades 3 through 8 scored below grade level on the state's Northwest Evaluation Association Measures of Academic Progress assessment over a period of 3 years between 2015 and 2018. Communications shared at professional learning community (PLC) meetings indicate that school instructional personnel have questions about the instructional support received from school administrators, according to a district administrator. The principal's leadership plays a significant role in creating a successful school environment (Manuel, 2016). School leaders have many more responsibilities and duties now than in previous years. For instance, a principal in the district study site shared with the district administrator their concerns about spending most of their day supervising students during the morning, noon, and afternoon recess, which generally takes 2 hours per day, and investigating student conflicts.

The belief that effective school leadership has a positive influence on student outcomes is not supported by all. Dixon (2015) contended that disparities in student achievement exist because of class and socioeconomic status. School systems will attain their goals of equity in preparing students to function effectively as citizens and productive workers only through a concerted effort to eliminate socioeconomic barriers (Dixon, 2015). However, this is a concept that had been previously challenged by several researchers, including Ronald Edmonds (1979), a former director of the Center for Urban Studies. He challenged the Coleman Report (1966), one of the largest studies regarding equity in education, which claimed that schools had little to do with student achievement. Edmonds argued,

We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us. We already know more than we need in order to do that. Whether or not we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven't so far. (p. 23)

Like Edmonds (1979), many other researchers have asserted that principals are key players in whether schools can make a difference in student achievement. Wilson (2019), for instance, maintained that effective principal leadership results in increased learning outcomes for students. The roles and responsibilities of principals are extensive. In addition to managing the administrative components of schools, principals are required to show leadership in instructional activities. They must be able to identify teaching practices that will impact learning. The research problem concerned the need to identify administrators' and teachers' perceptions of school leaders' instructional practices and the key characteristics and traits that influence student outcomes.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand administrators' and teachers' perceptions of school leaders' instructional practices and the key characteristics and traits that influence student outcomes. The lack of knowledge regarding the usefulness of school leaders' instructional practices to improve student outcomes (Sebastian et al., 2017) served as the key problem for this study. I wanted to help close the gap in the literature by focusing on understanding the relationship of academic progress and instructional leadership with student achievement (Mitchell, Kensler, & Tschannen-Moran, 2015). The conceptual framework for this study was Weber's (1987)

model for instructional leadership. The participants were elementary school leaders and teachers in the third- through eighth-grade level in a U.S. Midwest school district who work in Title I schools and have demonstrated success using the instructional leadership role. I obtained archival student achievement data of the teachers interviewed. I obtained data on characteristics of instructional leadership style from participants' responses to semistructured interview questions. The focus of this research study was on investigating the effective instructional leadership characteristics demonstrated by exemplary principals and teachers.

Research Questions

The instructional leadership framework (Weber, 1987) also relates to the key research questions (RQ) for the study:

RQ1.   How do school leaders provide instructional leadership to improve student outcomes?

RQ2.   What are the administrators' perceptions of the instructional practices of school leaders regarding student outcomes?

RQ3.   What are the teachers' perceptions of the instructional practices of school leaders regarding student outcomes?

Conceptual Framework

Principals are moving to the forefront of educational reform in the role of instructional leadership, both nationally and globally (Rockette, 2016). The reasons triggering this movement include the positive influences the role has on instructional practices and student academic improvement. The conceptual framework for this study is

Weber's (1987) model for instructional leadership. This framework delineates the issues

that principals must address on a daily basis, their responses to these issues, and the

conduct that effective leaders regularly display. This framework for instructional

leadership describes principals' responses to school concerns and the behavior that

effective leaders regularly display to promote an environment that is conducive to

teaching and learning. The model addresses six activities that effective instructional

leaders employ: setting academic goals; organizing the instructional program; hiring,

supervising, and evaluating; protecting instructional time and programs; creating a

climate for learning; and monitoring achievement and evaluating programs (Weber, 1987,

pp. 4-5).

Weber addressed the need for instructional leadership regardless of the school's

organizational structure. Weber (1996) concluded,

> The research suggests that even if an instructional leader were not packaged as a
>
> principal, it would still be necessary to designate such a leader. The leaderless-
>
> team approach to a school's instructional program has powerful appeal, but a
>
> large group of professionals still needs a single point of contact and an active
>
> advocate for teaching and learning. (p.254)

Weber's (1996) point is especially poignant in today's educational arena of shared

leadership and site-based management. Attention to instructional leadership will need to

continue regardless of the hierarchical nature of a school organization. Weber identified

five essential domains of instructional leadership: defining the school's mission,

managing curriculum, and instruction, promoting a positive learning climate, observing and improving instruction, and assessing the instructional program.

Weber described defining the school's mission as a dynamic process of cooperation and reflective thinking to create a mission that is clear and honest. The mission of the school should bind the staff, students, and parents to a common vision. The instructional leader offers the stakeholders the opportunity to discuss values and expectations for the school. Together they work to create a shared mission for the school.

Managing curriculum and instruction must be consistent with the mission of the school (Weber, 1996). The instructional leader's repertoire of instructional practices and classroom supervision offers teachers the needed resources to provide students with opportunities to succeed. The leader helps teachers use current research in best practices and instructional strategies to reach school goals for student performance.

Promoting a positive learning climate comprises the expectations and attitudes of the whole school community. "Indeed, of all the important factors that appear to affect students' learning, perhaps having the greatest influence is the set of beliefs, values, and attitudes that administration, teachers, and students hold about learning" (Weber, 1996, p.263). Leaders promote a positive learning climate by communicating instructional goals, establishing high expectations for performance, establishing an orderly learning environment with clear discipline expectations, and working to increase teacher commitment to the school (Weber, 1996).

Observing and improving instruction starts with the principal establishing trusting and respectful relationships with the school staff. Weber (1996) proposed that

observations are opportunities for professional interactions. These interactions provide professional development opportunities for both the observer and one being observed. In other words, a reciprocal relationship develops where both people involved gaining valuable information for professional growth. Principals enhance the experience by emphasizing research as the foundation for initiating teaching strategies, remediation, and differentiation of the lessons.

Weber's last domain of instructional leadership, assessing the instructional program, is essential for the improvement of the instructional program (Weber, 1996). The instructional leader initiates and contributes to the planning, designing, administering, and analysis of assessments that evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum. This continuous scrutiny of the instructional program enables teachers to effectively meet students' needs through constant revision and refinement.

Weber's model (1996) of instructional leadership incorporates research about shared leadership and empowerment of informal leaders to create a school that underscores the emphasis of academics and student achievement for all students. However, this model has not been empirically tested. It is not clear that if a principal demonstrates behaviors from Weber's model, high levels of student achievement will result. Weber's model is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Weber's (1996) Instructional Leadership Framework

Domains of Instructional Leadership				
Defining the school's mission	Managing curriculum and instruction	Promoting a positive learning climate	Observing and improving instruction	Assessing the instructional program
The instructional leader collaboratively develops a common vision and goals for the school with stakeholders.	The instructional leader monitors classroom practice alignment with the school's mission, provides resources and support in the use of instructional best practices, and models and provides support in t he use of data to drive instruction.	The instructional leader promotes a positive learning climate by communicating goals, establishing expectations, and establishing and orderly learning environment.	The instructional leader observes and improves instruction through the use of classroom observation and professional development opportunities.	The instructional leader contributes to the planning, designing, administering, and analysis of assessments that evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum.

Accordingly, an instructional leader should be a resource provider, an instructional resource, a communicator, and a visible presence (Weber, 1987, p. 2). This framework will relate to the study's approach by supporting the understanding of how school leaders provide instructional leadership to improve student outcomes because it outlines effective leadership practices and activities that effective instructional leaders implement.

Nature of the Study

This research will be guided by a qualitative case study design, which will be focused on an in-depth investigation of the principals' and teachers' perceptions of instructional leadership practices in Title I schools to influence student achievement. Principals and teachers with different roles and experiences will provide the data needed to respond to the RQs. Data will be collected through semistructured interviews and archival data to align with the RQs. Qualitative case study analysis involves the description of data, development of categories, and organization of data around topics, themes, or RQs to serve as a guide for data analysis (Yin, 2017).

Each principal will be interviewed using researcher-created questions. The basis of the questions will be the major categories of instructional leadership identified by Pietsch and Tulowitzi (2017) that include the school's mission, managing instruction, understanding best practices as it relates to teaching pedagogy, analyzing data as it relates to student progress, and creating and maintaining a school climate. I will be asking additional questions to gain a deeper insight into the daily instructional leadership practices of the principals to understand how each principal prioritized their instructional leadership behaviors with the managerial tasks that are also a part of the normal school day. Participant responses will be collected using an interview protocol, audio recording device, and notes. Themes will be identified through thematic analysis.

Definitions

Many terms in this study are often used in educational settings and educational literature. Following are definitions of some educational terms used throughout this study:

Leadership: The ability to organize, support, and monitor a positive learning climate where teaching and learning for all stakeholders occurs. It is "a process whereby an individual influence a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (Hitt & Tucker, 2016, p. 2).

Instructional leadership refers to the management and improvement of teaching and learning, including the nature of the work principals engage in to support such improvement (Hitt & Tucker, 2016).

Leadership development: The method used to enable leaders and potential leaders of organizations to understand and address challenges from a systematic perspective and to create a climate that promotes growth (Talan, Bloom, & Kelton, 2014).

Student achievement: The provision of quality instructional opportunities through which students continuously develop their knowledge and skills, and where high learning standards determine the vision of educational success for all students (Mitchell et al., 2015).

Title I schools: Schools in the U.S. K-12 system that receive federal funding because they have a high percentage of children from low-income families, such that students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches. These funds are meant to ensure

that students in these schools are able to meet Common Core State Standards (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

Assumptions

This research study included several assumptions. The researcher assumed that the participants would be objective and would answer the questionnaire and interview questions openly and honestly. During the processes of administering the interviews, the researcher explained how anonymity and confidentiality would be preserved and that the research participants would be volunteers who could withdraw from the study at any time and without any ramifications. Other assumptions were that the meaning of leadership would be embedded in the participants' experiences and that the research study could be replicated.

Lastly, another assumption for this study was that all participants would answer the interview questions in a true and unbiased manner. Because of the precautions that was taken for participant confidentiality, the participants' anonymity prevented direct persecution from authorities who might have perceived this study as having adverse results. Furthermore, this assumption confirmed that the analysis of data would be accurate and presented to the respondent's feedback, regardless of the unavailability of any documentation. It was also my assumption that the participants would present relevant insight regarding leadership actions and behaviors, which provided beneficial knowledge for the development of current and future school leaders.

Scope and Delimitations

Participants for this study were elementary school principals and teachers

employed in a large urban school district located in the Midwest. The focus of the study

was based on factors that influenced the principals' adoption of the instructional

leadership role, their perception of that role and their influence on student achievement.

The study's conceptual framework encompassed the theory for principals' responses to

school concerns and the behaviors that effective leaders regularly displayed to promote

an environment that was conducive to teaching and learning (Weber, 1987). This was

grounded in the belief that the six activities that effective instructional leaders employed

were: setting academic goals; organizing the instructional program; hiring, supervising,

and evaluating teachers; protecting instructional time and programs; creating a climate

for learning; and monitoring student achievement and evaluating programs (Weber, 1987,

pp. 4-5).

The participants were elementary school principals and teachers in a Midwest

school district who worked in Title I schools and demonstrated success in the

instructional leadership role. Characteristics of the instructional leadership style were

measured through the use of the responses gathered from semistructured interview

questions. Findings were not generalized to the population involved in this study.

Additional research was conducted to verify whether findings from this study could be

generalized. The boundaries of this study were limited to the experiences, knowledge,

behaviors, and actions of the selected elementary school principals and teachers currently

employed in this school district. Resulting conclusions were pertinent to all levels of

school leaders and provided suggestions for instructional leadership development programs.

Limitations

Limitations refer to criteria of which the researcher has no command over. One limitation of this study was the sample size. Although the sample was representative of elementary school principals and teachers, the sample included elementary principals and teachers from only one school district. Participant selection was determined by school district evaluation criteria that deemed these individuals as highly effective, thus I assume these individuals were highly qualified for this study. A second limitation was the use of interviews, which produce self-reported data. Information collected was based on the participants' perceptions of their own and their school leaders' personal leadership actions and behaviors. Data was limited to the honesty of responses. Experiences and interests of participants influenced the quality of data from the interviews. Another limitation related to the possibility of researcher bias. Because study participants are identified as effective school leaders, this may influence the researcher's expectations for evidence of successful leadership characteristics. The final limitation was also related to data availability. Although the leadership roles of both assistant principals and instructional coaches are well recognized in educational research (Hnasko, 2017), our data did not provide measures of those two types of leadership. Despite these limitations, this study revealed important similarities and differences across grade levels in the pathways between instructional leadership practices and student achievement.

Significance

The findings of this study helped with understanding how school leaders provide instructional leadership regarding student outcomes in Title I schools. These findings may be helpful to policymakers, district leaders, principals, administrators, teachers, and other faculty members in schools where student outcomes need improvement. The findings may support school communities in identifying key instructional practices that may influence teacher instructional practices in Title I schools positively, which ultimately affect student outcomes. It may also add to knowledge in the areas of (a) interactions among instructional leaders and instructional staff, (b) the relationship between instructional leadership and context, and (c) the relationship among instructional leadership, teaching, and learning (Sebastian et al., 2017). That in turn, may promote positive social change in affirming that administrators develop a better understanding of how principal leadership plays a key mediating role between instructional leadership and student achievement through the school learning climate. Elementary principals are more focused on instructional leadership traits and seeks to build consensus and build a shared sense of purpose within the school; high school principals focuses more on acquiring and allocating resources and views their staff as part of a complex organization rather than a reflective workgroup (Gedik & Bellibas, 2015). In addition, the principals in the study were able to distinguish their perceived instructional leadership and the perception of their teachers through the framework of Weber's model for instructional leadership.

Because the role of the principal is pivotal to the success of a school, it was important to examine the impact that principals have on teaching and learning (Brabham,

2017). One of the critical attributes of a successful principal is instructional leadership (Brabham, 2017). Successful principals realize that quality instruction necessary to transforming schools occurs in the classroom and not in the principal's office (Niqab, Sharma, Ali, & Mubarik, 2015). The principal's primary role as an instructional leader is to communicate the vision for teaching and learning to the staff and prepare them for the various changes that occur in education through federal and state mandates such as the one associated with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 and, most recently, ESSA (Pollitt, 2016). Although principals serve in various capacities in their schools, their role as an instructional leader is considered among the most important (Niqab et al., 2015).

Summary

Chapter 1 defined and presented a rationale for the problem of administrators' and teachers' perceptions of how school leaders' instructional practices regarding student outcomes. The key terms and guiding questions for the research were also explained. In addition, this section also reviewed the literature related to instructional leadership, instructional practices, and administrators' and teachers' perceptions of school leader's instructional practices. Within the literature review, the theoretical and conceptual frameworks for the study were delineated. The conceptual framework, Weber's model for instructional leadership, was instrumental in determining the research design. The information presented in this section informed Chapter Two: Literature Review. Chapter 2 will provide a literature review of studies relevant to instructional leadership and its relationship to Title I schools and student achievement.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify administrators' and teachers' perceptions of school leaders' instructional practices and the key characteristics and traits that influence student outcomes in Title I schools. I also examined instructional leadership development through the lens of Weber's (1987) instructional leadership model. As teachers' and administrators' accountability for school performance increases, there is a need to review literature regarding the roles, challenges, and leadership that are needed for students to achieve (Theisen, 2016). Instructional leadership has become more elaborate and complex over the past several decades as educational researchers have come to see it as an important factor in improving student achievement (Theisen, 2016). This review of the literature will address administrators' and teachers' perceptions of instructional leadership and its relationship with student achievement.

Although school principals have been charged with overseeing academic achievement based on state and federal mandates, many elementary school principals in Title I schools have focused more on management than on instructional leadership issues (Dixon, 2015). The goal of the literature review is to discuss current research findings on how the instructional leader of a school can impact teaching and learning. As discussed in the literature review and confirmed later in the study's findings, it is apparent that the traditional focus of the principal on management issues has shifted to that of instructional leadership. With this shift in thinking regarding the significance of the principal's role of instructional leadership, along with recent studies articulating the support that the

instructional leader's role lends to teaching and learning (e.g., Hagel, 2014), it is critical that principals, and particularly principals working in Title I schools, embrace the role of the instructional leader in order to oversee effective instruction and student engagement by focusing on priorities that are essential for student achievement.

The need observed in the current literature leads to the problem addressed in this study, which is the lack of knowledge of whether and to what extent administrators' and teachers' perceptions of school leaders' instructional leadership in Title I schools relate with student achievement. Therefore, I surveyed literature to evaluate the history of the problem, its evolution, and the current research. The terms *instructional leadership* and *leadership*, as well as *Title I schools* and *student achievement*, were used to conduct a thorough search of the literature. I examined the overall topic to be investigated and then considered the evolution of the problem and the gap in the literature.

