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Instructional Leadership Practices of High School Principals Regarding Proficiency in Literacy

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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Walden University
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MA, D'Youville College, 2016

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

High school principals at an urban public school district located in northern United States were inconsistently implementing instructional leadership practices to support teachers teaching literacy. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore how high school principals have implemented instructional leadership practices to support teachers teaching of literacy. The conceptual framework was the instructional leadership theory, which emphasized that educational leaders should encourage instructional staff to execute specific goals that lead to student academic success. Purposeful sampling was used to identify 8 high school principals. Data were collected via video conferencing interviews using Skype. Data were analyzed by using thematic analysis to identify emergent themes. The findings were that high school principals implement instructional leadership practices to support teachers teaching literacy through accountability, professional development, and collaboration with other academic departments. Implications for positive social change within the local urban public school district include recommendations for high school principals to support teachers teaching literacy via accountability, professional development, and collaboration with other academic departments in assisting students to graduate from school.

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Dedication

To my Heavenly Father, thank you for your many mercies and grace for giving me the strength to be in my right body and mind to be able to proceed on this journey.

I would like to dedicate this to my parents, may you both rest in peace and happiness, Margaret A. Blue and Emanuel C. Blue, for raising a child with grit and compassion. To my children, Kenneth G. Williams II, Emanuel J. Williams, and David C. Williams, thank you for being extremely patient with your mother in all the transitions of our new life. To my future husband, Derrick McNab, thank you for checking on me and keeping me on track and with great patience of postponing our big day so that I could complete my dream.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The research problem was that school principals have inconsistently implemented instructional leadership practices to support teachers teaching literacy. According to Darling-Hammond, Hyler, Gardner, & Espinoza (2017), instructional leadership practices assist students to become successful in the 21st century. Instructional leadership practices encompass effective communication to staff, students, and parents in regards to the mission of the school; common core learning standards and objectives; the high academic expectations of all students; data collection and assessments, including weekly quizzes, tests, and yearly state examinations as well as providing an opportunity for students to learn (Şenol & Lesinger, 2018). Instructional leadership practices should be applied by school leaders in order to enhance literacy curricula by assisting teachers to help their students in higher-order thinking (Bassetti, 2018; Thessin, 2019). School principals are instructional leaders (Collins, 2015) and accountable for student success (Carson, 2017; Deming & Figlio, 2016). Researchers have found that students' academic success is associated with school principals' instructional leadership practices (Marshall, 2018). Students benefit from having school principals who strive for high academic success (The National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2019). The findings of this study include information principals can use to better apply instructional leadership to support teachers. The implications for positive social change within the local school district and other high schools throughout the United Stated and globally include recommendations for high school principals regarding the application of instructional leadership to support teachers in assisting students to improve their proficiency in state assessments.

Background

The research site was an urban public-school district located in the southern United States consisting of 22 high schools that serve 13,000 high school students, of which about 9,000 of the students are African American. According to the district's Office of Accountability, the average state standardized test scores in literacy decreased (see Table 1) between 2015 and 2017; specifically, in 2015, 65% of students met the state benchmark scores, in 2016, 57% of students met the state benchmark scores, and in 2017, 51% of students met the state benchmark scores. The district superintendent stated that 10 of the 22 school principals were novice administrators who had been inconsistently applying their instructional leadership practices to support teachers who teach literacy. According to the District Board minutes documents between 2015 and 2017, teachers also complained that school principals have been inconsistently applying instructional leadership practices. Senior district administrators, such as associate superintendents and directors, decided to evaluate the leadership capacity of the principals by visiting the school sites on a monthly basis to help principals to better apply instructional leadership practices. The district superintendent shared that the associate superintendents, using a Likert scale survey of district literacy teachers, found that the teachers reported that school principals are inconsistently applying instructional leadership practices to support teachers who teach literacy. The district superintendent went on to say that although associate superintendents provided monthly feedback to principals, district administrators reported to the board members that principals continued to inconsistently support literacy teachers and literacy state scores (see Table 1) continued to decrease.

Table 1

Average State Standardized and District Test Scores in Literacy

Academic Year	Percentage of Students who Met Proficiency in Literacy	
	State	District
2015	65%	66%
2016	57%	59%
2017	51%	53%

According to a district principal, in 2018, the school district implemented The New Educational Bargain Multiple Pathways (NEBMP) program in order for students to increase their proficiency in literacy and to be college and career ready. The lead principal stated that NEBMP requires a commitment by school principals to support teachers teaching literacy because the mission of the district is for students to graduate from high school. Senior district administrators implemented NEBMP as a response to intervention literacy strategic plan for school principals to help teachers increase state standardized test scores in literacy. A senior school district administrator recommended that as the diverse student population continues to increase in this urban school district, school principals should consistently apply instructional leadership practices for students to increase proficiency in literacy.

Problem Statement

The research problem was that high school principals have inconsistently implemented instructional leadership practices to support teacher's teaching literacy. According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), instructional leadership practices assist

students to become successful in the 21st century. These instructional leadership practices

encompass effective communication to staff, students, and parents in regards to the

mission of the school; common core learning standards and objectives; the high academic

expectations of all students; data collection and assessments that include weekly quizzes,

tests, and yearly state examinations, as well as providing an opportunity for students to

learn (Şenol & Lesinger, 2018). Instructional leadership practices should be applied by

school leaders to enhance literacy curricula by assisting students in higher-order thinking

(Thessin, 2019). School principals need to support teachers who teach literacy in their

content classes (Bassetti, 2018) because principals are instructional leaders (Collins,

2015) and accountable for student success (Carson, 2017; Deming & Figlio, 2016).

Student academic success is associated with school principals' instructional leadership

practices (Marshall, 2018). Students benefit from having school principals who strive for

high academic success (The National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2019).

The instructional leadership of principals is required for school effectiveness in students

being proficient in literacy and their success of being college and career ready (Şenol &

Lesinger, 2018).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand how high school

principals have inconsistently implemented instructional leadership practices to support

teachers teaching of literacy. Researchers indicated that there was a correlation between

high school principals' instructional leadership practices and student achievement

(Accountability Designations, 2018). School principals should continue to improve their

instructional leadership practices as instructional leaders (Zepeda, Jimenez, & Lanoue, 2015) because instructional leadership practices contribute to students' academic achievement (Accountability Designations, 2018). High school principals should implement instructional leadership to assist teachers in incorporating literacy to improve student achievement.

Research Question

Instructional leaders should place emphasis on teaching practices (Terosky, 2016). Instructional leadership practices assist students to become successful in the 21st century (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). School principals should provide opportunities for students to learn (Şenol & Lesinger, 2018) and support teachers to enhance literacy curricula (Thessin, 2019). The research question that guided this study was:

How do high school principals' implement instructional leadership practices to support teachers teaching literacy?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study comprised the instructional leadership theory of Murphey, Hallinger, Weil, and Mitman (1983). Murphey et al.'s theory contains three main concepts of instructional leadership: (a) functions engaged by the principal, (b) the kinds of activities performed by the principal, and (c) procedures and practices of the school organization. I used this conceptual framework to understand how principals, as leaders in public high schools within an urban school district, apply their instructional leadership practices to help teachers for students to improve their proficiency in literacy. For example, the principal has various interactions with literacy

teachers, and such interactions are based on yearly teacher observations; activities that include monthly communication with teachers about data collection, monitoring student's performances, and gaps in learning; and adhering to state and district policies procedures of the school. I developed the interview protocol (see Appendix A) in order to understand the: (a) functions of these school principals, (b) types of instructional leadership practices these school principals apply to support literacy teachers, and (c) processes of the school regarding how high school principals help literacy teachers to increase standardized test scores in literacy.

Nature of the Study

In this study, I used a basic qualitative research design. Yin (2018) stated that this research design was applicable when the researcher was asking how questions about a unique occurrence in which the researcher has nominal or limited control. Qualitative research begins with a problem or question (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Qualitative researchers gather data through discussions with experienced participants in the field about a specific topic (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I chose a basic qualitative research design to understand how urban high school principals apply instructional leadership to support teachers in helping students to improve their proficiency in state assessments.

Definitions of Key Terms

Accountability: A cornerstone of contemporary education policy; increasingly characterized by external monitoring and an emphasis on outcomes or results (Smith & Benavot, 2019).

Instructional leadership practices: These practices include setting clear goals, managing curriculum, monitoring lesson plans, allocating resources, and evaluating teachers regularly to promote student learning and growth ("Four Instructional Leadership Skills Principals Need," 2019).

Professional development: Structured professional learning that results in changes to teacher knowledge and practices and improvements in student learning outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

Proficiency in literacy: An assessment that encompasses the skills and knowledge that are necessary to learn to read, including phonological awareness/beginning reading, listening, speaking, and writing (Connors-Tadros, 2014).

Assumptions

One assumption I made was that the urban high school principals would truthfully answer the interview questions found in the interview protocol. Another assumption was that the instructional leadership practices of principals are related to students' proficiency in literacy. I also assumed that instructional leadership practices contribute to student achievement. With the high expectation of meeting state benchmarks and district standards, high school principals may not have wanted to provide detailed responses to the interview questions.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this research was one urban school district in a southern state that serves 22 high schools and 13,000 high school students, of which 9,000 students are African American. One delimitation was that the sample were urban high school

principals. Another delimitation of the study was the timeframe of the interviews and the location of the study site.

Limitations

One limitation of this study was generalizability of the findings. Another limitation was the sample of urban high school principals. The use of a basic qualitative research design was also a limitation because I was the only one responsible for data collection and analysis.

Significance

The findings of this study have significance for stakeholders (i.e., district administrators, high school principals, teachers, and students), the potential to contribute to the existing knowledge on instructional leadership practices in literacy, and may have implications for social change. The findings of this research will help urban high school principals to better apply instructional leadership practices in literacy in order to improve instruction and students' academic achievement. The implications for positive social change within the local school district include recommendations for urban high school principals regarding the application of instructional leadership to better support teachers in assisting students to improve their proficiency in state assessments.

Summary

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand how high school principals have inconsistently implemented instructional leadership practices to support teachers teaching of literacy. I used the instructional leadership theory as the conceptual framework of this study. The goal of the study was to make recommendations for urban

high school principals regarding their application of instructional leadership to better support teachers in assisting students to improve their proficiency in state assessments. In Chapter 2, I will present a review of the literature about instructional leadership, instructional leadership practices, proficiency in literacy, student achievement, and positive social change are presented.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Researchers have acknowledged a relationship between the instructional leadership practices of high school principals and student achievement (Fullan, 2013; Karadağ et al., 2015, Shaked & Schechter, 2016, Wieczorek & Manard, 2018). The research problem was that school principals have inconsistently implemented instructional leadership practices to support teacher's teaching literacy. Researchers have indicated that there was a correlation between high school principal's instructional leadership practices and student achievement (Accountability Designations, 2018). Researchers have also emphasized that having a principal whose objectives are based on supporting instruction, student achievement, the quality of education that the student receives, and the professional development of the teacher (Terosky, 2016).

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand how high school principals have inconsistently implemented instructional leadership practices to support teachers teaching of literacy. The responses from the participants of this research study were analyzed in the context of the seminal work on instructional leadership by Murphey et al. (1983). In the instructional leadership theory, which was used as the conceptual framework of this study, Murphey et al. identified three exemplary instructional leadership practices: (a) aligning the functions engaged by the principal, (b) activities performed by the principal, and (c) procedures and practices of the school organization.

This literature review includes research on instructional leadership, instructional leadership practices, student achievement, and literacy proficiency of high school students. I also thoroughly examine the extant research concerning the influence of

principals as instructional leaders, student achievement, and high school students being proficient in literacy in the literature review. Murphey et al.'s (1983) work on exemplary practices of instructional leadership was also reviewed because it is considered a significant theory in the field of instructional leadership and has important recommendations for principals as instructional school leaders.

The implications of this study are significant to urban high school students to assist them in being proficient in literacy to prepare them to be college and career ready. The results of this study can be used to assist teachers and principals incorporate literacy skills and strategies into the content courses and obtain literacy teaching skills and strategies through professional development and additional credentials. Moreover, the findings help high school principals to better understand how to apply instructional leadership practices in literacy to improve instruction and students' academic achievement. The results of this study have implications for positive social change in the local school district through assisting high school principals better apply their instructional leadership practices to support teachers in helping students graduate from high school and become proficient in literacy.

Literature Search Strategy

I conducted an all-inclusive and organized search of current literature by using different electronic online databases through Walden University's Library including ProQuest, ERIC, Google Scholar, Emerald, and SAGE. I located the literature in this review from scholarly, peer-reviewed journals; books; U.S. government websites; and professional education websites, including the electronic databases of School Leadership

and Management, Education Research Institute, and Educational Management

Administration and Leadership; *The Journal of Research in Rural Education* and *Journal*

of Educational Administration; and the websites of the U.S. Department of Education,

National Association of Secondary School Principals, Instructional Leadership for

Effective Learning. Key words that helped guide the literature review included

accountability, data-based assessments (DBA), diverse school population, Center for

American Progress (CAP), comprehensive support and improvement (CSI), culturally

responsive instruction, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), instructional leadership,

instructional leadership practices, Instructional management, Murphey, Hallinger, Weil,

and Mitman, positive school learning climate, positive social change, professional

development, high school literacy, high school principals, principal leadership practices,

principal leadership, and *school environment, standardized literacy scores.* Additionally,

available literature related to the conceptual framework of this study was thoroughly and

analytically studied through the reading of educational books, searching for peer-

reviewed articles cited by other articles and journals, retrieving references and resources

from the Walden University librarians, and investigating other research published within

the last 5 years of the completion of this study. I concentrated my literature search on

peer-reviewed articles published between 2016 and 2020. Research and references more

than 5 years old have only been incorporated to provide foundational and seminal

thinking, theories, and research.

Conceptual Framework

I used the instructional leadership theory of Murphey et al. (1983) as the conceptual framework for this study. In the theory, Murphey et al. outlined three main concepts of instructional leadership: (a) functions engaged by the principal, (b) the kinds of activities performed by the principal, and (c) procedures and practices of the school organization. I used this conceptual framework to understand how principals, as leaders in public high schools within an urban school district, apply their instructional leadership practices to help teachers teach students to improve their proficiency in literacy. For example, the principal has various interactions with teachers, and such interactions are based on yearly teachers' observations; activities that include monthly communication with teachers about data collection, monitoring student's performances, and gaps in learning; and adhering to state and district policies procedures of the school and annual state assessments. Specifically, I used the theory as a lens through which to understand the: (a) functions of these school principals, (b) types of instructional leadership practices these school principals apply to support literacy teachers, and (c) processes of the school regarding how high school principals help teachers to teach literacy to increase standardized test scores in literacy.

