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Rural School District Principals' Perceptions for Recruiting, Hiring, and Retaining Highly Qualified Teachers

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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2020

Abstract

Rural School District Principals' Perceptions for Recruiting, Hiring, and Retaining

Highly Qualified Teachers

by

Mary Ann Giles

MEd, Delta State University, 2011

BS, Delta State University, 2010

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Highly qualified teachers (HQTs) have more influence on students' academic success than class size, curriculum, school culture, and technology. However, principals display discrepant practices in recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs. The purpose of this basic exploratory qualitative study was to investigate the perceptions of elementary, middle, and high school principals from a rural school district in a southern state concerning practices of recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs. Senge's paradigm of a learning organization and an adapted model of Dickinson's recruitment, selection, and retention of child welfare workers guided this study. Research questions addressed administrators' perceptions of strategies used to recruit, hire, and retain HQTs. Data were collected using semistructured interviews from a purposeful sample of eight elementary, middle, and high school principals with 2 or more years of administrative experience. Content analysis using a priori, open, and pattern coding identified categories and themes. The findings revealed that administrators from rural school districts (a) recruit HQTs through personal and professional referrals, local candidates' investment, and advertisement; (b) hire HQTs by selecting interview teams capable of judging whether candidates' experiences align with schools' vision and culture; and (c) retain HQTs by maintaining collaborative leadership practices and a positive school culture that allow teachers to be flexible in their planning, teaching, and professional development. It is recommended that school administrators in rural school districts be presented with these results. Insights from the study may afford positive social change by communicating effective practices to increase principals' ability to recruit, hire, and retain HQTs in rural school districts.

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Dedication

This journey is dedicated to my family, friends, professors, chairperson, second member, school committee members, and mentors who have supported and sacrificed time with me over the years. I truly thank God for blessing me with the patience, endurance, and knowledge needed to endure this doctoral journey to the end. To my children, Brianna, Alonzo, Ashlee, and Erik, thank you for being patient and responsible as I completed this challenging process. I can never give you the time back that we lost, but I can be an inspiration to you to never quit on yourself and know sometimes self-motivation will be all you have to keep going. I spent many years asking for forgiveness for not being able to attend events in my effort to complete this process. I must thank my wonderful and patient husband, Prophet, who has always been supportive and understanding with me as I completed this educational goal.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my family and friends for their encouragement, motivation, and support as I completed the dissertation process. Though many changes and challenges occurred over the years, I persevered to complete my overall educational goal. To my husband, Prophet, thank you for allowing me hours of alone time to complete difficult tasks. I am appreciative of the many educators, friends, and family members who have helped me and prayed for me as I continued my educational journey. I also would like to thank all those who participated in this study. I pray this study makes a difference in the educational realm to help support teachers, students, parents, and other stakeholders.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

A principal's role as an instructional leader requires the responsibility of seeking highly qualified teachers (HQTs) capable of increasing students' academic performance (Brownell et al., 2005/2018; Lee, 2018; Stringer & Hourani, 2016). To increase academic achievement, principals (a) hire teachers, (b) implement plans to retain teachers, (c) recruit effective teachers, (d) build school culture, (e) maintain safety, (f) develop curricula, (g) supervise educators and students, (h) communicate with stakeholders, and (i) enforce policies and procedures (Sterrett et al., 2018). However, principals in rural schools face difficulties recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs (Lee, 2018; Wieczorek & Manard, 2018). HQTs, required by and delineated by federal and state education reform legislation, also known as effective and qualified teachers, have the certification, pedagogical experience, and content knowledge needed to develop students' academic success (Fitchett & Heafner, 2018; Lee, 2018).

To address unique problems principals in rural school districts face regarding recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs, I conducted a qualitative interview-based study. Potential positive social change from the study may be improving principals' ability to recruit, hire, and retain HQTs who can increase students' academic achievement. In this chapter, I will provide the background of the study, the problem statement, the purpose of the study, the research questions, and the conceptual framework. In addition, I will explain the nature of the study and present definitions of unique terms, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, the significance of this study, and a summary.

Background

Administrators' ability to retain, recruit, and hire HQTs across all subject areas and grade levels is viewed as a national challenge (Solomonson et al., 2018). Principals encounter not only teacher quality issues but also an unequal distribution of HQTs serving in urban and rural school districts, resulting in severe teacher shortages (DeFeo & Tran, 2019). Teacher shortages influence principals' recruitment, hiring, and retention strategies. Teacher shortages also negatively affect the quality of teaching, achievement, and instructional practices (Hanushek et al., 2016). Teacher shortages exist in rural schools with a high percentage of African American and Hispanic students (Gunther, 2019; R. Ingersoll et al., 2019). Gunther (2019) identified reasons for teacher shortages: (a) salary, (b) workload, (c) teaching responsibilities, (d) school climate, (e) discipline, (f) stress, (g) family issues, (h) isolation, (i) lack of support, (j) leadership, and (k) collaboration. Since 2010, principals' roles and responsibilities have changed as an approach to improve the learning environment for students and teachers; teachers had expressed frustration correlating with their time spent in the educational profession (Lee, 2018).

With the institution of the federal law the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA, 2015) and its requirements, principals accepted professional responsibility for hiring and retaining HQTs to increase students' academic performance. As an effort to equalize the quality of education in the United States, ESSA increased the demand for using standardized tests, evaluating low-performing schools, implementing accountability based on student needs, and requiring classroom instruction to be delivered by HQTs in

public schools (Adler-Greene, 2019). The goal of ESSA was to ensure all students are college and career ready when graduating high school (Adler-Greene, 2019). Principals are rated by state leaders and local stakeholders based on yearly performance by teachers and students (Stringer & Hourani, 2016). State education leaders enforce school takeovers and principal replacement to ensure successful incentives and actions are taken if ESSA requirements are not met (Welsh & Williams, 2018).

To meet educational requirements, principals seek to recruit and retain teachers to improve student engagement and to reduce achievement gaps among students of different socioeconomic statuses and races (Gunther, 2019). As noted, rural schools face particular shortages (Gunther, 2019; R. Ingersoll et al., 2019). The study was designed to mitigate the gap in research about practices for recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs in rural school districts.

Problem Statement

Principals display discrepant practices in recruiting, hiring, and retaining teachers, resulting in inconsistent contracting of HQTs as legislatively mandated by ESSA (ESSA, 2015; Vagi et al., 2017). Each year, 40% of teachers leave the profession before completing 5 years of teaching (With, 2017). Retaining teachers is exacerbated in rural school districts where little is known of principals' perceptions of recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs (With, 2017). HQTs are important because classroom instructors have more influence on students' academic success than class size, curriculum, school culture, and technology (Lee, 2018). Despite the requirement for HQTs in public schools, little

research is available concerning the systematic strategies of principals who recruit, hire, and retain HQTs (Engel, Marisa, & Chris, 2018; Gallo et al., 2018).

In the last census, researchers for the National Center for Education Statistics (Goldring et al., 2014) identified one third of all public schools were located in rural school districts, serving over one quarter of all children educated in public schools. Despite a significant amount of research focusing on hiring and retaining teachers, sufficient data are lacking to support ways leaders recruit, hire, and retain HQTs (Papay & Kraft, 2016). The findings from this study may provide evidence to increase performance among principals, students, and teachers. The study filled a gap in the research about practice related to principals' perceptions of recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs in rural districts.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic exploratory qualitative study was to investigate the perceptions of elementary, middle, and high school principals from a rural school district in a southern state concerning practices of recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs. I interviewed eight elementary, middle, and high school administrators in a rural district to identify personal and professional perceptions of recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs. The findings from the data collected in the study resulted in identifying and potentially responding to reoccurring obstacles to mitigate the shortage of HQTs in rural school districts.

Research Questions

Three research questions guided this qualitative study to investigate the perceptions of eight elementary, middle, and high school principals from a rural southern state:

RQ1: How do elementary, middle, and high school principals in a rural district in a southern state perceive recruiting practices of HQTs using a recruitment, selection, and retention model?

RQ2: How do elementary, middle, and high school principals in a rural district in a southern state perceive hiring practices of HQTs using a recruitment, selection, and retention model?

RQ3: How do elementary, middle, and high school principals in a rural district in a southern state perceive retaining practices of HQTs using a recruitment, selection, and retention model?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was an adaptation of Dickinson's (2011) model for recruitment, selection, and retention of child welfare workers (see Figure 1), based on Senge's (1990) paradigm of a learning organization. Dickinson (2011) realized a need to identify concepts to increase recruitment, hiring, and selection of professional social workers because employees are committed to the organization when supported, rewarded, skilled, interested, and compensated. Dickinson (2011) stated that appropriate recruitment, hiring, and selection processes to increase job success and retention included

procedures for examining the external environment, job responsibilities, the environmental climate, work characteristics, and supervision.

Figure 1

Recruitment and Retention Model
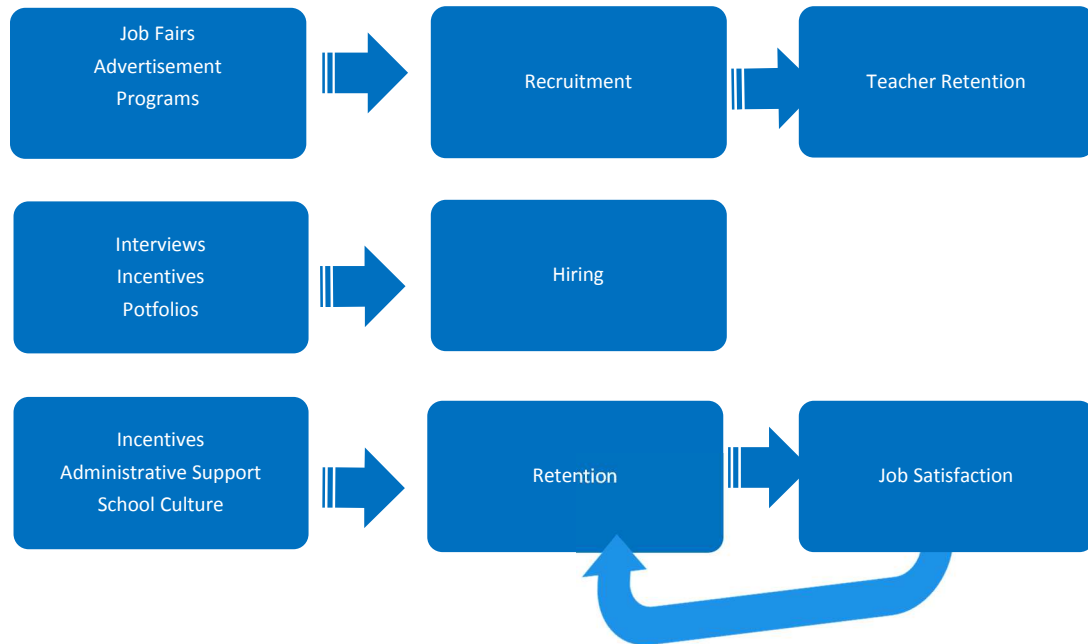
Note. Adapted with permission from "NC's Recruitment and Retention Project," by N. Dickinson, 2007, *Children Service Practice Notes, 12*(1).

Dickinson's (2007) conceptual model was based on Senge's (1990) concept of learning organizations that included the five disciplines or dimensions of a learning organization: (a) developing personal mastery, (b) creating shared mental models, (c) establishing a shared vision, (d) engaging in team learning, and (e) thinking systemically. Senge emphasized the importance of the ability to analyze the structure of an organization and make sustainable changes for an organization to experience success. Systems thinking relates to finding the leverage needed within a learning organization to

create solutions to help build a better system. Although Senge's systems thinking was originally applied to the business industry, this model is also practiced in an educational context. Student achievement involves communicating, setting goals, reflecting, generating conversations, and recognizing and managing complex situations within the learning organization. For Senge, an important component of thinking systemically involved collaboration to build a shared vision with parents, students, teachers, administrators, and all other stakeholders to identify each other's value and contribution to the organization to create effective methods for solving educational problems.

Understanding the perceptions of elementary, middle, and high school principals from a rural school district in a southern state concerning practices of recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs aligns with Senge's (1990) concept of systems thinking for learning organizations in the approach to align all educational ideas, goals, and practices to increase student performance. Dickinson (2011) extended Senge's learning organization paradigm and constructed strategies for ensuring teacher candidates would commit to the organization to increase recruitment, selection, and retention. Principals must acquire the knowledge to identify individual strengths and values to increase student and teacher performance within the school system (Dickinson, 2011).

A responsive interview approach for investigating perceptions of principals about recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs aligns with Dickinson's (2007, 2011) adapted model of recruitment, selection, and retention for professional social workers. The research questions were designed to investigate principals' perceptions of recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs within the framework of educational learning environments. I

collected data from interviews with the principals and allowed the participants to express personal and professional perceptions within the conceptual framework likely influencing existing recruitment, hiring, and retention of HQTs within rural school districts. When I analyzed the data, I used a priori codes based on Dickinson's model of recruitment, selection, and retention to begin to develop categories and themes to answer the research questions (see Yin, 2016). The framework helped me develop the study's interview questions aligning with Dickinson's model to collect data concerning the research questions. A more thorough explanation of the conceptual framework with analysis derived from the literature will be shared in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

A qualitative design is composed of data collection, management, and analysis as the researcher provides clear goals and objectives to support the reason for the study. In choosing the most appropriate method for this study, I compared qualitative versus quantitative research. Wahyuni (2012) noted that quantitative research provides statistical data to test hypothesis or determine correlations between variables. Because I did not plan to use hypothesis or numerical presentations, I chose a basic qualitative design to investigate rural school principals' perceptions of recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs, using interviews as the sole data collection instrument. Qualitative research takes place in a real-world setting where the phenomenon is being studied (Cypress, 2018). A basic approach was best suited for this study to explore individuals contextual experiences. The selection criteria were purposefully chosen principals in the district able to provide valid and reliable content during semistructured interviews.

I developed an interview protocol and questions based on the conceptual framework, peer-reviewed literature, and other studies. I used semistructured interviews to collect data to investigate the perceptions of elementary, middle, and high school principals from a rural school district concerning practices of recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs. My role in the collection of data was that of an observer. I conducted interviews at the principals' school campuses in a natural environment conducive to obtaining rich data. Each interview was audio-recorded and then transcribed.