With this study, I hope to contribute to the literature that already exists on the effects of effective instructional practices that influence student achievement in Title I schools. In addition, it was my desire to add to the body of literature that exists on ways that principals can grow as instructional leaders. Opportunities for leadership development for principals do exist in the perceptions of teachers; however, these opportunities could be more prominent and have a more deliberate focus (Brabham, 2017).

Schools depend on leadership, and the role of the principal as a school's leader has been a topic of great interest to educators and the general public (Mason, 2016). The general public are now able to recognize that a principal's leadership style can influence

student outcomes (Mason, 2016). Kearney and Valadez (2015) concluded that leadership experiences have so much value that the hours required for principal training should be increased to provide more time for them to engage with leadership activities in their school locations. Identifying strategies and actions that result in improved academic achievement for students will offer principals the opportunity to emulate behaviors that may result in positive academic success (Mason, 2016). School leadership is a complex task.

The goal of the literature review is to demonstrate what the current research says about administrators' and teachers' perceptions of school leaders' instructional practices and their relationship to student achievement in Title I schools. In Chapter 4, I discuss the findings from the data analysis; the data collected from participant interviews and documents reveal examples of instructional leadership practices that influence students' achievement. In this chapter, I review current scholarly literature on the study problem. The types of leadership experiences found in the literature reviewed included a wide range of hands-on principal leadership experiences, such as leading faculty meetings, holding evaluative conferences with teachers, facilitating professional learning with teachers, and meeting with community groups such as the PTA (Merchant, & Garza, 2015). Last, I will delineate the study's goals and offer a framework for implementation. A plan will be provided for evaluating the study and discussing its implications.

Literature Search Strategy

The libraries I used to access the databases for this study included Walden and EBSCOhost. The research databases I searched included Education Resources

Information Center (ERIC), Education Research Complete, Education: a SAGE with Full-Text, ProQuest Central, SocINDEX with Full-Text, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, Scholar Works, Google Scholar, and Academic Search Complete. I used these resources and the online journal databases of publishers Wiley, Emerald, and Taylor & Francis to find published articles, books, and recent dissertations. The key terms, which were used individually and in combination, included the following: *instructional leadership*, *leadership*, *teacher leadership*, *teacher effectiveness*, *school leadership*, *leadership development*, *building capacity*, *school improvement*, *student achievement*, and *leadership for learning*. I assessed more than 200 peer-reviewed journal articles and relevant books using these terms. I then examined the reference lists of several key studies. Prior to generating the results, the peer-reviewed and journal article functions were selected to ensure that all of the literature generated fit within the parameters of the study rubric.

I performed multiple Boolean searches using the keywords. The search yielded seminal articles and current articles pertaining to discussions of the instructional leadership theory. In addition, I selected articles pertaining to discussions about leadership, school administration, and student performance. By performing multiple searches, I was able to identify more articles regarding instructional leadership. The leadership literature and motivation field of study began in the second half of the 20th century. As such, the inclusion of older articles was useful in understanding how this field of study has developed. The older articles allowed the discussion of various theories associated with the study.

Conceptual Framework

I drew from instructional leadership theory, specifically the instructional leadership model defined by Weber's (1987), in developing the study. Weber's model delineates the issues that principals must address on a daily basis, their responses to these issues, and the conduct that effective leaders regularly display. It is the cornerstone of many leadership programs in advanced education (Weber, 1987) and the model used in this research. It was not always the cornerstone of teacher education programs, and teachers did not always receive the instructional leadership support needed to advance student achievement (Weber, 1987). Nevertheless, this model addresses six activities that effective instructional leaders employ: setting academic goals; organizing the instructional program; hiring, supervising, and evaluating teachers; protecting instructional time and programs; creating a climate for learning; and monitoring achievement and evaluating programs (Weber, 1987).

Although the history of instructional leadership dates back to the early 1980s, many different theories on this concept exist (Edmonds, 1979). For example, Duke (1982) maintained that seven functions of instructional leadership govern teacher and school effectiveness. These functions are staff development, recruitment, instructional support, resource acquisition and allocation, quality control, coordination, and troubleshooting. The first four functions of instructional leadership are directly related to instructional behaviors, whereas the remaining functions are indirectly relevant to instructional activities (Duke, 1982). According to these researchers, an instructional

leader should be a resource provider, an instructional resource, a communicator, and a visible presence.

Weber's framework has been used as a composite model for many K-12 leadership training and certification programs. According to Weber (1987), there are six activities that effective instructional leaders employ. They are setting academic goals; organizing the instructional program; hiring, supervising, and evaluating; protecting instructional time and programs; creating a climate for learning; and monitoring achievement and evaluating programs. Using the lens of Weber's six activities of instructional leaders, I will examine principals' perceptions of their instructional leadership practices and their influence on student achievement.

Setting Academic Goals

Defining school goals is a process of balancing clear academic ideas with the community and internal school needs. Perhaps initially, though, it is a matter of keeping current with those needs. The general goals of the school vary over time. The specific program objectives also may change in response to achievement indicators, such as standardized tests; and individual classroom objectives may shift as teachers conform to program or departmental objectives. The instructional leader is familiar with all levels of instruction in the school, much as a conductor knows the qualities of each instrument in an orchestra. As the conductor, the instructional leader must work with individuals of varying capacities and an established score (composed by the public and by various government agencies). In their jobs, instructional leaders may be less applauded than conductors, but nonetheless, need as much finesse and knowledge.

Organizing the Instructional Program

Closely aligned with making instructional goals for the school, the strategies for bringing the goals to reality depend on allocating staff and organizing curriculum to maximum effect. The instructional organization includes student groupings, teacher organization, leadership teams, and the structure of the curriculum. In effect, the policies affecting the organization of instruction involve matching teachers, students, and courses for the best outcomes. The degree of centralization in leadership seems to have a marked effect on whether schools foster team teaching, for instance, or on how decisions regarding curriculum are made.

Hiring, Supervising, and Evaluating

The hiring and supervising of teachers may be the principal's most important instructional leadership task, according to some researchers. Hiring competent people is vital to the health of an instructional program. Regardless of the amount of time principals spend in supervising teachers, the decisions they make about staffing can save headaches and time for instructional leadership later. Even excellent teachers, however, cannot be self-renewing all the time. They need the opportunity for in-service training and one-to-one supervision by instructional leaders to stimulate them, making the school's instructional goals more than mere abstractions. Formative (that is, ongoing) evaluations allow administrators to improve instruction or change the staff to offer students a better chance to learn. Hiring, supervising, and evaluating, then, are interactive, dynamic concerns of instructional leadership.

Protecting Instructional Time and Programs

To understand how instructional time may affect achievement, we must consider the possible drains in productive academic time. Although the length of the school day and the number of school days per year are prescribed in each state, scheduled time for instruction varies widely, as we have seen, from school to school and from classroom to classroom. Also varying is actual time available for instruction, which is susceptible to a host of unplanned distractions. Teachers use the instructional time for taking attendance, distributing materials entering and leaving the classroom, late starts or early endings, or such non-classroom activities as field trips or special assemblies. There are also drains on instruction time that arises from the way that instruction is planned and delivered. Grouping practices, instructional strategies, and the size or distribution of the class can all determine how time is spent in classrooms. Finally, achievement and instructional time both suffer when students are not in school or find it hard to concentrate because of disciplinary problems in the environment. Truancy and absenteeism can arise from a great variety of societal and personal conditions, ranging from poverty and peer group influence to boredom and poor academic background. Discipline problems often emerge from conflicts, misunderstanding about rules, or the absence of clear boundaries for behaviors.

Creating a Climate for Learning

Although school climate is hard to define or describe, there can be no doubt it is a real factor in motivating teachers and students to hold expectations for themselves and perform at their best academically. Most principals believe that the school's climate

highly influences student achievements and self-concepts. Climate is sometimes referred

to as the school environment, learning climate, social climate, or organizational climate.

In fact, there seem to be many sources of climate in a school: school discipline

procedures, the physical layout of the school building, noise levels, presence (or absence)

of enthusiasm, amount of litter or vandalism, and so forth. Many of the elements in

instructional leadership already covered have a bearing on school climate. The norms,

beliefs, and attitudes that students form about academic learning, come, at least in part,

from the adults in the school. In studies of both effective and ineffective schools, it is

clear that the norms for learning come from the staff's requirements of students: the

amount of time needed for studying, the amount of work assigned, the degree of

independent work students can do, the degree of preparedness students feel about the

work given to them, the appropriate behaviors for school, and the staff's judgments of

whether students are capable of learning. Of all these variables--all of them are

controllable by the adults in the school--the most important is probably the expectations

and judgments about students' abilities to learn.

Monitoring Achievement and Evaluating Programs

It is a primary task of instructional leaders to assess and revise the instructional

programs in schools. As in the case of supervising and evaluating teachers, whole

programs can be reviewed for planning, objectives, success in reaching the objectives,

and particular successes and problems. Ultimately, the success of any educational

program comes down to the performance of the students: Are they reaching the

objectives proposed? Where are they failing and why? More specifically that problems

can be identified, the more successfully the learning problems can be remedied or traced to particular objectives, units, or course activities. For principals and other instructional leaders, the educational literature agrees, the assessment of achievement is not just fine-tuning an existing instructional program. It is an integral part of the instructional planning process.

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Literature Review Related to Key Variables and Concepts

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The Principal as the Instructional Leader

In consideration of the role of the principal as an instructional leader, researchers have approached the topic from several perspectives. The perspectives considered in the following paragraphs include a) instructional leadership as a result of preparation and training; b.) instructional leadership and its effects on student achievement c.) and, the varying perspectives of principals and other stakeholders. Instructional leader activities related to vision and mission creation and teacher evaluation and school operation responsibilities are some of the most highly rated by aspiring principals who are preparing for the labyrinth of experiences principals face (Smith, & Somers, 2016).

Preparation and Training

The development of principals lends to the credibility and benefit of leadership programs for aspiring principals by ensuring the alignment of national, state, and local principal standards and licensure requirements with principal preparation programs (Vogel & Weiler, 2014). Enloe (2016) maintained that improving instructional leadership starts long before the principal evaluation process. He concluded that this process should begin with the principal preparation process. In his research, he critically examined

principal evaluation systems and their inability to transform managerial and operational taskmasters to the instructional leaders that schools need to improve student achievement. Enloe (2016) insists that the new evaluation system along with updates in the principal modification process may be the ticket to the creation and maintenance of instructional leaders.

Researchers suggest that collaboration should be considered as an approach for the preparations of school leadership to face the growing demands for instructional leadership. The systematic review of collaborative principal preparation programs was conducted in three stages—a systematic literature search, assessment of the identified articles, and thematic synthesis of the articles (Kearney & Valadez, 2015). Through this review, the researchers concluded that the studies conducted on the effectiveness ranged in scope in forces (Kearney & Valadez, 2015). For example, the data sources used to inform the studies were contributed through various stakeholders, thus presenting different aspects of the topic (Kearney & Valadez, 2015). Research conducted of aspiring principals who were appropriately paired with an experienced principal was able to find first-year principal positions sooner than those who did not have a mentor during their principal training programs (Thomas, McDonald, Russell, & Hutchinson, 2018).

Notwithstanding, several themes emerged for the review of literature that provides the framework for how principals should prepare for instructional leadership. In one study that examines the effectiveness of principal leadership programs regarding their effectiveness to provide training in instructional leadership (Taylor, Pelletier, Trimble, & Ruiz, 2014), the authors reported that principals who completed a program

had a heightened sense of preparedness. The researchers also noted that the principals'

who completed the programs perceptions of their preparedness were slightly less than

that of the principal supervisors and senior-level administrators (Backor & Gordon,

2015). In addition, instructional leadership was the area in which all of the participants

deemed the principals who completed the program completers to be less prepared (Hayes,

2016). Using action research, researchers determined the effectiveness of the content and

outcomes of university-based leadership programs for school leadership (Hayes, 2016).

After analyzing the data, it was concluded that there is virtually no empirical evidence

that redesigned university programs are making progress towards preparing school

leaders to improve student learning (Hayes, 2016). This begs the question, "How are

principals prepared to be the type of instructional leaders that affect student

achievement?"

Student Achievement

Student achievement measures the learning of students within a classroom

environment and can be evaluated through testing or teacher judgment (Vaux, 2015).

Most commonly schools measure their student achievement levels through mandated

federally legislated and/or state testing (Vaux, 2015). Schools are required to make

adequate progress and gains yearly in specific subjects such as reading, writing, math,

science, and social studies (Vaux, 2015). With increased accountability of schools and

student expectations due to several factors such as Every Student Succeeds Act, federal

and state mandates, state labels, and public demands, principals must lead their schools to

high levels of student achievement (Allen, Grigsby, & Peters, 2015). Standardized

student assessment scores have been associated with research-based methods that build in rigorous standards of achievement (Allen et al., 2015).

Intelligence is only one factor in student academic achievement (Shamaki, 2015). Shamaki (2015) found student achievement to be a result of several direct and indirect variables of the learning environment. Positive environments in school settings have been found to have positive relationships with student performance and achievement (Ali & Siddiqui, 2016). Student achievement is associated indirectly with principal leadership through teacher influences on instructional strategies (Mitchell et al., 2015). Sasscer (2016) stated that principal leadership, directly and indirectly, correlates with student achievement and can diminish school capacity when leadership is ineffective. School climate is useful in studying school characteristics that promote student achievement (Allen et al., 2015). Instructional leadership builds classroom practices and instruction and influences academic emphasis and student achievement (Allen et al., 2015). When teachers possess a repertoire of skills within planning, evaluating, and implementing instruction, higher student achievement will occur (Mitchell et al., 2015).

Over the past several decade's accountability reforms in schools have created pressure on principals to become instructional leaders to improve instructional performances in others to continue to improve student achievement (Sasscer, 2016). Accountability policies such as Race to the Top and No Child Left Behind have required raises in performance standards, expectations for students, teachers, administrators, and schools (Gurley, Anast-May, O'Neal, Lee, & Shores, 2015). As schools are faced with assessment reform due to low student achievement results, principals must take the

initiative to create conditions to improve schools and student achievement (Sasscer, 2016).

This paradigm shift in the culture of student achievement and assessment has emphasized both formative and summative assessment feedback providing information regarding the desired and actual performance levels of students (Seo, McGrane, & Taherbhai, 2015). Assessment information should have descriptive feedback for the teachers as well as the students and parents to adjust teaching strategies and learning efforts (Seo et al., 2015). Today student achievement has been defined as mastery of goals, categorized into multiple areas of mastery aimed to improve individual competence and performance goals (Lee & Bong, 2016). Accomplishing these goals and achievement levels relies on the classroom environment, teacher-student interactions, and teacher-administrator interactions (Lam, Schenke, Conley, Ruzek, & Karabenick, 2015).

Effects on Student Achievement

Prytula, Noonan, and Hellsten (2013) solidified the relationship between instructional leadership and assessment leadership which is needed as principals navigate their schools to success on large-scale assessments. It was concluded that large-scale assessments positively affect the principals in the study because the assessments motivated them to perform the practices of instructional leadership. Kwong and Davis (2015) noted that aspiring principals, especially turn around specialists, must understand the context in which their school exists to have any chance to affect student achievement.

The exploration of the effect of principal supervision on pre-service and novice teachers was the subject of one scholarly article (Shaked & Schechter, 2018). The author

explained how collaboration and trust strengthen the leadership of the principal. The findings as they pertained to the RQ, described supervisory behaviors faculty supervisors utilized when providing support to student teachers, gave several implications on how principals should provide instructional leadership for novice teachers. The responses were coded into four categories: trust building, clinical supervision, motivation, and remediation. The researcher concluded that school officials must re-think the supervision and evaluation process in order to consider the aforementioned categories (Shaked & Schechter, 2018).

In their study investigating the impact of the workload on principals to meet district and state performance standards for schools, Lock and Lummis (2014) sampled 20 school administrators from 12 schools regarding the workload required to complete the many tasks of instructional leadership to include completing external compliance requirements. The data were collected through semistructured interviews. From the interviews, three themes emerged: time and resources, prioritizing the requests for compliance, and the impact on the independence of the school. Unanimously, the participants agreed that too much time and resources were spent meeting to comply with external mandates rather than focusing on instruction and student achievement (Lock & Lummis, 2014).

Instructional Leadership

A focus on the development of school principals' instructional leadership skills is at the forefront of educational reform and research in response to the increased need for accountably in schools in the 21st century (Gurley et al., 2015). School leaders support

teachers to engage students in learning (Moore, Kuofie, Hakim, & Branch, 2016). Ongoing school reform in education in the United States has changed the focus in schools and educational leadership substantially (Gurley et al., 2015). Focusing on the development of instructional leadership skills among principals and teachers has been the course schools have taken regarding school improvement needs (Gurley et al., 2015).