Murphey et al. (1983) combined and expanded upon significant perspectives of the instructional leadership model. Over the past 3 decades since the creation of the theory, frameworks of instructional leadership have been discussed in the literature (Boyce & Bowers, 2018; Krüger & Scheerens, 2012; Terosky, 2016). The framework for this research study was not only designed to explore the instructional leadership practices

of urban high school principals but was designed to identify how urban high school principals implement instructional leadership practices based on the research question. Murphey et al. theorized that strategic leaders apply the same instructional leadership practices while managing their organizations.

In this study, I investigated urban high school principals' instructional leadership practices within the context of Murphey et al.'s (1983) research. Murphey et al. used commendable leaders from various parts of the world as participants in their study and identified the most effective instructional leadership experiences these leaders had in common, continually updating their findings over the years (Boyce & Bowers, 2018; Krüger & Scheerens, 2012). The conceptual framework presented here combines and expands upon the three main concepts of instructional leadership theory . By merging significant research that has already been presumed, the combinations of the three significant concepts would challenge the instructional leadership practices and strategies as it pertains to high school students becoming proficient in literacy and teachers incorporating literacy into their content courses.

The first main concept of the instructional leadership theory focuses on aligning the functions engaged by the principal. Principals exhibit this concept by establishing credibility through aligning their actions and objectives with state, federal, and local educational standards and guidelines (Learned, 2016a; Şenol & Lesinger, 2018). The next two concepts focus on the kinds of activities performed by the principal and the procedures and practices of the school organization. School principals should regularly develop and expand their instructional leadership practices to influence and support their

students' academic achievement and to contribute to the staff's enhancement in teaching literacy in their content courses (Zepeda et al., 2015). Principals empower their students and staff by constructing trust and leadership expertise and procedures for enhancing students' analytical thinking and encouraging staff to maintain and adhere to the school's objectives of learning, standards, and teaching literacy across content areas (Bassetti, 2018; Collins, 2015; Thessin, 2019).

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variable

Diverse Student Population

Due to the increasingly diverse student population and increased emphasis on the evolvement in the field of education in the 1900s, the role and traits of a principal have changed into a dual entity (Terosky, 2016). During this timeframe, the trait leadership methodology was defined by singularized power and authority, which was based on the classifications of the leadership attributes and characteristics of the leader (Karadağ, Bektaş, Çoğaltay, & Yalçın, 2015). The duality of the role of the principal was transformed from an instructional leader that focused on the school's curriculum to that of an administrator whose emphasis is on the operational tasks of managing the school and the instructional practices of the teachers to improve and increase student achievement (Terosky, 2016). This transition has changed the dynamics of the role of the principal (Terosky, 2016).

However, the prerequisites of the most vulnerable and marginalized students are often focused on intense interventions and creating differentiation and scaffolding instruction (Pentimonti et al., 2017). The creation of differentiation and scaffolding along

with intense interventions to improve literacy skills and strategies have not been successful (Terosky, 2016). A determined shared language needs to be established to communicate or transmit the instructional practices for all students and in all classrooms. Shared language needs are considered high-leverage, research-based practices known as the hallmarks of advanced literacy (Pentimonti et al., 2017). The Hallmarks of Advanced Literacy are important because they lead to the academic advancement of the student in language and literacy skills and strategies (Pentimonti et al., 2017). These compulsory instructional practices provide opportunities to be observed while teaching and administrating the instructional groundwork for instruction (Bartholomew & De Jong, 2017). There are four advanced literacy hallmarks: (a) implementing a variety of rich texts from different viewpoints; (b) involving and building upon language and comprehension skills and strategies; (c) practicing routine writing over an extended time to construct language and comprehension; and (d) most importantly, incorporating vocabulary to assist with comprehension (Bartholomew & De Jong, 2017). The four advanced literacy hallmarks assist students at different academic levels because the texts should be introspective of the student's cultural background and their background knowledge of the text that assists them in developing a flourishing comprehension of their skills and the utilization of literacy strategies (Bartholomew & De Jong, 2017).

School Principals as Leaders

Scholars have emphasized that having a principal whose objectives are based on the instruction has a specific emphasis on how the instruction is delivered, has an affirmative impact on the growth of the teacher professionally and increases student

achievement and the quality education that the student receives (Terosky, 2016). Karadağ et al. (2015) conducted a meta-analysis about the diversity of leadership characteristics among instructional leadership and student achievement. According to Stogdill (1948, 1950), the theory that there is not an association between leadership and high student achievement limits the characteristics and traits of a leader and, creates subdivisions such as, participation, accountability, achievements, and assessments which concludes the trait leadership methodology. The school principal is an individual that promotes strategies and proposals to develop the school's curriculum that distributes resources to the teachers and students. The principal implements systemic procedures of the curriculum to ensure alignment of curriculum resources with rigorous state standards for the courses that are taught. Rigorous state standards are implemented to engage student's and to meet the high achievement levels and standards that have been implemented. Principals develop and depend on leadership contributions from a variety of stakeholders, including teachers, parents, federal, state and local departments of education (Karadağ et al., 2015).

According to Karadağ et al. (2015), principals are accountable for student achievement and that there is a direct correlation between the instructional leadership of the principal and the student's achievement. The behavior of the instructional leader and the achievement level of the student is associated based on the behaviors and guidance of the principal based on state assessments, the values that have has been established by the instructional leader, expectations and Next Generation Learning Standards (Karadağ et al., 2015). Researchers have placed importance on the leadership skills of principals in successful schools towards the end of the 1970s, and they have been measured by these

skills as one of the main factors of school efficacy and usefulness (Şişman, 2016).

The variety of information and data that is required for students to actively engage and advance in the 21st Century is swiftly fluctuating. The increase of literacy requirements is attentively altering our economy, the labor force, and the technological development that is infused into our daily lives. The literacy requirements and advancements demand that students become critical thinkers, be able to utilize this new technology to resolve issues. Society recognizes the marginalization of students who have diversified the student population, and instructional transcendence and practices need to be amended to meet the needs of the diverse student population. By implementing a learning model and an instructional team of teachers and staff, they can have a critical impact on the culture of the learning and development of the school (Terosky, 2016). With the instructional team's support and commitment of additional responsibilities, it assists the school principal in focusing on instructional leadership (Terosky, 2016). With a strong leadership team in place who share similar academic goals for the school and students, their efforts may increase student's academics (Terosky, 2016). Since the restraints of the instructional model solely concentrated on principals, the focus was transferred to a transformational leadership model and consequently to the distributed leadership based on the development of teachers as leaders (Bush, 2015).

Instructional Leadership

According to Bartholomew and De Jong (2017), the instructional leadership framework (ILF) offers a guideline to assist in advancing student learning, cultivating

advancements in delivering instruction and being inclusive of the knowledge within these

diverse communities. Nationwide principals and teachers feel inadequately educated in

effectively delivering culturally responsive instruction to meet the needs of the diverse

student population that they teach (Bartholomew & De Jong, 2017); however, recognition

of the background knowledge that these diverse student populations bring to the

educational setting and the inclusion of culturally linguistic instruction engages the

students 21st Century literacies in a diverse manner that is conducive to their education

and learning. The reality of this educational shift or change not only impacts the students

but also the teachers and administration (Perrone & Tucker 2018). To enrich the student's

education the teacher and administration must meet this diverse student population where

they are by being inclusive of the diverse cultures, languages, gender, and educational

experience and into the school environment. As the needs of the diverse student

population are being addressed, support for teachers in the redesigning of the

instructional curriculum must also be supported to meet the literacy demands of this

culturally linguistic pedagogy and curriculum by providing professional development

(Bartholomew & De Jong, 2017).

   According to Samuels (2019), "Teachers who are committed to cultural

competence, establish high expectations, and position themselves as both facilitators and

learners" (para 2). With the change of the student population to a more diverse student

population, literacy is an important component to continuously build upon the

comprehensive culturally linguistic curriculum (Vogel, 2018). Culturally linguistic

curriculum is inclusive, rigorous, and provide equitable opportunities for all students

(Vogel, 2018). The Department of Education stated, "ILF relies on research-based practices to support the inquiry work of schools led and guided by Instructional Leadership Teams (ILTs) and district-level leaders" (Vogel, 2018, para 2). The culturally linguistic curriculum requires teachers to enhance their teaching practices by also incorporating specific professional development that is infused with rigorous culturally linguistic content and practices.

Instructional leadership is a combination of guidelines that are defined by advanced literacy instruction that incorporates the theories of culturally linguistic curriculum as an instructional standard that is inclusive of all students (Samuels, 2019). Implanted in utilizing these theories is the identification of the instructional leadership team will select an instructional significant area that is fitting to their school data as a primary emphasis to assist in improving student achievement. Incorporating a culturally linguistic curriculum encourages students to make a variety of connections and build relationships with the diverse curriculum to cultivate critical thinking skills across curriculum content that provides relevant, rigorous instruction that is inclusive of developing meaningful relationships that has an explicit influence on student achievement (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). The explicit influences on student achievement should be provided by the teacher and the school. However, by intentionally providing opportunities for students to actively explore, have direct interactions with content, and introducing multiple interactions to further engage the student's high expectations for academic achievement that is equitable for all students. According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2020), research illustrated links between students' positive

outcomes and interactions with educators who both bring high-expectations for all

students' academic achievement and who affirm, value, and utilize student's multiple

literacies, languages, racial, cultural, and ethnic identities as assets for teaching and

learning as well as, the interactions inside school and outside of school (para 3).

Principal Leadership and Student Success

Developing these relationships and affording students' an opportunity to

experience cultural and academic activities outside of school and outside of their

communities provides exposure to innovative and impactful learning spaces for all

students to develop critical thinking skills, and intellectually challenging curriculum by

being exposed to different perspectives in assisting them in developing academically.

With the intellectually challenging curriculum, there must be accountability procedures

and guidelines in place. The U.S. Department of Education re-evaluated the No Child

Left Behind (NCLB) accountability measures and implemented Every Student Succeeds

Act (ESSA) under President Barack Obama in 2015. Every Student Succeeds Act

(ESSA) made it a requirement that all states measure give an account of data, and

improve academic performance among students. According to Jimenez and Sargrad

(2017), "Given the 14-year gap between ESSA and NCLB, the ways in which the old law

measured and improved school quality were no longer useful in improving student

outcomes" (p. 2). The archaic NCLB structure was measured by a pass or fail system that

did not provide detailed information to accurately measure student achievements and

assessments whereas, the ESSA standards mandated that explicit indicators be used as a

comprehensive approach that was integrated into the accountability process and

procedures. The new process and procedures were focused on the distribution of responsibilities among states, school districts, and schools to use evidence-based strategies that provided flexibility for school improvements and specific interventions for struggling schools and students.

Diverse students who are preparing to attend college, the ESSA law have documented that states need to construct an accountability system that would be able to prepare students to be college and career ready and to be able to compete on a global level due to the immediate change in the technological advances that are happening in the 21st Century. According to Jimenez and Sargrad (2017), "More students can no longer compete in the economy without advanced training beyond a high school education" (p. 3). Jimenez and Sargrad (2017) stated, "If all children are to succeed in college and careers, then states must continue to tackle the persistent gaps in educational attainment for particular groups of students" (p. 2). With diverse groups who are often socio-economically disadvantaged and who attend college, their rates of high school and college completion still fall behind the national levels. With these persisting gaps, provisions must be in place by the state to ensure that higher education is attainable for diverse groups. According to Jimenez and Sargrad (2017), "Center for American Progress (CAP) reviewed how states were expanding their accountability systems to better support school and district improvement" (p. 2). CAP acknowledged that five objectives in which states are categorizing reforms and new concepts of accountability that includes: (a) assessing the progress of students towards college and career readiness, (b) recognizing the gaps and developing quality improvement strategies, (c) state

structures of provisions and mediations, (d) resource accountability, and (e) professional accountability (Jimenez & Sargrad, 2017). The CAP provisions that are in place assist states in progressing toward the vision of building accountability mechanisms. The CAP mechanisms accentuated two important goals that ensured that these accountability systems provide equitable opportunities by providing systems to assist marginalized students and provide a system that creates an academic environment that is safe, welcoming, and inclusive of people from all cultural backgrounds (Jimenez & Sargrad, 2017).

ESSA reports provided student's academic data, and distributed school classifications such as their accountability status, and utilizing the data to narrow the gap and update strategic supports to assist in developing and applying strategies to improve efforts in narrowing the gap. School districts must yearly report to the state about the assessment scores of the students in regards to set goals for specific indicators such as achievement scores in reading and mathematics for Grades 3 - 8, and upon entering high school, the high school graduation percentage rate, and English language arts aptitude level for only English students (Jimenez & Sargrad, 2017). The state's comprehensive data specified the distinct levels of student learning and engagement such as, advanced placement courses, office discipline referrals and suspensions, habitual absenteeism, qualifications of teachers and staff, and the cost per student that is being spent, and high school matriculation rates (Jimenez & Sargrad, 2017). The state utilized these indicators to identify schools that may not meet the state benchmarks and would be classified as requiring comprehensive support and improvement (CSI) (Jimenez & Sargrad, 2017).

Specifically, targeted and identified schools receive ESSA funding under Title 1 regulations from the state once every 3 years, however, these targeted schools are elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools (Jimenez & Sargrad, 2017).

Evidence-based strategies such as reorganizing new teachers, providing innovation zones of learning, and enabling students to enroll into schools that are in good standing are ways to engage in challenging the pressing issues of targeted schools. According to Jimenez and Scott (2017), lowest-performing 5% of schools in the state participated in Title I, any public high school with graduation rates less than 67%, and any Title I school previously identified for targeted support and improvement that fails to meet the state's exit criteria after implementing interventions (p. 5). The implementation of interventions and targeted supports are rigorously implemented within schools and when the data shows that these supports are ineffective, the state must take difficult measures and opt to phase out the school and disseminate students to other schools that would best suit the student's specific academic needs. Targeted underperforming schools are acknowledged yearly based on their state assessment scores. Underperforming schools must have in place evidence-based strategies until they meet the state's requirements and benchmarks of improvement. Resources must be distributed to these underperforming schools to assist in addressing these prerequisites and if these schools fail to meet these prerequisites, then the state must take supplementary measures for those schools that fail to meet the requirements of the state.

Legislation for policy purposes according to the ESSA's limitations of the requirements, says that states would have to contemplate a comprehensive outlook about

what student success looks like. This also encompassed the main goal of preparing

students to be college and career ready; however, the standards, assessments,

accountability, school improvement, additional student supports, and teacher efficiency

and efficacy demand that students receive a balanced, extensive, and realistic education

because not all students have the desire to attend college but are more vocational.