I analyzed the data using a priori codes focusing on an adapted version of Dickinson's (2007) model for recruitment, selection, and retention of child welfare workers. The open-ended questions of the interview protocol allowed participants to respond in such a manner that I could develop codes and categories from the transcripts of the interviews. Upon subsequent phases of analysis, I began to develop themes more efficiently as I looked at patterns and grouped and counted like responses. I shared data using figures and tables based on an adaptation of Dickinson's (2007) model for recruitment, selection, and retention of child welfare workers based on Senge's (1990) concepts of learning organizations.

I chose purposeful sampling for this study by interviewing principals from elementary, middle, and high schools. I also described the process of coding for patterns using multiple participants' interviews. Detailed descriptions and member checking of the findings were strategies used to mitigate potential researcher bias. Objectivity, validity, and trustworthiness supported the data collection process. The nature and methodology of this study will be explained in depth in Chapter 3.

Definitions

Terms unique to the study are defined as follows:

Highly qualified teachers (HQTs): As required by and delineated by federal and state education reform legislation, HQTs have the certification, pedagogical experience, and content knowledge needed to develop students' academic success (Fitchett & Heafner, 2018; Lee, 2018).

Teacher hiring: The process for administrators to acquire HQTs by identifying potential candidates who demonstrate practices aligned with the vision of the school, obtaining school board approval, gaining access to necessary paperwork, and offering a role in schools (Kimbrel, 2019).

Teacher recruitment: Recruitment relates to soliciting teacher hires who are skilled, competent, and committed to organizational goals (Dickinson, 2011).

Teacher retention: Administrative organizational practices that focus on specific school characteristics and factors that may help increase the retention of classroom instructors in the educational setting beyond 5 years (Wronowski, 2018). *Retention* refers to continued employment of a teacher for at least 5 years.

Teacher selection: The process of finding organizational members capable of performing the required job duties and being committed to master goals (Dickinson, 2011).

Assumptions

Assumptions are statements presumed to be true for a specific purpose in a research study (Ellis & Levy, 2009). Three assumptions support this study. First, I

assumed that principals were willing to share the process they use to recruit, hire, and retain HQTs. The second assumption was that participants would provide authentic and relevant answers to the questions. Finally, I assumed the criteria of the purposely selected samples were appropriate and participants had experienced similar phenomena.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of the study was limited to participants' perspectives relating to recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs. The setting was a rural school district in a southern state. I invited eight elementary, middle, and high school principals with 2 or more years of experience to participate in this study. I chose participants for this study with 2 or more years of administrative experience because of the level of expertise needed to answer the research questions of this study. The scope of this study includes schools serving a rural community in which 36.2% of residents live in poverty with the median household income estimated as $28,556 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). I used semistructured interviews to investigate principals' perceptions of recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs in a rural school district in the southern region of the United States.

The delimitations of a study are characteristics arising from the limitations in the scope of the study and the definition of the boundaries and decisions made during the development of the study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). The first delimitation existing in this study was a single school district in a rural area. School districts in urban areas were not included because I sought to answer research questions pertaining to rural school districts. Second, only principals who had at least 2 years of experience were included in the study. Principals with less experience were not chosen as participants because limited

administrative practice would not provide sufficient involvement to answer the research questions. Third, only purposive sampling was used to identify eight participants for semistructured interviews. More participants were not included because the study was delimited to one school district. Findings from the study were used to develop themes and patterns and to identify gaps for future studies.

Limitations

Limitations of a study are potential occurrences, based on the methodology and design, that are out of a researcher's control and could influence the findings (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). Confirmability, bias as the researcher, and limited number of participants are limitations of this study that possibly could affect the transferability of the findings to practice. Qualitative research is difficult to replicate and occurs in the natural setting of the participants (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). To address confirmability, I provided detailed plans of how I implemented this study using data from elementary, middle, and high school principals perceptions; and rich descriptions to provide reliable findings.

Additionally, researcher bias, which can influence participants' responses as well as data analysis, is a limitation of qualitative studies. I am an administrator in the district where the study was conducted and have experienced challenges with recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs. Although my role as the researcher was an observer gathering data, to address issues of bias, I interviewed eight school principals with whom I had not discussed or experienced challenges relating to the topic of the study. To avoid personal bias as the researcher, I used a self-reflexive journal and member checking of the findings to increase the credibility of the study. A self-reflexive journal provided awareness of any

personal experiences and opinions and assisted me in analyzing the observed, gathered data without bias (see Ahern, 1999). Member checking allowed me to strengthen my study by validating the content being shared by participants (see Yin, 2016).

The number of participants in the study is a limitation. The small sample size could influence the transferability of the study findings. Although some district-level leaders have been principals in prior careers, I did not include them in this study. I interviewed only current principals who had 2 or more years of experience. The participants were purposefully selected and did not represent other school districts.

Significance

The quality of teachers can determine students' professional and personal outcomes (Oguntimehin et al., 2018). Teachers spend more time with students than administrators do and thus help shape students' thinking and actions. For this reason, principals should hire quality teachers who improve students' academic success. Students who receive instruction from quality teachers are more likely to be successful personally and professionally (Oguntimehin et al., 2018). Administrators' roles require competence in hiring, recruiting, and retaining HQTs. With this study, I addressed a gap in research about practice by focusing specifically on the perceptions of principals from rural areas concerning recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs. To improve the academic environment for students, principals need access to HQTs. Students in rural areas need instruction by HQTs equipped with the skills and knowledge to increase academic achievement and college and career readiness (Barnes, 2019). In this study, I addressed an underresearched area among principals from rural areas regarding perceptions of recruiting, hiring, and

retaining HQTs (Engel, Cannata, & Curran, 2018). Insights from the study may effect positive social change by providing effective practices to increase principals' abilities to recruit, hire, and retain HQTs in rural school districts.

Summary

The purpose of this basic exploratory qualitative study was to investigate the perceptions of elementary, middle, and high school principals from a rural school district in a southern state concerning practices of recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs. Mandates of ESSA (2015) require principals to recruit, hire, and retain HQTs who improve students' academic performance. HQTs have the most influence on students' achievement, compared to resources, parental involvement, and class size (Lee, 2018). This study was conducted using a basic qualitative design with semistructured interviews to gain knowledge of rural school principals' perceptions of recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs.

Principals display discrepant practices when recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs. Some principals use state or district teacher initiatives, including methods to recruit and train paraprofessionals and service members to become HQTs and to leverage school district collaboration efforts to increase teacher retention (Beesley et al., 2010). Other principals attempt to align hiring and recruiting practices to the organizational objectives. Nevertheless, most principals' hiring and recruiting practices are not strategically aligned to educational goals (Engel & Curran, 2016).

In this chapter, I presented the focus of the study through the statement of the problem, research questions, and the significance of potential findings of the study (Yin,

2016). The potential for positive social change resulting from this study is by providing an in-depth understanding of rural school principals' perceptions concerning recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs. The findings of this study may benefit students, teachers, principals, superintendents, and other stakeholders involved in the educational decision-making process. In Chapter 2, I will elaborate on the conceptual framework of this study and provide a literature review of peer-reviewed articles concerning the challenges principals encounter to recruit, hire, and retain HQTs.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The problem addressed in this study is the discrepant practices of recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs by principals in rural school districts. The purpose of this basic exploratory qualitative study was to investigate the perceptions of elementary, middle, and high school principals from a rural school district in a southern state concerning practices of recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs. HQTs play a crucial role in increasing student academic performance (Fitchett & Heafner, 2018). The literature lacks adequate information on how administrators should recruit, hire, and retain HQTs for rural school districts (Miller et al., 2019), creating a need to explore this issue.

The emphasis in Chapter 2 will be on the literature relating for the topic of this study. The conceptual framework used in this study is described in detail and is aligned with an adapted model of Dickinson's (2007) recruitment, selection, and retention model based on Senge's (1990) learning organization model, which supports methods for recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs. Additionally, a comprehensive review of the literature is provided, outlining background information on the effect teacher quality has on student academic success; the role of principals as social change agents; and principals' challenges for recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs.

Literature Search Strategy

Through the Walden University Library, I used the following databases to search for current peer-reviewed literature and dissertations: ERIC, Education Source, EBSCOhost, Sage Journal, Emerald Management Journals, ProQuest, and Google Scholar. Government websites, such as the U.S. Department of Education, Mississippi

Department of Education, and the National Center for Education Statistics were

referenced. I accessed relevant research articles and books through references, citations,

and online purchases. I used the following key terms to conduct searches: *recruitment,*

retention, advertisement, e-portfolios, hiring, portfolios, teachers' pay, pay-for-

performance, trustworthiness, and *internship.* I used the following key phrases for

searches: *teacher recruitment, hiring teachers, retaining teachers, highly qualified*

teachers, administrators' roles, financial incentives, Nancy Dickinson conceptual

framework, Peter Senge's system thinking, professional learning community, recruiting

teachers in rural community, principals hiring and recruiting teachers, teachers' roles,

traditional portfolios, teachers' responsibilities, social change, students' achievement,

teachers' incentives, and *teachers' professional development.*

During the initial searches for relevant and peer-reviewed literature, I refined the

results to include only scholarly sources published within the previous 5 years, except

sources providing content for the background of the study. The abstracts of articles

allowed me to decide which articles would support the literature review of this study.

Additionally, I annotated ideas to help sort content and present findings from the

literature. References in previously found articles gave me additional resources to support

the study. I continued my literature search and reviews of articles until I reached

saturation on the topic of study.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for the study is an adapted model of Dickinson's

(2007, 2011) model for recruitment, selection, and retention of child welfare workers and

Senge's (1990) concepts of learning organization (see Figure 1). The recruitment model

and concepts of the learning organization align with the investigation of principals'

perceptions in elementary, middle, and high schools. Dickinson's (2007, 2011) model

emphasizes the importance of examining the work environment, external stakeholders'

viewpoints, workers' expectations, employees' characteristics, and leadership support to

implement plans to increase recruitment, hiring, and retention. Senge's learning

organization principles focus on the qualities of an effective organization. The purpose of

this exploratory study was framed by the idea of strategically examining employee

strengths to increase principals' ability to recruit, hire, and retain HQTs.

Dickinson's Recruitment, Selection, and Retention Model

Dickinson (2011) identified several areas as important factors to examine as an

effort to improve a leaders' ability to recruit, select, and retain quality teachers. First, the

external environment must consist of stakeholders who rate organization quality using the

services that make outsiders aware of organizational goals and visions. Second, the

organization must solicit potential candidates who possess skills, knowledge, and self-

confidence to perform well, thereby creating a pool of applicants for the selection

process. As a result, leaders can provide potential candidates with the school vision and

mission and methods to support candidates to build job satisfaction and tenure.

Additionally, during recruitment, selection, and retention processes, principals may

evaluate applicants for qualities, such as (a) building relationships, (b) adapting to the

culture, (c) communicating, (d) observing, (e) planning and organizing works, (f)

thinking analytically, (g) motivating, (h) having self-awareness and confidence, (i)

displaying commitment, and (j) possessing the traits of working as a team (Barth et al., 2008). Overall, Dickinson (2011) found leaders must be equipped with the knowledge to identify individual strengths and values to increase student and teacher performance within the school system.

School outcomes are based on leaders' ability to recruit, hire, and retain quality teachers who can improve student academic performance. According to Dickinson (2011), organizations perform better when they implement a strategic recruiting, selecting, and retaining model. External and internal stakeholders share similar visions and goals to produce academic success. Furthermore, students encounter practices contributing to long-term academic achievement. The quality of principals' recruitment, hiring, and retention model determines the success of students and teachers.

Senge's Learning Organization

Senge's (1990) paradigm of systems thinking suggests that collaboration and commitment within an organization, either educational or noneducational, are key factors for an organization to succeed. Corresponding with Dickinson's (2007, 2011) conceptual framework, Senge proposed creating goals, communicating, and training members to meet goals. Senge suggested leaders analyze the quality that exists within a structure to increase organizational performance. Senge viewed organizations' qualities by employee interaction, metacognition, mindset, and performance. Problems derived from relationships and interactions can be solved. As a result, leaders should examine employees to determine their strengths and weaknesses to establish plans for creating change. To produce change, the vision should align with expected outcomes. Employees

should be able to engage in critical thinking activities encouraging a change of mindset. Similarly, in the school setting, systems thinking influences leaders' planning process of assigning teachers' roles and responsibilities. Likewise, the ability to analyze the learning environment for strengths applies to Senge's ideas of creating a productive learning environment.

Senge et al. (2012) stated that increasing student achievement involves communicating skills, setting goals, reflecting on practices, generating conversations, and recognizing and managing complex situations within a learning organization. An important component of creating a learning organization is thinking systemically. Thinking systemically includes collaborating to build a shared vision with parents, students, teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders to identify values and contributions to the organization to create effective methods for solving educational problems (Senge et al., 2012). Dickinson (2011) suggested solving internal problems before quality employees can be recruited, selected, or retained, based on Senge's (1990) organizational systems thinking structure.