Instructional leadership includes providing resources for instruction, setting goals, managing curriculum, evaluating teachers and lesson plans, providing professional development, using technology, and making data-based decisions (Mitchell et al., 2015). Instructional leadership must be demonstrated by principals by being directly involved in the teaching and learning process (Mitchell et al., 2015). Principals support teachers as the primary source for educational expertise of effective teaching and high expectations (Rozich, 2016). Instructional leadership brings schools to a position to be more successful by generating school targets and motivating stakeholders in regard to instruction to create desired learning conditions for students to achieve those performance goals of the school (Rozich, 2016).

Over the past several decades the concept of leadership has become more elaborate and emerged as more suitable for educational leadership (R. Goddard, Goddard, Kim, & Miller, 2015). Attempts were made in the 1960s to identify factors that contribute to student learning, but the principal as an instructional leader was not a prominent figure in the focus (Gurley et al., 2015). Funding, school environment, and measurements of school outcomes such as standardized test scores were focused on instead (Gurley et al., 2015). In the 1960s additional factors such as family and student background and verbal

skills among teachers were studied as contributors to student success (Gurley et al., 2015). In the 1970s many researchers began to focus on attitudes and values of students contributing to school success or ineffectiveness (Gurley et al., 2015). The late 1970s and 1980s are when multiple studies began to be conducted regarding the role of the school principal and leadership contributing to student learning (Gurley et al., 2015). During the 1980s support for teacher collaborative planning, collegiality, community development, stakeholders, shared expectations and goals, and discipline in the learning environment were variables that experts began to report as playing key roles in determining the climate, culture, and success of schools (Gurley et al., 2015). The definition of instructional leadership was created in the mid-1980s, but still, only a limited number of studies attempted to identify what principals do and do not do that can effectively or ineffectively influence school improvement (Gurley et al., 2015). In the 1990s the Instructional Leadership model emerged within the research of effective schools (R. Goddard, Goddard, Kim, & Miller, 2015).

This model was a contrast to earlier leadership models because it focused on the manners of leadership improving educational outcomes and the principal's role in helping teachers help students to learn (R. Goddard, Goddard, Kim, & Miller, 2015). The school principal's leadership was found to be instrumental in the explanation of school effectiveness and their leadership behaviors are intended to help teachers engage in learning to increase their student learning activities (R. Goddard, Goddard, Kim, & Miller, 2015). Moore et al., (2016) believed in a broader perspective of instructional leadership in which instructional leaders value a blend of staff development, curriculum

development, and supervision. Hallinger and Wang's (2015) conceptualization of instructional leadership identifies leadership in the categories of promoting school climate, defining the school mission, and managing the instructional programs.

Hallinger and other researchers agreed that improving 21st -century schools requires principals to exhibit expertise in instruction and strong instructional leadership skills (Hallinger & Wang, 2015). Since the beginning of the 21st century, researchers have focused on student learning through a variety of leadership models and comprehensive systems of instructional leadership (Gurley et al., 2015). Educational experts have evolved their research substantially over time regarding instructional leadership and the role of principals in supporting teachers and the learning environments in schools (Gurley et al., 2015). Evidence showed principals play a crucial role in establishing and maintaining a learning environment focused on continual improvement through instructional leadership behaviors (Gurley et al., 2015).

Using specific best practices in instructional leadership behaviors helps guide the success and precise outcomes in schools (Gurley et al., 2015). This provides a plan beginning with the student outcomes in mind and making progress through culture/climate, school organization, and structure, learning styles and processes, leadership, teaching strategies, and management (Jones & Shindler, 2016). These researchers stated that essential vision for instructional leadership was to be student-centered with the principals, teachers, and school qualities focusing on student performance and learning (Jones & Shindler, 2016). Problems with instructional leadership began to occur because not all principals in schools are educational and

content experts and many perceive their roles as administrative and supervision, rather than engaging themselves in the classroom environment (Jones & Shindler, 2016).

Hallinger and Wang (2015) argued some research suggests that principals in many cases have less expertise than the teachers they supervise. Criticisms of the instructional leadership model include that it is hierarchical in nature due to top-down relationships between principals and teachers and that not all principals are capable of being curriculum experts in all academic areas (Hallinger & Wang, 2015). Additionally, this may potentially cause a fragmented role of the principal not having the amount of time necessary to effectively engage in the instructional leadership concepts needed without committing to significant additional time (Hallinger & Wang, 2015). The challenge for principals to work as educational stakeholders balancing the conflicting demands of several interest groups encouraged the elaboration and more contemporary versions of instructional leadership (Hallinger & Wang, 2015). With the new conceptualization of instructional leadership focus, instructional leadership has been termed a shared and collaborative instructional model (R. Goddard, Goddard, Kim, & Miller, 2015). Within this model, the principal leads the instructional leaders and is not the only person who is independently responsible for the leadership initiatives within the school (R. Goddard, Goddard, Kim, & Miller, 2015). Some studies have shown neglect to focus on school environmental variables or to control for demographics when evaluating student outcomes and achievement measures (R. Goddard, Goddard, & Kim, 2015). Additional research has found multiple factors that diminish school climate including an

increased number of policies and punitive discipline practices (R. Goddard, Goddard, & Kim, 2015).

More current researchers are agreeing with these works of instructional leadership and the instructional practices of principals and are advocating for teaching and learning to be the core of the leadership efforts that are occurring in schools (Gurley et al., 2015). Their evidence supports the critical notion that principals play important roles in establishing and continuing focus on learning in a school organization through continual instructional leadership behaviors (Gurley et al., 2015). Identification of best practices in instructional leadership characteristics of principals and teacher leaders that enhance classroom instruction must occur for student achievement (Gurley et al., 2015). This requires trained and qualified support and academic staff and efficient instructional leaders (Niqab et al., 2015). Finding quality leadership and motivational levels of teacher leaders can improve the quality of their teaching and student outcomes due to the leadership and school capacity (Niqab et al., 2015).

Instructional leadership correlation with student achievement. There are several models that assess student achievement in classrooms that have both strengths and weaknesses in their analytical approaches. Principals must do more than spend time in classrooms observing lessons to improve teaching and raise student achievement (Hitt & Tucker, 2016). Hitt and Tucker (2016) found a relationship between principals' influence on teacher and student performance occurs when academic efforts are focused and sustained. Instructional leadership behaviors and powers are associated with the conditions of the school and it aims to increase student success (Hitt & Tucker, 2016).

Instructional leaders encourage and direct groups towards achievement goals and influence individuals to achieve the intended objectives (Allen et al., 2015). Instructional leadership focuses schools on student learning and improving student achievement which encourages school leaders to focus on the teaching and learning to do so (Allen et al., 2015).

Perceptions of principal influences. Teachers' perceptions of their school principal and the principal's leadership style can be related with school climate (Allen et al., 2015). Principals can increase teachers' perceptions of school climate by creating a collaborative decision-making environment and attempting to support teachers in the removal of obstacles that limit their focus on instruction (Allen et al., 2015). Teachers' classroom effectiveness improves as their perceptions of leadership improve (Allen et al., 2015). Principals that wish to increase the positivity of their school climate should focus on providing teachers with the resources and support necessary to lead to effective teaching and instruction (Allen et al., 2015).

Principals must show their teachers they are willing to be flexible and take risks while giving up some control by trusting teachers to be leaders (Aspen Institute, 2014). When teachers are supported and given autonomy to lead they feel empowered to make the right decisions on their own with the guidance and support of their administration (Aspen Institute, 2014). When strong leadership supports the ongoing professional development of teachers to improve instruction for continuous learning, students thrive in schools (Allen et al., 2015).

Effects of teacher leaders on student achievement. Teacher leaders are the teachers who accept responsibility for student learning (Broin & New, 2015). Recent research has revealed a link between teacher leadership and student achievement. New forms of teacher leadership will help to transform students' learning experiences and teachers' work experiences (Moran & Larwin, 2017). Administrators and teachers alike are struggling to define teacher leadership and put a definite face on the roles these teachers play, but the data show these leaders make a difference in schools and with the children they serve (Broin & New, 2015). School administrators are well aware that teachers matter for student achievement. Teacher leaders aid student learning by creating new and innovative approaches with students, such as student-led conferencing or counseling at-risk youngsters students (Hitt & Tucker, 2016). The utilization of such innovations illustrates how teacher leaders place their students' learning as their primary goal and work within their own classrooms to improve student achievement. Student achievement is and should be one of the most important practices of teacher leadership (Broin & New, 2015). Student learning is an area where teacher leaders can really make a difference for a school.

Title I Schools and Student Achievement

Title I schools are schools in the K-12 system that receive federal funding because they have a high percentage of children from low-income families, such that students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches. These funds are meant to ensure that students in these schools are able to meet CCSS (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The achievement gap that is commonly referred to in education in the United States is the

difference in state test scores between different subgroups of students. These subgroups can be students from low-income families versus higher-income families, students who are native English speakers versus English as a second language speakers, or students whose racial, ethnic, and/or cultural backgrounds are not aligned with the dominant school culture versus those whose racial, ethnic, or cultural backgrounds are aligned with the dominant school culture. It can also refer to a gender gap, but this is less common (Rumbaut, 2015).

According to the American Psychological Association's (APA) fact sheet, the socioeconomic status (SES) of a school's students has a relationship with school achievement, including fewer and less qualified teachers and lower academic achievement in schools that serve majority low-SES populations (Murray & Yuhaniak, 2017). The literature is clear on the relationship between lower SES and student achievement, including the areas of language skill acquisition, letter recognition, and phonological awareness. Students with lower SES are at greater risk for a variety of reading difficulties (Murray & Yuhaniak, 2017). This effect of lower SES relating to lower achievement holds true for math skills as well (Murray & Yuhaniak, 2017). On average, students from low-SES backgrounds are behind by multiple grade levels entering high school, learn less while they are in high school, and are more likely to drop out (NCES, 2015). Of course, not all Title I schools have higher than the national average numbers of students of color or higher numbers of English learners, but such students are more likely than their white, native-English-speaking counterparts to attend Title I schools. Further, because the majority of teachers (82%) and principals (80%) are White,

students of color are unlikely to be taught or led by a person with whom they have a demographic background in common, whereas white students can take advantage of the shared social capital (NCES, 2015). This is important because students have been shown to learn more from teachers of the same race (Murray & Yuhaniak, 2017).

Though this problem seems overwhelming, it is an ever-present truth that will not be affected without continual, purposeful actions on the part of professional educators and their supporters. One promising strategy for improving student achievement in Title I schools may be to shift the focus from following trends in education, the pendulum swing, to grounding school leadership ideology and work in effective practices research.

Effective Title I School Leadership Practices

In the literature, schools that serve low-income populations in Title I environments are described as urban schools, high-poverty schools, and Title I schools (Murray & Yuhaniak, 2017). A recent study of these programs indicated that principals were acutely aware of the problems faced in low performing, high minority schools, but they were not able to articulate or understand why the problems existed that challenged the schools (Duke, 2014). Duke (2014) noted that aspiring principals, especially turn around specialists, must understand the context in which the school exists to have any chance to effect change in the school. After reviewing studies in this area, the practices noted as consistently and significantly contributing to student achievement were grouped into four categories: organization and instruction, nurturing environment, meeting EL needs, and culturally responsive behaviors (Duke, 2014).

Organization and instruction. Not surprisingly, studies documenting practices of school leaders in effective Title I schools do include the leadership practices outlined in the research of effective school leadership. For example, practices like outstanding leadership, effective instructional and organizational arrangements, monitoring of student progress, and high operational expectations and requirements for all students have already been established as features of instructional leadership (Mitchell et al., 2015). As we narrow the lens to only Title I schools, it is important to reiterate that these leadership approaches remain pertinent to student achievement. In studies of principals in high achieving Title I schools, three practices were found to be related to student achievement: (a) using directive leadership, (b) holding high expectations for students and holding students and teachers accountable, and (c) using goal-focused or data-driven instruction (Mitchell et al., 2015).

Nurturing environment. School leader practices corresponding to findings of positive school climate, trust, or relationships are included in this section under the umbrella term nurturing environment. This term is inclusive of the circumstances for both staff and students as facilitated by the school leader. Jain, Cohen, Huang, Hanson, and Austin (2015) found that schools serving students in low performing Title I schools had negative socio-emotional climates. The schools in their study often had majority Hispanic and/or Black student populations and were lower performing. The features of the negative climate included the relationships between staff and students, the achievement expectations for students by staff, and how welcome and safe students felt at the school. With each of the following studies, the school leader was the focus of the study, and a

positive school climate or a related feature was found to be the practice of an effective leader. Sasscer (2016) found strong school leaders noticed the tone of the room. They believed that there should be a sense of being student-centered with items being made by students. There was an expectation of orderliness but not rigidity. School climate has also been found to have an indirect relationship to school effectiveness because the actions of the school principal influenced school climate and the school climate was related to school effectiveness (Hallinger & Wang, 2015).

Interpersonal relationships established by leadership in the Title I school setting have been shown to relate with student achievement. The *Title I Achieving Schools Study* conducted in the Los Angeles United School District and noted that school leaders and teachers in higher-performing schools were more likely to have positive relationships and that school leaders were more likely to encourage collaboration (Jain et al., 2015). This was less likely to be a part of the practice at lower-performing schools. Practices that ensure a nurturing environment are included in the description of leadership for social justice beliefs and practices presented here because, as outlined in the theory of caring-centered multicultural education, the trust and relationships established with students in Title I schools is foundational, even prerequisite, to academic success (Jain et al., 2015). Educators working in these environments, including school leaders, need to "understand that relationships are at the heart of teaching" (Jain et al., 2015).

Meeting EL needs. Practices that meet the needs of EL students are included in the list of what is considered leadership in Title I schools and practices presented here for two reasons. First, this population is growing in the United States and so presents a

greater challenge to educators across the country, not just in states like California and Texas with historically large EL populations (Achinstein, Curry, & Ogawa, 2015). Second, EL students are some of the most significantly underserved students in the nation, partly because their needs are not confined to the classroom, curriculum, or school programs. To be able to serve students learning English, school leaders and teachers must also consider the needs of the family and the community (Achinstein et al., 2015).

In a case study of two successful EL programs, the following features were found to contribute to students' success. Staff development was a key component in both schools, including not only educating teachers about specific EL teaching strategies but also community building and collaboration. State and local Title I funds were considered when revamping the approach to class size and teacher accessibility for students. Eliminating pull out programs and reducing class sizes allowed EL teachers and general education teachers to work together to best serve students, leading to higher achievement. By changing their approach to EL education, relationships within the schools and between the families and the schools were greatly improved (Jain et al., 2015).

Culturally responsive practices. An area related to addressing the needs of EL students is the use of culturally responsive practices. These are defined here as "practices that incorporate the history, values, and cultural knowledge of students' home communities in the school curriculum to develop a critical consciousness among students and faculty to challenge inequalities in the larger society and empower parents from diverse communities" (Ylimaki, Brunderman, Bennett, & Dugan, 2014, p. 32). While this is a popular topic in the literature, there is less evidence that these practices are related to

student achievement than any of the others reviewed here. Interestingly, studies that investigate strong culturally responsive leadership practices do not necessarily even seek out high performing schools as exemplars (Rumbaut, 2015). An example of a study that does link these two is reviewed here with attention to the authors' emphasis on the key role that culturally responsive practices played in an intervention for Title I principals in Arizona (Ylimaki et al., 2014).

Culturally responsive behaviors and beliefs are a popular part of the instructional leadership conversation. Often, doing things like "creating an environment" or "providing ongoing meaningful contributions" are subject to the judgments of the stakeholders involved (La Salle, Zabek, & Meyers, 2016). That is, parents, students, and community members are ultimately the voices that can truly say if these features are meaningful for them. Further, the self-analysis of a school leader that must be done to analyze the performance of items like these is a deep and ongoing process, one that is not easily quantified. Nevertheless, culturally responsive or proficient behaviors and beliefs are included in the list of what is considered leadership beliefs and practices presented here because they form the crux of soft skills that leaders need to employ to honor the families and communities with whom they work in Title I schools.

Summary and Conclusions

The review of literature covered two main topics: instructional leadership and the activities that instructional leaders employ that have a positive impact on student achievement in Title I schools. Instructional leadership was further broken down into the role of the principal, instructional leader, teacher leadership, and instructional coaching.

The role of the principal included information on the increasing demands on the position over time. These demands include shaping the culture and climate of the building, the school improvement process, and instructional leadership in both teacher growth and growth in student achievement in Title I schools.

Next, instructional leadership of the principal was examined as to its own entity, as well as through the lenses of student achievement, and instructional coaching. The principal's role moves into the orchestration of multiple positions and resources to assist in the development of improved instructional practices. Structures for these types of instructional leadership may vary from school to school with the common element of carefully coordinated leadership from the principal. An overview of the six activities were provided to assist in the understanding of the instructional system that forms the basis for this research in schools. The six activities form a framework for meeting the needs of students in relevant and meaningful ways. This study linked the practice of instructional leadership with the improvement of student achievement in Title 1 schools.