According to Jimenez and Scott (2017), "Definitions of college and career readiness are

formal and informal statements … that their systems of education should provide to

students so they are successful in college, the workforce, and society" (p. 6). The

definitions of college and career readiness are promoted from K-12 grade levels that are

prescribed with the alignment and application of NGLS. The prescribed definitions have

been classified in various ways through state education legislation for policy purposes

and the unprescribed definitions are not classified but are documented for federal

resources. Students are required to be proficient in core subjects such as math, reading,

writing, science, social studies, and history and utilize critical thinking and investigative

analyzation that is infused with the alliance of social and emotional knowledge, and

community engagement. The five guidelines are used by the state to detect and classify

underperforming schools every 3 years.

School Principals and School Environment

The principal is the individual who executes and upholds the program development

based on federal, state, and local guidelines, distributes supplies and sources, improves

the performance of the teachers and students by inspiring and reassuring them, and

influencing them to meet the justifications of the school (Karadağ et al., 2015). If the

criterion promotes strong attachments and relationships, then the results should be a sense of safety for all and acceptance. The school cultivation and the environment are created by students, teachers, administrators, parents, other staff members, and community stakeholders. The school culture is conveyed and managed by the school administrators. The school's environment is developed by the habits, beliefs of cultural inclusion, observations, manners, performances and standards, that has an impact on how the school and faculty functions, including the tone, methods and modes of communication, and the design of leadership of the school. Major stakeholders are crucial in formulating organizational trust in schools by cultivating a safe environment for students to learn and for staff to work. Explicit and clear communication among administrators and other stakeholders must be crucial in assembling trust within the school, increasing student and staff morale, and creating a safe environment to express concerns, ask questions and be heard (Şenol & Lesinger, 2018).

Instructional management along with instructional leadership requires principals to have acquired knowledge in a higher educational program to command a school. A principal's dedication to improve student's academic achievement requires that the students are exposed, involved, and engaged in specific learning environments outside of the school to intentionally create knowledge that is aligned with NGLS and collaboration between the curriculum and alternative educational stakeholders (Şenol & Lesinger, 2018). Academic objectives of the school should be explicit and understood based on the state, federal, and local educational regulations. The academic objectives and standards must also be implemented by the staff and accomplished by the students and explicitly

communicated to the students, parents, community stakeholders, and executed by the teaching staff.

Making sure that the academic standards and objectives are aligned with NGLS requires a certain amount of accountability that is constructed by giving students data-based assessments (DBA's) and having unannounced and announced observations by the principal for teachers. The state and data-based assessments and observations offer constructive feedback of improvement of teaching and assessing the academic gap of students. Obtaining these high academic standards and expectations creates a continuous learning environment with minimal interruptions, the implementation of new skills, the reteaching of foundational skills, and concepts from professional developments that teachers take to promote the school's objectives and student academic success. The school principal's objective is to provide a continuous learning environment that promotes the objective and standards of the school and a welcoming culturally inclusive learning environment for students and staff (Şenol & Lesinger, 2018).

Seminal work of Ediger (2014), positions a direct link between the principal having confidence in its teachers, students and the school that it governs. The school also provides the dietary needs of the students and meet the student's social and emotional needs, provide a school food bank to meet the dietary needs of the student's and their families over the weekend, and also providing a school consignment shop to meet the clothing needs of the students and their family as well. Although, major improvements to high school have had a minimal impact on students that has not been the same for students who are marginalized in specific subgroups (Becker & Luthar, 2002; Cook &

Evans, 2000; Davison, Young, Davenport, Butterbaugh, & Davison, 2004; Lee, 2002, 2004). Studies of a variety of administrative and environmental elements of schools, studies have indicated that administration alone do not increase school effectiveness; the proof is not as resilient for any administrative or environmental adjustments alone will lead to improved student academic success. Two components need to be considered: (a) students and teacher's agendas and (b) how the content courses are arranged to meet the academic needs of the student based on allotted time that meets state and federal guidelines. The problem is how principals apply instructional leadership practices to support teachers in teaching students to improve their proficiency in state standardized test scores in literacy have not been examined using a basic qualitative research design.

Although, research reveals principals play an important role as instructional leaders in student academic success and is associated with school principals' instructional leadership practices (Marshall, 2018). Narrowing the literacy proficiency gap and improving student academic success at schools, is not explicitly known what principals themselves believe are their leadership standards or practices influencing student academic success (Chibani & Chibani, 2013; Dhuey & Smith, 2014; Dutta & Sahney, 2016; McKinney et al., 2015).

Due to the increasingly diverse student population and emphasis on the evolvement in the field of education in the 1900s, the representation of how the role and traits of a principal have changed into a dual entity. During this timeframe, the trait leadership methodology was defined by singularized power and authority. The trait leadership development was based on the classifications of the leadership attributes and

characteristics of the leader (Karadağ et al., 2015). Researchers have disputed that the

principal's disposition and qualities are not the reasons of student's academic success,

however, the differentiation between the schools was due to the leadership behaviors of

the school administrators (Karadağ et al., 2015).

With establishing the rationale of the school, principals as instructional leaders

must establish that the rationale is explicitly determined and agreed upon with the

stakeholders (Karadağ et al., 2015). The duality of the role of the principal was

transformed from an instructional leader that focused on the school's curriculum, the

instructional practices of the teachers to improve and increase student achievement

(Terosky, 2016). With the transition of the role of the principal from an instructional

leader to an administrator whose emphasis is on the operational tasks of managing the

school has changed the dynamics of the role of the principal (Terosky, 2016). The

instructional leaders emphasis is based on the stability of teaching practices and staff and

learning by creating a vision for the school, staff commitment of the vision of the school

that is presented by the principal and to engage student's on a higher-order thinking level

that fosters critical thinking skills, and quality education that all students are entitled that

has been constructed on NGLS that have been set by state educational regulations

(Terosky, 2016).

Researchers have emphasized that having a principal whose objectives are based

on the instruction has a specific emphasis on how the instruction is delivered, has an

affirmative impact on the growth of the teacher professionally and increases student

achievement and the quality education that the student receives (Terosky, 2016). Karadağ

et al. (2015) conducted a meta-analysis about the diversity of leadership characteristics among instructional leadership and student achievement. According to Stogdill (1948, 1950), the theory that there is not an association between leadership and high student achievement limits the characteristics and traits of a leader but, creates subdivisions such as, participation, accountability, achievements, and assessments which concludes the trait leadership methodology. The leadership methodology is common in leaders and attempts to answer why some people are effective leaders and others are not. The leadership methodology also tries to identify the talents, skills and characteristics of people who have risen to a certain level of power or influence. The characteristics are often compared to leaders who are likely to be successful leaders and leaders who are not successful as leaders.

Principal Accountability

According to Karadağ et al. (2015), principals are accountable for the student achievement and that there is a direct correlation between the instructional leadership of the principal and the student's achievement. The behavior of the instructional leader and the achievement level of the students are associated based on the behaviors and guidance of the principal based on state assessments, the values that have has been established by the instructional leader. The increase of literacy requirements is attentively altering the economy, the labor force, and the technological development that was infused into our daily lives. The literacy requirements and advancements demand that students become critical thinkers, be able to utilize this new technology to resolve issues. According to Molla and Gale (2019), ILF offers a guideline to assist in advancing student learning,

cultivating advancements in delivering instruction and being inclusive of the knowledge within these diverse communities. Nationwide principals and teachers feel inadequately educated in effectively delivering culturally responsive instruction to meet the needs of the diverse student population that they teach along with teaching literacy within their content courses.

Samuels (2020) and Educator Diversity (2019) stated that recognition of the background knowledge that the diverse student population brings to the educational setting and the inclusion of culturally linguistic instruction engages the students in the 21st century literacies in a diverse manner that is conducive to their education and learning. To enrich the students' education the teacher and administration must meet the diverse student population where they are being inclusive of the diverse cultures, languages, gender, and educational experience. As the needs of the diverse student population would be addressed, support for teachers in the redesigned instructional curriculum must also be supported to meet the literacy demands of the culturally linguistic pedagogy and curriculum by providing professional development and assistance in implementation.

According to WeTeachNYC (2019), "ILF requires that we engage with instructional practices of Advanced Literacy and that we do so with Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education as out driving force so that we ensure high quality and equitable instruction for every student" (para 2). With the change of the student population to a more diverse student population, the importance to continuously build upon the literacy foundation of the student should be comprehensive of a culturally

linguistic curriculum that would be inclusive, rigorous, and provide equitable

opportunities for all students (Stricker, 2019). The culturally linguistic curriculum

requires teachers to enhance their teaching practices by also incorporating specific

professional development that would be infused with rigorous culturally linguistic

content and practices.

Implanted in utilizing these theories would be the identification of the

instructional leadership team would be selected with an instructional significant area that

would be fitting to their school data as a primary emphasis to assist in improving student

achievement. Incorporating a culturally linguistic curriculum encourages students to

make a variety of connections and build relationships with the diverse curriculum

(Aronson & Laughter, 2016). Providing culturally linguistic curriculum assists in critical

thinking skills across curriculum content that provides rigorous instruction (Aronson &

Laughter, 2016). Incorporating culturally linguistic curriculum assists in developing

meaningful relationships that has an explicit influence on student achievement (Aronson

& Laughter, 2016). The explicit influences on student achievement should be provided by

the teacher and the school. By providing opportunities for students to actively explore,

have direct interactions with content, and introducing multiple interactions to further

engage the student's high expectations for academic achievement that is equitable for all

students. According to Samuels (2019), research illustrates links between students'

positive outcomes and interactions with educators who both bring high-expectations for

all students' and expect high academic achievement. With the intellectually challenging

curriculum, there must be accountability procedures and guidelines in place. The U.S.

Department of Education re-evaluated the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) accountability

measures and implemented ESSA under President Barack Obama in 2015. ESSA made it

a requirement that all states measure, give an account of data, and improve academic

performance among students. The ESSA law documented that states needed to construct

an accountability system that was able to prepare students to be college and career ready

and to be able to compete on a global level due to the immediate change in the

technological advances that are happening in the 21st Century.

According to Jimenez and Sargrad (2017), "More students can no longer compete

in the economy without advanced training beyond a high school education" (p.3).

Jimenez and Sargrad stated, "If all children are to succeed in college and careers, then

states must continue to tackle the persistent gaps in educational attainment for particular

groups of students" (p.2). With these marginalized groups who are often socio-

economically disadvantaged and diverse students who attend college, their rates of high

school and college completion still fall behind the national levels. Provisions must be in

place by the state to ensure that higher education is attainable for diverse students. CAP

acknowledged that five objectives in which states are categorizing reforms and new

concepts of accountability that includes: (a) assessing the progress of students towards

college and career readiness, (b) recognizing the gaps and developing quality

improvement strategies, (c) state structures of provisions and mediations, (d) resource

accountability, and (e) professional accountability (Jimenez & Sargrad, 2017). The

provisions that are in place assist states in progressing toward the vision of building

accountability mechanisms. The mechanisms accentuate two important goals that ensure

that these accountability systems provide equitable opportunities by providing systems to

assist diverse students and provide a system that creates an academic environment that is

safe, welcoming, and inclusive of people from all cultural backgrounds (Jimenez &

Sargrad, 2017).

ESSA reports provided student's academic data, and distributed school

classifications such as their accountability status, and utilized the data to narrow the gap

and updated strategic supports to assist in developing and applying strategies to improve

efforts in narrowing the gap (Jimenez & Sargrad, 2017). School districts must yearly

report to the state about the assessment scores of the students in regards to set goals for

specific indicators such as achievement scores in reading and mathematics for grades

three through eighth grade, and upon entering high school, the high school graduation

percentage rate, and English language arts aptitude level for only English students

(Jimenez & Sargrad, 2017). The comprehensive data specifies the distinct levels of

student learning and engagement such as, advanced placement courses, office discipline

referrals and suspensions, habitual absenteeism, qualifications of teachers and staff, and

the cost per student that has been spent, and high school matriculation rates (Jimenez &

Sargrad). The comprehensive indicators are used to identify schools that may not meet

the state benchmarks and would be classified as requiring comprehensive support and

improvement (CSI) or needs targeted support and improvement (TSI) (Jimenez &

Sargrad). TSI schools who consistently have been identified as low performing subgroups

and need supplemental provisions and have not shown significant growth over three years

may also be identified as CSI schools ("Accountability Designations," 2019).

According to Jimenez and Sargrad (2017), lowest-performing 5% of schools in the

state participating in Title I, any public high school with graduation rates less than 67%,

and any Title I school previously identified for targeted support and improvement that

fails to meet the state's exit criteria after implementing interventions (p. 5). The

interventions and targeted supports are rigorously implemented within schools and if the

data shows that these supports are ineffective, the state must take difficult measures and

opt to phase out the school and disseminate students to other schools that will best suit

the student's specific academic needs (Jimenez & Sargrad, 2017). Targeted

underperforming schools are acknowledged yearly based on their state assessment scores.

The targeted underperforming schools must have in place evidence-based strategies until

they meet the state's requirements and benchmarks of improvement (Jimenez & Sargrad,

2017). Resources must be distributed to these underperforming schools to assist in

addressing these prerequisites and if these schools fail to meet these prerequisites the

state must take supplementary measures for those schools that fail to meet the

requirements of the state.

Due to ESSA's limitations of the requirements, states have to contemplate a

comprehensive outlook about what student success looks like (Jimenez & Sargrad, 2017).

Academic standards, assessments, accountability, school improvement, additional student

supports, and teacher efficiency and efficacy demand that students receive a balanced,

extensive, and realistic education because not all students have the desire to attend

college but are more vocational. The aforementioned prescribed definitions have been

classified in various ways through state education legislation for policy purposes and the

unprescribed definitions are not classified but are documented for federal resources

(Jimenez & Sargrad, 2017). Students in high school are required to be proficient in core

subjects and utilize critical thinking and investigative analyzation that is infused with the

alliance of social and emotional knowledge, and community engagement (Jimenez &

Sargrad, 2017). According to Accountability Designations (2019) and the indicators

under the ESSA federal law that six indicators measure success accountability for high

schools are: (a) Composite Performance: annual assessments in ELA, math, science, and

social studies; (b) Academic Progress: students improvement and progress on state

assessments concerning long-term goals; (c) the calculation of students individual

progress benchmarks and levels on the achievement assessment; (d) Chronic

Absenteeism: students who are truant from school more than 10% of instructional days;

(e) Graduation Rate: Graduation rates 4 to 6 years after entering their freshman year,

based on the graduation rate cohorts of the student that are recorded; and (f) College,

Career, and Civic Readiness: the percentage of high school students who are graduating

from high school prepared for college, community service that is measured by obtaining a

high school diploma, qualifications, Advanced Placement (AP) courses, and the results of

those assessments ("Accountability Designations," 2019).