Dickinson's Paradigm and Senge's Conceptual Framework

In the process of improving an organization, Dickinson (2007, 2011) and Senge (1990) identified practices related to recruiting, selecting, and retaining quality employees that must be analyzed. During the initial hiring process, potential employees must believe principals are interested and care about their well-being. Dickinson (2011) discussed that external members need to develop different ideas and concepts relating to the organization because of external presentations. Senge et al. (2012) acknowledged the

importance of displaying exceptional organizational qualities to gain the approval of all stakeholders. Both Senge's concept of learning organizations and Dickinson's (2007, 2011) paradigm for recruiting, selecting, and retaining employees included the necessity of collaboration when discussing problems and finding solutions to increase the productivity of the organization. Successful organizations consist of ongoing communication, planning, and evaluation. Furthermore, Dickinson (2007, 2011) and Senge et al. described the learning organization as a process, including continual challenges, reflection, and modifications, where employees understand their assigned purpose and perform based on the overall goals of the organization. Based on the purpose of this study, Dickinson's (2007, 2011) paradigm, founded on Senge's principles of learning organizations, is the most appropriate conceptual lens to investigate the perceptions of elementary, middle, and high school principals in a rural school district concerning practices used to recruit, select, and retain HQTs.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variables

Organizations depend on teachers to help develop students into adults able to contribute to society. When recruiting, hiring, and retaining teachers, school leaders analyze teacher quality. Teacher quality is defined as teachers' professional and pedagogic abilities to improve students' learning environment and increase students' academic performance (Mammadov & Cimen, 2019). In addition, teacher quality relates to teachers' beliefs and attitudes and how they affect students. Quality teachers are limited but valuable to the educational environment. The goal of providing students in rural school districts with quality instruction by HQTs is a national focus to align

equitable academic instruction with educational performance in urban and suburban

areas. Furthermore, students' educational experiences determine their academic, social,

behavioral, and occupational outcomes. Principals take ultimate responsibility for

students' academic outcomes, which requires administrators to think strategically as they

attempt to recruit, hire, and retain HQTs (Stringer & Hourani, 2016). The following

literature review provides background information concerning this phenomenon;

addresses the role of the principal in recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs; and discusses

recruitment, hiring, and retention practices.

  With the increased accountability for district- and school-level administrators to

increase teacher performance and student achievement, the recruitment, hiring, and

retention of HQTs have become vital aspects of a principal's role. Recruiting, hiring, and

retaining HQTs are important procedures for all school leaders but are notably

challenging for rural school administrators. Hiring HQTs reduces the educational gap

between students in rural and suburban environments (Gomba, 2015). However,

researchers who have studied the difficulties principals from rural schools encounter

when recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs reported that principals lacked consistent

methods to increase teacher recruitment, hiring, and retention (DeFeo & Tran, 2019;

Wronowski, 2018). Furthermore, educational statistics show that new teachers stay in the

profession between 5 and 6 years before choosing a different occupation (DeFeo & Tran,

2019; Wronowski, 2018). Such teacher attrition creates a dilemma for principals in

replacing HQTs with novice teachers. Moreover, when instructors leave educational

positions, administrators not only lose classroom teachers but also face financial costs to train and enculturate new faculty to campus environments (DeFeo & Tran, 2019).

In addition to teacher attrition, principals experience positive and negative encounters attempting to hire quality teachers. Ryan et al. (2017) reported professional burnout and dissatisfaction in negative educational environmental influence teacher retention and job satisfaction. Other factors including teacher retirement and attrition limited the number of HQTs available for administrators to recruit, hire, and retain. According to Ulferts (2015), principals in rural school districts face a greater challenge than urban and suburban principals when recruiting, hiring, or retaining HQTs. With (2017) reported rural school district communities have insufficient housing, limited family activities, unsatisfactory pay, misaligned resources, and insufficient educational support which influence recruitment, hiring, and retention of HQTs.

A primary goal of school principals is to decrease achievement gaps between different demographics of students. In doing so, building leaders oversee teachers daily instructional practices that guide students learning. Furthermore, principals develop different and highly competitive approaches to meet state, local, and federal educational requirements. Approaches have included different forms of incentives. These stimuli include initial financial bonuses, college partnerships, and collaboration programs. Additionally, teachers are provided choices in job assignment, location, and student placement (Farinde et al., 2016) to improve recruitment, hiring, and retention of HQTs (Cruz, 2018). However, these approaches have failed to decrease gaps in educational quality between rural and metropolitan schools (Campion et al., 2019; Coffey et al.,

2019). In search of best practices, principals continue to seek the most suitable practice to recruit, hire, and retain HQTs.

Role of Principals and Factors Influencing Recruiting, Hiring, and Retaining HQTs

Principals' roles have evolved over the years to improve educational outcomes. The ESSA (2015) played a major factor in the change of principals' roles by stipulating strict policies requiring all students to have access to HQTs. Leaders' practices now reflect instructional leaders performing as change agents, building managers, and relationship builders who influence the educational setting (Paletta, 2018; Wood et al., 2013). Principals are also responsible for possessing the skills and knowledge to promote school culture and implement practices to promote students' and teachers' professional and personal growth (Chan et al., 2018). Moreover, Wood et al. (2013) explained, principals set the tone of the learning and teaching environment to reflect collaboration and partnerships among educational stakeholders. Key stakeholders include parents, teachers, students, other administrators, and community members.

To increase partnerships and collaboration, principals aim to hire HQTs with educational experiences that create long-term academic and occupational success (Ni et al., 2018). However, challenges associated with recruiting and retaining HQTs are influenced by the lack of access to quality professional development, infrastructure, support, and safety (Acheampong & Gyasi, 2019). Principals attributed HQT attrition to professional isolation, burnout, and limited resources. Principals may need new roles and methods to attract HQTs to rural school districts.

One concept that influences recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs is school culture. School culture consists of many components aligned to produce students' academic success or failures. Principals create school culture through decisions related to teachers and students (Dicke et al., 2019). Students' social, personal, professional, educational, and environmental encounters are identified as school culture. Additionally, teachers' job satisfaction is associated with retention and school culture. Most importantly, ensuring a positive work environment can improve teachers' practices and students' learning (Dicke et al., 2019).

Furner and McCulla (2017) examined principals' practices in creating a culture that improved student and teacher performance. Findings indicated principals' leadership practices influenced not only school culture but also teacher retention. In the study, principals categorized teachers as concerned, confident, serious, or focused learners. At each stage, teachers received different approaches and assistance from the administrator. Strategies created growth and support for teachers and provided a positive school culture that attracted and retained educators. Principals came to understand the importance of knowing that different types of teachers required different approaches. Also, practices were based on the teacher's level of experience. To conclude, when the culture of the school included positive actions, teachers remained in the profession longer and committed to the mission, vision, and goals to improve students' academic success.

Another challenge for principals in a leadership role is teacher retention. Schools nationwide, but especially in rural areas, have experienced a shortage of HQTs. Leaders reported 12% of teachers in rural school settings leave the profession compared to urban

and suburban area teachers; however, 59% of teachers leave one school to work in another within the same district, whereas 38% move to another school district (Goldring et al., 2014). Principals from rural areas contended that teachers in rural areas experience poor working conditions, lack of parental involvement, lower pay, inadequate teacher preparation programs, increased workload, and other limitations making retention difficult (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). Job dissatisfaction concerns principals because of the teachers' role in increasing students' academic performance. A shortage of HQTs may lead principals to seek noncertified or nontraditional licensed teachers. As a result, principals may modify the learning environment by eliminating courses and increasing class sizes (Ulferts, 2015). Henceforth, principals seek multiple ways to recruit, hire, and retain HQTs.

Recruitment Practices

Recruitment practices relate to identifying teachers capable of increasing students' academic, social, and behavioral performance. Principals in all school districts face recruitment barriers to find qualified teachers, but leaders from rural communities encounter extreme obstacles. Harmon (2001) revealed the following as needed qualities to teach in a rural area: (a) certified to teach more than one subject area or grade level; (b) prepared to supervise several extracurricular activities; (c) able to teach a wide range of abilities in a classroom; (d) able to overcome cultural differences and understand the present society; and (e) able to adjust to the differences in the community such as social opportunities, lifestyles, shopping areas, and scrutiny. The overall goal of employee

recruitment is to seek candidates capable of fulfilling job requirements and vacancies (Acikgoz, 2018).

Principals realize the teaching profession entails a career filled with an overload of work, stress, demands, and uncompetitive pay (Dell'Angelo & Richardson, 2019). Principals also seek teacher candidates who are committed and passionate about increasing children's academic, social, and behavioral opportunities. Conversely, principals experience a shortage of HQTs, creating challenges of recruiting teachers with the skill set required to increase student achievement. Similarly, the shortage creates competitive recruitment efforts by administrators (Dell'Angelo & Richardson, 2019) leading to principals' implementing various strategies to recruit HQTs. However, the typical means to hire new teachers are job fairs, advertisements, and programs.

The Role of Job Fairs in Recruitment

Job fairs are conducted within different industries to increase the recruitment of valuable employees. The goal is to seek individuals who match the organization's goals. In the business world, leaders use job fairs to recruit competitive and goal-driven individuals. In nonprofit organizations, managers seek employees displaying enthusiasm and relationship-building skills (Minifie et al., 2018). Principals seek teachers who are not only competent in specific subjects but also adventurous, intelligent, willing, and passionate. With the use of job fairs, leaders seek to meet educational candidates willing and able to improve student performance.

Some leaders seek to recruit workers overseas to increase recruitment opportunities. Beam (2016) reported a group of international leaders hosted 400 job fairs

annually, resulting in the recruitment of an estimated 40,000 potential employees. Candidates received information relating to the organization's culture, vision, mission, demographics, and needs (Beam, 2016). Of 210 participants who attended one of the job fairs, only two were hired by a representative at the career event, although other attendees reported hearing from leaders 10 months after the job fair (Beam, 2016). Factors such as wages, inadequate information, and experiences played a role in employment status. Nevertheless, job fair participants acknowledged being able to connect with other job-seekers, apply to work in different industries, and observe the job fair process. Overall, leaders expressed job fairs were most influential in recruiting new members.

Educational leaders found attending college job fairs increased recruitment opportunities. College students, seeking career information to guide decisions for choosing an occupation, labeled job fairs as an excellent place to meet educators and secure a classroom position (Minifie et al., 2018). Job fairs also permitted opportunities for leaders to conduct informal interviews to gather information about candidates. Principals would schedule formal interviews and campus tours when candidates' characteristics matched the school vision. Leaders offered teacher candidates resources to share background information about the school's learning environment. Other data collected from job-seekers included records of academic performance, references, experiences, communication skills, nonverbal skills, teaching qualities, and beliefs about education (Minifie et al., 2018).

Principals attempt to recruit HQTs based on characteristic traits as well as academic ability and subject certification. Minifie et al. (2018) found independent school

districts, nonprofit organizations, government entities, and commercial enterprises recruited candidates based on personality traits that included extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. Although each group valued specific characteristics conducive for success in their organization, independent school districts emphasized openness traits, which involved analyzing candidates' grade point average, references, résumé, verbal skills, and positive attitude. Although leaders experienced positive results at job fairs for teacher recruitment, hiring representatives encountered candidates with experience in other areas than teaching. Findings indicated job fairs increased teacher recruitment but had little influence on leaders' ability to identify successful candidates (Beam, 2016; Minifie et al., 2018). Given this lack of evidence on the effectiveness of acquiring HQTs at job fairs, leaders continue to use other methods to recruit trustworthy and committed workers.

The Role of Advertisement in Recruitment

Advertisements offer opportunities to share organizational goals, mission, and job vacancies and to recruit HQTs. Organization leaders reported using advertisements to identify job availabilities and solicit candidates to apply for positions. Leaders in Acikgoz's (2018) study identified the following as valuable concepts to recruit potential candidates: (a) values, (b) needs, (c) interest, (d) personality characteristics, (e) pay, (f) benefit, (g) working hours, and (h) company descriptions. In the educational setting, principals shared using different forms of advertisement such as district webpages, social media, newspapers, television, organizational networks, newspapers, brochures, and promotional materials to attract teachers for formal interviews (Acikgoz, 2018; M.

Ingersoll et al., 2018). One of the most important processes of advertising included developing content to attract the most qualified applicants and promote the overall goal of the organization. Other advertising methods such as webpages provided local and out-of-state candidates with appealing information such as the salary scale, teacher demographics, school achievement, professional growth opportunities, benefits, and advancement probabilities (Acikgoz, 2018). Additionally, social media provided an efficient method for recruitment because of the appeal to college students (Acikgoz, 2018; Carpentier et al., 2019; Chen & DiVall, 2018).

Research in the business sector highlighted leaders using social media as a novel method for communicating job vacancies and expectations. Blogs, discussion boards, chat rooms, forums, websites, and social networks were examples of social media business leaders considered (Kissel & Buttgen, 2015). Kissel and Buttgen (2015) reported 48% of business leaders used social media to recruit workers because of the flexibility and ability to present the company image of authenticity, self-congruity, and credible content. Principals used social media to recruit specified groups of people and to gather candidates' background information (Acikgoz, 2018; Kissel & Buttgen, 2015; Shahani-Denning et al., 2017). Researchers' findings suggested social media increased recruitment and provided feedback on ways to improve content shared (Kissel & Buttgen, 2015). Moreover, in rural areas, leaders cannot rely on one strategy to recruit HQTs (Miller et al., 2019). Different programs enhance the recruitment process.

The Role of Programs in Recruitment

School districts employ different programs to assist with recruiting HQTs. Some viable options district administrators and principals use to attract and recruit HTQs are alternative route programs and teacher preparation programs. Each avenue of entry into the teaching profession provides an opportunity to recruit new capable employees.

Teacher preparation programs, such as teacher internships, provide teacher candidates with quality teaching experiences. Almerico (2018) found that interns were most successful when they had expectations, meaningful work, and protocols within the educational environment. Interns encountered practical experiences to increase teaching practices and performance. Furthermore, interns' knowledge, skills, and love for children were enhanced using practical teaching experiences (Almerico, 2018; Sharzadin et al., 2019). Overall, recruiting interns bridged the gap between academic knowledge and reality, which increased employment chances. Candidates were able to grasp the concept of teaching and understand the commitment needed before the hiring process began, creating opportunities to increase teacher recruitment (Vagi et al., 2019). Teacher preparation programs allow teacher candidates to gain pedagogical experience and obtain an understanding of the curriculum to increase teacher recruitment. Van Overschelde et al. (2017) reported the benefits of a teacher preparation program in a southern state; 85% of teacher candidates recruited in the program remained within the profession after 5 years. Van Overschelde et al. (2017) indicated important factors implemented within the teacher preparation program were (a) training candidates full time, (b) providing and explaining the educational curriculum, and (c) setting expectations for participants. The

goal was to increase teacher candidates' value, respect, awareness, and longevity in the classroom by developing different practices, problems, and expectations.