This literature review has established the existence of three gaps in the literature. First, instructional leadership practices in Title I schools lack empirical support. Second, there is no empirically grounded description of school leadership for Title I schools. Third, the differences between the beliefs and practices of high performing and low performing school leaders of Title I schools are not well understood. Ultimately the argument was made that the use of models for practicing instructional leadership in Title I schools is limited and a better approach is to ground school leadership ineffective

practices research, both generally effective school leadership practices and effective Title

I school leadership practices and that the relationship to student achievement.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand administrators' and teachers' perceptions of school leaders' instructional practices and the key characteristics and traits that influence student outcomes in Title I schools. I examined instructional leadership development through the lens of Weber's (1987) instructional leadership model. In conducting this study, I sought to address the gap in practice concerning the educational community's need for a greater understanding of the specific actions, behaviors, and characteristics of effective school leaders that influence on student achievement (Mason, 2016).

The building principal is key to efficient operations, academic achievement, professional development for staff, and the emotional and social development of multiple groups (Hagel, 2014). Yet, not all building principals possess the same skill level and ability to create a successful educational environment, as evidenced by the variety of levels of academic success experienced between schools with similar demographics (Hagel, 2014). In this study, I investigated school principals' leadership practices and related self-perceptions. Understanding these practices may help to increase student achievement. In addition, I explored the ways in which principals may strengthen weak leadership skills to positively affect student learning (Hagel, 2014).

In this chapter, I discuss the methodology that was used in the study along with the rationale for its use. Included in this description of the study are the RQs, the population and setting, instrumentation, and interview protocol selected for data

collection and analysis. This chapter additionally contains information on reliability and validity and the measures for ensuring the ethical protection of participants, a description of the researcher's role, and the data analysis approach.

Research Design and Rationale

In addition to learning about the key characteristics and traits of school leaders and teachers who lead effective schools and influence student achievement conceptions, I sought to understand principals' instructional leadership practices. I further examined administrators' and teachers' perceptions of school leaders' instructional leadership practices regarding student outcomes. I addressed the following RQs in this study:

RQ1. How do school leaders provide instructional leadership to improve student outcomes?

RQ2. What are the administrators' perceptions of the instructional practices of school leaders regarding student outcomes?

RQ3. What are the teachers' perceptions of the instructional practices of school leaders regarding student outcomes?

Central Concept and Phenomenon

I used a descriptive case study design for this study. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2016), descriptive research designs may be correlational, survey, observational, or developmental. The strength of descriptive case studies is that these studies are used to describe a case, process, or event in its natural setting. According to Yin (2017), a case study is a commonly used research method in the field of education. Yin also stated that the goal of descriptive research is to answer "what" or "how" questions. The purpose of

this descriptive case study was to identify the key characteristics and traits of school leaders and the perceptions of administrators and teachers who lead effective schools and influence student achievement. This information may affect student achievement by assisting school leaders in recognizing and strengthening the deficiencies in their instructional leadership practices.

I conducted a descriptive case study because this design allowed me to use a small sample size in the natural environment to represent an otherwise large population of school principals and teachers. Data were collected through semistructured interviews, the questions for which were aligned with the RQs. Principals and teachers with different experiences provided the data needed to respond to the RQs. Qualitative case study analysis involves the description of data, development of categories, and organization of data around topics, themes, or RQs to serve as a guide for data analysis (Yin, 2017). Data were analyzed using RQ analysis to discover trends, themes, and patterns.

I designed this study to inform and guide district-level stakeholders in the development of behaviors and strategies that enable principals of Title I schools to perform the instructional leadership role effectively. In so doing, the study directly addresses the problem, present in many Title 1 schools (Yazan, 2015), of principals not having the necessary infrastructure in place to allow them to assume the instructional leadership role—a role educators and researchers have deemed instrumental to students' academic and social success (Yazan, 2015). The data collected through semistructured interviews and documents reveal activities that participants view as promoting their growth as instructional leaders. The findings also clarify participants' perception of

leadership development as well as what opportunities exist to measure and enhance the leadership development of school leaders. As the researcher, I chose to use interviews because they can articulate the true stories of participants--principals and teachers in Title I schools—based on their everyday professional experiences.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher has the duty and responsibility not to mislead participants as to the nature of the research (Yazan, 2015). I spoke personally to all participants prior to the study and during the interviews, I was available to answer concerns or questions. I had the responsibility to conduct the study in a professional manner, honor the integrity of the educational environment, and emphasize the voluntary nature of the study as well as the separation between this study and their employment. I was also responsible for data collection and analysis.

As the researcher, I was responsible for maintaining a professional relationship at all times with participants throughout the study. I had a professional relationship with the principals because of the leadership practices that we have in common. This relationship was based on mutual respect and shared goals for the success of students. That level of understanding provided a more comfortable environment for oral interviews.

I designed this qualitative case study to address the RQs in accordance with the methodology outlined in the previous paragraphs in this section. I was responsible for collecting and transferring data from the school sites to my home office for assessment and analysis, in addition to protecting the rights of the participants and maintaining confidentiality. The data provided by the participants were reported without bias because

the focus of the research is the perception of the participants not of other stakeholders (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Methodology

Participant Selection

A typical sampling technique is selected because it reflects the average person, situation, or instance (Yazan, 2015). Therefore, my RQs influenced my selection of participants. The selection criteria for participants were that individually, they have knowledge of the instructional leadership role, have experience working in Title I schools, have demonstrated success at their school site using the instructional leadership role, and have been under the leadership of principals who met this criterion (Yazan, 2015). I also targeted principals and teachers at the elementary level. I used the district-study-site rating standard, the School Quality Rating Policy (SQRP), to determine which principals and teachers have demonstrated academic success at their respective school sites.

The setting for this study was an urban school district. Of the K–8 elementary schools; there will be principal and teacher participants from various elementary schools in the urban community school district. District, teacher, and principal names and e-mail addresses were obtained from the schools through formal procedures and with the cooperation of the school district. Each teacher was sent an e-mail with a description of the study and requesting participation. The study was limited to teachers and principals in a K–8 setting because I believe their instructional leadership practices and educational interests, as well as the educational atmosphere of their schools, differ from that of

preschool and secondary school personnel sufficiently to warrant studying them as a distinct group. Actual participation was voluntary.

E-mails was sent to participants informing them of the nature and purpose of the study. Their right to anonymity were respected and the data were treated with confidentiality so that no individual teacher, principal, or school were identifiable (Yazan, 2015). The procedures required by the Institutional Review Boards for both Walden University and the school district were strictly followed. Administrators and teachers comprised the optimal number selected for my research study. Purposeful sampling for all participants were based on the knowledge each participant had on the subject of the instructional leadership role, as well as their experience of working in a Title I school. With the number of participants selected, I accounted for time and scheduling for each individual interview.

Instrumentation and Materials

This study was conducted to develop a deeper understanding and insight between the perceived and actual leadership practices of school leaders and their potential to increase student achievement. The data sources used included semistructured interviews and documents retrieved. The first data source for this study was derived from semistructured interviews with principals and teachers. There was a common protocol for each interview because it could be a powerful organizational tool for the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The second data source came from collecting documents, texts, and other artifacts as valuable sources of qualitative data for this study (Yazan, 2015).

This included reflections, performance evaluations, tools for coaching teachers, meeting agendas, or school improvement data.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation and Data Collection

Personal interviews were collected in order to inform the findings. Before collecting data, I consulted the district superintendent to request permission to conduct my research and asked which schools in the district would be the best study site. After recruiting participants, I held a prestudy informational meeting during which I described the study, explained the time commitment required, and advised participants of their rights as research subjects. At the end of this informational meeting, I will scheduled individual interviews with each participant at a time convenient for them. These individual interviews will last between 30 to 45 minutes.

Interviews. The first stage of data collection will involve individual, semistructured interviews. In qualitative investigations, interviewing is generally less structured than those included in quantitative studies (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The questions are mostly open-ended; however, questions pertaining to demographics were included as well (Yazan, 2015). I was seeking to investigate the perception of instructional leadership practices of principals and teachers and use semistructured interviewing as a method of data collection. My semistructured approach included a mix of interview questions that were more and less-structured; all questions had flexibility, although specific data was required of each respondent (Yazan, 2015). The greater part of the interview was guided by the list of questions I developed. My guiding RQs were

instrumental in helping me frame the process for the investigation of this descriptive case study (Yazan, 2015).

According to Weber (1987), there were six activities that effective instructional leaders employ. They are setting academic goals; organizing the instructional program; hiring, supervising, and evaluating; protecting instructional time and programs; creating a climate for learning; and monitoring achievement and evaluating programs. The semistructured interview instrument will featured at least one question about each of the six activities delineated in Weber's model. In order to generate the data for the interview, I interviewed the participants virtually due to the pandemic crisis. I audio recorded the interviews as well as made written notes regarding any nonverbal communication of the respondents. Secondly, in the discussion, time was spent focusing on how the instructional practices of principals increased student achievement. A time estimate of 30-45 minutes were given for each interview.

Documents and texts. Documents, texts, pictures or photographs, and artifacts can also be valuable sources of qualitative data (Yazan, 2015). With the permission of the participants and the site supervisors, I collected documents such as meeting agendas and handouts to be used as data to inform the study. These items were made available to me by the participants during the interviews. Any document collected during the data collection phase was used to inform descriptive data for the research. I employed measures to maintain anonymity and confidentiality regarding these documents as well. These documents were not included in the research document or the appendix without the consent of the participants. If the documents were included, any identifying information

was blacked out using a permanent black marker or replaced with a pseudonym when applicable to ensure anonymity. To ensure confidentiality, at no time were the names of the participants be released or associated with their pseudonym.

Data Analysis Plan

The data analysis process involved giving meaning to data by preparing it for analyses, conducting different analyses, and moving deeper and deeper into understanding the data, [for the purpose of] representing the data, and making an interpretation of the larger meaning of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2017). As discussed earlier, gathering information for my study consisted of one-on-one interviews. My intent was to allow for multiple perspectives, thus giving both breadth and depth concerning the guiding RQ being explored (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Supporting the analysis process, I used throughout the study, I engaged in continual reflection regarding the data about which I asked myself analytic questions, accompanied by the writing of memos (Creswell & Poth, 2017). This was in concurrence with the ongoing gathering and interpretation of data, and in turn, the writing of reports (Creswell & Poth, 2017). It was recommended that qualitative data analysis be done simultaneously with data collection. Analyzing data while it is being collected will lead to more enlightening and timesaving study (Theron, 2015). It was my intention to begin the analytical process while the data were being collected.

The purpose of this study was to use qualitative methods to determine both self-perceived leadership practices and actually practiced leadership behaviors that may affect student achievement. As such, data analysis included three forms of deconstruction and

review, as described by (Yazan, 2015). The procedures included categorical aggregation, during which I looked for groupings of examples within the data with the hope that relevant themes would surface (Yazan, 2015). The second form of analysis included establishing patterns and seeking connections between categories, which also allowed differences to be noted (Yazan, 2015)**.** Finally, natural generalizations were drawn from the data, creating generalizations that could be learned and applied to a population of cases (Yazan, 2015).

In order to analyze and interpret the data, I also drew from Creswell and Poth's (2017) six steps in analyzing and interpreting qualitative data. The first step was to organize the data. In accordance with this step, I created file folders for the physical data and computer files for the electronic data. The data yielded from interviews and were organized according to the participant, site, and date. Secondly, the text or words collected through interviews were transcribed. Next, I conducted an analysis of the qualitative data by reading the transcription of the data, illuminating keywords, and dividing it into sections according to the occurrence of those words. Through an emergent coding process, I was able to designate terms to describe the ideas, concepts, actions, and relationships that manifested from the transcribed data. Once the emergent codes were designated, I began the coding process. Through coding, I was able to identify the themes to be used in the research report and then organize the findings accordingly (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

In my study, I supported my credibility by using several avenues: (a) member checking, the process of obtaining participant feedback on the draft of the study as it pertained to the participants, for the purpose of verification of my reflections of their perspectives; (b) support from friends and colleagues, by asking them to help me develop codes, apply my codes, or interpret field notes to widen my perceptions; and (c) feedback from Walden University committee members, the auditors of my study (Smith, 2018). In addition to those avenues, I continued to reference my guiding RQs and my theoretical framework to ensure that the focus of my study was being addressed accordingly (Yazan, 2015). The factor of time was also a source to be used. In this study, the time I spent on interviewing, as well as time spent building relationships with participants, helped contribute to the trustworthiness of the data (Smith, 2018)**.** Maintaining a thorough record keeping of recorded transcripts and organized files of data will similarly helped support the credibility of the study (Smith, 2018).

Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity were important to the integrity and accuracy of the research. Reliability refers to the degree to which an instrument measures the same way each time it is used under the same condition with the same subjects (Smit, 2018). In addition, reliability refers to the consistency of findings obtained by the study over time (Smit, 2018). Validity shows the strength of the conclusions. The trustworthiness of a study can be strengthened by a process that is emphasized by validation (Smit, 2018).

Multiple strategies may be used to strengthen the external and internal reliability and validity of case study research (Yazan, 2015). External validity is described as the ability to transfer the findings of one study to other similar situations, and internal validity as to how aligned the findings are with reality (Smit, 2018). In order to ensure the validation of qualitative research, the researcher must take into consideration the accuracy of the study (Smit, 2018).

Ethical Procedures

The checklist provided by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, (2014) helped me address ethical issues for the methods required in this study. The checklist also includes consideration of the worthiness or contribution of the project, competence as a researcher and interviewer, the informed consent and disclosure of the purpose of the study, and the benefits to both the participants and future researchers. The checklist also addresses avoidance of harm and risk to participants, trust between the researcher and participants, privacy and confidentiality, and intervention and advocacy. Finally, Miles et al. (2014) provide guidelines that assisted me with research integrity and the quality, ownership, and use of data; conclusions; and the use and misuse of results.

IRB documents. I followed the IRB protocol by utilizing proper information and consent forms. To protect the privacy and maintain the confidentiality of the participants and the school, I used pseudonyms for all participants and a pseudonym to serve as means to identify the school throughout the study and in the report.

Ethical concerns. I took steps to avoid encountering any ethical problems during the recruitment process and interaction with faculty members of the school participating

in the study. The consent and confidentiality form helped me to maintain integrity throughout the study and respect the individual autonomy and fundamental principle of ethics in qualitative research. In addition to using pseudonyms to fulfill the ethical responsibility of confidentiality of the participants involved in a research study, Miles et al. (2014), noted the importance of using appropriate measures to guard and protect the participants' information. These actions included the following:

- Guarding and protecting participants' information from unauthorized access, use, disclosure, modification, loss, or theft by making sure that data is secure and inaccessible to others.

- Assuring that the participants' information is safe on my personal computer that requires a username and password for login. I will also store the participants' information on a flash drive.

- Storing written documentation and transcriptions in a locked cabinet safe in my home office.

Treatment of data. I kept all data obtained from each participant in this study confidential. The data will be securely stored for 5 years and then destroyed. As previously discussed, there are no professional or personal conflicts of interest or power differentials. Miles et al. (2014) advised qualitative researchers to secure data by backing up data regularly and storing all transcribed files in several locations. I kept three electronic copies of the data in two different locations to ensure that the data is available if the originals are lost or corrupted.

Summary

This chapter summarizes a description of the methodology that was used to examine if there is a relationship between a school principal's perceived leadership practices and the actually practiced leadership behaviors, which may affect student achievement in Title I schools. Regarding the methodology, I conducted individual interviews using open-ended questions, thus allowing for flexibility of answers for the purpose of gaining in-depth responses (Yazan, 2015). The population selected for this study included building principals and teachers at Title I schools. Also discussed in this chapter are the research design and approach, the participants, the instrument used to collect the data, the data collection procedures, and the data analysis that were used to address the goal of this study. Chapter 4 will include the results of the study.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to understand administrators' and teachers'

perceptions of school leaders' instructional practices and the key characteristics and traits

that influence student outcomes in Title I elementary schools. I also hoped to identify the

specific instructional leadership behaviors perceived by successful elementary school

principals and the teachers they lead to have a positive effect on student outcomes and

school climate in Title I schools. In doing so, I wanted to add to the considerable body of

research that describes the measurable effect that school leaders have on student

achievement (Dixon, 2015). In this chapter, I present the findings of the data collected for

this case study. A review of the RQs and a summary of the research methods, including a

brief description of the participants and an overview of the procedures for collecting,

recording, and analyzing the data, follow. The chapter also includes a synthesis of the key

findings and evidence of trustworthiness.