The importance of understanding how the designing and measuring the effective

coordination and interaction between states and districts function within the development

of these standards ("Accountability Designations," 2019). Determining who is

accountable for certifying that students are college and career ready; what they are

accountable for; and how they are accountable helps each level of the structure and coordination between the states, districts, and schools, how each structure utilizes their assets to reach mutual objectives for the student and school success ("Accountability Designations," 2019). Similarly, states can provide provisions and support that has effective interaction within and between each structure, when specific roles and responsibilities are issued, then they know who has specific responsibilities and in what mandates are in place to certify efficient influence and control of the implementation of the levels of the structure and supplies that the state stipulates ("Accountability Designations," 2019). Any adequately functioning structure must perform audits of its supplies and implement a checks and balances system in how to allocate the supplies and sources to adequately meet its goals. Similar structures are in place in construct of education.

School Principals as Leaders

Scholars have emphasized that having a principal whose objectives are based on the instruction has a specific emphasis on how the instruction was delivered, has an affirmative impact on the growth of the teacher professionally and increased student achievement and the quality education that the student receives (Terosky, 2016). Karadağ et al.,(2015) conducted a meta-analysis about the diversity of leadership characteristics among instructional leadership and student achievement. According to Stogdill (1948, 1950), the theory that there was not an association between leadership, high student achievement limits the characteristics, and traits of a leader. The theory also created subdivisions such as, participation, accountability, achievements, and assessments

which concludes the trait leadership methodology. The school principal would be an individual that promotes strategies and proposals to develop the school's curriculum that distributes resources to the teachers and students so that the teacher can present an engaging lesson and the student can meet the high achievement levels that have been set, that have been agreed upon by the stakeholders such as, the teachers, students, parents, and the federal, state, and local departments of education (Karadağ et al., 2015).

According to Karadağ et al. (2015), principals are accountable for student achievement and that there was a direct correlation between the instructional leadership of the principal and the student's achievement. The activities of the instructional leader and the achievement level of the student was associated based on the behaviors and guidance of the principal based on state assessments, the values that have has been established by the instructional leader, expectations and Next Generation Learning Standards (Karadağ et al., 2015). Researchers have placed importance on the leadership skills of principals in successful schools towards the end of the 1970s, and they have been measured by these skills as one of the main factors of school efficacy and usefulness (Şişman, 2016).

The variety of information and data that was required for students to actively engage and advance in the 21st Century is changing. The colossal increase of literacy requirements was attentively altering our economy, the labor force, and the technological development that has been infused into our daily lives. The requirements and advancements demand that students become critical thinkers, be able to utilize this new technology to resolve issues. As a society, the acknowledgment of diverse students who

have diversified the student population, and instructional transcendence and practices need to be amended to meet the needs of the diverse student population. By implementing a learning model and an instructional team of teachers and staff, they can have a critical impact on the culture of the learning and development of the school (Terosky, 2016). With the instructional team's support and buy-in of additional responsibilities, it assists the school principal in focusing on instructional leadership (Terosky, 2016). With a strong leadership team in place who share similar academic goals for the school and students, their efforts may increase student's academics (Terosky, 2016). Since the restraints of the instructional model solely concentrated on principals, the focus was transferred to a transformational leadership model and consequently to the distributed leadership based on the development of teachers as leaders (Bush, 2015).

Summary and Conclusions

I began this literature review looking at the distinctive instructional leadership skills of urban high school principals and how they assist teachers in helping students become proficient in literacy to become college and career ready. Recognizing that students who struggle in literacy in Grades 3 through 6 have continued struggles when they enter high school in all content areas because teachers only teach their content courses and oftentimes do not include literacy into their teaching. Data from state and national assessments from this southern school district averaged in the state's standardized test scores in literacy decreased between 2015 and 2017; specifically, in

2015, 65% of students met the state benchmark scores, in 2016, 57% of students met the state benchmark scores, and in 2017, 51% of students met the state benchmark scores.

Research also revealed that principals play an important role as instructional leaders in student academic success and are associated with the school principals' instructional leadership and practices. Bridging the literacy proficiency gap and improving student academic success in schools, was not explicitly known what principals themselves believe are their leadership standards that are influencing student academic success. The school principal was an individual that promoted strategies and professional- development to assist teachers in promoting the school's curriculum. The distribution of these resources was to assist the teachers and students to meet the high achievement levels that have been set by the federal, state and local departments of education.

In Chapter 3, I will describe the methodology of this research study. The procedures I have used to encourage participants, and the details related to the alignment of the data collection, and data analyses are clarified. I include how I protected the participants' rights and confidentiality of the participants and how I reinforced the trustworthiness of the study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

In this chapter, I discuss the research methodology and rationale. I explain the process for the selection of the participants and how the data were collected and analyzed. I also discuss the credibility, dependability, and confirmability to establish trustworthiness. The ethical procedures to protect the confidentiality of the participants are also discussed.

The research problem was that urban high school principals are inconsistently implementing instructional leadership practices to support teachers teaching literacy. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand how high school principals have inconsistently implemented instructional leadership practices to support teachers teaching of literacy. School principals should continue to improve their instructional leadership practices as instructional leaders (Zepeda et al., 2015). Instructional leadership practices contribute to students' academic achievement ("Accountability Designations," 2018). According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), instructional leadership practices assisted students to become successful in the 21st century. Instructional leadership practices should be applied by school leaders to enhance literacy curricula by assisting students in higher-order thinking (Thessin, 2019). School principals need to support teachers who teach literacy (Bassetti, 2018) because principals are instructional leaders (Collins, 2015) and accountable for student success (Carson, 2017; Deming & Figlio, 2016). Student academic success is associated with school principals' instructional leadership practices (Marshall, 2018).

Research Design and Rationale

The research design is the map researchers use to guide them systematically from research problem and research question to data collection and data analysis (Yin, 2018). In this study, I used a basic qualitative research design to examine how high school principals implement leadership practices to support teachers teaching literacy. A basic qualitative research design was appropriate to examine the experiences of the participants regarding practices to support teachers teaching literacy. Numerical data were not collected, and there were no independent and dependent variables.

I did not use a grounded theory design in this research study because a theory about the perceptions of public high school principals was not being created. Other research designs that were given consideration but were not used were ethnography and phenomenology. Ethnography was not suitable for this study because it is used to examines a phenomenon over an extended time (see Creswell, 2014). An ethnographic design was not selected because the focus was not on an entire cultural group (see Creswell, 2014). A relationship between an independent variable and a dependent variable was not examined (see Creswell, 2014). The stories of the participants would not be interpreted (see Creswell, 2014).

In the following sections, the role of the researcher and the population and sampling strategies are articulated. The sources of data, instrumentation, and protocol for the interviews are also discussed. The following research question guided this research study:

How do high school principals implement instructional leadership practices to support teachers teaching literacy?

Role of the Researcher

I am a school teacher and a novice researcher. I established a good working relationship with high school principal participants at the study site. My role did not affect the data collection process, and I did not know the participants. I was interested in gathering the perceptions of high school principals to answer the research question. I had no supervisory role over the potential participants and was vigilant in ensuring that I did not solicit any former colleagues as part of this study. Before the data collection process, I was responsible for communicating with the necessary administrators to gain consent to conduct the study. The doctoral committee members at Walden University and I analyzed the data; however, I was the only person to collect and code the data from the participants.

Methodology

In this section, I discuss the qualitative methodology used for this doctoral research study, the sample and selection criteria, and the procedures for data collection and analysis. I used a basic qualitative research design to understand why high school principals are applying instructional leadership practices to support teachers' teaching literacy. Qualitative research allows researchers to see, engage with, and make meaning of the complexity of people's lives; society; and the social, economic, and historical forces that shape them (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Qualitative data were collected from high school principals to understand their perceptions of school principals (see Yin, 2009).

Studying the perceptions of high school principals required a research method for collecting data about specific experiences from the viewpoint of school principals (see Rule & John, 2015). Creswell (2014) noted that qualitative research is used to understand the thoughts and feelings of participants. For these reasons, I used a basic qualitative design to gather information from urban high school principals who were the central focus of this study.

The setting for this research study was a public school district. The student-to-teacher ratio is 15:1. The school has a very diverse population of students. At the study site, about 60% of students graduate from school, and the dropout rate is between 15% and 30% annually. According to the district superintendent, 10 of the 22 school principals in the district were novice administrators who had been inconsistently applying their instructional leadership practices to support teachers who teach literacy. According to District Board meeting minutes documents from between 2015 and 2017, teachers complained that school principals have been inconsistently applying instructional leadership practices. Senior district administrators, such as associate superintendents and directors, decided to evaluate the leadership capacity of the principals by visiting the school sites on a monthly basis to help principals to better apply instructional leadership practices. The district superintendent stated that the associate superintendents found that many school principals have inconsistently applied instructional leadership practices to support teachers who teach literacy. Although associate superintendents provided monthly feedback to principals, district administrators reported to the board members that principals still continued to inconsistently support literacy teachers and literacy state

scores (see Table 1) continued to decrease. According to senior school district administrator, in 2015, the average state standardized test scores in literacy were 65%; in 2016, scores were 57%; and in 2017, scores were 51%.

A district principal reported that in 2018, the school district implemented the NEBMP program in order for students to increase their proficiency in literacy and to be college and career ready. A lead principal in the district explained that NEBMP requires a commitment by school principals to support teachers teaching literacy because the mission of the district is for students to graduate from high school. Senior district administrators implemented NEBMP as a response to intervention literacy strategic plan for school principals to help teachers for state standardized test scores in literacy to increase. A senior school district administrator recommended that as the diverse student population continues to increase in this urban school district, school principals should consistently apply instructional leadership practices for students to increase proficiency in literacy. Through Likert-scale surveys administered by, senior district administrators, literacy teachers reported that school principals are inconsistently applying instructional leadership practices to support teachers who teach literacy.

I used purposeful sampling in this study because the participants were urban high school principals who were intentionally selected to participate in the research study. The goal was to identify about 15 potential participants who met the following selection criteria: (a) worked as a school principal for at least 2 years and (b) were state certified. According to Creswell (2014), there are no set guidelines as to the number of participants

to be sampled. The sample size for a qualitative study varies from study to study

(Creswell, 2014).

I obtained access to the participants through the senior district administrator

responsible for the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the research study site. I provided

this administrator with an overview of the study, including the purpose of the study and

the method for data collection. The administrator allowed me to talk to school principals

after their monthly meetings to invite them to participate in the research study. I provided

the principals with my e-mail address and cell phone number. If interested, I asked them

to e-mail me the completed consent form. The participants let me know via e-mail if they

wished to participate in an e-mail and/or Skype interview. Those high school principals

who contacted me by e-mail were invited to an interview by a response to their e-mails. I

scheduled an online meeting via e-mail and Skype that took place after school hours and

in a private conference room. I conducted interviews via the videoconferencing platform,

Skype, and following an interview protocol.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Participation in this study was voluntary. I collected data from the participants via

interviews, and the data were treated confidentially. The school's name and school

principals' names were not included in the findings to prevent the identification of the

research site. I strived to make each participant feel comfortable during the interviews. A

consent form was given to each participant for their files. Before the interviews began, I

established good rapport with each participant by explaining that my role would be that

of a researcher and that I would listen and serve as the primary instrument for gathering

data during each interview. I assured each participant that the information they shared with me was valuable to the research study. I addressed each participant professionally and worked with them to develop a researcher-participant relationship.

Before seeking IRB approval from Walden University and the study site, I completed the National Institutes of Health's training on Protecting Human Research Participants. I emphasized to each participant that their participation was voluntary. Participant protection was a priority throughout the duration of this research study. The identity of the participants was not used in the findings or revealed at any time to the school district or school administrators. A letter was assigned to each participant to protect the participants' identities before, during, and after data collection. I used the letter P followed by a number to refer to each school principal participant. For example, P1 referred to the first high school principal, P2 referred to the second, high school principal, and so forth. I informed each participant that the interview data collected were protected and would only be used for the research study.

Interview transcripts were stored electronically in my home in a password-protected file on my personal computer. All files contained the interview transcripts were encrypted. All nonelectronic data were stored securely in a secure desk located in my home office. Data are kept secure for 5 years, per the protocol of Walden University. After 5 years, I will destroy all the data that I collected.

I obtained access to the participants from the senior district administrator responsible for the IRB at the research study site. The senior school district administrator has the authority to approve the research study. I provided this administrator with an

overview of the study, which included the purpose of the study and the method for data collection.

The administrator allowed me to talk to school principals after their monthly meetings to invite them to participate in the research study. I provided them with my e-mail address and cell phone number. I asked them to e-mail me the consent form. The participants let me know via e-mail if they wished to participate in an e-mail and or Skype interview with me. Those high school principals who contacted me by e-mail, I invited them to interview by responding to their e-mails. I scheduled a meeting via e-mail and Skype, after school hours, and in a private conference room electronically. Thus, all high school principals were asked if they would be interested in participating in this research study. I conducted interviews via videoconferencing platform Skype and by using an interview protocol. The interview questions found in the interview protocol were intended to accurately identify the participants' opinion about their instructional leadership practices to support students in being proficient in literacy.

According to Creswell (2014), collecting qualitative data from interviews involves strategies that result in gathering information about perceptions and opinions. I did not know saturation was reached until I conducted the interviews. When the participants shared with me the same responses over and over and no new information was gleaned from the interviews, then I knew I had reached saturation. I had interviewed approximately eight high school principals. For this research study, the sample of eight potential participants was appropriate to represent a rich description of their responses at the time of conducting the research. The size of the sample in purposive sampling is

determined when the researcher reached a point of information saturation where he or she was hearing similar responses, and no new information was gained (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). After selection of potential participants was made, principals were contacted to assess their interest and willingness to participate in the research study. Prior to interviewing the participants, the purpose of the study was explained to each participant as well as the interview process and the plan for data analysis.

Instrumentation

Qualitative interviewing goals were used to gain concentrated understanding and awareness into individuals' lived experiences; understand how participants decoded and constructed reality in relation to the phenomenon, events, engagement, or experience in focus; and investigate how individuals' understandings and perceptions relate to other study participants and prior research on similar topics (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Semistructured interviews via videoconferencing platform Skype were used in this basic qualitative research and were guided by specific research questions. However, they did not have uniformity but pursued customized replication based on the participants conversation through follow-up questioning that examined specific data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Interviews are a respected source of data for research and are structured by having stress free conversations instead of conventional or official questions (Yin, 2018). I developed the questions for the interviews based on the instructional leadership theory of Murphey et al. (1983) and from the literature review on instructional leadership practices (Bassetti, 2018; Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017; Haynes, Lisic, Goltz, Stein, & Harris, 2016; Karadağ et al., 2015; Şenol & Lesinger, 2018).

Data Analysis Plan

The first stage of the data analysis process was the initial coding process. After the Skype interviews through videoconferencing, a follow-up appointment with the participants were scheduled so the participants to review and approve their transcribed responses. When the participants responded, reviewed, and confirmed the truthfulness of their responses, I organized the interview data.