Some state educational leaders offer alternative certification programs, which aim to increase the pool of teacher applicants. Although applicants must hold a bachelor's degree to apply, alternative route programs provide a flexible pathway for noncertified teachers to obtain a teaching degree. Miller et al. (2019) found alternative route programs increased recruitment for rural areas and hard-to-staff schools. In Miller et al.'s study, principals offered participants a $5,000 scholarship for a commitment of 3 years in a partner school district. As support, program partners also offered district leaders technological resources to enhance instruction. Findings from the study showed that alternative certification programs increased teacher recruitment, but leaders struggled to find candidates possessing a bachelor's degree (Miller et al., 2019). Other alternative route programs used by leaders entailed training potential teachers for 5–8 weeks on strategies and skills needed to teach in rural communities and inner cities. Although district leaders acknowledged programs decreased teacher shortage, problems in teacher retention remained (Brewer et al., 2016). Teachers committed for 2 years but left to pursue other professions (Larson & Vontz, 2018). For this reason, educational leaders seek to implement other programs to increase the recruitment of HQTs.

In conclusion, student academic performance is influenced by principals' ability to recruit quality teachers willing to stay in the profession. Alternative certification programs and teacher preparation programs assist with recruiting quality teachers (Ulferts, 2015). Other teacher preparation programs educational leaders have

implemented include provisional license, temporary license, and emergency license.

However, administrators reported teacher preparation programs increased teachers'

retention (Van Overschelde et al., 2017).

Hiring Practices

The hiring process is a critical task for educational leaders in search of HQTs to

improve student achievement (Schumacher et al., 2015). State and local leaders rely on

school-level administrators to hire HQTs capable of increasing student academic

achievement. In the process of hiring HQTs, principals shared limited access to funds,

resources, applicants, and data to support ways to hire HQTs (Kimbrel, 2019;

Schumacher et al., 2015). Engel and Finch (2015) described the hiring phase as having

three components: (a) screening, (b) selection, and (c) hiring. During these phases of the

hiring process, principals interact with teacher candidates using interviews, incentives,

and portfolios.

The Role of Interviews in Hiring

Interviews are the most common practice used to hire teachers. Leaders have

reported interviewing candidates at job fairs, in person, or over the phone. Candidates are

chosen for interviews by site application, reference, referral, personal contact, or career

fairs (Engel & Finch, 2015; Kimbrel, 2019). Elementary, middle, and high school leaders

have described the process of conducting interviews as a partnership with colleagues

(Engel & Finch, 2015; Kimbrel, 2019). Engel and Finch (2015) surveyed 31

administrators from an urban area requiring committees to interview only local teacher

candidates. Administrators believed teachers would stay in the profession if the job was

close to home (Engel & Finch, 2015). Principals also identified committees as valuable to eliminate bias when selecting teachers. Before the interview, principals discussed ways to screen and hire the most suitable candidate. The results of the study showed principals from urban, lower achieving schools hired substitute or student teachers during the interview process. Principals from urban, high-achieving schools accessed and mobilized social capital to hire teachers (Engel & Finch, 2015).

Kimbrel (2019) surveyed 20,367 principals from rural, suburban, and urban settings. Each school leader required assistant principals, teachers, staff members, students, parents, school board members, or the superintendent to be part of the interview committee. In addition, applicants were asked to demonstrate a lesson, explain writing samples, or provide reference checks to share background experience and capabilities. Reports indicated 22% of the principals used teachers to hire HQTs, and 25% used references. Only 6% shared using phone interviews or having teachers demonstrate lessons in the interview. Additionally, 81% of leaders used predeveloped questions, 18% developed some questions during the interview, and less than 1% did not use predeveloped questions. Further, 87% of principals used the same questions during interviews, and 70% of the questions related to teacher quality. Overall, principals relied more on teachers' ability to build relationships, gain certification, and collaborate to hire. To conclude, Kimbrel reported interviews were the most commonly used method to hire teachers but also noted interviews were the most unreliable element for selecting HQTs because school leaders lacked the training to increase validly, reliability, and predictability in the hiring process.

In a different study, Schumacher et al. (2015) reported leaders gave candidates scenarios during the interview to gather data about teaching quality. Principals predeveloped questions to target applicants' professional experience, ability, and skills related to the schools' mission and vision (Schumacher et al., 2015). Elementary and secondary school administrators created questions to inquire about candidates' ability to build a student–teacher relationship, manage the classroom, and increase student academic performance. In some instances, building leaders conducted interviews over several days to gain an overview of the skills, instructional strategies, and abilities of all participants. Although Schumacher et al. (2015) found predeveloped interview questions were productive in search of HQTs, the study lacked sufficient data to support the conclusion that predeveloped questions increased principals' ability to hire HQTs.

The shared research findings suggest ways leaders conduct interviews. During the interview process, principals asked questions related to teacher candidates' experiences, skills, abilities, and knowledge, but data did not support strategies to improve the recruitment of HQTs. According to Juchniewicz (2016), leaders display inconsistency in using interviews to hire HQTs. Based on the reported findings, research is needed on ways interviewing influences school leaders' ability to recruit HQTs. As data support a need to determine methods most successful in improving leaders' ability to recruit HQTs, leaders continue to use other methods, such as incentives.

The Role of Incentives in Hiring

To potentially employ more HQTs, federal, local, and state leaders consider incentive payment programs, including monetary incentives. At the school level, leaders

have used pay to recruit experienced and HQTs. Teachers seek employment where pay is competitive. To counter hiring challenges, building administrators offer incentives to teachers who (a) commit to 2 or more years of employment within hard-to-staff schools, (b) earn national board certification, (c) hold a certification in a core subject, and (d) demonstrate an ability to increase students' academic achievement (Liang et al., 2015).

Principals have suggested implementing financial pay equivalent to other professions to increase the hiring of HQTs (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). Teacher bonuses empower leaders to encourage teachers to work in challenging schools (Springer et al., 2016). Salaries are not the sole reason teachers choose the education field but provide motivation for teachers to select a particular school or district. However, hiring HQTs is a national competitive approach. Incentives can be based on the quality of teacher candidates' portfolios.

The Role of Portfolios in Hiring

Traditional and e-portfolios are composed of tangible documents and recommendations of teachers' personal and professional experiences related to the education setting. In contrast to traditional portfolios, e-portfolios are presenting electronically. In Kelly and Hancock's (2018) study, principals in an eastern rural school district found digital portfolios useful for choosing specific applicants to select for the interview process. Principals considered e-portfolios beneficial in the hiring process for providing accessible evidence of a candidate's knowledge, skills, and attributes. In contrast to traditional portfolios, school leaders viewed e-portfolios as time-consuming to appraise and evaluate teachers when content was omitted or irrelevant during

presentations. Both types of portfolios allowed principals to read the potential candidates' résumé, ascertain teaching philosophy, and view a demonstration of skills and knowledge (Baris & Tosun, 2013; Kelly & Hancock, 2018). Based on Kelly and Hancock's findings, urban and rural educational leaders preferred a traditional portfolio to evaluate the quality of teacher candidates' assessment data, compared to administrators in suburban school districts, who relied on evidence of teaching practices, students' learning, and documentation methods. However, traditional portfolios provide information relating to candidates' experience and past success. Leaders use portfolios to match candidates with the organization's expectations, and e-portfolio content can be easily accessed, managed, stored, personalized, and revised (Baris & Tosun, 2013; Kelly & Hancock, 2018; Ring et al., 2017).

Administrators in Kelly and Hancock's (2018) study used traditional and e-portfolios to influence hiring while analyzing teacher candidates' experience, work performance, professional and personal growth, and knowledge related to a topic or career. In addition, portfolios provided leaders with background knowledge of teacher candidates to judge whether applicants would be suitable for the school. Principals shared strategies of using monetary incentives, programs, and portfolios to hire HQTs, but studies did not report success outcomes of using identified hiring practices. Principals were able to differentiate candidates to finalize their hiring decision and begin implementing retention strategies with new classroom instructors (Kelly & Hancock, 2018).

Retention Practices

The goal of new teacher retention is to motivate and develop quality teachers capable of improving students' academic outcomes. Instructional leaders and building administrators from rural areas described the retention of new teachers as a difficult process (Beesley et al., 2010). Adams and Woods (2015) reported rural principals focused on why teachers leave and stay in the teaching profession as well as choose teaching over other professions to help determine the appropriate strategies to retain HQTs. In the effort to improve the retention of HQTs, school leaders implement mentor programs, school culture strategies, and administrative support.

The Role of Mentor Programs in Retention

Mentor programs connect experienced teachers with 1st- and 2nd-year teachers to increase personal and professional performance. In a longitudinal study, leaders from several northwestern rural schools in the United States implemented a mentor program to increase teacher retention (Bressman et al., 2018). The program created the opportunity for mentors to communicate weekly with mentees to monitor mentees' classroom instruction, offer feedback, and receive intensive, ongoing professional development. After implementing the program for 10 years, teachers' retention increased from 320 during the start of the program to 500 in the last few years. The study showed leaders from rural schools were able to increase teacher retention but found retention more challenging than did leaders of local urban schools.

Bressman et al. (2018) also studied teachers' perceptions relating to offering individualized mentoring. Findings suggested the following recommendations to increase

teacher retention: (a) offer nonjudgmental mentor opportunities to all teachers to address teaching demands, (b) expand on current teacher induction programs, (c) create critical friend mentors, (d) use professional learning communities (PLCs), and (e) use videos or other technology to increase communication between mentors and mentees (Bressman et al., 2018). Teachers viewed mentors as an ongoing learning process that increased teacher retention if offered by supportive administrators.

The Role of Administrative Support Systems in Retention

Administrative support systems consist of various educational strategies and practices implemented in the school setting by school leaders to increase teacher retention (Hughes et al., 2015). Leaders create a structure that allows teachers to communicate concerns, develop plans, and gather resources. Because teachers listed a lack of appreciation and support as factors leading to leaving education and choosing a different profession, principals use practices to support teachers' professional and personal growth (Hughes et al., 2015). Administrative support such as allowing teachers to make educational decisions, offering professional development, and creating a productive work environment increased teacher retention (Hughes et al., 2015).

To improve teacher retention, leaders may offer collaborative learning opportunities. Collaborative learning empowers teachers, demonstrate the benefit of effective communication practices, change poor teaching practices, and ensure students and teachers have adequate support to improve teaching and learning (Paletta, 2018; Reitman & Karge, 2019). An example of collaborative learning leaders used was PLCs, also identified as collaborative learning opportunities. Reitman and Karge (2019)

reported 60 teachers had been at the same educational site since beginning to receive

support. PLCs focused on deeper learning, thinking skills, and solving problems to

improve instructional practice. Besides PLCs, teachers reported receiving mentors and

administrative support. Ovenden-Hope et al. (2018) reported PLCs are productive when

the agenda includes discussions of the mission and vision of the school, instructional

practices, feedback, student data, and ways to improve. In comparison with Senge's

(1990) learning organization, PLCs involve a group of educators sharing and reflecting

on practices to improve teaching practice and student academic outcomes (Paletta, 2018).

In addition to collaborative learning opportunities, providing teachers educational

assistance is an example of administrative support that improves HQTs retention.

Administrative support may include external resources offered to teachers based on

performance data. In Adams and Woods's (2015) study, external resources, also called

consultants, assisted teachers with different teaching approaches such as ways to organize

students, deliver instruction, and create engaging lessons. Teachers were also offered

ways to interact with colleagues, respond professionally during situations, and connect

with the community. Leaders found these trajectories to increase teacher retention, but

data lacked exact results for implementing administrative support strategies to increase

teacher retention (Adams & Woods, 2015). Administrative support plays a major role in

the retention of HQTs; however, transforming school culture to allow administrative

support is a priority (Olsen & Huang, 2019).

The Role of School Culture in Retention

School culture is the attitude and social environment consisting of administrative and organizational structures that impact teacher practice and student academic performance (Schipper et al., 2020). Olsen and Huang (2019) reported instructional, emotional, and administrative support aligned with school culture as principals created space for mentoring, learning, collaborating, building professional culture, addressing students' misbehavior, and improving the learning environment to increase teacher retention. In a school culture that increases teacher retention, students and teachers work cooperatively to create a safe and caring environment. Senge's (1990) paradigm of a learning organization corroborated the importance of an organization's environment. Principals identified a school culture that contributes to an increase in teachers' retention as including actions that develop commitment and effective practices, incorporating shared learning, vision, and practices (Olsen & Huang, 2019).

To conclude, principals used different methods to provide support to teachers in an effort to increase retention. Leaders learned that each school has a unique structure and style that create culture (Ucar & Ipek, 2019). Principals determined the implementation of methods based on individual needs. For this reason, administrators displayed flexibility in approaches and practices. Some additional practices were peer observations, self-evaluation, and administrative observations (Leiva et al., 2017). From the data gathered, school culture influences school leaders' ability to recruit, retain, and hire HQTs.

Summary and Conclusions

An achievement gap exists among urban, rural, and suburban areas relating to the quality of teachers recruited, hired, and retained (Goldhaber et al., 2015). Leader roles play a factor in student outcomes. The first step to improving teacher retention and student achievement is the ability of school leaders to use strategies to recruit, hire, and retain HQTs despite the national problem of attrition and limited funds (Holmes et al., 2019). State and local leaders depend on principals to hire teachers capable of collaborating with colleagues and building relationships that produce academic success (Park et al., 2019). For this reason, principals employ strategies within competitive environments to recruit, hire, and retain HQTS. Principals choose ways to recruit, hire, and retain HQTs in an educational era consisting of high-stakes assessments, increased teacher shortage, low student performance, and often poor school infrastructures and school buildings. State and local leaders depend on the building principal to make decisions that will increase students' academic performance (Egalite et al., 2014).

Administrators' strategies are not identified clearly due to lack of resources, training, and limited research (Kraft et al., 2016). However, several researchers reported principals use strategies such as job fairs, advertisements, programs, interviews, portfolios, administrative support systems, and cultural building techniques as aligned to Senge (1990) ideas of creating a learning organization and Dickinson's (2007) approach for recruiting, hiring, and selecting quality welfare workers. Dickinson (2011) stated leaders were responsible for keeping quality workers willing to provide high-quality instruction and value the individual needs of children. Dickinson's (2007, 2011)

approaches were identified for child welfare agencies but are applicable for educational environments as well. Senge's paradigm of a learning organization involved leaders possessing the skills and knowledge to create a culture of people sharing the same vision to master goals.