Through interviews and the collection of artifacts, I examined the perceptions and

practices of principals and teachers from an urban district in the Midwest region of the

United States. Findings from this study illustrate the principals' and teachers' perceptions

of the implementation of instructional leadership and student achievement in Title I

elementary schools. I sought to answer three RQs in this qualitative case study:

RQ1: How do school leaders provide instructional leadership to improve student

outcomes?

RQ2: What are the administrators' perceptions of the instructional practices of

school leaders regarding student outcomes?

RQ3: What are the teacher's perceptions of the instructional practices of school leaders regarding student outcomes?

This study may help to bridge the gap in the literature as very little is known about why, when, and how principals implement instructional leadership practices that directly or indirectly affect student growth (Mitchell et al., 2015). The results of this study may help to identify leadership practices used in these schools that may positively affect student achievement. I hope that the results from this study will illustrate to school leaders' effective ways to increase student achievement for similar populations with high-poverty levels.

Setting

The setting for this study was a Midwest urban school district. I interviewed each research participant virtually due to the status of the pandemic. The participants were elementary school principals and teachers who work in Title I schools in the district. They have demonstrated success in an instructional leadership role based on a review of trend data available on the district website, the Progress and School Climate components of the School Quality Rating Policy (SQRP) administered by the district, and other school artifacts. I obtained archival student achievement data for the Grades 3-8 teachers in the study. Characteristics of the instructional leadership style were measured using the semistructured interview question responses. The focus of this research study was on investigating the effective instructional leadership characteristics demonstrated by exemplary principals and teachers in Title I schools.

Demographics

For this study, I conducted one-to-one virtual interviews with four elementary principals and six teachers who served students in Grades 3 through 8 in Title I school settings. The average number of years that research participants served in their roles at the sites for the study ranged from 4 years to 10 years. Ethnically, the makeup of the participant group included black and white elementary principals and black, white, and Hispanic teachers. Participants' names were not used in this study to respect the confidentiality and anonymity of all participants.

During the time frame for this study, the school district was comprised of approximately 42,000 students, 5,000 employees, and 50 schools (Fast Facts, 2019). The ethnic breakdown for the district that served as the setting for this study was 52% black students, 32% white students, 9% Hispanic students, 4% multiracial students, and 3% Asian students at the time of the research. The student population also included 51% economically disadvantaged students, 5% English Language Learners, 13% of students with disabilities, and 13% of students receiving gifted services.

Data Collection

I began the data collection phase of this research by sending an e-mail invitation to four elementary school principals and six elementary school teachers to participate in the study. In the e-mail I explained the nature of the research and invited the potential study participants to share their perceptions regarding the instructional leadership practices implemented during the time frame in which students in their elementary schools demonstrated stable or consistent growth according to the College and Career

Readiness Performance Index, specifically during the time frame 2015-2018. Attached to the invitational e-mail were copies of the invitation to participate and the informed consent form for participants to sign and return. The participants were asked to reply to the e-mail acknowledging that they had read the informed consent form, indicating their agreement to participate in the study, and provided convenient times to conduct the virtual interviews electronically. All of the potential study participants agreed to participate in the study after I reached out to them via e-mail and then followed up with a phone call.

The informed consent forms were expected to be collected on-site at the time of the face to face interview however due to the pandemic and the protocols put in place requiring social distancing. I changed the process for the forms to be signed and returned electronically. Then I contacted each participant by phone to ask if they would be comfortable with conducting the interviews virtually. During the phone conversations, each study participant did accept the invitation to participate and scheduled a time to conduct the virtual interview. Although this did represent a slight variation from the initial plan outlined in chapter 3 for obtaining informed consent and conducting the interviews, all participants agreed to the changes and participated in the interviews. Prior to beginning the interviews, the study participants were asked to review the informed consent forms, study participants were given the opportunity to ask questions, and consent to participate was recorded at the beginning of each virtual interview. The data were collected virtually using the Zoom video communications software and by collecting archival data from the schools and district's website for each elementary

principal and teacher for the study.

Recruitment

To gain permission to collect data at the site, I first had to establish a community partner. To do this, I sent an e-mail to the principals of the schools who directed me to one of the district's directors. I sent an e-mail to the director, copying the school principals. Upon receiving IRB approval (no. 04-28-20-0743954), I sent the approval to the district leader and the school principals. With permission to collect data, I began to recruit participants. I sent another e-mail asking the principals to participate in the study. I also asked the principals for the e-mails of potential teacher participants who met the criteria for the study and permission to contact them. I sent a letter of invitation to each potential participant via e-mail. I followed up my e-mails up with phone calls to the participants due to the confirm changing to virtual interviews. Once I received verbal confirmation from all participants. I waited for the e-mails back from them with the signed consent forms and confirmation of dates for data collection. The principals and teachers were very helpful in scheduling the data collection; considering the protocols in place due to the ongoing pandemic. Once I finalized the dates for data collection, I sent individual e-mails to all the participants to confirm the dates and times of the interviews. Finally, I asked them to contact me if they had any questions or concerns.

One day before my first day of interviews, I sent e-mails to each of the participants to remind them of our virtual call and to once again inform them of the purpose of the interview. In my e-mail, I reminded each participant of the link to connect to the virtual call and to be prepared to e-mail any relevant documents relating to the

practice of instructional leadership or that supported their perceptions of instructional leadership practice provided by their principals.

Interviews. On the days of the interviews, I had several interview guides, an extra recording device, which I used for the interviews and to transcribe the data. Once the participants connected to the virtual call, I greeted them and thanked them for volunteering to participate in the study and for agreeing to have the interview recorded. I went over the purpose of the study then I reviewed the consent form with them that they had already signed. The interviews began only after each participant assured me they were comfortable and I had reassured them that the information they provided would remain confidential. I informed them that they had a right to withdraw from the interview at any time or refuse to respond to any question. I reminded the participants that the interview would be 45 minutes.

I asked open-ended questions based on my interview protocols for principals (see Appendix A) and teachers (see Appendix B). I also used the same set of interview questions for each set of participants. I asked probing questions to clarify and or expand on the participants' responses. The interview guide contained 15 open-ended questions, which explored the participants' perspectives of and practice of instructional leadership at the schools. With the participants' permission, I used a recorder app to record all the interviews to ensure the accuracy of the participants' responses. I took notes to emphasize the key points made by the participants, which helped me keep track of the participants' responses to the questions. I conducted all ten interviews virtually using the Zoom video platform.

During the interview, the participants shared documents that I had asked them to bring ahead of time to bring to the interview that supported their perceptions of instructional leadership at their schools. At the completion of all the interviews and after the participants had shared the documents, I thanked each participant and informed them that I would send a transcript of the interview as an e-mail attachment for their review for accuracy.

Documents

Before the data collection began, the director shared with me each of the school's demographics and free/reduced lunch data in comparison with other schools in the district. From each of the school's websites, I downloaded three years of standardized student test scores. The standardized test scores from the school's website showed a yearly improvement in students' scores in mathematics and English in Grades 3 - 8. Principals and teachers shared their documents during their interviews. The principals shared their school's School Improvement Plans (SIP), agendas from leadership team meetings, and teacher provided feedback data. Teachers shared samples of tools used by principals to get their feedback on professional development given, agenda and minutes from their last teacher team meeting, and tools used for classroom observations and walkthroughs. The SIP included student academic performance measures for state accountability, which showed the school's overall success criteria in relation to students' learning outcomes as well as their target for improvement in students' learning outcomes. The SIP addressed students' behavior and attendance and procedures for addressing disruptive behavior. It also includes learning goals for all students and student subgroups

which includes students that meet Title I requirements. The teachers also gave me their teacher team meeting agendas and minutes from their last meeting. The documents were all relevant because they corroborated participants' responses to the interview questions and helped me answer the RQs. I will describe later how I analyzed the documents.

Data Collection Summary

The data collection process and methods that I presented in Chapter 3 served as my guide to the data collection. I relied on my professional experience as an administrator and my abilities as a detail-oriented listener to collect and organize the data. Because of my professional experience as a school administrator, I tried to minimize bias throughout the data collection process by making sure that my knowledge and experiences did not affect the data collection and interpretation. I focused on my role as a student researcher by actively listening to the participants' responses to the interview questions. The only change to the data collection process was that I interviewed the participants virtually rather than face to face in person as I proposed in Chapter 3.

I then developed a system for managing and organizing the data obtained from the participants in this study. I stored all the data collected for this study in a folder on my computer. I organized all the documents shared by the participants according to type and the pseudonym assigned to each participant. A backup folder was stored on a flash drive and kept in my office safe.

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Data Analysis

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I followed the multistage data analysis procedure for qualitative data suggested by Miles et al. (2014) to analyze the data from the interviews and documents. First, I used an

ongoing cyclical data analysis process that began during the data collection stage and

continued during the data analysis. The process involved reading the transcribed data at

least 5 times during the initial coding stage to become familiarized with the data and to

ensure that I had an accurate account of what each participant said during the interview.

The process also included an ongoing data analysis through coding to reduce data and

identify themes and patterns. Second, I used codes from the literature and codes that

emerged from the data collected from participants and documents (Miles et al., 2014).

The third stage of data analysis was the display of themes and patterns obtained from

coding the data; the fourth stage involved verification and drawing conclusions from the

data obtained (Miles et al., 2014).

The multistage analysis procedure and hand coding, was used for qualitative data

(Miles et al., 2014). I continued coding after the completion of data collection and

received all member checking from the participants. I analyzed the data following the

recommendation of Miles et al., using open codes to reduce data and identify, label, and

determine the differences and similarities between the participants' responses to the same

question to identify themes and categories. This section provides a detailed description of

the four stages recommended by Miles et al.: data familiarization, data reduction, data

display, and data verification, and my conclusions from the data analyzed for this study.

Data familiarization. I began familiarizing myself with the data while

transcribing the participants' interviews. I recorded and reread the reflective notes I took

during the interviews to capture the participants' tone in response to various questions.

As soon as each interview was over, I transcribed it into a Word document. I completed

the interview transcription the same day it took place. The transcription process helped me immerse myself in the data.

Within two days after receiving my e-mail, all but one of the 10 participants replied to the e-mail. The last participant took five days to respond, but I received it within the first week of sending all the e-mails. Four of the 10 participants returned the transcribed notes via e-mail with no corrections, additions, or deletions. Three of the participants made minor corrections to my transcriptions of their responses. I continued analyzing and familiarizing myself with the data while coding to identify themes and patterns from the participants' responses.

Data reduction. Data reduction required me to reread the interview transcripts and manually highlight words, sentences, and phrases to reduce the data. For example, key words such as *communicate*, *vision*, and *shared*, became *communicated shared vision*. *Improvement* and *instruction*, became *improved instruction*. To reduce the data further, I reexamined the initial codes and categorized the data from all participants to determine patterns, themes, and relationships to the codes from literature. Finally, I compared the emerging codes to the prior codes from the literature to determine relationships as suggested by Miles et al. (2014). Table 2 illustrates the documents I collected from the participants and obtained from the school's website and how I used them to answer the RQs in triangulation with the interview data.

Table 2

Document Analysis

Documents	RQ1 How do school leaders provide instructional leadership to improve student outcomes?	RQ2 What are the administrators' perceptions of the instructional practices of school leaders regarding student outcomes?	RQ3 What are the teachers' perceptions of the instructional practices of school leaders regarding student outcomes?
Students standardized test scores	School's 3 years of standardized test scores showed improvement in mathematics and English		
School improvement plan	Confirmed instructional strategies including peer classroom observation, and reading and mathematics improvement criteria for all student demographic	Evidence of plans in place for ongoing intervention and enrichment for students' learning	Evidence of professional development plans for faculty
Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) agenda and notes	Evidence of instructional strategies focused on student centered learning	Evidence of meeting notes showing multiple individuals in ILT's involved in ILT meetings	
School website	Confirmed district test scores for grades 3 through 8 for school years' 2015 - 2018		

(*table continues*)

Documents	RQ1 How do school leaders provide instructional leadership to improve student outcomes?	RQ2 What are the administrators' perceptions of the instructional practices of school leaders regarding student outcomes?	RQ3 What are the teachers' perceptions of the instructional practices of school leaders regarding student outcomes?
PLC agenda and notes			Evidence of meeting notes showing multiple individuals in PLCs involved in PLC meetings
Classroom observation and walkthrough tool			Evidence of tools used to assess teacher instructional practice
Teacher feedback tool		Evidence of teachers providing feedback to principals on their instructional leadership practices	
Principal provided feedback tool for professional development			Evidence of teachers providing feedback to principals on the effectiveness of professional development

Although interviews were the main source of data for this study, I learned a significant amount about the participants' roles and their day-to-day practices of instructional leadership by reading and analyzing several documents that they shared with me. Reduction of the data also involved the analysis of the documents provided by the participants and the district leader as well as those I obtained online from the school's website. For the analysis of the documents, I employed content analysis to determine the context of the document. Miles et al. (2014) noted that understanding both the social production and the context of the document helps in document analysis. I identified emerging codes and themes from the analysis of the documents by highlighting the documents by hand.

There were 11 major themes that came from the data analysis of the interviews and documents that supported the purpose of the study, which was to identify the perceptions of principals and teachers regarding how instructional leadership practices influence student achievement in Title I schools. As I identified tentative findings and explanations developed from the themes, I returned to the data to further revise the coding, reduce the data, and test the findings and explanations against the participants' responses to the interview questions. Revising the codes allowed me to reduce the categories further from 11 major themes to five themes with subthemes.

Data display. Data display is the next level of the qualitative data analysis process. Miles et al. (2014) recommended using data display to organize data and describe and predict qualitative research findings. Miles et al. (2014) noted that a good display of data in tables and charts is an effective way of providing organized and

reduced information that facilitates drawing conclusions from the data (see Table 2).

Data verification and conclusions. The final level of qualitative data analysis is to verify and draw conclusions. This process involved stepping back and revisiting the data to determine if I could make meaning from the analyzed data. The data display made it easier to interpret the research findings. Revisiting the data several times to cross-check the emerging themes during data analysis was helpful in beginning to verify and draw conclusions from the data.

Discrepant cases. Discrepant cases may affect the validity of the results of this study. All qualitative data were analyzed and no outlying data cases were evident. The careful compliance of the data collection procedures used in this study was helpful in ensuring the avoidance of any discrepant cases.

Results

To address the RQs, I chose a qualitative case study as a research design. Through this research design, I was able to capture the perceptions of principals and teachers as they experience the implementation of instructional leadership and its effects on student achievement in Title I schools. I was able to gather this data through semistructured interviews and the collection of documents. As a result of analyzing the data, I found that even though the participants reported activity in most aspects of Weber's model of instructional leadership development, there was no way to measure the growth or ensure that it was deliberate. In this chapter, I present findings on how the four principals perceive their roles as school leaders and how the six teachers perceive their school leaders' instructional practices specifically how instructional leadership played into their

broader conception and their enactment of these conceptions in schools.

In the results section of this chapter, I present the findings on principals' perceptions of their roles. The findings were based on data retrieved from principal interviews and documents/artifacts. The section begins with a brief overview of each of the principals' perceptions, highlighting comparisons of the similarities and differences in their perceptions of their roles. In-depth summaries of each principal's perception of their roles are included to illuminate their voices. In addition, the principals' prioritized practices are highlighted. The section includes a discussion with principals about the most important tasks they engaged in. The section concludes with a summary of the principals' perceptions of their roles as school leaders.

In the next section of the chapter, I present the findings on teachers' perceptions of the instructional leadership roles of their school leaders. As I examined the insight teachers gave concerning the perceptions of instructional leadership implementation rendered by their school principals, it became clear that there is a high perception of evidence of instructional leadership practice in the schools. I noticed that teachers were able to identify actions tied to instructional leadership. The teachers also offered supporting information regarding those actions that their school principal rendered in terms of instructional leadership practices which are tied to Weber's model that show alignment. Teachers at the school locations were able to reinforce and deeply solidify the attention and implementation of the instructional leadership practices implemented by their school principals. The teachers' ability to perceive the instructional leadership behaviors of their principals is supported by Moore et al., (2016) stating that leaders'

characteristics are shown through their actions; therefore, those actions are recognized by other stakeholders. There were only minor differences in regard to different implementations of instructional leadership across schools. This occurrence is based upon individual school leader's instructional leadership style and possibly to the diverse school culture and climate.

The three RQs served as the framework for the research findings. I answer the RQs by summarizing the research findings from the interviews and the documents collected. In response to the RQs I analyzed, coded, and themed the patterns that emerged from the participants' interview transcripts and documents obtained from the participants and the school's website. Due to the volume and extensive nature of the data obtained from the interviews and documents, I analyzed the data sets separately. Next, I combined the data to identify common themes and patterns from the data obtained from analysis of the documents and the interviews to find alignment with the RQs for this study. Table 3 aligns the RQs with the major themes and subthemes drawn from data obtained from participants' interview responses and documents.