I grouped phrases and themes according to the interview questions that I asked during the interviews via videoconferencing platform Skype. Participants' similar responses to specific interview questions was categorized using a chart. I charted similar phrases, words, and terms to assess them using axial coding design to classify subcategories that may have emerged from the participants' responses. I compiled the responses from each high school principal using the axial coding design to identify the subcategories of principals' instructional leadership practices and literacy. I identified key thematic words, phrases, and sentences and record them on a chart. Thus, Murphey et al. (1983) instructional leadership examined how principals as leaders in public schools within an urban school district applied their instructional leadership practices were classified and recorded to classify the participant's responses aligned with the instructional leadership theory.

I used the data that I collected from interviews to review instructional leadership practices of high school principals regarding proficiency in literacy, and narrative records to ensure trustworthiness. The piloted interview questions were fundamental to

emphasize trustworthiness. Based on the feedback from the piloted questions, minor adjustments were made to the interview questions.

Qualitative data analysis draws conclusions logically from the data collected and compared the findings against other situations (Saldaña, 2016). For this research study data were collected during the interview period of 1 month. High school principals who met the criteria were invited to participate in the interviews. After 2 weeks, when the minimum number of participants agreed to participate, interviews started.

I compiled the responses from the high school principals using axial coding procedures to identify key positive and negative associations of instructional leadership practices (Saldaña, 2016). Key thematic words, phrases, and sentences from the interviews were recorded on a chart. A second chart was developed to allow me to research word patterns, themes to create subcategories. Subsequently, the data were triangulated. A system of the alphanumeric method was used to track the themes identified by the participants. Murphey et al. (1983) instructional leadership examines how principals as leaders in public high schools within an urban school district apply their instructional leadership practices were classified and recorded to classify the participant's responses aligned with the instructional leadership theory.

Trustworthiness

I used videoconferencing platform Skype for the interviews to review instructional leadership practices of high school principals regarding proficiency in literacy, and narrative records to ensure trustworthiness. Concepts of the procedures were utilized based on the complexity of the participants' experiences and methodically

scrutinizing the participant's responses based on perspectives and experiences to assist in presenting valid interpretations (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I scheduled follow-up meetings (i.e., member checks) within the same 3-week timeframe for each participant to examine their responses for accuracy.

Credibility

The credibility of this research study was supported by protecting the participants anonymity. I made sure to accurately represent the participants' responses as well as extra data collected. Member checking was used to minimize the researcher's biases (Stake, 2010). The participants were able to review their responses for accuracy after the interviews were transcribed. To further establish credibility, I made every effort to accurately represent the responses of the participants. During the data collection and analysis, I did not have emotions or reactions to the participants' responses and I was able to avoid personal biases and reactivity.

Confirmability

Researchers pursue data that are verified and clear about the foreseeable favoritism or bias that may exist within the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Maintaining reflexive notes and a journal was used to analyze background information and data, replies to research questions, and interviews by building a foundation based on the findings being able to be substantiated. Confirmability describes the notion that other researchers would be able to confirm the findings of the study. I diligently analyzed the data to ensure that the results of the research study precisely reflected a synopsis of the participants' perspectives (see Yazan, 2015). Reflecting on member checking helped to

support the trustworthiness of this qualitative research study. An audit trail was maintained. During the data analysis, there were no discrepancies. Notes were maintained and follow appropriate data collection procedures to avoid bias.

Dependability

Dependability references the strength of the data collected. Dependability requires that the researcher to have a stable argument to answer the research questions (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I strengthened concepts of dependability to support the research study. This was done by strategically and consistently including the contributions of each participant as well as a thorough inspection of the standards of qualitative research (see Yazan, 2015). Qualitative research can achieve dependability by ensuring consistency within the subject regardless of existing variables, conditions of the interview location, or timeframe. I was able to maintain consistency in the way I asked, recorded, and transcribed each section of data.

Transferability

Data were transcribed to explicitly describe the participant's interviews. Transferability is how to apply or transfer a comprehensive context while maintaining the richness of the context from the participant's responses. I transcribed the interviews and conducted member checks to ensure accuracy of the interview transcripts. The findings may be generalized or transferred to other similar public high schools based on reasonable explanations of the findings. Transferability in this research was enhanced by interviewing multiple participants. The findings may be transferable to other high schools.

Ethical Procedures

I followed the ethical parameters established by IRB for the protection of human participants. Approval from the IRB confirmed that I have complied with the proper ethical standards for recruitment, interviewing, and the data collection process (IRB # 08-04-20-0737427). I will keep all recorded and transcribed data in a filing cabinet for a period of 5 years. I am the only one who has a key to the filing cabinet. No demographic details, such as age or ethnicity were shared in the findings. I did not include other details that could reveal any of the participant's information.

Summary

In Chapter 3, I restated the primary purpose of this research study and described the research design and rationale. I also described the role of the researcher and the criteria for the participants, as well as how they will be contacted and recruited. D ata analysis plan, procedures for coding, connections to the research questions, and the data management system were described. Also, I described credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and reliability. In Chapter 4, I present the findings.

Chapter 4: Results

In Chapter 4, I present the findings of this basic qualitative research study and a description of the methodology used for collecting, recording, and analyzing the interview transcripts. The purpose of this basic qualitative research design was to understand how high school principals have inconsistently implemented instructional leadership practices to support teachers teaching of literacy.

Qualitative researchers use an iterative process and approach to collect data on and interpret the phenomena being studied using the lens of the participants and their perceptions and then present their versions based on the participant's conclusions (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I collected the data for this basic qualitative study via Skype interviews with eight high school principals from one school district in a southern state.

Teachers should scaffold and differentiate instruction for those students who have recurrently displayed academic difficulties, particularly in conceptual terminology and academic vocabulary, which may include differentiating content (Waters & Britton, 2017). Response to intervention is a strategy for literacy improvement that embeds a well-defined professional learning strategy, development, and strong collaboration among content area teachers to collaborate on the delivery of differentiated, cross-curricular instructional supports (Waters & Britton, 2017). With the national legislation of NCLB Act, multiple systems were assembled to implement multitiered instructional models, including response to intervention aimed at improving students' academic success by providing academic literacy supports (Swanson et al., 2017). In addition to implementing these rigorous literacy supports to adapt to the needs of the student's specific literacy

needs, it is essential that teachers receive frequent professional development to have the

tools to identify gaps and strategies that would be beneficial to the student's specific

academic needs (Swanson et al., 2017). To provide teachers with specific professional

development, effective instructional practices must be identified to assemble the needs of

the student's specific literacy needs (Swanson et al., 2017). In both the NGLSs and the

school district's standards, teachers are expected to incorporate literacy practices,

strategies, and professional developments into their rigorous content area of instruction

(Swanson et al., 2017).

Researchers have highlighted that the content of the professional development

should be consistent and logical to teachers who have to then teach these strategies within

their content curriculum (Desimone & Garet, 2015; Kirsten, 2019). Analyses of

professional development in content area literacy have investigated the consistency and

rationality in stipulations of what specific strategies are applicable for teachers to

incorporate in their content classes for the academic success of their students (Kirsten,

2019). In this chapter, I provide the results and a review of Murphey et al.'s (1983)

instructional leadership model.

Setting

According to the Office of Accountability, the average state standardized test

scores for the study site in literacy decreased (see Table 1) between 2015 and 2017;

specifically, in 2015, 65% of students met the state benchmark scores; in 2016, 57% of

students met the state benchmark scores; and in 2017, 51% of students met the state

benchmark scores. The district superintendent stated that 10 of the 22 school principals

were novice administrators who had been inconsistently applying their instructional

leadership practices to support teachers who teach literacy to ENL students who may not

have attended school within the United States for 12 months and who had fallen two or

more grade levels below the state required benchmarks due to the student's interrupted

academic career before their arrival. According to the District Board meeting minutes

from between 2015 and 2017, teachers complained that school principals have been

inconsistently applying instructional leadership practices. Senior district administrators,

such as associate superintendents and directors, decided to evaluate the leadership

capacity of the principals by visiting the school sites on a monthly basis to help principals

to better apply instructional leadership practices. The district superintendent reported that

the associate superintendents found that many school principals have inconsistently

applied instructional leadership practices to support teachers who teach literacy, and

despite those associate superintendents providing monthly feedback to principals, district

administrators told the board members that principals continued to inconsistently support

literacy teachers and literacy state scores continued to decrease.

     According to a district principal, in 2018, the school district implemented the

NEBMP program for students to increase their proficiency in literacy and to be college

and career ready. A lead principal in the district explained that the NEBMP requires a

commitment by school principals to support teachers teaching literacy because the

mission of the district is for students to graduate from high school. Senior district

administrators implemented NEBMP as a response to intervention literacy strategic plan

for school principals to help teachers for state standardized test scores in literacy to

increase. A senior school district administrator recommended that as the diverse student population continues to increase in this urban school district, school principals should consistently apply instructional leadership practices for students to increase proficiency in literacy. Senior district administrators surveyed literacy teachers using a Likert scale, finding that the teachers reported that school principals are inconsistently applying instructional leadership practices to support teachers who teach literacy.

The population under study was urban high school principals from one school district in a southern state. At the research site district, 22 principals serve at the high school level. Of the 22 principals contacted with a request to participate in the study, 18 responded with interest, but only eight agreed to be interviewed and signed consent forms. Ten volunteers who initially agreed to be a part of the study declined to participate due to the coronavirus and technical difficulties using Skype. Therefore, the resulting sample was eight participants. The participants had administrative experience of at least 3 school years (see Table 2). The interviews were semistructured, and open-ended interview questions were used. I used the phone calls to schedule the interviews with participants, and an interview protocol was used with each participant.

The participants had worked in the education field from 4 to 18 years with 10 years being the average length. The participants served as a principal from 3 to 16 years with the average being 8.5 years (see Table 2). Almost all the participants had been high school principals at one school. Six participants were females and two were males.

Table 2

Demographic Information

Academic Career Timeline	Range (in years)	Average (in years)
Years in education	8–32	18.5
Years as a principal	2–16	8.5
Years as a principal at current school	2–8	3.5

Data Collection

I conducted interviews with the eight principals over a period of 30 days. I used an alphanumeric coding system of P1–P8 to identify the participants and keep their identities and personal information confidential. All the participants interviews took place via video conferencing on Skype. I received the participant's consent to participate before their interview took place. Each high school principal was interviewed between 45 minutes and 1 hour. The interviews were recorded, with permission from each participant, and transcribed within 3 days of the interview. Subsequently, I electronically sent each participant their completed transcription to ensure that it was accurate. All participants were given a chance to amend their responses or insert information to their transcript to fully answer the questions.

The participants' interview responses provided information about their beliefs about their instructional leadership practices. I wrote notes about their responses as they took place and immediately after each interview as part of first cycle coding, which also included highlighting and labeling portions of the participants' responses (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Data Analysis

The first stage of the data analysis process was the initial coding process. After the interviews, I made a follow-up appointment with the participants to allow them to review and approve their transcribed responses. After the participants had responded, reviewed, and confirmed the truthfulness of their responses, I grouped phrases and themes according to the interview questions that I had asked in the video conference interviews. Participants' similar responses to specific interview questions were categorized using a chart. I charted similar and key phrases, words, and terms to assess them using axial coding design to classify subcategories of principals' instructional leadership practices and literacy that emerged. Specifically, during first-stage coding, I identified responses by highlighting keywords, phrases, or entire quotes on the actual transcripts. I arranged the ideas into columns that were labeled with each interview question by creating a spreadsheet to filter and sort the text.

Once I merged common concepts together, I placed handwriting codes onto sticky notes and then on large posters. To ensure that the research question was answered, I moved to the second stage of analysis to identify similarly coded data. Then, I organized the data into combined categories to identify emergent themes that included attributes of the conceptual framework and answered the research question. I applied several strategies to triangulate the data consisting of (a) rereading field notes, (b) reviewing the analytic memos I recorded during the coding stages about relevant codes, (c) highlighting and labeling pertinent respondent quotes and referencing the quotes to emphasize the relationship to each theme, (d) identifying and making note of recurring data, and (e)

creating diagrams to illustrate the relationships among codes and how the codes evolved into categories and themes (see Yin, 2016).

I compiled commonalities in relation to the interview questions and arranged the ideas in a logical format to scrutinize the data into smaller codes (see Yin, 2016). After compiling the data, I merged ideas together and placed the newly labeled concepts into predetermined codes. The codes were determined based on the conceptual framework of this study and represented fundamentals of the core constructs of the research question. Specific quotes or key phrases were recorded to support the newly developed category and an emergent category was identified.

I used pattern coding to reorganize and combine similar ideas based on the emergent categories that were uncovered through a priori coding. I also revisited my journal and any analytic memos that I wrote during earlier coding stages to support the creation of possible themes. This process was accomplished by creating process maps on large poster paper that made clear connections between the data and the new substantive themes.

During coding, I reviewed interview transcripts and analytic memos from earlier coding stages to determine if themes answered the research question. The principals talked about following the district standards and guidelines, professional development for their staff, and making sure that all staff collaborate with different departments to assist students to become proficient in literacy and college and career ready. All high principals had some description of professional development at their schools and within their school district. The high school principals also discussed collaborating with a variety of

academic departments to assist students with bridging the gap and assessing the student's

weakness. Instructional leadership practices embrace the concept of growing leaders in

the organization as crucial to the success of the organization (see Yin, 2016). These types

of leaders recognize one person cannot do it all alone and that it is important to

collaborate with other departments that offer their expertise to assist students with being

proficient in literacy and college and career ready (see Yin, 2016).

Table 3

Common Themes - Initial Phase

Interview Questions	Codes
1	Practices, curriculum, instructional focus, clear attainable goals, data driven
2	Literacy, observations, key standards
3	Progress, monitoring, analysis, expectations, reinforcement
4	Strategies, interventions, rigor
5	Writing, plan, improvement, support
6	Instructional leadership, skill development,
7	Professional development, collaboration

In the course of the second phase of the coding process, I charted similar terms

and phrases in the initial phase. I evaluated the phrases using the axial coding designed to

identify pattern coding that emerged from similar responses (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

The subsections were assembled according to a comparative model and based on

common themes (Table 3). The participants responses disclosed related responses to the

supporting questions. In Table 4, I linked the three identified themes from the

instructional leadership theory of Murphey et al. (1983) on three model practices.

The description for each theme is as follows:

    Theme 1. Accountability,

    Theme 2. Professional Development,

    Theme 3. Collaborating with other Academic Departments

I addressed discrepant cases during the data analysis stage. Discrepant cases refer to data uncovered that may not align or contradict with the assumptions that support the conceptual lens that frames a research study (Yin, 2018). Throughout the interviews, I notated any obvious responses that could be considered a rival explanation. I evaluated any plausible contradictions during all stages of data analysis. However, after I examined all the data, I found no discrepant cases that conflicted with the emerging themes.