Recruiting HQTs is challenging for all leaders, but especially in rural areas where unique challenges arise. Along with other methods, leaders have attempted to provide professional development to noncertified teachers in districts in efforts to create quality teachers willing to commit to the area (Coffey et al., 2019). Other leaders used further strategies such as recommendations from college referrals, community leaders, and programs aimed to reduce teacher shortage. None of the methods was identified as the most influential strategy to recruit teachers. Kimbrel (2019) described the hiring process as being unreliable and invalid to predict quality in teachers but reported interviews provided principals an opportunity to hire potential candidates who can improve students' academic performance.

Once teachers were hired, leaders explained the retention process was difficult. The experiences teachers encountered within the school culture determined job satisfaction, which influenced retention. Principals found the school climate impacted the level of performance by teachers and students (Ansley et al., 2019). Building administrators focused on practices to enhance teachers' professional and personal outcomes. Researchers' findings showed teachers have different motivations for staying in the profession and at a current school, but leaders play a major factor in job

satisfaction and retention. Leaders recalled having to use internal and external motivation to increase teacher retention (Ucar & Ipek, 2019).

In summary, principals in rural communities shared greater challenges when attempting to recruit, hire, and retain workers in hard-to-staff schools. In each study reviewed, researchers were able to demonstrate ways leaders use strategies in educational settings lacked data to definitively identify successful or failing strategies for administrators seeking to recruit, hire, and retain HQTs. As stated, limited research is available to support the best practices in hiring and keeping HQTs, particularly in rural schools. State and local leaders are continuously seeking ways to increase student achievement. Teachers and principals in rural areas face problems such as inconsistent practices, poor compensation, and poor student behavior, which lead to a teacher shortage. Principals explained a teacher shortage produced poor academic performance by students, leading to dissatisfaction by state, local, and federal stakeholders. As a result, school leaders need to recruit, hire, and retain HQTs willing to commit to (a) teaching; (b) learning; (c) mentoring; (d) assessing; (e) observing; (f) evaluating; (g) reflecting; (h) modifying; and (i) collaborating with colleagues, students, parents, administrators, and other educational stakeholders (Holmes et al., 2019). Success for recruitment and retention is not determined by gaining a large number of new employees, but rather by the ability to obtain workers that fit the culture, possess personal and professional knowledge, and can improve teaching and learning (Campion et al., 2019). This study is important as it investigated the perception of elementary, middle, and high school principals from a rural school district concerning reoccurring challenges that arise

relating to recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs. Chapter 3 will provide further details

regarding the research design and methodology for this qualitative study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this basic exploratory qualitative study was to investigate the perceptions of elementary, middle, and high school principals from a rural district in a southern state concerning practices of recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs. Important aspects in this qualitative research design include identifying the goal and rationale for the study, integrating the conceptual framework, following guidelines for participants, planning for validity and trustworthiness, and aligning the research questions and data collection process (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In Chapter 3, I will explain my role as the researcher, provide an overview of the research method and procedures, describe the development of the interview protocol, and clarify selection of the volunteer participants for this study. Additionally, I will elucidate a description of the data collection process, analysis, and interpretation of findings. Throughout the study, I implemented best practices to ensure a valid study.

Research Design and Rationale

For this research, I chose a basic qualitative design. Qualitative research focuses on studying the perspectives of people's lives, experiences, and conditions. Yin (2016) explained that the value of qualitative research allows data to be integrated and presented from the participants' social, cultural, institutional, or environmental experiences. Because the purpose of this exploratory study was to investigate the perceptions of elementary, middle, and high school principals from rural school districts concerning practices of recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs, choosing a qualitative design was appropriate. Interviews with participants were on school campuses in the natural setting

of the volunteers, allowing principals to provide data based on experiences and practices. I analyzed data based on the conceptual framework and coded the data to develop categories and themes to answer the research questions of the study.

In qualitative studies, researchers focus on a topic of study, plan and prepare the data collection process, collect and analyze the data, and disseminate the findings (Yin, 2016). Some approaches used for a qualitative study are (a) action research reflecting on participants' values and concerns, (b) case studies including data from participants' actual context, (c) phenomenology analysis description, and (d) a basic qualitative approach (Yin, 2016). Action research is based on inquiry of a social phenomenon. Researchers seek to find solutions to identified problems in a specified setting (McManners, 2016) while observing practices and suggesting changes to improve the current environment. Case studies allow researchers to use various data collection methods to understand a particular phenomenon (Yin, 2016). Phenomenology consists of studying lived experiences from participants' points of view and typically requires multiple interviews (McManners, 2016). Similar to qualitative approaches, a basic qualitative study is performed in a natural setting of the participants that helps to reveal participants' interpretation of experiences and outcomes to answer the research questions (Caelli et al., 2003). A basic approach allowed me to engage in the study without explicit epistemological ramifications, answering the research questions to learn about an issue that permits investigation (see Merriam, 2009).

I used a basic qualitative study to gain an in-depth understanding of principals' perceptions of practices for recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs. Merriam (2009)

stated, "A basic approach focuses on (a) how people interpret their experiences, (b) how they construct their worlds, and (c) what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 23). Because the research questions ask about the perceptions of elementary, middle, and high school principals, the most suitable research design for this study was a basic qualitative study. Understanding the research design connects the research questions to the goal of the study, conceptual framework, process of collecting data to identify the setting for the study, and resources use for the study. The research questions to guide the study are as follows:

RQ1: How do elementary, middle, and high school principals in a rural district in a southern state perceive recruiting practices of HQTs using a recruitment, selection, and retention model?

RQ2: How do elementary, middle, and high school principals in a rural district in a southern state perceive hiring practices of HQTs using a recruitment, selection, and retention model?

RQ3: How do elementary, middle, and high school principals in a rural district in a southern state perceive retaining practices of HQTs using a recruitment, selection, and retention model?

Role of the Researcher

I was the exclusive data collection instrument in this study. This role placed me as an observer who collected, analyzed, and presented data gleaned from interviews. I developed the interview questions, conducted the interviews, and interpreted the data to present the findings and recommendations for this study.

To avoid bias, I did not interact with any volunteer participant concerning the study before receiving Walden's University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. I refrained from including friends or family in the study or expressing personal feelings when asking interview questions. I have worked in the district for 3 years, serving 2 years as an academic coach and 1 year as an assistant principal. One of the potential participants has worked in the school setting where the study was conducted; however, I have no supervisory position in the district that would interfere with this study. Additionally, I provided participants with the expectations and guidelines for participating in the study and did not offer an incentive for participation.

Because I am an administrator in the district associated with participants in this study and may have bias toward participants' responses, I used bracketing to decrease bias and ensure personal feelings and assumptions were not included in the data collection and analysis process. Bracketing is a process used by a researcher to reflect on potential bias and assumptions to mitigate collecting invalid data (Ahern, 1999). To further avoid bias, I used member checking to address the credibility of the findings of the study. Member checking allows participants to review analyzed findings for accuracy (Birt et al., 2016). Using such strategies to address possible bias increased the ethical conduct in this study.

Methodology

I conducted a basic qualitative study to investigate the perceptions of elementary, middle, and high school principals from a rural school district concerning practices of recruiting, hiring, and retain HQTs. Data were collected in individual semistructured

interviews. I analyzed the participants' responses to identify shared perceptions, from which I determined categories and themes. Results may be used to provide recommendations to increase effective recruitment of HQTs so that productive classroom instructors are hired and retained in rural school districts.

Participant Selection

Participants in a basic qualitative study comprise the people who provide data through interviews that answer the research questions of a study (see Yin, 2016). I used purposive sampling to select participants who were knowledgeable and capable of contributing to the outcome of the study (see Etikan et al., 2016). I selected eight elementary, middle, and high school principals from a rural school district to participate. Choosing different participants from a similar organization with different perspectives contributes rich data or "converging lines of inquiry" (Yin, 2016, p. 87) to a study. The participants of this study were required to have a current state administrator's license and at least 2 years of administrative experience. According to Starks and Trinidad (2007), the sample size depends on the goal, scope, topic, research design, and the data collection method used in the study. Because an individual person can contribute a significant number of concepts verbally, a large number of participants is not required for a qualitative study.

To gain access to participants, I obtained a letter of permission from the district's superintendent where the study was conducted. Next, I applied to receive approval from IRB to collect data. After receiving IRB approval, I began the process of inviting participants to contribute in the study. To determine potential participants for the study

based on the requirements of principal licensure and at least 2 years of administrative experience, I contacted the district personnel director to request the list of administrators who met these qualifications. Using this list, I sent potential participants an email invitation from my personal account to request their participation in the study and attached a copy of the consent form to voluntarily participate. In the subject line of the email, I clearly stated the correspondence was an invitation to participate in an educational study to ensure participants understood the email was not a commercial solicitation email. I gave participants 7 days to respond via email. I did not obtain the projected sample size, so I sent a second email to potential participants and awaited another 7 days for responses. For participants who agreed to participate, I responded with an email to establish an interview time and date convenient for each participant and sent a reminder 3 days prior to the scheduled date. The process aligned with a basic qualitative approach to obtain participants and collect data relating to challenges administrators encounter while recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs.

Instrumentation

I conducted research to investigate the perceptions of elementary, middle, and high school principals from a rural school district concerning practices of recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs. I used an interview protocol and semistructured interview questions to guide the interview process (see Appendix) and answer the research questions of this basic study. I asked open-ended and probing questions to allow participants to share authentic experiences in their natural setting (see Yin, 2016). During the interview process, I added probing questions based on initial responses to collect

additional data. Questions focused on participants' years of experience; school demographics; performance level; and approaches to recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs. I audio recorded all interviews. Based on Yin's (2016) research, prompts increase validity in the data collection process. I considered the use of metaphors, articulations, culture norms, and conditions to guide appropriate probing questions. Arsel (2017) suggested to avoid asking "why" questions to decrease participants from speculating in the interview.

To mitigate potential biases, I brought to the interview setting, I used bracketing to remain cognizant of any personal assumptions, interests, or experiences throughout the research process (see Fischer, 2009). I took notes during interviews to record biases and thoughts as well as possible changes in participants' behaviors I observed. No follow-up meetings were scheduled after I conducted the initial interview.

I developed the instrument to be consistent with literature focused on practices of recruiting, hiring, and retaining teachers (see Acikgoz, 2018; Beesley et al., 2010). To increase the validity of the interview protocol and semistructured questions, I asked three educational leaders, who were not participating in the study and located in an adjoining district, to review the interview protocol and interview questions to ensure the instrument would permit participants to provide sufficient data to answer the research questions of the study. Administrator A had 8 years of experience and taught in a high school and elementary school in a neighboring rural school district. Administrator B had 12 years of experience in a high school in a different rural school district. Administrator C had 18 years of experience in a middle and high school in an urban area. All three administrators

examined the interview protocol to ensure clarity, validity, and suitability in answering the research questions. After the three administrators provided feedback, I made all necessary adjustments and changes to increase the validity of the protocol.

Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

In qualitative research, researchers seek to study participants within natural setting (Bengtsson, 2016). This study involved a close examination of participants' perceptions from a rural school district experiencing challenges with recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs. In the following section, I describe the process to recruit participants, obtain consent and participation, and collect and manage data.

Procedures for Recruitment

Participants in this study were certified administrators with 2 or more years of experience in elementary, middle, and high schools located in a rural community. Each participant voluntarily committed to the purpose of the study, and I did not offer any form of incentive for participation. The following steps identify the recruitment procedures I used in this study:

1. I secured a letter of cooperation from the district's superintendent.

2. I obtained Walden University IRB approval.

3. I acquired names of potential participants from the district's personnel director.

4. I sent potential participants an email to recruit certified administrators with 2 or more years of administrative experience at elementary, middle, and high schools to participate in the study. I attached the consent form to the email to provide information about the study.

To begin the process of recruiting participants for this study, I received a letter of cooperation from the district's superintendent to gain permission to conduct the study in the chosen school district. Next, I submitted an application to the Walden University IRB for approval to collect data from participants. The purpose of IRB is to protect the rights of the participants. To ensure I collected data in an ethical manner, I completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative for research ethics and compliance training.

I then contacted the district's personnel director to request names and contact information for eligible principals to participate in the study. When I received IRB approval, I used the names provided by the district's personnel director and sent invitations to potential participants via email using my personal email address. The heading of the email included "invitation to participate in an educational study" to avoid the participant confusing the invitation with unsolicited bulk email. Administrators who met criteria were invited to participate in one-on-one, semistructured interviews with open-ended questions. I informed participants that my current job status did not relate to the research study and did not obligate participants to participate in this study. Participants were able to consent to participant in the study with the words "I consent" in their responding email or by signing the consent form in the face-to-face interview session.

Procedures for Participation

The first step to selecting participants was to solicit individuals who could provide a wealth of content based on the focus of the study (see Yin, 2016). The following are the steps I took after recruiting participants for the study:

1. I scheduled on-site interviews or video conferences for each participant.

2. I confirmed the interview time with the participant via email 3 days prior to the scheduled date.

3. I conducted on-site, in-person interviews or video conference calls with each participant.

4. I ensured receipt of written consent from each participant to acknowledge voluntary participation in the study.

After receiving email responses from participants, I requested interview times and suitable locations from each participant. I sent a reminder of interview times and dates 3 days prior to the in-person interview or video conference call arrangement. The in-person interviews took place at one participant's site in the administrator's office immediately after faculty and staff members were dismissed so that normal student- and faculty-related administrative responsibilities were are not disrupted. I conducted video conferences using similar time-related arrangements and ensured the interview was conducted in a private setting, as agreed to by the participant, to affirm all information was kept confidential.

I interviewed each participant one time and allotted 45–60 minutes to conduct each interview or video conference. At each scheduled interview, I reviewed the consent form and answered any questions the participants had. I also reminded participants of the option to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. For persons withdrawing from the study, I assured all written documents would be destroyed using a

paper shredder and electronic data deleted within 2 days following withdrawal from the study.