Table 3

Research Questions Related to Themes and Subthemes That Emerged From Interview and Document Analysis

Research Questions	Themes	Subthemes
RQ1 How do school leaders provide instructional leadership to improve student outcomes? RQ2 What are the administrators' perceptions of the instructional practices of school leaders regarding student outcomes?	Communicate a shared vision	Communicates the vision to teachers and staff during faculty meetings. Communicates the vision to teachers and students using school-wide announcements Communicates the vision to teachers, students, parents, and other stakeholders using community fairs, and through out-bound communications.
RQ1 How do school leaders provide instructional leadership to improve student outcomes? RQ2 What are the administrators' perceptions of the instructional practices of school leaders regarding student outcomes?	Create a positive school environment	The principals make congratulatory announcements to teachers and students and encourages students to make good decisions and choices. Principals are visible in the school during the school day and during extracurricular activities. Principals make individual comments on students' report cards.

(*table continues*)

RQ1 How do school leaders provide instructional leadership to improve student outcomes? RQ2 What are the administrators' perceptions of the instructional practices of school leaders regarding student outcomes?	Cultivate leadership in others	Encourages professional development and makes provisions for staff to attend professional development meetings. Identifies strengths and growth areas through observations, evaluations, and one-on-one conversations. The principal encourages teachers to showcase their talents and put them in leadership roles.
RQ1 How do school leaders provide instructional leadership to improve student outcomes? RQ2 What are the administrators' perceptions of the instructional practices of school leaders regarding student outcomes? RQ3 What are the teachers' perceptions of the instructional practices of school leaders regarding student outcomes?	Manage data and processes	State test data and academic reports are used to make instructional determinations. Tutoring opportunities are offered for students. Title I requirements determine students in need of pull-out services.

(*table continues*)

RQ1	Improve instruction	State Evaluation Process is
How do school leaders provide instructional leadership to improve student outcomes?		used to observe and give feedback to teachers and instructional practice.
		Walkthrough observations/Pop-ups
RQ3 What are the teachers' perceptions of the instructional practices of school leaders regarding student outcomes?		Feedback about instructional practices is given via e-mail and/or in hard copy version. Uses one-on-one meetings to give instructional feedback.

Principals' Perceptions of Their Roles

In order to connect principals' conceptions of their roles to instructional leadership, it was important to examine the accepted beliefs and practices of principals. My analysis uncovered several key similarities among the principals in how they conceptualized their roles. Each principal in this study believed that instructional leadership should be a central role. They all indicated that teaching and learning should be their primary focus. While each principal expressed differently what an instructional leader would look like, they all agreed that principals were responsible for facilitating the following instructional tasks: instructional focus walks, grade-level meetings, and formal and informal observations with guided feedback. Second, each principal believed that one of his or her roles was to develop a vision for the school. Third, the principals believed that one of their primary roles was to create a safe learning environment. A final similarity was that principals believed they were responsible for everything, which included being responsible for discipline, paperwork, budgeting, the operation of the

school building and meetings with various stakeholders. Being responsible for everything

received prominence as principals described their many roles. In this section, the

following RQs are examined:

RQ1: How do school leaders provide instructional leadership to improve student

outcomes?

RQ2: What are the administrators' perceptions of the instructional practices of

school leaders regarding student outcomes?

To better understand the principals' perceptions and practices, semi- structured open-

ended interviews were conducted with each principal. In an effort to illuminate the voices

of the participants, direct quotes from the principals are included in the summaries.

Findings for Principal 1. Among all of the principals in the study, this principal

was the most explicit and direct about his role as an instructional leader. Being a previous

teacher and teacher leader, he had always taken an active role in the instructional

components of his school. Principal 1 defined instructional components as working with

intentionality on teaching and student learning. He shared his experience as a member of

the school's leadership team and coordinator of the afterschool program as examples of

his commitments to instructional leadership as a teacher. As a member of the school's

leadership team, Principal One played a central part in establishing school wide learning

goals. He also assisted in establishing and monitoring school wide improvement plans.

Principal One believed the leadership opportunities he experienced as a teacher has

allowed him to prioritize instruction as a principal.

Throughout the interview, Principal 1 made his perception of his role very clear. When asked to name the most important tasks of a school principal, he adamantly stated that his primary role was that of an instructional leader. He defined instructional leadership as a leader's ability to focus on instruction. He believed that an important part of his role was to ensure that his school had the necessary tools for instruction. He believed that, as an instructional leader, his job was to ensure that during PLC meetings, the emphasis was on teaching and student learning. During the 45-minute interview, Principal 1 mentioned instructional leadership multiple times. The following quote illustrates Principal 1's perception of his role:

> The most important task of the school principal obviously is leading the building instructionally. You know, setting up instructional programs that will make a difference in the kids' academics. It really doesn't matter what type of school it is- whether it's a high performing school or whether the school is in the focus category. You really want to make sure that you are the instructional leader of the building.

During the interview, Principal 1 provided examples of ways he believed his leadership was enacted in the school. When asked to discuss how he spent his day as a principal and the practices he believed were most important to his work, he shared the following activities:

- Establishing a vision and setting goals
- Establishing clear expectations for students and teachers
- Developing and monitoring systems

- Protocol for reviewing school assessment data

- Protocol for reviewing lesson plans

- Conducting instructional focus walks that focused on ensuring curriculum and teaching was aligned

- Supervising and monitoring instruction

- Improving instructional outcomes

As the interview unfolded, Principal 1 discussed another area that was a central focus of his leadership; he cited school climate as an area requiring his attention. Principal 1 admitted that, in previous years, school climate topped his list of priorities. He said the school had been a revolving door for administrators, causing it to have limited and inconsistent schoolwide structures. He also added that the school community did not have a structure that allowed for consistent educational practices; hence, discipline was high and school morale low. Principal 1 believed that establishing a clear vision and a good school climate would allow him to better address the instructional needs of the school. He also held that one of his central roles was to ensure there was a safe learning environment for students. Principal 1 stated:

> You know you can't have good instruction and good classroom environments if the behavior is not good ... I think that a few years ago that probably would've been number one for me because coming into a school where there had been seven principals before me in nine years the behavior wasn't very good so that was more towards the top of my list.

Establishing positive relationships with stakeholders was also very important to

Principal 1. He said, "It's very important that you're a cheerleader for your building ...

the human resource side and the cheerleading side shouldn't be overlooked ... making

sure you have good relationships with parents and colleagues". When asked to elaborate,

he explained that having positive relationships would allow people to look favorably

upon his school, which he thought would increase participation in programs and activities

that impacts student achievement.

Principal 1 admitted there weren't many supports in place during his principal

preparation program that was helpful for leading in Title I schools. According to the

principal, as a leader in the district there are training sessions for meeting the diverse

needs of their school population and there are also district supports around utilizing the

resources that come with being a Title I school but for the most part he has to seek out his

own understanding. When asked about what is most important in leading a Title I school

the principal shared that often the mindset around serving students in Title I schools is to

narrow the lens, when in fact the opposite should be done. It is asserted here that students

in Title I schools have all the same needs as students that are not in Title I schools, as

well as additional needs specific to their circumstances.

In summary, Principal 1's perception of his responsibilities was that he should be

an instructional leader. He believed that instruction should play a pivotal role in his daily

activities and that his job was to ensure instructional programs were running effectively.

Establishing relationships, monitoring the learning environment of the school, and

ensuring the school's vision was enacted were also all very important.

Findings for Principal 2. Similar to Principal 1, Principal 2 also believed one of her primary roles was to focus on instruction. She is closely involved in the teaching and learning aspects of the school. In describing her perceptions of her role, Principal 2 primarily mentioned instructional duties. A key area of focus of Principal 2 was programming and instructional planning. She, along with teacher leaders throughout her school, collaborated on teaching and school wide programming. In her interview, Principal 2 discussed how she meets with the first-year teachers. She discussed how she provides direct support and guidance to these first-year teachers with their instructional struggles in the classroom. Additionally, she and the teachers discuss strategies for improving instructional practices, and the teachers also express appreciation of the support they received from their principal. The first-year teachers voluntarily give up their lunch to discuss effective teaching practices with the principal in order to improve their practice.

Principal 2 primarily discussed her role as ensuring teaching and learning was taking place in her school. She further expressed the importance of ensuring that she was there for teachers and students, with students being a central consideration in her role. She discussed instructional leadership that included activities like: instructional walk-throughs, teacher observations, professional development and instructional meetings. She also believed that among her number-one priorities was to ensure that the environment was conducive to learning. When asked to prioritize her most important tasks, Principal 2 said, "Safety ... providing a safe environment that is conducive to learning". In order to ensure that her building is safe, Principal Two regularly meets with her school safety

team. She also ensures that all emergency plans are intact and discipline issues are minimized. An important safety consideration is ensuring that she had a sufficient number of staff members to monitor the instructional and operational needs of the school. She added when teachers and students feel safe they can focus on teaching and learning.

Principal 2 saw her role as multifaceted. She said, "Besides being an accountant, a maintenance supervisor, and a supervisor of instruction, I mean, there are so many facets to a principal's role. It's never ending really". According to Principal 2, principals are required to perform multiple tasks. The required tasks, as discussed by Principal 2, can be organized into three main categories: management, instruction, and relationships. She uses management to categorize tasks such as paperwork, climate, checking e-mails, and returning or answering phone calls, while instructional tasks are any tasks associated with teaching and learning, and relationships refer to the interactions Principal 2 has with staff and students.

Principal 2 believed that principals should spend no more than 20% of their day on management issues. Nevertheless, in the interview, she said she spent many more hours on discipline and paperwork. Principal 2 said, "Unfortunately, discipline, paperwork ... should be 20% of our day ... everything kind of falls on me ... it takes me away from what I really should be doing". Principal 2 believed that, as a principal, she should spend more time visiting classrooms and on instructional tasks. She also believed her role was to interact frequently with teachers and students. Principal 2 described how she would like to spend her time in this way:

I wish I could be in those classrooms. I wish I could be teaching students. I was

just observing an English class, which I was dying to jump in. It was a Socratic

Seminar and of course I couldn't because I was not the facilitator or any part of

the group. I would love the opportunity to just really be able to do that on a daily

basis, to work with teachers on a daily basis. And I really would love to spend

time with students who are never in trouble; I don't interact with them much. That

to me would be ideal.

According to Principal 2 understanding the needs of Title I students is important

in leading a Title I school. She shared that the socioeconomic status (SES) of a school's

students has a relationship with school achievement, including fewer and less qualified

teachers and lower academic achievement in schools that serve majority low-SES

populations. She added that utilizing the funds that are allocated for Title I schools to

ensure that students in these schools are able to meet Common Core State Standards is

just a part of it. Creating a school culture that is safe and equitable for all students is a

huge part of it. The learning environment has to be safe yet challenging and teachers have

to be equipped to meet the individual needs of all students.

In summary, Principal 2 believed her role was multifaceted. She was

instructionally focused in her orientation, but found herself being pulled toward other

demands of her position. Although she placed considerable emphasis on ensuring

instruction was a priority, she valued her role as nurturer to children, ensuring that their

needs were met first. The interview and other data collected showed that Principal 2

believed that responding to the needs of teachers was also an important role. She also

emphasized ensuring that the vision developed for the school was being enacted daily in all aspects of the school.

Findings for Principal 3. Like Principal 2, Principal 3 saw his role as multifaceted, but, like Principal One, his approach was managerial. He said, "My role as the principal ... I would say I'm like the CEO and I'm not responsible for just one thing, I'm responsible for many things". He also believed that one of his chief roles was to establish a vision for the school. He believed this vision should be developed with key stakeholders. He said, "I think that one of the most important tasks is being able to develop a vision for the school. And yes, that should also include stakeholders who are trying to develop that vision". When asked how he prioritized his roles, Principal 3 said, "My first priority is ensuring, number one, that we have a safe learning environment. That's number one because without that, I can't say that any learning is going to take place (laugh)".

Principal 3 saw instructional leadership as playing a major role in a principal's responsibility, even though he does not seem to be able to fit instructional leadership practices into his schedule on a regular basis. The instructional leadership practices that Principal 3 believed and wished he could spend more time on were providing ongoing feedback to teachers and classroom walkthroughs. He also said he would like to spend more time coaching teachers. When asked to explain the many things he is responsible for, Principal 3 had this to say:

> In addition to the responsibility of managing the instructional practices of
>
> teachers, I have the responsibility of managing staff, managing the day-to-day

operations of the building, including budgeting, parental and community involvement, building maintenance and crisis management.

According to Principal 3, most of his time was spent on management issues. Although he has been able to commit some time to instructional leadership practices (e.g., instructional walk-throughs, involving his leadership team in school-wide decisions and providing regular feedback to teachers), he believed the social context of his school required him to dedicate more time to discipline issues. Principal 3's school is located in one of the most economically depressed communities in the district. He cited discipline and social problems related to students' socioeconomic status as reasons for not being able to prioritize instruction. In addition, Principal 3 shared these are concerns instructional leaders of Title I schools face. Though this problem seems overwhelming, it is an ever-present truth that will not be affected without continual, purposeful actions on the part of instructional leaders and their supporters. Below, Principal 3 shares some of the difficulties he faced in prioritizing instruction in his school.

> When you have students, who come to school angry because they are not properly prepared for learning and they want to fight everybody. These issues must be addressed before we can teach these students. We do but it's very difficult ... you never know what kind of outburst you're going to have in the classroom, cafeteria or anywhere in the school really. It's difficult to focus on instruction when I'm the only administrator in the building. This is when Title I resources come into play.

During the interview, Principal 3 included understanding curriculum and leading curriculum development, understanding effective teaching practices, and monitoring the

use of data to make instructional decisions as important skills needed to serve in the role

of principal; however, he did not position himself to lead these efforts in his school.

When asked to name the most important tasks of the principal, here is what he said:

> I think you should have some understanding of curriculum and curriculum
>
> development, teaching practices, and obviously now using data to make the
>
> necessary decisions in instruction.

> Overall, Principal 3 believed that his primary role as principal was to be

responsible for everything, with instructional leadership playing a central role, even

though he was not always able to fulfill the instructional portion of his role. Everything

included not only managing and supervising instructional programs; it also included

managing the tremendous amount of paperwork generated by school, district, and state

initiatives. Everything also included collaborating with parents, teachers, and district

leaders, as well as managing the maintenance of the building. And, finally, everything

included effectively managing discipline in the school.

Findings for Principal 4. Similar to the other three principals, Principal 4

believed instructional leadership should be his primary role. He believed that one of his

roles was to assist teachers in understanding their roles. When asked to describe his role,

he said, "Teacher of teachers. I am supposed to be an instructional leader ... primarily the

role of the principal is to be an instructional leader and to articulate the vision for the

school and to work on the vision collaboratively".

While Principal 4 believed being an instructional leader was important, because

he was new to a building plagued with frequent changes in leadership, he believed his

initial role should be communications and establishing relationships with all stakeholders.
Principal 4 said, "I believe instructional leadership is important but entering a building
where there have been multiple principals and a lot of apathy, I believe my relationship
skills are paramount".

Although Principal 4 is new to the principalship, he is no stranger to
administration. Prior to accepting the principalship at this school, he served as a vice
principal for nine years in another school district. While Principal 4 understood the tenets
of instructional leadership, he also believed that being responsible for everything in the
school made it difficult to prioritize instruction appropriately. He said, "I am supposed to
be an instructional leader; my job is to do all that I can to move the school forward".
When asked to describe 'all,' Principal 4 noted that, in addition to instruction, he is
responsible for managerial tasks, such as managing the attendance of both staff and
students, as well as coordinating the placement of substitute teachers and other tasks that
allow the building to run smoothly.

Principal 4 believed his most important role as an instructional leader was to be an
effective communicator. He was the only principal who emphasized effective
communications. While others discussed building relationships as a subset of
communications, he very directly and explicitly acknowledged communications as a top
priority. Principal 4 articulated the importance of effective communications by stating,
"The most important task of a school principal, I believe, is to communicate well".

As Principal 4 articulated his role as an effective communicator, embedded in his
description was the importance of setting and sharing a school vision and mission

collaboratively, as well as the importance of establishing positive interactions with all stakeholders. There was also a relational stance embedded throughout his responses. He prided himself on his ability to establish relationships with all stakeholders, adding, "Building relationships builds trust, which results in improved relationships that will ultimately impact student achievement".

While instructional leadership does play an important role in Principal 4's conception, the newness of his role as principal and newcomer to the district has caused him to prioritize effective communications. Principal 4 shared a key component of his faculty meetings is the emphasis he places on maintaining relationships. During these meetings he discusses the importance of communications with his staff, he reminds all staff members to check their e-mails for daily correspondence from him. He also provides reassurance to the staff that he believes they were working hard. Overall, Principal 4 believed that his role as principal included multiple responsibilities, with instructional leadership being paramount. He also believed communication and relationship building was very high on his prioritized list of responsibilities. When asked about being an instructional leader in a Title I school the principal reported that focus must be on the practices that consistently and significantly contribute to student achievement such as: organization and instruction, creating a nurturing environment, meeting EL needs, and culturally responsive behaviors these effective practices qualify as instructional leadership practices or beliefs.