Data Analysis Results

The research question that guided this study was:

How do high school principals' implement instructional leadership practices to support teachers teaching literacy?

Theme 1: Accountability

The participants who were high school principals shared the importance they placed on accountability. P1 stated that she is focusing on accountability for "reading across the content curricula and inquiry-based instruction." Focusing on accountability for reading across content curricula is "inclusive of reading, writing, speaking, and listening" that will further engage students in the content; however, she is also incorporating technology and inquiry-based instruction. Students will need "advanced levels of literacy skills and strategies" to perform explicit academic proficiencies. By

obtaining specific literacy skills and strategies, students must take "an active role in their education to prepare to be college and career ready."

P2 stated, "As an educational leader, I follow rules that support student achievement. I focus my attention on students who are in need of support and seek out the best practices to provide that level of intervention." P2 also reported that she liked to "build a team that is like-minded and self-motivated to support students." P2 said, "I am a strong advocate of leading by example." The focus of P2 was on accountability based on the needs of the students and the implementation of supports such as, "scaffolding and differentiation of the curriculum to engage the student in their academics."

P3 stated that accountability as an instructional practice "involves coaching schools and district leaders in the importance of being instructional leaders." Having an instructional focus helps "support teachers who in turn support students." Sharing those instructional practices with teachers is "a must and coaching" those that are having difficulty displaying those skills. As an instructional leader, accountability is important that "the principal is seen as a coach to teachers who may need additional supports with delivering the curriculum effectively to the students."

P4 stated, "Accountability is an instructional leadership practice that involves setting clear and attainable goals for all of my staff." P4 also stated, "I believe in accountability and collaboratively working with all stakeholders to create a learning environment for all students that will enable them to thrive in and outside of our school building." P4 concluded, "District goals must be achieved in a collaborative approach to meet federal, state, and local objectives."

P5 stated, "All my practices were driven by data and focused on student needs based on accountability" Critical to those practices were implementing "effective teacher supervision, including observation and feedback, providing relevant and actionable professional development, and developing collegiality necessary for our professional learning community.

P6 stated, "I implement accountability to support literacy teachers. I strive to set and model clear expectations for all staff and students as it relates to the district and school's priorities." The goal is to "foster meaningful, professional relationships through accountability" that will lead to professional growth for all parties.

P7 stated, "Accountability as my instructional leadership practice is that one must tailor the learned task so that in incremental steps success can be achieved." P8 stated, "I work with assistant principals, department supervisors, and teachers to implement the goals that are set yearly." In conclusion, accountability is important for principals to support students to meet their needs and students may need several supports that meet their social and emotional needs to achieve a pathway towards academic success.

I apply accountability as an instructional leadership practice to support literacy teachers by providing additional supports by incorporating ENL teachers into content courses to assist the teacher in teaching literacy skills to the ENL students that are in these content classes. I also implement accountability as an instructional leadership practice to support teachers who teach literacy within their content courses by providing a certified, knowledgeable ENL teacher to co-teach within the content courses and allowing the ENL teachers to provide individualized instruction to assist ENL students in

building their literacy foundation. I use accountability as an instructional leadership practice to support teachers who teach literacy within their content classes by providing rigorous instruction that is mandated by the state and yearly state mandated assessments.

I strive for accountability as an instructional leadership practice to support teacher's teaching literacy within their content classes by providing multiple tiered supports for both the teacher and the students, collaborating with multiple departments in adding additional supports for students, and partnering with parents, the community as stakeholders as well as, expecting high expectations for all students to achieve.

P1 stated, "Since I have been assigned to the alternative high school, I have created a school wide focus on writing and student discussion of his/her text." P1 also reported that students are more "engaged in the lesson" because they know that they will discuss it later in the class. P1 implied that developing this skill will assist students to use it beyond high school and into college.

P2 reported, "Students are well aware of my firm expectations combined with jovial nature. Kids can benefit from my extensive practice with Restorative Justice and Trauma Informed Care." P2 also stated, "The personal interactions I have with students in conjunction with working with their teachers helps formulate plans directed towards student achievement." P3 said, "When school leaders visit classrooms to support instruction it send the message that instruction is important and valued." P3 also stated, "When school leaders have created an environment where it is safe for them to interject during a lesson to ask questions and/or provide supportive feedback, students realize that

the leader and teacher are partners in their education." Principals are accountable with

eliminating achievement gaps.

P4 stated, "A part of my job is to manage the curriculum and monitor the lesson

plans of the certified staff members. By doing so, teachers can provide our students with

an enriching learning environment that promotes student achievement." P5 reported, "As

a result of our administrator team's leadership, student scores increased." P6 said,

"Students benefit from my instructional leadership because their teachers are supported."

P7 implied, "Students achieve success, sometimes for the first time, and enjoy the

process. It is human nature to desire to achieve, when the value is explained." P8 stated,

"I am constantly ensuring that teachers are implementing instructional strategies that are

meeting the needs of different students, ensuring positive frequent communication with

parents, setting high expectations, and ensuring that students' basic needs are met."

According to P2, "I follow the district recommended implementation where

students are to be reading and writing in each lesson." The principals talked about

following the district standards and guidelines, professional development for their staff,

and making sure that all staff collaborate with different departments to assist students to

become proficient in literacy and college and career ready.

All participants stressed that following the school district's standards and NGLS

are recommended in incorporating literacy within each content area. Principals are the

liaison between state and federal policies and the school, the local school district. The

appointment of the principal is challenging, demanding, and has become progressively

multifaceted as a result of increased stress, accountability, and under The ESSA in the United States (Ford, Lavigne, Fiegener, & Si, 2020).

It is a requirement that state educational agencies upgrade and implement a state accountability plan that has high standards and accountability measures based on students' results by using student academic data, and their graduation measures in the accountability systems that include additional measures such as, advanced placement classes to ensure students are college and career ready. Aligning these achievement goals and standards for schools and school districts allows for progress is used as a benchmark for principals and as an evaluation. State educational agencies develop these accountability measures to improve and provide data analysis needed to outline and model targeted growth measures and support principals (Bae, 2018).

The accountability system and standards were developed to align with annual planning and budgeting needs for school improvements. The accountability systems are a way to provide interventions for schools who are not meeting the guidelines and benchmarks of the state requirements and who have a significant achievement gap. The state's accountability strategy and measures are in place to assure that schools are led by highly effective principals who have the necessary supports to be successful in their role.

The accountability measures and benchmarks provide assurance that the local school improvement planning process: (a) includes active participation from the new principal; (b) classifies and concentrates circumstances at the school level and at the system level that may be hindering improvement; and (c) provides principals with autonomy over staffing, budget, and program. This local school improvement plans

include: (a) research-based strategies for improvement; (b) sufficient resources for justifiable implementation; and (c) chances for principals to modify priorities and strategies from year to year based on the school assessment data of the school needs.

Positive and multi-tiered supports that are provided for students oftentimes, motivates the student to succeed academically and address the student's needs (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018). The accountability guidelines include multiple standards for districts to validate to the state that the current or newly designated principal is highly effective, based on rigorous hiring standards, completion of higher learning that is aligned to the needs of the schools, proven success in similar schools, proven proficiency measures and standards that is measured by a valid and uniform principal evaluation system that differentiates between strong and weak performers, and for current principals leading have met the benchmark indicators of school improvement (Bae, 2018). Many principal's incorporate high expectations for student development, evolution, and achievement when academic benchmarks are met. States require systems that address involvements, interests by delivering information to principals. When schools are in need of substantial development in academic areas, state accountability systems investigate both the school's instructional strengths and weaknesses as well as systematic provisions that may impede or obstruct improvement, and recommend strategies that remove and replace specific obstacles in order for the principal to have the competency and the capacity to be able to effectively lead their school (Perrin, 2017).

Theme 2: Professional Development

The high school principals implement instructional leadership practices to support literacy teachers via PD. P1 stated, "Since we have placed a large amount of instructional leadership training on inquiry-based instruction. We have provided training to staff school-wide by providing professional learning opportunities as well as during common planning sessions where core teachers can collaborate." Common planning, and teacher's planning periods are opportunities that are designated for staff to obtain new instructional leadership skills and review skills to assist with classroom literacy proficiency to incorporate into the content courses to assist students with their proficiency levels in literacy. P2 stated, "I require my teachers to practice their instructional leadership skills by allowing them to conduct peer professional development within the school, develop lesson plans reviewed bi-weekly to ensure reading and writing are taking place within the classroom." Use of portfolios, teacher observations, and reviewing lesson plans ensure that the NGLS are utilized in all content classes. For example, MyLexia is utilized within the district as "a tool for students to use to assess their literacy skills." MyLexia incorporates word study, grammar, and comprehension components. MyLexia compiles data of an action plan of the three components for each student within the class. MyLexia relays and compiles data to the teacher of "struggling students, the students time using the literacy computer program, and provides the teacher with skill builder lesson plans for each student."

P3 stated, "There are key standards associated with teaching literacy across content curricula so I make sure that content area teachers are aware of those standards."

For example, professional development needs are not an area of focus typically for secondary content teachers. In high schools, "literacy is not explicitly taught like it is in elementary schools." Literacy is embedded within the content classes that build upon the "student's literacy skills to enhance their high order thinking skills."

P4 stated, "I apply instructional leadership practices to support teacher's teaching literacy across content curricula by encouraging teachers to teach literacy skills in all content areas." Professional learning communities (PLC) is used to help "teachers from content areas to get together to explore strategies on how to incorporate literacy into each area". P5 stated, "In addition to observations, feedback and evaluations, teachers were given PD on data driven instruction in various forums such as small and large groups. "Teachers were given training by the district in literacy initiatives." Additional opportunities for individual teachers were arranged with "specialists and with me as needed." P5 also stated, "I provided model lessons in classrooms and arrange for teachers to observe each other as critical friends."

P6 stated, "I apply these instructional leadership skills to plan and provide relevant professional development opportunities for staff to promote and support teacher's capacity in teaching literacy across content curricula." P7 said, "All new ideas taught across the curriculum must have vocabulary taught in coordination with the lesson to ensure that understanding and learning is occurring." P8 reported, "When I do observations, I reinforce the positive instructional strategies that my teachers use and plan professional development sessions to develop their weak areas. I look at students' test scores and implement interventional plans to address students' deficient areas."

PLC have several supporters of this innovative concept restructuring the field of education and restructuring the way educational services are provided to children and teachers (Brown, Horne, & King, 2018). PD and peer observations are critical in allowing the teachers to develop their craft and to see a different perspective from their professional peers. DuFour (2004) defined the term PLC has often been used to express a partnership of teachers and administrators, such as grade-level teaching teams, school committees, a specific high school department, a school district, the state department of education, or even national professional organizations. However, DuFour stated that the creation of PLC focuses more on learning than on teaching, and he also stressed that collaboration and accountability are the keys to successful PLCs (HoBrown, Horn & King, 2018). PLC were created for teachers to learn professional and research-based information. With the professional developments, teachers are to incorporate what they have learned within these PLC and the strategies into their daily instructional teaching practices.

P1 stated, "Step Up to Writing have helped our students pass ELA exam." When students enter alternative school, "they tend to lack the writing skills that will help them pass the ELA exam" (P1). As a school, "we have focused to students writing essays as well as short responses across the core classes. This helped several students become better prepared for the ELA exam" (P1). Within certain schools, "specific skills are chosen for the school to work on based on the data from the previously school year state assessments" (P1). With the data, it is determined which skill needs to be created for the school for a determined amount of time. Writing was the determined skill for the

alternative school and the research-based strategy, Step Up to Writing was utilized to assist students with their writing skill set. Step Up to Writing is "a series of instructional strategies and writing lessons to assist students in understanding the importance of each step in the writing process" (P1). Explicit instruction assists with student's cognitive processes" (P1).

P2 stated, "As a building leader, I have worked within my ELA department and supported the strategies necessary for students for student achievement on the ELA Regent's exam." As a building leader, it is important to collaborate with other departments to "assist with the vision of the school as well as, assist with bridging the gap that they school may have in assisting students with academic success" (P2). High performing schools and increased student achievement are contingent on the effective leadership that the school is guided under. The role of the school leader has been transformed "from building administrator and disciplinarian to a varied role that is accountable for increasing student success, building a positive, safe, climate and culture, and serving as an instructional leader" (P2).

P3 reported, "Knowing which standards your students have mastered vs. those that need support is a starting point." However, instead of using "test prep" as a means to support those standards it is important to infuse those standards across content areas. For example, if using context clues to define academic vocabulary. "This skill can be used in all content areas" (P3).

NGLS are to be used across content areas of instruction that include math, ELA, social studies, and science. NGLS are defined as the comprehension skills, and

knowledge that individuals demonstrate over a duration of time when students are exposed to quality instructional atmospheres and learning experiences and proficiencies ("Next generation learning standards," 2019). The ESSA of 2015 mandates that ELP standards align with all content standards so that students are college and career ready (Lee, 2019). The ESSA of 2015 mandates that ELP standards address (a) the four domains of speaking, listening, reading, and writing; (b) different levels of English language and literacy proficiency; and (c) align with all content standards (U.S. Department of Education, 2015; Lee, 2019). The NGLS requires extensive knowledge of multiple sets of content standards and fundamental disciplinary standards (Lee, 2019).

P4 stated, "To improve ELA state scores, a group of teachers got together, analyzed the scores to determine where our students showed a deficit. From that analysis we determined the areas in which we needed to focus on." Formal and informal assessments provide understanding about the progress and gaps in student learning, "curriculum foundational efficiency and teaching strategies" (P4). When reviewing student's data, it's important that "schools gather a variety of data that is used in a variety of ways" (P4).

P5 stated, "I reviewed the state standards with all teachers to ensure understanding first. Then I asked effective teachers to share their practices." P5 shared student successes through "announcements and postings to ensure that teachers did the same." P5 said, "PD on student data folders to ensure that students were reviewing their progress in meeting focus standards and setting learning goals."

P6 stated, "Setting and modeling expectations of rigorous, relevant learning communities in each classroom have been the most effective way that I have been able to monitor and impact state scores". P7 reported, "ELA is best incorporated with social studies, world languages, and art. By combining all of these across the board subject areas, higher rates of written expression and reading comprehension can be achieved." P8 reported, "Reading across content areas, improving students' vocabulary across various disciplines, and providing professional development for staff."