Procedures for Data Collection

I used interviews to collect data to answer the research questions within the study. The goal was to collect rich and valid data of principals' perceptions related to the practices incurred to recruit, hire, and retain HQTs in rural school districts (see Yin, 2016). The data collection process included the following steps:

1. Conduct semistructured, open-ended, in-person interviews or video conference.

2. Assign participants a number to ensure data confidential.

3. Transcribe participants' interviews.

4. Organize and analyze the collected data.

5. Send findings to participants and solicit feedback.

6. Write the findings and recommendations for the study.

To begin the interview protocol, I introduced myself to participants, acknowledged participant's agreement to participate voluntarily, and reviewed the consent form. At each face-to-face interview, I also provided participants with a written copy of the consent form. If the interview was conducted by video conferencing, I made certain the participant acknowledged receipt of the consent form attached to the initial email invitation.

I obtained background information and reminded participants of the ethical process, the purpose of the study, and the expected flow of the interview. I assigned each participant a code to ensure confidentiality of each participant. The interview was

scheduled for 45–60 minutes. Each interview was recorded. I began to collect data using semistructured questions. I also used the interview instrument to record pertinent observations that was important in the analysis stage of the study, and to bracket any possible biases I experienced internally during the interview. After the interview, the audio device allowed me to transcribe the participants' responses in a reliable manner, and the reflective journal augmented the analysis process.

At the conclusion of each interview, I thanked participants for providing valuable information to the study, reminded them that the data would only be used for this educational study, and assigned a number to each participant to maintain confidentiality. I also reminded participants I would send the findings of the study by email after my analysis to allow participants an opportunity to provide additional feedback. I reminded the participants all study resources were protected on my personal computer using a private password, and any paper files were locked in a file cabinet for 5 years, as required by the university.

Data Analysis Plan

Qualitative data analysis relates to the researcher's ability to interpret meaning by dissembling data that represent concepts aligned to a framework to describe a specific phenomenon (Kleinheksel et al., 2020). The goal of the data analysis is to become familiar with the data through a deep examination of verbal and nonverbal content shared by the participants during the interview process to answer the research questions (see Bengtsson, 2016; Yin, 2016). In this study, I used Senge's (1990) paradigm of a learning organization and an adapted model of Dickinson's (2007) recruitment, selection, and

retention of child welfare workers to develop codes, subcategories, categories, and themes to analyze data collected to answer the research questions.

I used content analysis to assist with analyzing the data of this study. Content analysis is "a method that provides a systematic and objective means to make valid inferences from verbal, visual, or written data in order to describe and quantify specific phenomena" (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992, p. 314). Yin (2016) recommended that researchers check and recheck all data, make a thorough analysis of the data, and acknowledge unwanted bias. I divided the analysis process into phases using Yin's five-step process to analyze data: (a) compile, (b) disassemble, (c) reassemble, (d) interpret, and (e) conclude. This credible and trustworthy research process enabled drawing conclusions based on the findings.

Compile

During the initial stage of data analysis, I became familiar with data derived from transcripts and notes while reflecting on Dickinson's (2011) adapted model of recruiting, selecting, and retaining child welfare workers and Senge's (1990) paradigm of a learning organization. I repeatedly listen to the recording of the interviews, reread the transcripts, and read the reflective notes I made during the interviews. I sorted and organized my notes I recorded in the margins of the transcripts using index cards and highlighters to assist with identifying ideas that relate to the conceptual framework. I used the notes to determine features of the data, ways the data related to the research questions, and new insights that emerged (see Yin, 2016). The process assisted me to identify and record recurring ideas developed during the dissemble phase that I could use during a later phase

of the data analysis process. I did not use any software for the data management but organized the data into a spreadsheet to prepare for future analysis.

Disassemble

During the disassemble phase, the compiled data were broken down into smaller fragments (Yin, 2016). Bengtsson (2016) referred to this phase of analysis as decontextualization, where text from the data collected represent units of meaning. The list of meaning units was checked for validity using the original text. I started with the interview transcripts to further the coding process. In the first cycle of analyzing and coding the data, I used open coding to apply words or phrases from the data to observe similarities or differences (Merriam, 2009; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Yin, 2016). Open coding of participants' responses helped to determine if responses supported the purpose of the study (see Yin, 2016).

Reassemble

In the reassemble phase of analysis, coding consists of integrating and refining categories developed during the previous two phases of the data analysis process (Yin, 2016). The numerous codes that may result in the open coding phase of the analysis process are reduced in this second reassembly phase. In content analysis, this phase is called recontextualization (Bengtsson, 2016). During the second phase of the reassembling of data, I used pattern coding to systematically link subcategories with categories and observe emerging themes (see Bengtsson, 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I continued to use a spreadsheet to create a list of the organized data to aid with developing themes and concepts.

Interpret

At the interpreting phase, I used reassembled content to create a narrative. In content analysis, this stage requires observing the categories to reaffirm evolving themes to emerge (see Bengtsson, 2016). I reexamined data to determine if data needed to be recompiled, disassembled, or reassembled in a different way before the concluding phase of the analysis process. I reread the interview transcripts to ensure responses answered the research questions. Bengtsson (2016) suggested the importance of using exact words from the data. I listed the themes to reveal sequential findings from the study to help form the interpretation of the findings.

Conclude

The conclusion consists of more than restating the findings; it supports the purpose of the study and answers the research questions. Bengtsson (2016) described this phase as the compilation stage. I assigned words and phrases to sentences or paragraphs of data from participants' responses as evidence to support the findings of this study. To avoid presenting discrepant data, which do not support the themes, I continuously analyzed the data to ensure interpretations were valid. Ravitch and Carl (2016) suggested researchers challenge, question, and seek alternative explanations to identify the value of discrepant cases while only presenting valid and reliable data important to the purpose of the study. Within the phase of analysis, findings of the study were checked for correspondence to the peer-reviewed literature.

The goal of the study was for analyses to conclude by demonstrating a call for new research and providing recommendations likely offering possible changes in

thinking (see Yin, 2016). A change in thinking may be concluded when data show differences or unexpected social patterns from a previous studied topic in the literature. This possibility may call for positive social change as a result of the findings of this study.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to the degree of confidence in the data collection process, interpretations, and methods used to ensure a valid and reliable study (Connelly, 2016). Amankwaa (2016) acknowledged research studies are strengthened by trustworthiness, which is a vital component of the research process. For each stage of the research process, data must be evaluated for credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility relates to the authenticity of the findings, transferability relates to findings being applicable in other contexts, dependability demonstrates consistency in findings, and confirmability relates to findings presented from a neutral perspective. In the upcoming sections, I address ways I implemented credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability to increase trustworthiness in the research study.

Credibility

Credibility of the study relates to how data are collected and analyzed to produce valid content (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I established credibility by using the following techniques: (a) member checking and (b) reflexivity. Yin (2016) stated, "You may have to rely on the verbal reports from three different people but have no other source of corroboration" (p. 88). Patton (1999) stated, "Comparing the perspective of people from different point of views" (p. 1195) by considering interview data from difference sources

provides credibility to a study. I also used two conceptual frameworks: Senge's (1990) paradigm of learning organizations and an adapted model of Dickinson's (2007) model of recruitment, selection, and retention of child welfare workers. Integrating both frameworks into this study promoted validity (see Patton, 1999; Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Senge's (1990) paradigm of learning organizations and an adapted model of Dickinson's (2007) model of recruitment, selection, and retention of child welfare workers. Integrating both frameworks into this study promoted validity (see Patton, 1999; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I included participants from elementary, middle, and high schools in the interview process to gather data from multiple sources. Patton (1999) stated, "Comparing the perspective of people from different point of views" (p. 1195) by considering interview data from difference sources provides credibility to a study.

I increased credibility by using member checking as I requested participants to examine the study's findings to provide feedback. By allowing participants to review the findings, a "converging of lines of inquiry" (Yin, 2016, p. 87) was gained, advancing the trustworthiness of the study. To further increase credibility, I implemented reflexivity practices. Reflexivity involves being aware of preconceptions and assumptions about a topic (Yin, 2016). I kept a reflexivity journal to document any potential bias such as values, opinions, and experiences affecting the findings (see Karagiozis, 2018). This process occurred during in-person or video conference interviews with each participant.

Dependability

Dependability refers to a study's findings as consistent and repeatable (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To increase dependability in the study, I created an audit trail and used

reflective journaling. An audit trail relates to presenting the research process in a sequential, detailed, transparent manner. To increase dependability of the instrument used, three current administrators with 2 or more years of experiences from an elementary, middle, and high school reviewed the interview questions and protocol to provide feedback on whether the interview questions would answer the research questions of the study. The methodological approach for the study involves a consistent and appropriate plan specifically outlining all procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection to ensure dependability (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Yin, 2016). Additionally, in the analysis stage, I provided an audit trail by documenting reasons for generating specific themes for the study (see Bengtsson, 2016). To increase dependability, I used a reflexive journal to notate potential biases during the data collection and analysis processes.

Confirmability

Confirmability relates to the degree to which findings are presented consistently and can be repeated (Connelly, 2016). To increase confirmability, I used reflexivity, bracketing, and debriefing. Reflexivity relates to being self-aware of potential bias during the research process (Yin, 2016). I used a reflexive journal to assess my biases during and after the interview process. I reflected on personal thoughts that might interfere with how I responded to a participant based on past experiences, knowledge, and beliefs about recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs. To increase confirmability, I requested each participant to provide member checking of the findings of the study. In addition, I used a reflexive journal to notate bias that might occur during the data analysis process to secure

intersubjectivity (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). An audio device and transcripts of participants' responses assisted with reporting reliable and valid findings.

In addition to reflexivity, I used bracketing to demonstrate confirmability. Yin (2016) defined bracketing as the process researchers use to attempt setting aside personal beliefs, values, and assumptions to avoid presenting biases in a study. I also used bracketing by taking notes of personal biases that arose throughout the research process.

As a third way to increase the confirmability of the findings of this study, I used peer debriefing (see Patton, 1999; Yin, 2016). An administrator who had 7 years of experience from a different rural district and is an expert in understanding the requirement of recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs assisted me. Debriefing allowed rural district administrators, not participating in the study, to review the developed themes to reduce potential bias of the data gathered and analysis in this study.

Transferability

Transferability involves a reader or researcher considering findings from a study applicable in a different context (see Yin, 2016). I promoted transferability in the study by using thick descriptions of all processes (see Yin, 2016). Thick descriptions consist of a detailed description of the setting, atmosphere, culture, context, procedures for selecting participants, participants' attitudes and reactions, and the data collection process in the study. I increased transferability by providing detailed descriptions to allow readers to obtain a vivid picture of the events in the study (see Amankwaa, 2016). This description also included a step-by-step description of the research process. According to Graneheim and Lundman (2004), trustworthiness is enhanced when the findings are presented in a

way that allow alternative interpretations. The process of collecting authentic and

credible data enhances transferability (Korstjens & Moser, 2017).

Ethical Procedures

Ethical standards help identify procedures for conducting a trustworthy, valid, and

reliable study (Yin, 2016). To increase personal knowledge and awareness of ethical

procedures, I completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative course as

required by Walden University. This training taught me the ethical process for treatment

of participants, data, issues in a research study, and assisted with earning Walden

University IRB approval to conduct the study adhering to ethical standards. The IRB

approval number for this study is #06-25-20-0375883.

I was given written permission by the district superintendent to conduct the study

in the district. Adhering to Walden University IRB requirements, I did not contact any

participants prior to obtaining approval from Walden's IRB. After I received IRB

approval, I contacted the district's personnel director to obtain a list of eligible

participants for the study. From the list, I emailed each potential participant, from my

personal email account, an invitation to participate in the study, with the consent form

attached. Potential participants were asked to reply "I consent" to show agreement to

participate in the study.

In the initial stage of the interview process, I explained the purpose of the

research. In addition, I obtained written or electronic consent from participants to

acknowledge participation in the study and provided them with a copy of the consent

form. I also discussed my role as the researcher, independent of the school district, and

provided a brief a description of the study. Another ethical process I included was to acknowledge the voluntary participation of each participant, which allowed the freedom to stop contributing to the interview process at any time. I explained if participants wished to withdraw before the completion of the interview protocol, collected data would be omitted from the study. If an adverse or unanticipated event were to arise, I would stop the interview, attempt to implement solutions based on the situation, and reschedule the interview if possible.

Part of an ethical study includes ensuring the participants' data offered are confidential (Yin, 2016). Participants were codified, and no other individual had access to confidential information allowing the identification of a person or location. Written documents are locked in a file cabinet at my home, and electronic files stored on my personal computer are protected by a private password. I also will retain all research documents for 5 years after the completion of the study, as required by the university. After 5 years, I will destroy all information used to conduct the study by shredding paper materials and deleting electronic files.

In addition to the above practices, I applied ethical standards that related to conducting a study within my work environment. I informed participants that my current position as an assistant principal was not related to the educational study. I also explained the willingness to participate did not provide any benefits such as monetary incentives, rewards, or promotions. Likewise, I expressed not participating in this study would not result in demotions or any unfavorable treatment. I shared with each participant that the

findings from this study offer educational social change that could increase effective practices principals apply related to recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs.

Summary

In this chapter, I explained the research design that I used to investigate the perceptions of elementary, middle, and high school principals from a rural school district in a southern state concerning practices of recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs. Because the intent of this study was to gain an understanding from real-life experiences of volunteer participants, a basic qualitative approach was the most appropriate design (see Yin, 2016). I discussed my role as a researcher, the procedures for choosing the participants, the interview protocol, the data analysis plan, and the ethical process I used in the study. Chapter 4 will describe the setting of the study, address the data analysis process, and provide the results of the study based on the research questions aligned to the conceptual framework.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic exploratory qualitative study was to investigate the perceptions of elementary, middle, and high school principals from a rural district in a southern state concerning practices for recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs. The results from this study offer a greater understanding of practices and strategies to improve recruitment, hiring, and retention in rural school districts. From the data collected using semistructured interviews, I identified categories and themes. The conceptual frameworks used in this study were Senge's (1990) paradigm of a learning organization and Dickinson's (2007) model for recruitment, selection, and retention of child welfare workers (see Figure 1). Research questions explored in this study were:

RQ1: How do elementary, middle, and high school principals in a rural district in a southern state perceive recruiting practices of HQTs using a recruitment, selection, and retention model?

RQ2: How do elementary, middle, and high school principals in a rural district in a southern state perceive hiring practices of HQTs using a recruitment, selection, and retention model?