Teachers' Perceptions of Their Principal's Roles

Instructional leadership is a leadership type that has specific criteria; however,

there are various ways to fulfill those domains and be successful. The findings of this study were consistent, that the teachers were able to present insight about their principal's actions and behaviors which aligned to instructional leadership and the five domains in the Weber model. In analyzing the data from participants and the artifacts, I determined that the six teacher participants presented common themes.

A review of the RQ, a summary of the research methods and a brief description of the participants, in addition to, a synthesis of the findings from the sources of data collection are presented in this section. Findings from this study will report the teachers' perceptions of the implementation of instructional leadership by the school principals participating in this study and instructional leadership behaviors of the school principals. In this section, the following RQs are examined:

RQ1: How do school leaders provide instructional leadership to improve student outcomes?

RQ3: What are the teachers' perceptions of the instructional practices of school leaders regarding student outcomes?

Findings for Teacher 1. Teacher 1 gave responses to the ways their school principal communicates the school's vision to members of the school community. The participant stated that the principal has conveyed the vision by addressing parents at open houses they have had at the school. They were also able to speak to the ways their principal creates a positive, hospitable climate when discussing student progress. For example, the participant shared that the principal walks around the school and has a positive dialogue with students and staff about their progress as well as the school's

progress. Teacher 1 also indicated that the principal looks at the camera and finds time to

provide direction for staff to address certain situations that may occur in the school at any

given time. The participant reported about the ways the principal share students' progress

and reward and recognize superior performance. Teacher 1 reported that the principal

uses the intercom daily to address the school community by encouraging students to

make good choices and reminding teachers to use the incentive programs that are in

place. The participant also mentioned hard copy artifacts and flyers are disseminated,

which show the academic progress of the school. When reporting about how the principal

creates professional growth opportunities for staff Teacher 1 stated, the principal

encourages professional development/growth and opportunities within the school for

teachers to showcase their talent which affords leadership opportunities. Teacher 1 also

stated that the principal forwards e-mails and provides tools and resources for teachers to

pursue growth opportunities outside of school. However, it's individual, the teachers have

to seek their own professional development for the most part. When asked about the

forms of data used to determine goal attainment, growth targets, and identify at-risk

students annually the participant shared that the Principal uses different forms of

academic and non-academic data that include state test data, attendance data, and

behavioral data to drive instructional, remedial, and cultural decisions in an effort to

provide needed supports to students. The participant indicated a variety of things that

speak to the principal ensuring instructional time is sacred and that instructional practice

is observed. For instance, there are no interruptions on the intercom during the school day

and there are very few assemblies that are held during the school day. Also, the

participant reported that the principal sends the document used with all of the information that was recorded when he observes in your classroom. This offers teachers the opportunity to read the principal's comments. They also indicated, "The principal met with me and explained each comment". These responses from teacher 1 highlighted ways that instructional leadership is operationalized to improve student achievement with the school community.

        Findings for Teacher 2. Teacher 2 shared that communicating the mission and vision of the school is a big priority for the principal. The vision is communicated during in-services and is a major focus on the first day of in-service and during subsequent meetings, the participant stated "It's a part of what we do". Teacher 2 reported that people have bought into the vision of the administrator and that the principal has done a great job of getting people to buy into the vision. Teacher 2 also indicated ways that the principal informs students and families of students' and the schools' progress. Teacher 2 discussed that quarterly interim assessments and academic tests are used. In addition, Teacher 2 highlighted that information is collected in the behavioral electronic program they use to assess progress for the school's behavior goals. Teacher 2 emphasized that Title I meetings, parent meetings, and hard copy information are disseminated to communicate progress. The participant reported that the principal engages in a positive way with the school community by showing visibility and vested interest in the school. According to Teacher 2, the principal is present at extra-curricular and athletic events. Teacher 2 stated, "He attends every game". In addition, the participant indicated that announcements are made and quarterly awards are issued and mentioned that the

principal writes individual comments on each student's report card. The participant

reported ways the principal prioritizes improving instruction. Teacher 2 stated that the

principal uses one-on-one meetings to gain feedback and also indicated the ability to have

conversations with their principal. The participant also indicated that the principal

requests feedback about their instructional leadership practices through general

conversation which also consists of one-on-one conversations. Teacher 2 confirmed that

the principal identifies strength and growth areas through observations and evaluations.

The participant reported about the forms of data used throughout the year to determine

goal attainment, growth targets, and identify at-risk students. The participant shared that

state test data is used along with the school improvement plan (SIP) and data from the

previous year to set the school's academic goals for the year. Teacher 2 also spoke of the

use of subject area interim assessments and identified Math scores as a growth area.

Some strategies implemented in the instructional program that was shared consisted of

tutoring and Special Education services which were highlighted by Teacher 2, tutoring

programs are used after they have identified kids that need academic intervention. In

addition, Teacher 2 spoke of the implementation of RTI and that students' learning

deficiencies are addressed in lesson plans that can be found in the remediation portion of

the lesson plan design. Teacher 2 expressed that data from the previous school year is

viewed which carries over to goals that are placed in the school improvement plan. The

school improvement plan also includes behavior and climate goals. Teacher 2 also

reported that the school starts tutoring students in January so they can accurately identify

kids who need academic intervention. According to Teacher 2, behavior consequences

depend on the infraction. "We make sure we give punishments or consequences that fit the situation". Specific behavioral interventions were not specified. The participant reported about how the principal observes and improves instructional practice. Teacher 2 indicated that informal walkthroughs are done during the beginning of the school year. The purpose of the walkthrough is to get a synopsis of what's going on in individual classrooms. Teacher 2 also stated that walkthrough observations are not a part of the formal evaluation process. The Participant reported that the standard state process consists of: a pre-observation, two announced, and two unannounced evaluations and this is what is implemented for teachers. Teacher 2 also stated that there is always a feedback piece during the post-observation conference. Teacher 2 described the instructional leadership practices that support learning in their school.

Findings for Teacher 3. Teacher 3 highlighted the impact of the principal communicating the school's vision to the school community on its students. The participant reported the level of student buy-in that students have shown towards the vision and attribute the gains that have been achieved to the level of student buy-in. In addition, Teacher 3 stated that the principal does other things that involve showing students that they are invested in the school's vision like, putting individual comments on student report cards, attending student-lead groups and meetings, and attending sports events and extracurricular activities. The participant discussed how the principal communicated with staff and created professional growth opportunities for them. Teacher 3 reported that the principal primarily communicates via e-mail to share information or provide feedback and uses surveys as a way to garner feedback. In addition, they stated

that the principal may forward e-mails to get assistance related to tasks or to get ideas

about a program or project. They confirmed that the principal identifies strength and

growth areas through observations and evaluations. Teacher 3 reported that they have had

quick, unscheduled observations that are known as "pop-ins." She also stated that the

principal would follow-up with feedback about the lesson.   Teacher 3 stated that staff is

encouraged to do some sort of professional development throughout the year, but does

not state that the principal provides this development. The participant reported how the

principal ensured that instructional time was kept sacred and the support put in place for

students identified as at-risk or struggling academically. Teacher 3 stated that there are

very few assemblies held during school hours and the assemblies that take place are

necessary (multicultural celebrations, incentive awards, honor's programs, and etc.).

Teacher 3 reported that teachers monitor the academic interventions for at-risk students in

the classroom. They also reported that the school has Multi-Tiered Support Systems

(MTSS) protocols in place for supporting struggling students and adding to the

interventions being done in the classroom. The participant added that these practices are

common in Title I schools that have large populations of at-risk students. This participant

stressed that managing curriculum and instruction is a major priority for principals of

Title I Schools.

     Findings for Teacher 4. Teacher 4 discussed that the principal puts great value

on communication with the school community. They reported whether it is the school's

vision or student and school progress the principal believes that communication is one of

the strengths of a good leader. Teacher 4 reported an interesting practice where the

principal calls parents in an effort to make them aware of their child's/children's academic status especially if underperformance is evident. Teacher 4 specifically identifies Parent Connect as a system that gives parents the opportunity to see students' progress for themselves. Teacher 4 also included that the principal used intercom announcements as a form of school-wide communication for students and staff. Teacher 4 shared, "He is both visible and vocal. That's why it feels so safe because it seems like he is everywhere". Teacher 4 also confirmed that the principal both made calls and met with parents throughout the year to inform them of progress or lack of progress performed by the students. Teacher 4 stated that their principal gives rewards and special recognition to both teachers and students. Teacher 4 also confirmed that the principal constantly reinforces superior performance by making announcements, and added that the use of announcements is their principal's tool for school-wide communication at the start and end of the day. Teacher 4 reported that the principal congratulates teachers in team meetings, and the staff receives an incentive for performance during the holiday break. Like Teacher 1, Teacher 4 shared that the principal walks around the school and is visible and present. The participant shared that along with communicating all facets of the school's progress and operation, the principal also communicates individually with teachers about their growth and progress. They highlighted that strengths and growth areas are understood through the principal having one-on-one conversations with teachers. Teacher 4 also stated that the principal invites them to attend district-level meetings and teachers believe that they would not be well-equipped to do their job if they did not have those types of opportunities.

Findings for Teacher 5. When asked about the principal's practices around communicating the school's vision Teacher 5 shared that the principal of their school values communicating the school's vision with the school community. Teacher 5 reported that the school vision is communicated, for the most part, during staff meetings. The school vision is also printed in classrooms and in front of the school building. They also mentioned that students have bought into the vision because student surveys show that they are eager to attend the school and participate in school activities. Teacher 5 like the other participants reported that the principal makes announcements about students' progress during morning and afternoon announcements. They indicated that student and school progress is communicated through progress reports and electronic communication as well. Teacher 5 also shared that electronic communication is used in the form of the call-out system and text messages to inform and update parents. According to teacher 5, the principal gives accolades to teachers during faculty meetings and communicates performance through e-mails. The participant reported that the principal places value on instructional time by observing instructional practice and providing teachers guided feedback. The participant reported the principal's propensity to conduct random walkthroughs. Teacher 5 confirmed like other participants that the principal identifies strengths and growth areas through observations and evaluations. The participant added that the principal gathers feedback on their own practice from teachers and students. They also gather information from students about their teachers' strengths and growth areas through surveys to get their perspective. Teacher 5 reported that the principal uses team meetings and e-mails to request and give feedback. When asked about professional

growth opportunities Teacher 5 reported that they most times have to seek their own professional development. However, when it comes to using various forms of data to support instruction Teacher 5 stated that the school uses academic reports, and also spoke of the incorporation of tutoring by subject areas to help students who are needing academic support. In addition to tutoring, Teacher 5 highlighted that peer mediation and pull-outs for Special Needs students are used to address academic and behavioral needs. Teacher 5 also stated that motivational speakers come to the school to address the middle school student body. The participant added that these are programs that specifically target students who meet the Title I requirements.

Findings for Teacher 6. Teacher 6 stated that in order for the principal to communicate the school's vision the principal communicates the vision at different community events and student academic fairs. They also stated that the vision statement is written in different spaces over the school and is posted in classes. Teacher 6 also stated that the principal communicates with parents through letters and makes announcements on the electronic communication system used by the school. The participant reported that the principal finds positive ways to share students' progress and recognize superior performance. Teacher 6 stated that student progress is highlighted during honor's programs that occur every six weeks. Teacher 6 reported that weekly assessments issued by teachers are used to assess progress towards school academic goals. Teacher 6 indicated that e-mails are sent to inform parents about student and school progress. Teacher 6 stated that the principal verbally commends both students and teachers during the morning or end of day announcements. The participant reported being

proud of the principal being visible in the hallways and classrooms. In addition, the

principal is present at extra-curricular and athletic events. Teacher 6 stated, "He is at a lot

of athletic events for the scholars". When asked about opportunities for professional

growth Teacher 6 reported that the principal encourages them to seek outside leadership

opportunities to gain advancement. Teacher 6 added, "He pushes us to continue with

school and educate ourselves". Teacher 6 reported that the principal uses individual

meetings to gain feedback about their own practices indicating that they care about their

own growth. The participant also shared that the principal encourages them to seek

outside leadership opportunities to gain advancement. Teacher 6 added that the principal

uses individual conversations with teachers and that the principal would rather the teacher

talk to them if they have a concern. Teacher 6 added, "his door is usually always open".

Like Teacher 5, Teacher 6 confirmed and agreed that their principals identify strengths

and growth areas through observations and evaluations. Teacher 6 shared that the

principal creates professional growth opportunities for staff by placing them in leadership

roles and assigning them different leadership opportunities to showcase their talent. The

participant reported that the principal has protocols in place for using data to determine

goal attainment, growth targets, and identify at-risk students. Teacher 6 stated that

teachers reflect and re-teach content that data reveals the need for it to be re-taught based

on class performance percentages. Teacher 6 explained that observation data,

walkthrough data, and evaluation data are used to ensure that good instruction is

happening. Teacher 6 also indicated that behavior data is placed in the electronic system

used school-wide. This method keeps teachers informed of student behavior in other

classes. Teacher 6 identified the Social Studies subject area as a growth target even though much of the focus is placed on English, Science, and Math. Teacher 6 indicated that pull-outs are used depending on whether or not the student has an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). The Participant indicated that pull outs are also used to address students' academic and behavioral needs.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Data analysis for this case study included triangulation of data from eight participants' responses to the interview questions and analysis of documents collected from the participants, district coordinator, and the school's website. Trustworthiness or rigor refers to the confidence that the reader can have in the data, interpretation, and methods utilized to ensure the quality of the study (Connelly, 2016). Researchers must establish protocols and procedures to ensure that specific criteria related to the trustworthiness of the qualitative study have been addressed (Connelly, 2016). Specific criteria include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Connelly, 2016).

Credibility

Credibility refers to the truth of the study and the results or findings of the study (Connelly, 2016). To ensure the credibility of this study, I engaged in member checking and triangulation of data obtained from the participants' responses to interview questions as well as from data collected from the participants, district accountability director, and from the school's website. I sent all the participants a transcribed copy of their interview responses and incorporated all corrections and additions made by the participants to the

final interview data. I used member checking to ensure that the participants had the opportunity to review my analysis of their responses to the interview questions and to clarify any misconceptions. I triangulated data from the participants' interview responses and the data from analysis of the school documents as a way to ensure credibility and consistency. To further achieve data saturation and accuracy, I retrieved data from the school's website about the students' scores on standardized scores and the school behavior policy.

To compare or triangulate the data sources, I searched for common themes present in all three data sources: face to face interviews, the member checking process and peer debriefing. For example, after conducting each interview, participant responses were transcribed for accuracy and in preparation for thematic analysis. During the member checking process, I asked each study participant to verify the accuracy of my interpretation of their responses to ensure that there was no bias in my interpretation. Each study participant did confirm that I captured their responses accurately with no need for further expansion of my interpretation.

During the peer debriefing process, the two principals who participated confirmed the key findings of my study based on their own experience as elementary principals. Each principal also confirmed that interview questions were straight forward and did not seem to contain any inherent bias that would encourage respondents to answer in a specific or desired way.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the way in which qualitative studies can be applied to or

generalized to a broader context while maintaining context specific richness (Ravitch &

Carl, 2016). While we know that qualitative data or results cannot be generalized from a

sample to a population, the findings of the research must have some value or meaning

beyond the actual research (Burkholder, Cox, & Crawford, 2016). To promote the

likelihood that the findings of the research will have some meaning beyond the research,

I used thick descriptions to describe the findings of the research and the context of the

study. Thick descriptions provide sufficient details about the findings, the contextual

details characterizing the research and data collection, and my interactions with the study

participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Dependability

Dependability refers to whether evidence exists that demonstrates that there is

consistency in data collection, analysis, and reporting (Burkholder et al., 2016).

Dependability also requires that any shifts in methodology or data collection that occurs

during the qualitative study be reported. To promote dependability, I utilized strategies to

increase researcher accountability such as keeping process logs about each step in the

data collection process. As described in the credibility session, I also triangulated the data

collected during face to face interviews, the member checking process and the peer

debriefing process. This process did not deviate from the previously described process.

To address dependability, I provided all participants their transcribed interview

responses to review for accurate representation of their experiences. I provided a detailed

description of the steps and procedures I followed for data collection, data storage,

analysis, and interpretation of the research findings to make it easier for others interested

in engaging in a similar study to replicate.

Confirmability

The protocol previously established to address issues of confirmability, I implemented the previously established protocol wherein I kept copious field notes and a reflective journal. The reflective journal was used to document each step of the data collection process. Maintaining a reflective journal promotes transparency and neutrality in qualitative studies (Connelly, 2016). In addition, the Walden dissertation committee reviewed and evaluated every step of this study.

To ensure confirmability of this single case study, I saved all the transcribed data from the interviews and from the documents collected for this study to facilitate an audit trail by my committee chair and methodologist if needed. I provided a detailed description of the data collection and analysis method. I also conducted a content analysis of all documents collected to understand the context. I hand coded all data from the interviews and documents several times to discern major and subthemes.