P1 stated, "Recently, I have required my ELA teachers to attend the Step Up to Writing training as well as, the Inquiry Base instruction training session as well." P1 also stated, "In the 21st century a technological time, however, the traditional practices of delivering reading instruction is antiquated" (P1). P2 implied, "Professional development content should be consistent, rational, and reasonable with teachers' current teaching content." P2 stated, "Staff are all trained in MyLexia, ongoing professional developments within Common Planning Time (CPT); Superintendent Conference Days (SCD) for more professional development" (P2). P2 also stated, "Research has indicated that professional development has an effect when the professional development correlates to the content classes that teachers teach."

P3 stated, "Every district is different. However, in many districts I support they have the advantage of working with Teachers College and getting the support of the Lucy Calkins Reading and Writing Project." P4 stated, "We have various opportunities onsite to support our literacy initiative." P4 also stated, "The school has a Learning Disabilities Teacher Consultant that presents on Dyslexia: writing, vocabulary, and using technology

to enhance literacy instruction." P4 also reported, "The professional development seminars are conducted after school and any staff member is invited to attend."

P5 stated, "Professional learning opportunities were provided at the school and district levels. In addition, to those, teachers examined and analyzed data to set personal professional goals." P5 also stated, "Administration always nurtured teachers' individually and as a team. Opportunities were based on need and personal request, in addition to administrative requirements." P6 stated, "There are various opportunities for professional development available in our Professional Growth System that support literacy." P7 stated, "There are some opportunities to retrain or further training on an individual basis provided by the district, which many have benefitted from. There are great for individual improvement for teachers." P8 said, "The school hired a professional literacy consultant to work closely with teachers, besides, another curriculum developer that work closely with each teacher, and they have the opportunity to sign up for professional development sessions they feel they need."

There is persuasive evidence that PD is paramount when these professional courses are embedded in the teachers' specific content areas. Researchers have documented that teachers' professional development is critical to transforming classroom preparation to improve schools, and enhance and improve student learning results (Postholm, 2018). P2 expressed, "Staff are all trained in MyLexia, ongoing professional developments within CPT (Common Planning Time); SCD (Superintendent Conference Days) for more professional development." "We have various opportunities onsite to support our literacy initiative" (P2). "The school has a Learning Disabilities Teacher

Consultant that presents on Dyslexia: writing, vocabulary, and using technology to enhance literacy instruction" (P3). "The professional development seminars are conducted after school and any staff member is invited to attend" (P4). The professional development courses and information are modified to each individual user based on his or her current position within the school district.

Theme 3: Collaborating with Other Academic Departments

P1 said, "The district literacy plan includes materials. The district requires all teachers to use their material." Another plan is "Students Read" for students to read independently." Another plan includes the use of "Students Write" for students to "demonstrate deep understanding of the text they read" (P1). Differentiation is used as an instruction to support "all students in the classroom" in collaboration with literacy coaches, special education teachers, and ENL teachers. (P1). Many school districts have literacy instructional priorities that are embedded into the high school curriculum across all content areas. School districts also have "materials and curriculum intended for teachers to use that is aligned with the Next Generation Learning Standards" (P1).

P2 elaborated, "Scaffolding questions can be used to support students' comprehension of the text." This strategy allows students to work on differentiated assignments and/or in differentiated groups as appropriate based on students' needs and prior performance. "Teachers are consistently leading and facilitating small group instruction to address students' differentiated needs and "prepare students for independent reading" with the collaboration of special education teachers and ENL teachers that are also in the classroom (P2).

P3 implied that most districts don't have a "secondary intervention plan." P3 suggested that a plan must be built into the curriculum to "support particular content areas." P3 collaborated with the literacy coaches, special education teachers and ENL teacher to develop "strategies and intervention support to address the needs of those teachers." P3 reported that many high school curricula have literacy embedded into the content. While content classes have literacy activities and strategies embedded into the content aimed at improving students' general literacy skills in accordance to NGLS.

P4 stated, "The district's comprehensive literacy action plan was created to address the literacy needs of our students. This plan is a road map for teachers, literacy coaches, special education teachers, and ENL teachers to use as a guideline to assist in providing literacy instruction." A part of a literacy plan is to provide "students with access to the quality literacy instruction, purposeful literacy evaluations, and systemic literacy assessments" (P4). The literacy plan provides a differentiated literacy intervention system that utilizes "response to intervention based on multiple tiered supports that is in collaboration with the special education and ENL teachers." P6 stated, "The district focuses on the implementation of rigorous early reading interventions for students." P7 stated, "I believe our district's only intervention occurs at grade levels below 6th grade."

P1 stated, "I mostly chunk out what I feel that we need to focus on as an alternative educational community. Lately we have been focusing on writing, so all teachers are asked to provide a writing task daily." The NGLS provide "higher academic expectations to increase learning" (P1). P2 reported, "In the high school level we ensure

that students are reading during each class, providing ample opportunity for students to read aloud as well as write critical thinking essays." Scaffolding questions to support students' comprehension of the text, giving students' the opportunity to "work on differentiated assignments and/or in differentiated groups as appropriate, based on students' needs and prior performance" (P2). Teachers consistently leading and facilitating small group instruction to "address students' differentiated need and prepare students for independent reading" (P2). Scaffolding signifies support that is conditional and aimed at "the transference of a specific skill or task that the student has learned" (P2).

P3 stated, "As a school leader, it is important to work with either the literacy coaching staff or district literacy department for strategies and intervention support to address the needs of those teachers." Collective learning is important among school leaders and staff "based on the collective knowledge construction by the school learning community working together" (P3). The school learning community engages in discussion and "reflects about information and data, interpreting it cooperatively and allocating it among them to assist students in their academic success" (P3).

P4 reported, "We continually monitor data to improve instruction. It is our goal to implement any literacy plan requirements by September 2021." The strategic literacy plan is designed to provide "staff development to all to focus on effective literacy instruction" (P4). P6 stated, "This plan is introduced at the primary level; a literacy team comprised of coaches and teachers to ensure the implementation and follow through of a plan of each student". P7 said, "When my teachers interact at common planning meetings

with coordinated efforts, we have raised scores in the past. It is dependent on the staff's ability to interact and plan an engaging and rigorous lesson for students." P3 also reported, "As a leader the difficulty is getting the entire team to attempt to improve as a community."

The participants indicated that reaching out to academic coaches are important in collaborating with teachers to ensure that student's academic requirements are met explicitly based on data presented. P3 expressed, "As a building leader, I have worked within my ELA department and supported the strategies necessary for students for student achievement on the ELA Regent's exam." "As a school leader, it is important to work with either the literacy coaching staff or district literacy department for strategies and intervention support to address the needs of those teachers" (P2). Collaborating with other departments are critical to ensure that the student's academic needs are met to ensure that academic success and achievement is met and mastered.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

A reflexivity journal was sustained before, during, and after the interview process and data analysis. A reflexivity journal was kept by me to keep me informed of my biases, feelings, and feedback while data was collected and analyzed to avoid bias and reactivity (Patton, 2015). As I began coding the transcriptions, I wrote down analytical memos of my thinking and reasons for my choices and kept a color coded post-it to chronicle and record to enable credibility of my research.

I reinforced the dependability of the findings by using the practice of member checking. In this instance, I utilized member-checking to determine if both the interview

and interpretation of the findings were an accurate representation of each participant's beliefs. Member checking or participant validation is a practice used in qualitative research to establish the credibility of the data collected by giving all participants an opportunity to review the transcripts of the interview to declare and verify the accuracy of their statements (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Yin, 2018). Member checking was conducted for the trustworthiness of this research study and contributed to the credibility of the findings. All of the participants interviews took place via video conferencing. I received the participants consent to participate in the research ahead of time. Each high school principal was interviewed between 45 minutes and 1 hour. The interviews were recorded with permission from each participant during the COVID-19 pandemic and transcribed within 3 days after each interview.

I conducted member checking with each participant. Each member checking meeting was between 45 minutes and 1 hour. The participants did not request any changes to their interview transcripts. By allowing the participants to review the transcribed interview data and emergent themes in the study, I ensured that my personal biases were not reflected in the data but rather the data were a true reflection of the perceptions of the interviewees. Concepts of the procedures have been developed based on the complexities and difficulties of the participants' experiences and methodically scrutinizing the participant's responses based on their perspectives and experiences to assist in presenting valid interpretations (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Reflecting on my own rational and view, and member checking assisted to verify the trustworthiness of this research study. I maintained a reflexivity journal log starting

from the point of obtaining input on the development of interview questions through data analysis. I avoided bias by maintaining meticulous and careful notes and following appropriate data collection procedures.

Summary

In Chapter 4, I summarized the results of my analysis of the interview responses. The purpose of this basic qualitative research design was to understand how high school principals have inconsistently implemented instructional leadership practices to support teachers teaching of literacy. After analyzing the data, three instructional leadership practices emerged that each participant referenced aligning the (a) functions engaged by a principal, (b) activities performed by the principal, and (c) procedures and practices of the school organization. I used member checking with each participant to confirm I correctly identified the instructional leadership practice themes they intended in their responses during the interviews. In Chapter 5, I focus on a discussion of implications for transferability and social change and recommendations for next steps.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Although many studies exist that document the influence of an effective school principal on student achievement and school success, the problem addressed in this research study was the lack of understanding related to high school principals' inconsistent implementation of instructional leadership practices to support teachers teaching literacy. In the instructional leadership theory used as the conceptual framework for this basic qualitative study, Murphey et.al. (1983) identified three exemplary instructional leadership practices: (a) aligning the functions engaged by the principal, (b) activities performed by the principal, and (c) procedures and practices of the school organization. These three instructional leadership practices are embedded in the three instructional leadership practice themes found in this study. The research question that guided this study was:

How do high school principals' implement instructional leadership practices to support teachers teaching literacy?

Interpretation of the Findings

One of the interview questions that I asked the participants concerned how they implemented instructional leadership practices that support teachers teaching literacy. The question was designed to elicit the principals' experiences in implementing instructional leadership practices in supporting teachers teaching literacy in their content courses. In addition, instructional leadership practices were also identified as being critical to the academic success and student's proficiency in literacy. Heck and Hallinger (2014) stated, "instructional leadership had a significant effect on student's academic

achievement" (para. 2). Principals' practices as instructional leaders have a straightforward influence on teacher and student procedures and activities in the classroom (Rigby, 2014). Instructional leadership practices do not meet the needs of all students, and urban high schools, in particular, face challenges that are different from those in elementary schools (Sebastian et al., 2017). High schools deal with various issues, such as high dropout rates, low college readiness, and challenging school environments, and these challenges may call for a variety of leadership responses where different administrative influences that are important for student learning (Sebastian et al., 2017). Focusing on the relationship between school leadership, procedures, and practices, student learning in urban high schools is reasonably unique; however, incorporating those practices with transformational, distributive, and instructional leadership could lead to greater school success (Sebastian et al., 2017). Day, Gu, and Sammons (2016) determined that successful and effectual principals use a blend of instructional, distributive, and transformative leadership practices to achieve higher academic achievement and proficiency in literacy.

In this study, I selected participants from a population of high school principals from one school district in a southern state who led schools where the achievement gap in literacy, as measured by the end of year standardized state assessment, had decreased over the period of a year. Benchmarks for the selection included high schools earning end-of-the-year ELA/literacy assessment scores for the last 3 school years. I increased my understanding of instructional leadership practices that current principals believe influence student achievement and proficiency in literacy. Although the three

instructional leadership practice themes identified in this research study introduce no new concepts or strategies, the findings of this basic qualitative research study add to the literature on instructional leadership practices and provide increased understanding into the beliefs of current high school principals themselves. In the following subsections, I discuss the three emergent themes.

Theme 1: Accountability

The participants were collegial instructional leaders involved in addressing the students' academic needs and achievements. Accountability systems are governed by independent assessments and student achievement data (Shirrell, 2016). The requests and demands are being made for accountability and a new accountability exemplar and archetype that concentrates on intentional learning that is supported and facilitated by professionally experienced and dedicated educators (Shirrell, 2016). Principals are the essential individuals in the functioning of the school's accountability component (Hallett, 2010). Principals are also critical to creating relational and collegial trust among students, staff, and the communities in their schools (Shirrell, 2016).

Accountability has always been critical for schools to achieve their function in society in preparing students to be productive adults within the world. Due to the environment of the school's functioning foundation, it has been based on a bureaucratic and professional accountability system (Klein, 2020). During the 20th century, the educational system has implemented instruments of managerial accountability within the system: however, the bureaucratic accountability focus was concentrated on how the system would function and its consistency (Klein, 2020). With accountability measures

being implemented, standards and mechanisms hold persons accountable and focuses

their work on the effectiveness of the schools based on these accountability measures that

have been outlined. The importance of the accountability system has required the

consolidation and establishment of school leadership and accountability by implementing

performance standards and measurements through tests, analysis, and inquiry (Klein,

2020).

This shift of influence and authority has created stability between teachers and

schools, and principals. The accountability systems are centered around continuous

improvement and learning and require the development and implementation of an

analytical assessment (Bae, 2018). The procedures and methods were developed to

understand and identify the quality of teaching and learning within schools, and having

support systems in place to support the teachers teaching along with their quality of

teaching is just as important (Bae, 2018).

In these systems, the teachers and staff are urged to participate and make an

attempt for constant development within the academic structure of the school based on

the collaboration of all participants (Tolo, Lillejord, Flórez Petour, & Hopfenbeck, 2019).

P3 shared, "When school leaders visit classrooms to support instruction it sends the

message that instruction is important and valued." Accountability stipulates information

and analyses that support continuous improvement regarding academic and operational

services to support student achievement. P4 reported, "As a leader, my job is to manage

the curriculum and monitor lesson plans of certified staff members. By doing so, teachers

are able to provide our students with an enriching learning environment that promotes

student achievement." P8 articulated, "I work with my assistant principals, department supervisors, and teachers to implement goals that are set yearly." Principal accountability implements an all-inclusive program of student assessment that includes administering all components of the state-mandated testing; analyzing and reporting assessment outcomes from the state and non-state mandated assessments that must meet the federal, state, and local guidelines; and providing technical assistance in the areas of record and data organization.

Theme 2: Professional Development

All high school principal participants had some description of PLCs and PD at their schools and within their school district that was available for both teachers and principals. Three of the principals interviewed identified an emphasis on collaborating with a variety of departmental coaches and felt that collaborations were important opportunities that indicated an increase in the achievement of their students and the student's proficiency in literacy. P2 expressed that all staff district-wide has access to ongoing PD within their buildings' CPT, within the district's mandated SCD, and on the district's Professional Growth System. Researchers have supported that teachers' PD is critical to transforming classroom preparation to improve schools and student learning, resulting in preparation for the students to be college ready (Postholm, 2018).