RQ3: How do elementary, middle, and high school principals in a rural district in a southern state perceive retaining practices of HQTs using a recruitment, selection, and retention model?

I answered the research questions by collecting data from administrators' responses during interviews. I describe the details of the findings in Chapter 4 by

highlighting the setting, data collection, data analysis, results, and evidence of trustworthiness. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Setting

The setting for this study was a rural school district in a southern state. The district consists of six elementary schools, four middle schools, and two high schools, together serving over 3,000 students. Each school was identified as a Title I campus based on the percentage of low-income students. Ninety-five percent of students in the district are African American, with the remaining 5% of children coming from European American, Hispanic, and Asian American families. Principals at these schools have administrative experience that ranges from 1 to 20 years.

Initially, I planned to interview 10–12 elementary, middle, and high school principals with 2 or more years of experience in the rural school district. However, changes in leadership occurred, including promotions, reassignments, and resignations, reducing the number of potential participants to 10. These changes did not compromise the study results. Saturation was reached during data analysis from the data obtained during the interview process with eight participants capable of answering the research questions of this study relating to recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs in a rural school district from a southern state.

Eight participants consented to participate in the study. Each participant agreed to either an in-person interview or a video conference call. I followed up with an email to confirm locations, dates, and times for each interview. Additionally, an unanticipated global health concern influenced leaders' decision to choose a video conference call

rather than face-to-face interviews. Of the eight participants, one participant engaged in an in-person interview.

The demographics of this study consisted of a range of participants with varying ethnicities, genders, experience levels, and education levels. Eight principals volunteered to participate in this study, with a range of administrator experience from 5–20 years. One principal was European American, and seven were African American. Five were women and three were men. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to keep their identity confidential. The demographics of the participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant *Demographics*

Participant	Gender	Grades serving	Years of experience at current site	Years of educational administration experience
1	Male	Grades 6–8	4	9
2	Male	Grades 10–12	3	12
3	Male	Grades 9–12	4	7
4	Female	K–Grade 12	4	7
5	Female	PreK–Grade 5	5	20
6	Female	Grades 10–12	5	5
7	Female	PreK–Grade 3	7	7
8	Female	PreK–Grade 6	6	12

Note. K = kindergarten; PreK = prekindergarten.

I was able to invite participants, wait for responses, schedule interviews, and conduct interviews over 3 weeks. Scheduled interviews stayed within the 45–60 minutes allotted for each session and were recorded so I could transcribe the responses.

Data Collection

Throughout the data collection process, I referred to the practices defined in Chapter 3 to remain consistent with the plans and process established. I began to collect data after receiving Walden's IRB approval and after receiving superintendent permission to interview participants in the rural school district. Potential participants' information was provided by the district's personnel director. Using the participants' district emails, I sent 10 potential participants an email from my Walden account and provided background information for the study, possible risks and benefits, the purpose for conducting the study, and an informed consent form. I sent a follow-up email to participants who did not respond after 7 days. Of the 10 participant invitational emails sent, eight administrators voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. After receiving consent, I arranged a time and place for in-person interviews and video conference calls. I asked a series of semistructured open-ended questions during the interviews. From the participants' responses, I gathered data to answer the research questions. An unanticipated global health concern influenced seven participants to choose a video conference call rather than face-to-face interviews. Other than that, I did not encounter any unusual situations during the data collection process.

Before interviewing participants, I created an interview protocol (see Appendix) consisting of semistructured questions to help guide the interview process as participants answered the research questions. Semistructured questions were most suitable in the effort to gather data relating to principals' perceptions for recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs in a rural school district. Prior to the start of each interview, I discussed the

consent form and ensured participants understood the purpose of the study. I provided participants clarity concerning how their names would be kept confidential and the procedures for maintaining data privacy. The order of questions varied among participants based on individual responses. In some cases, I probed participants' responses to clarify or gather more information. Each interview varied from 30–45 minutes in the principal's office or a private location chosen by the participant for a video conference call. During the interview sessions, I also used bracketing to notate personal bias to avoid integrating personal feelings, experiences, or thoughts in the data collection process. I recorded each interview using a digital recorder and then uploaded the interview to my computer to be saved on a USB drive. Additionally, I was able to listen repeatedly to recordings to familiarize myself with the data and begin the content analysis process. There was no need to schedule a follow-up interview with participants. I saved transcripts on my password-protected computer and stored written documents in a locked cabinet in my home when I was not using them. The collected data will be stored and kept for 5 years after the study was completed.

Data Analysis

Data analysis consists of several stages repeated throughout the data analysis process to establish trustworthiness and quality (Bengtsson, 2016; Yin, 2016). I completed interviews within 3 weeks. After each interview with a participant, I immediately typed the transcript. The transcription process is the first part of the analysis because I reviewed and interpreted aspects of the actual interview in my mind as I typed the recordings of each participant (see Yin, 2016).

I used content analysis to analyze and interpret the data in four stages: decontextualization, recontextualization, categorization, and compilation (see Bengtsson, 2016). Content analysis is "a coding operation involving logical and conceptualizing work that can be completed effectively by only one researcher" (Downe-Wamboldt, 192, p. 320). I aligned the content analysis process with Yin's (2016) five phases of analysis: compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding data to create codes and categories to identify themes. I describe the content analysis process I used in the following sections.

Coding Strategy

Compiling Data

To compile the data, I first uploaded the audio recording of each interview to a password-protected file on my computer. Then, I listened to the recording as I transcribed participants' responses. After transcribing the responses, I read and reread the transcripts to familiarize myself with the data collected and to identify what, how, and why administrators recruit, hire, and retain HQTs. I used the hard copies of the transcripts to highlight repeated words and phrases mentioned by participants that answered the research questions. I also highlighted words and phrases on the transcripts to pinpoint the concepts participants considered most important to recruit, hire, and retain HQTs in a rural school district.

As I read each transcript, I notated similarities in the data that corresponded with Senge's (1990) paradigm of a learning organization and Dickinson's (2007) conceptual framework for recruiting, selecting, and retaining child welfare workers. Using the

transcripts, I was able to identify a priori codes based on the conceptual framework. I

used all the notes on the transcripts to place information into a Microsoft Excel

spreadsheet to arrange content into columns based on the a priori codes of recruitment,

hiring, and retention, which aligned to the conceptual framework of Senge's learning

organization and Dickinson's model for recruitment, selection, and retention. Next, I

placed an excerpt from the raw interview data that corresponded with and aligned to the a

priori codes of the conceptual framework. The data displayed in Table 2 indicate how I

determined a prior codes based on transcriptions from participants' responses.

Table 2

Sample a Priori Coding for Participants

Participant	Interview text excerpt	A priori code
2	When you put job announcement out, you ask for résumés so the candidates can tell their best stories about their experience.	Recruitment
3	We try to decipher through applications to find people who are dedicated and passionate about being an educator.	Recruitment
4	People use different strategies for hiring. I might pair them with a mentor to assist them with getting to know the new school.	Hiring
5	We ask for background checks, word of mouth references, and ensure positions are available that match the person certification.	Hiring
6	You have to create a positive school culture to keep teachers because when it is toxic, teachers don't just leave at the end of the year, but by December.	Retention
7	Observations play a big role in retention so that you can provide support and professional development.	Retention

Disassembling

Yin's (2016) next phase of analyzing data is the disassembling process. I disassembled or decontextualized (see Bengtsson, 2016) the data by revisiting predetermined a priori codes using Senge's (1990) paradigm of a learning organization and an adapted model of Dickinson's (2007) model for recruitment, selection, and retention of child welfare workers. Using an inductive process, I assigned either a word or phrase to segment the data into meaningful expressions and completed an open-coding process by assigning these words and phrases to excerpts of participant responses. After creating this first open coding, I completed second open coding using the spreadsheet to relabel previously identified words and phrases to condense previously developed codes. I reorganized and combined similar codes. For example, participants referred to principals' support, accountability, and expectations as they referred to principals' responsibilities and expectations. Table 3 demonstrates the process of using the a priori codes to perform the first and second coding disassembling process.

Table 3

Sample of a Priori Codes to First and Second Open Coding

A priori codes	Open coding	Second coding
Hiring	Leadership team	Interview process
Hiring	Questioning	Interview process
Recruitment	Access to highly qualified teachers	Leadership
Recruitment	Limited community resources	Access to resources
Retention	Professional development	Professional development
Retention	Location	Driving distance

Reassembling

During the reassembling of data (see Yin, 2016), I recontextualized (see Bengtsson, 2016) data using pivot tables within the spreadsheet for each open code. I reviewed the raw data to ensure content aligned with the a priori codes. I determined whether data needed to be removed or kept as I looked for any possible discrepant data. I created patterns by combining similar terms and phrases using codes created during the open and second coding processes. I identified similarities in the codes presented in the pivot tables to determine concepts participants referenced the most during interviews. I also referred to the data presented during the compiling and disassembling process to merge words and phrases to create pattern codes. I ensured possible codes and categories were appropriate. Table 4 provides a sample of content changed from second coding to pattern coding.

Table 4

Second Open Coding to Pattern Coding

Second coding	Pattern coding
Interview process	Principals' responsibilities
Leadership	Principals' responsibilities
Access to resources	Access to resources
Professional development	Principals' responsibilities
Driving distance	Community challenges

Interpreting

After pattern codes were identified, I interpreted the data by using the patterns to categorize codes to help identify emergent themes that aligned with Dickinson's (2007)

model for retaining, selecting, and hiring child welfare workers and Senge's (1990)

paradigm of a learning organization. I revisited the raw data to ensure that meanings were

not lost while condensing codes. I reread the purpose statement and research questions to

determine whether I could use the emergent themes to answer the research questions.

Using the spreadsheet pivot tables, I continued to condense codes to generate categories

that developed into emergent themes. Several themes emerged to align with Senge's

paradigm of a learning organization and Dickinson's (2007) model for recruitment,

selection, and retention of child welfare workers. The themes are shown in Table 5.

Table 5

Pattern Coding to Categories to Themes

Pattern coding	Category	Theme
Principals' responsibilities	Principals use interviews to hire.	Administrators from a rural school district recruit highly qualified teachers (HQTs) through personal and professional referrals, local candidates' investment, and advertisement.
Principals' responsibilities	Principals rate potential teachers based on experience and qualifications	
Principals' responsibilities	New faculty want a positive school culture and climate	
Access to resources	Leaders use various strategies to hire	Administrators from a rural school district hire HQTs by selecting interview teams capable of judging whether candidates' experiences align with schools' vision and culture.
Principals' responsibilities	Incentives attract new faculty members	Administrators from a rural school district retain HQTs by maintaining collaborative leadership practices and a positive school culture that allow teachers to be flexible in their planning, teaching, and professional development.
Community challenges	Hindrances influence principal's retention	

Concluding

To increase the validity of the study, I asked two peer debriefers from different rural school districts to read the research questions, purpose statement, categories, and themes to determine whether the content of the findings was reasonable. I asked for

feedback relating to the words used to explain the findings. The first peer debriefer had 7 years of leadership experience in a rural school district. The second administrator serving as a debriefer had 21 years of experience as a principal in a rural school district. Both peer debriefers offered expert feedback supporting the findings and interpretations that emerged from the data. Using these peer debriefers' feedback and the a priori codes established, I revisited the collected data and emergent themes.

Additionally, I requested the eight participants of this study to member check the findings. I sent each administrator a summary of the findings by email and asked them to review the themes to confirm the accuracy of the findings. All participants responded and provided supporting comments to the findings shared. As a result, I reviewed the raw data and findings to ensure alignment with the conceptual framework and the research questions of the study.

Discrepant Cases

Yin (2016) wrote that discrepant cases possibly arise at any point in the data collection process. Describing discrepant cases strengthens a study by the researcher recognizing alternative explanations and accepting or rejecting original interpretations (Yin, 2016). I continued to analyze data for discrepant cases to avoid including personal assumptions based on experience or ideas relating to recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs. During the content analysis of the data, I used a reflexive journal (see Korstjens & Moser, 2017) to avoid including any personal feelings or experiences during the interview process. I also performed bracketing (see Ahern, 1999) to help me accurately interpret the raw data. These processes allowed me "to enhance the inferential quality of

the results by relating the categories to the context of the environment that produces the data" (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992, p. 314). After carefully examining the data and reviewing the themes, I found no discrepant cases that conflicted with the developed themes.

Results

The findings of this basic qualitative study were based on an investigation of principals' perceptions from a rural school district in a southern state regarding recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs. I investigated the experiences, ideas, and practices of elementary, middle, and high school administrators. I interviewed eight participants: four high school principals, three elementary principals, and one middle school principal. During the analysis process, I identified subcategories and categories that emerged into themes. The following three themes emerged:

- Administrators from a rural school district recruit HQTs through personal and professional referrals, local candidates' investment, and advertisement.

- Administrators from a rural school district hire HQTs by selecting interview teams capable of judging whether candidates' experiences align with schools' vision and culture.

- Administrators from a rural school district retain HQTs by maintaining collaborative leadership practices and a positive school culture that allow teachers to be flexible in their planning, teaching, and professional development.

Data in this study supported the conceptual framework presented by Dickinson (2007) as related to recruitment, selection, and retention when workers are supported,

provided incentives, and culturally accepted. Senge's (1990) concepts of a learning organization consisted of shared responsibilities, cooperative learning, and personal and professional growth. In the following section, I describe the themes that answered the research questions of the study as presented in Table 3.

Theme 1

The first research question of this study was the following: How do elementary, middle, and high school principals in a rural school district in a southern state perceive recruiting practices of HQTs using a recruitment, selection, and retention model? The theme that emerged from the analysis of the data was that administrators from a rural school district recruit HQTs through personal and professional referrals, local candidates' investment, and advertisement. Each of these recruiting practices is discussed in the following sections.

Personal and Professional Referrals to Recruit HQTs

The first category that emerged from Theme 1 was that professional and personal referrals were a means to recruit HQTs in rural school districts. Personal and professional referrals increased leaders' ability to hire employees (see Engel & Finch, 2015). In this study, administrators described personal referrals as using friends or personal connections outside of the educational setting to recruit new members. Professional referrals were obtained through recommendations within the organization or local universities. Administrator participants believed when they used personal and professional referrals, candidates committed longer to the organization and were vested in the work required to

be a successful teacher. Participant 2, a high school principal, described seeking referrals in the same discipline or content area as potential teachers.