Summary

The purpose of this research was to describe the specific instructional leadership behaviors perceived by successful elementary school principals and teachers to have a positive effect on student outcomes in Title I schools. This study the following RQs:

RQ1: How do school leaders provide instructional leadership to improve student outcomes?

RQ2: What are the administrators' perceptions of the instructional practices of school leaders regarding student outcomes?

RQ3: What are the teachers' perceptions of the instructional practices of school leaders regarding student outcomes?

Five themes emerged in response to these RQs which focused about direct and indirect instructional leadership practices perceived to be most important for ensuring student academic success. The emergent themes included creating a shared vision, creating a positive climate, cultivating leadership in others, managing data and processes, and improving instruction. The participants indicated that the instructional leadership practices that they perceived to be most important with regards to having a positive impact on student academic success were focusing on data when making building-level decisions, building effective teams that could carry out the mission and vision of the school and perform instructional leadership tasks such as monitoring instruction, and supporting teachers who they felt were the "boots on the ground" in the school building. In addition, all but two study participants adamantly responded that establishing and maintaining a positive school climate was critical to the success of students. One study participant indicated that having a school climate that was not positive and conducive to learning, other school processes would be sabotaged. In Chapter 5, I provide a summary and interpretation of my findings, my recommendations for school change, and an analysis of the potential impact of the study for positive social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

Introduction

This chapter contains a summary and interpretation of the research findings, implications for social change, and recommendations for further study. By conducting this study, I developed a deeper understanding and insight into the perceived and actual leadership practices of building principals and the teachers they lead and their potential to increase student achievement. I identified and described the specific actions, behaviors, and characteristics of effective school administrators. I used a descriptive case study design featuring an observational strategy approach. This study was needed to develop a better understanding of the link between effective leadership practices and their influence on academic success.

In the literature review, I reviewed the practices of instructional leadership because this approach has been established as effective, regardless of whether the school is Title I or not (Mitchell et al., 2015). I can then assert that using a system of effective practices is a superior way to serve all students. To create such a system, the effective practices of school leaders in Title I schools must be understood. This can only be done if the beliefs that inform these practices are also understood. This study furthers the capability of school leaders and other educators to enact school leadership practices by uncovering some of the previously poorly understood beliefs and practices of effective Title I school leaders.

I chose participants for this study using convenience sampling. The sample included four building principals and six teachers from an urban school district serving a

population in which 80% of children live in poverty. The schools were selected because they exist inside one district with similar demographics and are Title I schools. The principal and teacher participants work in a school in which students demonstrate high achievement. Individual virtual interviews lasting 45 minutes each were conducted during Spring 2020 with the participants.

I collected data through multiple methods. The first data source used was a face-to-face structured interview conducted virtually. The questionnaires contained 15 open-ended questions, which explored and validated the perception versus the actual leadership practices of the principals. (The questions for the principal and teacher participants are included in the interview protocols in Appendices A and B.) The study findings provide significant indicators of leadership practices in addition to what has been previously identified in the literature (Boudreaux & Davis, 2019). The three RQs that served as the foundation for the interview protocol were

RQ1: How do school leaders provide instructional leadership to improve student outcomes?

RQ2: What are the administrators' perceptions of the instructional practices of school leaders regarding student outcomes?

RQ3: What are the teachers' perceptions of the instructional practices of school leaders regarding student outcomes?

Several themes emerged. Each theme was directly related to the RQs. There were no discrepant cases or data that did not relate to the RQs.

Interpretation of Findings

The major findings were discussed in Chapter 4 for this study. For all three RQs, common themes included creating a shared vision, creating a positive climate, cultivating leadership in others, managing data and processes, and improving instruction. As I examined the insight principals and teachers gave concerning the perceptions of instructional leadership implementation by school principals, it became clear that the practices were evident in the schools. I noticed that principals and teachers were able to identify actions tied to instructional leadership. The principals and teachers also offered supporting information regarding school principals' instructional leadership practices. Principals and teachers at the different school locations were able to reinforce and deeply solidify the attention and implementation of the instructional leadership practice enacted by teachers and their school principals. The principals' and teachers' ability to perceive the instructional leadership behaviors of themselves and their principals is supported by Moore et al. (2016), who stated that leaders' characteristics are shown through their actions, which are subsequently recognized by other stakeholders. While instructional leadership actions and behaviors were identified in the study findings from all participants, it was clear that there were some actions and behaviors that were specific to individual school principals and individual schools. This speaks to the idea that even though school leaders may have different approaches when implementating instructional leadership practices, the instructional leadership framework can still have a positive impact on student outcomes and school success.

Summary of Findings in Relation to the Research Questions

The RQs were as follows:

RQ1: How do school leaders provide instructional leadership to improve student outcomes?

RQ2: What are the administrators' perceptions of the instructional practices of school leaders regarding student outcomes?

RQ3: What are the teachers' perceptions of the instructional practices of school leaders regarding student outcomes?

Create a shared vision. In regard to creating a shared vision, participants shared that the principal communicates the school's vision to members of the school community by emphasizing it in the school's décor (printed in the school to include classrooms), and parents receive this communication through letters and announcements. Contrasts that were not reemphasized across participants include that the principal announces the vision during faculty meetings and when recruiting students at school fairs. In support of these findings, Dixon (2015) conveyed that good principals are instructional leaders who provide staff with guidance and a sense of mission and students with motivation to succeed.

Create a positive school environment. Participants confirmed that the principal creates a positive, hospitable climate by making announcements about students' progress and giving recognition to students during honor programs. The principal openly congratulates students and encourages them to reach high expectations. The principal is visible during the school day and supports students who participate in extracurricular

activities. The principal also shows a vested interest in students' academic performance by writing individual comments on students' report cards. An identified contrast not reemphasized across participants was that financial incentives are given to teachers. In support of these findings, Brabham (2017) explained that effective principals focus on solidifying a safe and orderly school environment and display a supportive and responsive attitude towards children's needs.

Cultivate leadership in others. In the matter of cultivating leadership in others, participants shared that the principal provides professional growth opportunities for staff by encouraging professional development. They also shared that the principal uses observations, evaluations, and one-on-one conversations to identify strength and growth areas for teachers. Information not reemphasized across participants referenced that the principal sends information regarding tools through e-mail and encourages teachers to showcase their talent, which creates opportunities for leadership roles. In support of these findings, Moran and Larwin (2017) indicated that schools must have leaders who can cultivate and retain great teachers in order to have a positive impact on student outcomes.

Manage data and processes. With regards to managing data and processes, participants indicated that state test data and academic reports are used to make determinations and IEPs are used to determine students in need of pull-out services. Within that, participants identified the various forms of data points that are used to determine goal attainment, growth targets, and identify at-risk students throughout the year. Information not reemphasized across participants consisted of: tutoring opportunities for students, re-teaching methods in classrooms to address students'

misconceptions, and the use of absentee data. In support of these findings, Gurley et al. (2015) emphasizes that the principal's role in leading school improvement efforts that promote student achievement is very important to students' success.

Improve instruction. In reference to the principal improving instruction, participants shared that the principal observes instructional practice through unannounced and announced observations/evaluations. They also give feedback in one-on-one meetings. Feedback is given either via e-mail or in hard copy format. Information that was not reemphasized across participants revealed that the principal insists on keeping instructional time sacred by not disturbing instructional time with intercom announcement interruptions and frivolous, non- essential assemblies. Also, the principal uses walkthrough evaluations to observe instructional practices. In support of these findings, Rumbaut (2015) asserts that leaders who can confront the academic inequalities and social injustices serving as barriers to student achievement are needed.

Limitations of the Study

The small sample size of 10 participants in this study may prevent generalizing the findings to other Title I schools. Those who did not respond to the invitation to participate may have had different perspectives and experiences. In addition, because I was unable to observe the participants in their teaching and administrative environment, I had fewer data to triangulate. To minimize bias, I used the participants' words when inquiring about the implications of their thoughts and reactions to the interview questions. During the interview, I avoided summarizing the participants' responses in my own words. I also rephrased the interview questions so the participants could answer the

questions based on their personal experiences and when they did not understand the question. The use of the audio recordings allowed me to listen to the tone of the participants' voices while I observed their body language during the interview. I ensured transferability to other settings by providing thick descriptions and describing the purposeful selection of the participants. Involving the participants in evaluating the research findings, interpretations, and recommendations from this study, also helped address the credibility of the study. Finally, during the analysis phase, I made every effort to minimize bias by challenging preexisting assumptions that I might have had due to my personal experience as a school leader.

Recommendations

The results of this study identified specific instructional leadership practices perceived by successful elementary principals and teachers as having a positive impact on student growth. The first recommendation for future research is that the findings of this study will be presented at the district level to district level leaders, principals, and assistant principals to provide a deeper insight into the instructional leadership practices that have a positive influence on student achievement as perceived by successful elementary principals and teachers serving in the district which served as the setting for this study.

The second recommendation is to conduct a similar study at the secondary level-middle and high schools. Using the same research design and methodology, the purpose of the recommendation for future study is to determine if successful middle and high school principals and teachers describe similar instructional leadership practices as

having a positive influence on student achievement in Title I schools. Collecting data about the perceptions of principals and teachers at the middle and high school level could provide deeper insight as to how to support principals as instructional leaders at all levels.

The third and final recommendation is to conduct future research using a larger sample size. This recommendation could address one limitation of this study which was the small sample size of 10 particpants. Although the sample size for qualitative studies is dependent on the design and context (Boddy, 2016), attempting to conduct this research using the same design and methodology may increase confidence with regards to the practical application of the findings of this study.

Implications

In this study, school administrators identified as effective leaders demonstrated similar leadership attributes. Although these practices and behaviors may have been expressed differently, due to the unique personality of each individual, the purpose and anticipated outcomes were similar. This study was significant for social change as it may provide school districts and school leaders with a better understanding of effective school leaders' actions and behaviors when they participated in professional learning opportunities founded on research-based practices. Documentation obtained can be utilized in the development of leadership training for colleges and universities, along with local school districts' professional development plans and programs. Research revealed specific actions, behaviors, and practices of successful elementary principals. Results supplied meaningful knowledge useful in defining the expectations of an effective school leader.

The implications of this study as it relates to positive social change are relevant to principals and district level leaders in the field of education. While previous research described instructional leadership practices, this study addresses a gap in the literature because it provides insight into the specific instructional leadership practices perceived by successful elementary principals to have a positive impact on student growth in Title I schools. The findings of this study may be used to inform principals about specific instructional leadership practices as well as district-level leadership. Gaining insight into the specific instructional leadership practices perceived by successful elementary principals to have a positive impact on student outcomes could result in increased student achievement in schools locally and globally. District level leadership may also consider creating a mentoring program for elementary principals struggling to increase student achievement because of the lack of consistency with regards to the implementation of instructional leadership practices. The findings of this study may also influence decision making at the district level as it pertains to the number of district initiatives implemented each year as well as promote more thoughtfulness as it pertains to plans for incremental implementation. Gaining a better understanding about the specific instructional leadership perceived by successful elementary principals and the teachers they lead as having a positive influence on student achievement, may help elementary principals choose more intentional strategies and processes that may result in increased student achievement.

Conclusion

With the increased scrutiny and rising levels of accountability placed on school principals as it pertains to student growth and achievement, additional research must be conducted to identify the specific instructional leadership practices that principals must employ to promote student growth and achievement. There is an abundance of research that demonstrated the importance of effective school leadership as it pertains to positive student outcomes. It is no longer acceptable to leave principals without a specific framework for successful school leadership as it pertains to stabilizing cultures and creating positive school climates, strategies for prioritizing the management and monitoring of instructional practices, and the importance of the school's mission. It is crucial for every principal to be equipped with the knowledge, skills, and training to ensure that every student in their learning community is learning in an environment wherein he can thrive and demonstrate mastery and be equipped to survive in the local and global community.

After considering the state of affairs for students in Title I schools it is clear that the education system in the United States has yet to be shaped to meet Title I students' needs. The achievement gaps between different groups of students remain in all but a few unique schools. Yet, certain features of successful Title I schools have been identified. By deepening the understanding the relationship between Title I school leaders' leadership practices and the academic achievement of students this study added to the literature about effective school leadership practices all over the world.

Results from this study concluded successful school leaders do possess certain characteristics, actions, and behaviors which are attributed to their effectiveness as a leader. Supportive efforts offered by higher institutions of learning and school districts are needed in order to continue developing our current and future school leaders. Schools today need leaders who are highly qualified and competent in order to meet the challenges presented. Principals must implement a variety of leadership practices to create an environment that makes all stakeholders successful and engaged in focusing on academic achievement of students. These leadership practices range from empowering others to providing praise for a job well done. It is also important for school leaders to model behaviors to build and cultivate leadership capacity, work collaboratively toward a shared vision, and truly listen to all stakeholders, even in the face of external threats or political pressures, for the improvement of student outcomes. Because the needs in today's schools particularly Title I schools, are so vast and instructional leadership is the recommended leadership style, we will get closer to having more high performing schools with the more we learn about Instructional Leadership, and uncover new ways to implement for the betterment of our schools and students.

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Appendix A: Principal Interview Protocol

This interview will take approximately 45 minutes. The findings will also be shared with my dissertation committee, with the use of pseudonyms or otherwise reported so that no individuals can be identified. You can refuse to answer any of the questions and you can ask me not to use your responses at any time during or after this interview.

With your permission, I will tape the interview with a digital recorder. The interview will be transcribed by a professional transcription service. If information from this interview is published or presented at research conferences, then your name and other personal information will not be used.

In addition to the questions listed on this protocol, follow-up questions may be asked or additional questions may arise as a result of your answers.

Time of Interview: Date: Location: Interviewee and Role:

District Name:

School Name:

Questions

1. How long have you worked as a school leader? How long have you worked at this school?

2. To what extent did your certification program prepare you to do the work you are doing now?

3. What recommendations would you give to universities preparing students to become school leaders? What areas should they devote more time to? Why?

4. In your opinion, what are the most important tasks of a school principal?

5. What three activities do you spend the most time on in any week?

6. How do you perceive the term "instructional leadership"?

7. What role do you play in improving student achievement?

8. In what ways is instructional leadership operationalized to improve student achievement in your organization?

9. What percentage of the time do you spend working along the continuum of instructional leadership? Why do you think the percentage is what you perceive?

10. How do you operationalize the next steps in improving student achievement?

11. In your opinion, how have you been supported in building an instructional leadership culture by your district? Please provide examples.

12. Thinking about your role as principal, how would you prioritize your responsibilities?

13. What supports have you received from principal preparation programs, mentors, coaches, and/or your district that have been helpful in leading Title I schools (support can be from professional development, district, conferences, central office, teachers, support staff, colleagues, or your family)?

14. In your view, which is most important in leading Title I schools?

15. Is there any other information you would like to share about being an instructional leader in a Title I school?

Thank you for your answers. Do you have anything else you'd like to share?

Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you for your time, goodbye.

Appendix B: Teacher Interview Protocol

This interview will take approximately 45 minutes. The findings will also be shared with my dissertation committee, with the use of pseudonyms or otherwise reported so that no individuals can be identified. You can refuse to answer any of the questions and you can ask me not to use your responses at any time during or after this interview.

With your permission, I will tape the interview with a digital recorder. The interview will be transcribed by a professional transcription service. If information from this interview is published or presented at research conferences, then your name and other personal information will not be used.

In addition to the questions listed on this protocol, follow-up questions may be asked or additional questions may arise as a result of your answers.

Time of Interview: Date: Location: Interviewee and Role:

District Name:

School Name:

Questions

1. How long have you worked as a school leader? How long have you worked at this school?

2. How would you describe your race/ethnicity? Highest level of education?

3. The number of years as a classroom teacher? What subject/grade level did you teach?

4. How does your principal communicate the school's vision to the school community?

5. In what ways does your principal discuss students' progress, reward and recognize superior performance, and show visibility or vested interest in the school?

6. How does your principal create professional growth opportunities for staff?

7. What forms of data are used throughout the year to determine goal attainment, growth targets, and identify at-risk students?

8. How does your principal ensure that instructional time is sacred, observe instructional practice, and give instructional feedback?

9. How do you perceive the term "instructional leadership"?

10. Please describe instructional leadership in your organization. Whose roles, if any, are designed to be instructional leaders?

11. In what ways is instructional leadership operationalized to improve student achievement in your organization?

12. What role do you play in improving student achievement?

13. What percentage of the time do you spend working along the continuum of instructional leadership? Why do you think the percentage is what you perceive?

14. Please list the best teaching practices for teachers who work in Title I schools and give a rationale for why you think these are most important.

15. Is there any other information you would like to share about being a teacher in a Title I school?

Thank you for your answers. Do you have anything else you'd like to share?

Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you for your time, goodbye.