Complex procedures and methods of teaching are necessary to develop student proficiencies, such as deep mastery of content, higher-order critical thinking, multifaceted problem-solving, effective communication and cooperation, and independence (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Efficient PD is necessary to assist

teachers to learn and improve and enhance the instructional strategies essential to teach students these essential skills. According to research, professional learning and development have shown an important influence on student achievement when the PD is concentrated on the content that teachers teach and discusses specialized curricula, such as mathematics, science, social studies, and literacy (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

The PD embeds meaning that is established in teachers' classrooms with their students, and inclusive of COVID-19, virtual PD that is presented specifically throughout the school district contexts (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). These varieties of PD provide teachers the chance to study their students' work and provide additional supports. Especially during the pandemic, PD that are also inclusive of the teachers' social and emotional well-being allow for the testing out of new ways to deliver curriculum to their students and the learning of study-specific elements of pedagogy and improving student learning in the content area. PD should be aligned with school and district priorities, providing consistency and rationality for teachers.

Theme 3: Collaborating with Other Academic Departments

Throughout the interviews, high school principals discussed collaborating with a variety of academic departments Instructional leadership practices embrace the concept of growing leaders in the organization as crucial to the success of the organization (Vangrieken et al., 2017). These types of leaders recognize one person cannot do it all alone and that it is important to collaborate with other departments that offer their expertise to assist students with being proficient in literacy and college and career

ready. P7 shared that when "teachers interact in joint planning and coordinated efforts, students' scores were raised."

When staff collaborates with their different expertise sets, the collaborative efforts of all can combine to assist the students in achieving academic success and proficiency in literacy. P5 shared that it is important that "coaches and teachers collaborate to ensure the implementation of the strategic plan." Collaboration and combined cooperation are critical within the school communities to improve and enrich the continual PD of teachers in conjoining with other departments and with other teachers (Akinyemi, Rembe, Shumba, Adewumi, & Szameitat, 2019; Vangrieken et al., 2017). In addition, all of the high school principal participants shared the versions of PD and collaboration at their schools, in their school district, and with local colleges.

All of the high school principals interviewed placed importance on the PD that they develop specifically for their schools, within their school district, and in collaboration with local colleges so that students will have an opportunity to meet their academic goals and requirements. P1 and P3 shared that in the many school districts that they support have had the advantage of working with Teachers College and getting the support of the Lucy Calkins Reading and Writing Project as well as that there are designated times and days during common planning periods where core teachers can collaborate with one another.

I used the instructional leadership theory by Murphey et al. (1983) as the conceptual framework for this study. The instructional leadership practices of high school principals are critical to the success of a school and student achievement as well as their

proficiency in literacy (Bush, 2015; Dhuey & Smith, 2018; Sezer, 2018). In the findings, I identified instructional leadership practices that principals in high schools have tried to incorporate literacy into all of the content classes to ensure that students become proficient in literacy and college and career ready. It was evident that the high school principals acted as instructional leaders at their school. The instructional leadership theory contains three main concepts: (a) functions engaged by the principal, (b) the kinds of activities performed by the principal, and (c) procedures and practices of the school organization. I developed the research question to investigate the principals' instructional practices and determine how they support teachers in teaching literacy in their content courses. My interpretations of the study findings were substantiated in the associations with the conceptual framework and the conclusions of previous researchers as described in the literature review.

The findings also identified that each of the participants saw themselves as instructional leaders that was just one aspect of ensuring that students are proficient in literacy and achieve academic success in preparation of them to be college and career ready. Principals are accountable for cultivating the complete academic success and literacy of their students as well as, ensuring that students are college and career ready – a shift that ultimately makes principals more accountable (Leithwood, 2017; Powell, 2017). Instructional leaders provide clear instructional emphasis to teachers to assist the teacher's meet the academic and literacy needs of their students (Leithwood, 2017). All principals are required to spend time in classrooms for observation purposes, analyze

data, evaluate and observe current classroom practices and continue to work with teachers on improving their instructional practices (Smith, 2016).

The high school principals I interviewed made it transparent through their responses that although instructional leadership is critical, they must follow the school district guidelines as well as, the state guidelines to ensure that students are proficient in literacy and college and career ready. My research supported this research. It was apparent from the responses of each high school principal recognized the importance for emerging relationships with all stakeholders and communicating and inspiring all stakeholders with their vision for their schools. The high school principals believed in shared decisionmaking and developing teachers as leaders, and understood the value of fostering relationships with students to ensure that their social and emotional needs are met. The high school principals believed in risk taking and innovative approaches that have strong instructional leadership especially with the incorporation of literacy Bush (2015) established effective principals use a combination of instructional practices to achieve higher academic, but the results of effective instructional leadership often reveal a variety of practices due to the complexities of managing a high school (Dhuey & Smith, 2018; Sezer, 2018).

The seminal work of Murphey et al. (1983) can be established in the responses of the participants in this research study. Most educational researchers and practitioners will not be alarmed by the identified themes of this research study. The three instructional leadership practice themes that emerged from the data confirm many of the instructional practice approaches and methods that have been identified in previous research and

literature. The value of integrating an instructional leadership approach was confirmed through this research study. Murphey et al. (1983) three practices of instructional leaders were embedded into the responses of the interviews and emerged throughout most of the instructional leadership practice themes that I identified. In this study the instructional leaders, I interviewed incorporated these three practices into their own instructional leadership style.

Limitations of the Study

The population of this study was 22 high school principals. The sample was eight participants. This number of participants may serve as a limitation for this study. Although credibility was enhanced by including principals from multiple types of schools within one school district, only eight of the 22 possible principal participants were interviewed. The limited sample size may be considered a challenge for transferability. Additionally, because only high school principal experiences were explored, findings for this study may not be relevant to elementary and middle schools. Thus, this research study was limited by interviews from high school principals from one school district.

I had non-participating high school principals serve as a peer reviewer to provide feedback and input on the identified themes, findings, results, and conclusion. The peer reviewing process was used from non-participating principals to provide feedback to the interview questions and to identified emergent themes. During the data analysis, there were no discrepancies. Notes were maintained and follow appropriate data collection procedures to avoid researcher bias. I performed a member check by asking the participants to provide comment, input, and feedback on the themes that were identified

from their interviews. Reflecting on triangulation, member checking helped to support the trustworthiness of this qualitative research study. An audit trail was maintained starting from the point of obtaining input from a peer reviewer through to data analysis.

The basic qualitative research study approach limits the responses to what each of the participants believe were their instructional leadership practices that positively influenced student achievement and student's proficiency in literacy, but may not actually reflect their true instructional leadership practices. This basic qualitative research study was conducted just with high school principals in one school district and may not be transferable to other school district or states. The findings are specific to high schools in this one school district which met the criteria established for this research study. High schools that do not meet the criteria may have different results.

Although individual interview questions did not solely focus on student achievement and student's proficiency in literacy, the overarching theme focused on PD, accountability, and following the school's district learning standards. Participants kept this theme in mind when they responded to each question. Consequently, an additional limitation could be that the identified instructional practices may only support student academic achievement and the student's becoming college and career ready. Researchers have acknowledged a relationship between the instructional leadership practices of high school principals and student achievement (Fullan, 2013; Karadağ et al., 2015, Shaked & Schechter, 2016, Wieczorek & Manard, 2018). The research problem was that high school principals have inconsistently implemented instructional leadership practices to support teacher's teaching literacy.

Research revealed that high school principals have an important part in student achievement and as instructional leaders. Researchers have indicated that there was a correlation between high school principal's instructional leadership practices and student achievement (Accountability Designations, 2018). Researchers have also emphasized that having a principal whose objectives are based on supporting instruction, student achievement, the quality of education that the student receives, and the professional development of the teacher (Terosky, 2016).

The purpose of this basic qualitative research design was to understand how high school principals have inconsistently implemented instructional leadership practices to support teachers teaching of literacy. Researchers have indicated that there was a correlation between high school principal's instructional leadership practices and student achievement (Accountability Designations, 2018). The responses from the participants of this research study was to analyze within the context of the seminal work on instructional leadership by Murpheyet al. (1983). In the instructional leadership model, Murphey et al. (1983) identified three exemplary instructional leadership practices including: (a) aligning the functions engaged by the principal, (b) activities performed by the principal, and (c) procedures and practices of the school organization, which will support the framework for this research study.

This literature review included research on instructional leadership, instructional leadership practices, student achievement, and literacy proficiency of high school students. There was also a thorough examination of literature research surrounding the influence of principals as instructional leaders, student achievement, and high school

students being proficient in literacy within the literature review. Research on instructional leadership and instructional leadership practices were also reviewed as well as research on the importance of being proficient in literacy. Murpheyet al. (1983) work on exemplary practices of instructional leadership was reviewed since it is considered a significant theory in the field of instructional leadership and has important recommendations for principals as instructional school leaders.

The implications are important to urban high school students to assist them in being proficient in literacy to prepare them to be college and career ready. The results will assist teachers and principals to incorporate literacy skills and strategies into the content courses and obtain literacy skills and strategies through professional developments and additional credentials. Moreover, the findings may help high school principals to better understand how to apply instructional leadership practices in literacy in order to improve instruction and students' academic achievement. The results of this study would also conclude in a positive social change, within the local school district, which may occur when high school principals better apply their instructional leadership practices to assist teachers in helping students to graduate from high school and become proficient in literacy.

This literature review comes from scholarly peer-reviewed journals, books, U.S. government websites, and professional education websites. The databases that were researched were School Leadership and Management, Education Research Institute, Educational Management Administration and Leadership, *Journal of Research in Rural Education, Journal of Educational Administration*, U.S. Department of Education,

National Association of Secondary School Principals, Instructional Leadership for Effective Learning, and other electronic databases that was made available through Walden University Library.

Recommendations

The findings of this research study identified three instructional leadership practices high school principals believe influence their instructional leadership, student's academic achievement and their proficiency in literacy to become college and career ready. The primary recommendation is to share the outcomes with high school principals to increase student achievement in becoming proficient in literacy. A secondary recommendation would be for school district, state leaders and principal preparation programs to use the findings from this study to inform their PD and the training of new and current principals in establishing similar instructional leadership practices in their own school. The following recommendations are made based on the outcomes of this basic qualitative research study:

1. To assess high school principals as participants with Murphey et al. (1983) instructional leadership practices for alignment of perspectives with the high school principals' beliefs as documented in their interviews.

2. To provide the high school principal participants with the results of the interview responses.

3. To interview high school principals in different school districts other than one school district to see if similar themes emerge.

4. To interview high school principals at schools that did not meet the criteria to assess whether the instructional leadership practices identified in this study were absent.

A recommendation for further research is to examine more dimensions of the instructional leadership model to focus on how to support teachers teaching literacy using a comparative qualitative case study of K-12 school principals. Another recommendation for further research is to include a larger sample and to interview principals from multiple school districts.

Implications

I believe this research study has implications for social change within the local school district that may include recommendations for urban high school principals regarding the application of instructional leadership to support teachers in assisting students to improve their proficiency in literacy, state assessments, and becoming college and career ready. The findings of this study may help high school principals to better implement their instructional leadership practices to support literacy teachers. Additionally, literacy teachers who are supported by their school principals could be more successful at work. Understanding the practices school principals believe are most influential in supporting literacy teachers could help other school principals facing similar challenges.

Conclusion

The high school principals who were interviewed in this study implement instructional leadership practices to support teachers teaching literacy through

accountability, PD, and collaboration with other academic departments. High school

principals should support teachers teaching literacy for the benefit of the students. For

example, all participants reported that literacy teachers should follow the school district's

standards and NGLS in incorporating literacy within each content area. PD is paramount

when PD courses are embedded in the teachers' specific content areas. PD is critical to

transforming classroom preparation to improve schools, and enhance and improve

student learning results (Postholm, 2018). The participants also indicated that reaching

out to academic coaches are important in collaborating with teachers to ensure that

student's academic requirements are met explicitly based on data presented.

Collaborating with other departments are critical to ensure that the student's academic

needs are met to ensure that academic success and achievement is met and mastered.

The influence that principals have at their schools is multifaceted and incorporate

diverse leadership skills, and styles sets the culture for their school environment and has

been the focus of educational research (Fullan & Quinn, 2015; Smith, 2016). It is critical

that school leaders put students as a priority for their school. Instructional leaders must

also place an importance on student learning and academics in their regular work

schedules and be led by the vision of their academic success and proficiency in literacy in

order to be college and career ready (Smith, 2016).

Reevaluating the school vision, cultural school climate, and academic focus

should be a yearly task in which participation and involvement from all stakeholders

including teachers, students, parents and community members, is taken into account

(Smith, 2016). It is projected by federal, state, and local educational departments

expectations as well as by researchers that principals do have a positive impact on student achievement (Al-Mahdy, Emam, & Hallinger, 2018; Smith, 2016). School leaders have been acknowledged as a critical contributing factor in student achievement (Dutta & Sahney, 2016; Fullan, 2013). Murphey et al. (1983) research on instructional practices is an appropriate and valid framework to use to understand the instructional leadership practices of high school principals (Boyce & Bowers, 2018; Bush, 2015; Dhuey & Smith, 2014.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

Please tell me:

1. How do you apply your instructional leadership practices in your high school?
2. Which instructional leadership practices do you apply in your high school?
3. Which instructional leadership practices do you apply to help teachers teaching ELA/ Literacy?
4. How do you help teachers assist students in improving proficiency in ELA/Literacy?
5. How do you apply instructional leadership practices that support teacher's teaching literacy across content curricula?
6. Which leadership practices have you applied to improve literacy (ELA) state score?
7. What is your district's intervention strategic literacy plan?
8. How do you use and implement this strategic literacy plan?
9. How do student's benefit from your leadership as an instructional leader?
10. What professional opportunities are available for teachers to support literacy in their classrooms?

Instructional Management:

(a) framing school goals,

What are your primary goals for your school? and

(b) communicating school goals.

How do you communicate your school goals to the community?

Instructional Leadership

Please answer the following questions about when you are working with your

literacy teachers in particular

(a) supervising and evaluating instruction,

1. What do you do to supervise literacy teachers?

2. What do you do to evaluate your literacy teachers?

(b) coordinating curriculum, and

What do you do to assist in the coordination of the ELA curriculum across courses or grades?

(c) monitoring student progress.

What do you to do monitor students' ELA academic achievement?

Positive School Learning Climate:

(a) protecting instructional time,

How do you protect the instructional time for ELA teachers?

 (b) promoting professional development,

How do you promote professional development specifically for ELA teachers?

(c) maintaining high visibility,

What actions or steps do you take to maintain a high visibility?

(d) providing incentives for teachers,

What incentives do you provide for teachers? What criteria do you use for these incentives?

 (e) enforcing academic standards, and

What is some specific action you take to enforce academic standards?

(f) providing incentives for students.

What incentives do you provide for students? What criteria do you use for these incentives?

Is there anything else thinking about your instructional leadership as a whole or specifically related to ELA that you feel has set your school apart in increasing student achievement?