The principal of a K-12 campus, Participant 4, shared, "If you know somebody personally, you think they are a good candidate for your building, you can just reach out to them." Similarly, Participant 5, an elementary school principal, advised, "I usually try to recruit teachers that I already know or someone that my teams know." Participant 6, a high school principal, stated word of mouth, communicating, and professional networking are pivotal factors for recruiting new hires. An elementary school principal, Participant 8, shared, "The human resource department does a great job of informing principals of highly qualified candidates."

Recruiting HQTs by means of personal and professional referrals in rural school districts was an important means to obtain classroom instructors. This result supports Engel and Finch (2015), who found leaders who used personal and professional references improved recruitment opportunities in school districts. Personal references allowed individuals to refer candidates who were familiar with the current structure and culture of the school. Professional references were beneficial in recruiting members who were qualified and understood the expectations of a teacher.

Local Candidate Investment to Recruit HQTs

The second category in Theme 1 was that administrators in rural school districts stated recruiting local members of the community increased recruitment opportunities. Administrators found educators from the community were familiar with rural school settings and expectations, which positively influenced recruitment. Participant 7, an

elementary school principal, shared, "People are from here, and they are invested in this community, . . . They like what happens here that causes people to stay." Another elementary school principal, Participant 5, communicated,

> Having teachers who are close to home, who really love students, who really care
> about the community because they are the community people, will increase
> teachers' time of being on the job. They will be there for the long haul.

Conversely, Participant 4, a high school principal, discussed times when applicants refuse rural jobs because of unfamiliarity and commuting barriers:

> With our district being in a rural area, we have housing issues, like when some
> people consider a job here, they may not have housing for them to live. Like, most
> people drive from like 20 to 30 miles radius, have to travel, so that's one of the
> limitations. I have talked to some great people who would like to work in the
> district but they are faced with "Where I'm going to live, are there any available
> homes or apartments?"

Likewise, Participant 7 stated, "If someone does not like the community, then chances are, they are going to move. People are more willing to stay here in the [local rural school district] when they are vested in the community."

The results of this study regarding recruiting HQTs agreed with the findings from the Engle and Finch (2015) study concerning best practices to recruit educators from the local community. "Teachers prefer to teach close to where they are from" (Engle & Finch, 2015, p. 33). Dickinson (2007) found employees commit to jobs when

expectations match qualities. In many cases, candidates from the area are familiar with expectations, culture, and the people of the community.

Advertisement to Recruit HQTs

The third category revealed in Theme 1 was that various forms of messaging are required to recruit HQTs to rural school districts. Social media, district webpages, as well as word of mouth are avenues to promote positions and recruit educators in a rural school district.

All eight participants shared access to a district software program for the recruitment of HQTs. Participant 7 specified,

They [district personnel department] post on the district website any vacancies, but also if they get different applications to come into the personnel department, they'll send principals an email that'll say, "We got this applicant, and this person is certified to teach X, Y, and Z, and if you are interested, then here is their contact information." So the district provides names and qualifications as they receive them.

Participant 5, an elementary school principal, detailed,

I also check other social media to ensure I know who the real person is, because sometimes people [interview] with one face, but they get on [social media] and [are another] person. So I like seeing who the real person is.

Similar to other elementary principals, Participant 7 described advertising as a tool to share positive experiences and accomplishments about the school to increase recruitment:

A lot of recruitment is, well, first of all, we try to make a positive name for

ourselves through social media. Another means of recruitment is word of mouth,

like I'll tell the teachers, "If you know of any teacher who is interested in this

position, we have it vacant." And teachers really do a good job in getting the word

out because teachers know other teachers. . . That's a pretty effective [way of]

advertising.

Participant 8, an elementary school principal, indicated, "I create a school flyer that

advertises school information and job vacancies. I take flyers to job fairs and other sites

to assist with recruiting HQTs." Participant 2, a high school principal, pinpointed, "I try

to sell myself, my team, and the district. I share the district is willing to help, and I am

very transparent."

When analyzing the overall data, participants in a rural school district used a

variety of methods to recruit HQTs through advertising. Chang and Tanford (2018) found

that advertising within an organization is beneficial for recruiting employees. Senge

(1990) stated advertisement can inform external members of how the organization works.

Acikgoz's (2018) findings revealed that social media is a popular method for advertising

vacancies and recruiting new staff. The rural school district in this study used social

media as a tool to advertise, recruit, and access background knowledge of new

employees. Some of the least important techniques for this school district included

providing resources, offering sign-on bonuses, and encouraging cultural acceptances.

Personal and professional referrals, local candidates' investment, and advertisement were

the prominent means for this school district to recruit educators.

Theme 2

The second research question of the study was the following: How do elementary, middle, and high school principals in a rural school district in a southern state perceive hiring practices of HQTs using a recruitment, selection, and retention model? The developed Theme 2 was that administrators from a rural school district hire HQTs by selecting interview teams capable of judging whether candidates' experiences align with the schools' vision and culture. Each of these hiring practices is discussed in the following sections.

Interview Teams to Hire HQTs

The first category in Theme 2 was that administrators in the rural school district of this study primarily relied on interview teams to hire HQTs. Interviews were used to collect potential candidates' background experiences, qualities, references, and résumés. Most employers ask candidates to express reasons they should be chosen over other candidates. Leaders seek to find candidates that best fit the organization (Hiava, 2016).

All eight participants in this study discussed using an interview team to hire HQTs. A high school principal, Participant 2, specified,

> I always do things with a team. In fact, in an interview, I do the least amount of talking; I have my assistant principal, I have my academic coach, I have a teacher, I have my team there. They do all the talking 'cause I'm setting the example that . . . I'm not the person to be afraid of, . . . and this is a shared community.

Participant 3 stated,

Me and my leadership team look at the pool [of applicants], especially my

assistant principal. We try to decipher through the application, try to look for

people who are dedicated and passionate about being educators, and [how] they

will be a good fit into our school family.

Participant 6 described using a leadership team to provide feedback and evaluate

experiences, knowledge, and character traits of potential candidates. Participant 6

indicated, "I've learned, one person, you can really feel the wrong thing. You think

you're getting someone great, and come to find out, you're really not. Different people

have different ways of picking up on somebody's vibes."

Another approach administrators used during interviews was discussed by

Participant 8, and consisted of educators who asked predeveloped questions and

appraised responses using a rating scale. The elementary principal stated,

So, when we bring in a candidate for an interview, we go through that process

[with the interview team], and that particular candidate is rated. Then once we

have selected a candidate with the highest rating, the assistant [principal] and I

will recommend that particular person for that position to the superintendent, and

then from there, the superintendent will present the recommendation to the school

board, and then we will receive information whether or not as to if that particular

candidate has been approved through our school board.

Participant 1, a middle school principal, noted school interview teams use a rubric to ask

a set of predeveloped questions to ensure potential candidates fit the school before hiring.

Participant 1 explained using rubrics to hire in this manner:

We use a rubric of things that we require for teachers and things we want our

teachers to know. We know they are not going to know everything, but we at least

want teachers to have some kind of knowledge of what is they need to do in the

classroom to make sure our kids are learning.

Team-based interviews, in a face-to-face setting, were found to be a common

approach to hiring HQTs in a rural school district. Candidates are allowed to share

experiences and qualities that align with managers' expectations (Hiava, 2016).

Questioning strategies were used to identify candidates' experiences and knowledge

relating to the organization. Leaders were able to review educational backgrounds and

experiences. Administrators in this rural school district found interviews to be an

advantageous and practical way to hire HQTs. Moreover, qualifications were easily

identified using rubrics and rating scales and evaluated for hire based on organizational

mission and vision.

School Culture and Vision

The second category developed from Theme 2 was that administrators in this

study believed new hires must fit the culture and vision of the school. Culture is defined

as the characteristics and specifications of an organization, including members sharing

the values, norms, and beliefs within an organization (Yusuf, 2019). According to Minifie

et al. (2018), principals display best practices when teacher candidates are hired based on

experience and qualifications that match the school's vision. Senge (1990) described

vision as a team approach to creating plans to master long-term goals and stated that

success is created when employees' educational goals align with the organizational

vision. Dickinson (2007) expressed having a clear vision and mission improves

organizations. All members of the organization are responsible for creating the vision that

defines the culture of the rural school district and campus. A high school principal,

Participant 3, described school culture as follows:

> I feel that if your culture and climate of your school is one that is conducive to
> effective teaching and learning, and the teacher feels, . . . "Hey, my administrators
> have my back. They here for me. They support me. They provide me all the
> possible resources that I can get that can make me a better person, and they have a
> sense of belonging." I think that that alone helps people say, . . . "I need to stay
> here a little while longer, it's okay. They care about me."

According to Participant 5, an elementary school principal,

> We offer an atmosphere where teachers can actually teach and students can learn.
> When a school's culture is one where teachers are pleased, they are able to own
> their craft. Teachers are apt to stay and return year after year. We don't have any
> money to offer them. You know, no sign-on bonuses or anything like that, but
> when an atmosphere, because a lot of times, money does not really drive teachers,
> it's . . . when they are comfortable, and they are allowed to really do what they
> know how to do. You don't have to worry about them leaving.

In summary, rural school principals identified school culture as a significant

factor to improve the hiring of HQTs. According to Yusuf (2019), a positive culture is

needed to increase job satisfaction among colleagues. Employees are committed and

vested in an organization when the culture aligns with the school vision. Problems may

occur, but there are practices in place that result in positive solutions. Culture is shaped over time by leaders (Senge, 1990). Leaders seek candidates that can easily fit into the culture. Followers remain in roles when leaders demonstrate appreciation and clear expectations as related to the mission and vision of the organization.

Theme 3

The third research question of the study was the following: How do elementary, middle, and high school principals in a rural district in a southern state perceive retaining practices of HQTs using a recruitment, selection, and retention model? The third theme was that administrators from a rural school district retain HQTs by maintaining collaborative leadership practices and a positive school culture that allow teachers to be flexible in their planning, teaching, and professional development. Each of these retention practices is discussed in the following sections.

Collaborative Leadership Practices to Retain HQTs

In Theme 3, the first category was that HQTs in rural school districts were retained by principals' collaborative leadership practices. Senge (1990) suggested leaders may improve teaching and learning when administrators provide educators with deep knowledge and understanding of the job and processes, which includes an understanding of the context and setting of the school district. Collaborative leadership practices consist of a mixed group of members deciding on the day-to-day operations of an organization (Gunther, 2019). Leaders share responsibilities and create an environment where different perspectives can be shared and respected. Gunther (2019) found that teachers leave the profession when the environment lacks collaboration. According to Senge (1990), the

level of collaboration within an organization influences teacher retention. Successful

organizations implement mental models, collaboration, and personal mastery

opportunities for individuals. Dickinson (2011) recommended leaders use teachers'

strengths to create collaborative opportunities.

Administrators collaborate with HQTs on various levels in the rural school district

studied. New candidates require relational leadership practices that set them up for

success in the school district and encourage retention. An elementary school principal,

Participant 8, indicated,

> I like to conduct a preorientation with my new employees, and so I bring them
>
> into the school even before anyone else arrives on campus. This gives the new
>
> employees, the new teacher candidates, an opportunity to become familiar with
>
> the campus. I can sit down with them and talk to them in detail about the policies
>
> and procedures that govern the school. I share with them [the] school's resources
>
> and what we have available on campus, what resources they will be working
>
> within their classrooms, what online websites they can use references. So, that's
>
> something I like to do to get them to kind of relieve some of the anxiety they may
>
> feel about starting a new position.

In this rural school district, because of the competitive process to maintain HQTs

in employment, principals use collaborative leadership practices to retain classroom

teachers. An elementary school principal, Participant 7, communicated with the teachers

as coworkers, provided professional development throughout the year, and supplied

resources and materials these educators required in the classroom. Participant 7 shared,

We have an open-door policy pretty much, so [if] anybody has any questions, all

they have to do is text my phone, call me, come into the office, it doesn't even

matter. Usually I'm out there somewhere in the school [hallways], so they can just

stop and say, "Hey, I have this question." If I can't answer it, or if I don't have

time to sit down with them and help them with whatever it is, then I can say go

ask [the academic coach] . . . We try to be as supportive as we can.

Collaborative leadership to retain HQTs includes not only the principal's

consistent facilitation of classroom instruction and management but also guidance with

communication with parents and stakeholders. Participant 5 noted, "Teachers . . . need to

know the leader of that school is going to support them, have their backs with parents,

with students . . . That's a comfortable place to work."

Additionally, in this rural community, district leaders and teachers have a

collaborative partnership to attain the overall goals of the district. Participant 3, a high

school head principal, indicated the district-level curriculum team provides teachers

professional development.

[The superintendent] . . . actually comes out to speak with our teachers . . . We

have a group of people at our central office that come out to the school and try to

provide resources to those teachers and show them that they, we, care as well and

we are here for you. Just making sure that our teachers know that we have [their]

back.

Principals found that collaboration was of similar importance as building a

positive school culture to improve the retention of HQTs. Teachers wanted to play a role

in creating a collaborative school culture. An elementary school principal, Participant 7, discussed,

> We [administrators] work alongside them [teachers] but, as the administrator, myself, and the assistant principal, we are very hands on. We are not removed from all that is happening, like. I mean, if something going on, we are right there, . . . I get text messages from teachers, I promise you, all hours of the day and night, and it doesn't matter, because I tell them if I'm asleep, look it's not going to wake me up. If you need something, text me, I'll text you back. It might not be that moment, but I'm going to get back with you.

> Vijayadevar et al. (2019) found that collaborative leadership practices in an organization must include a collection of skills including building relationships, sharing responsibilities, making joint decisions, and creating contextual concepts. Leaders in this study relayed that collaboration influenced the school culture and teachers' academic performance. Moreover, teachers and leaders relied on open communication, mentorship, and partnership to build collaborative practices.

Positive School Culture to Retain HQTs

The second category that emerged from Theme 3 was the importance of creating a positive campus culture to retain HQTs in rural school districts. School culture is created by leaders and followers. Actions and interactions that include communicating, solving problems, meeting needs, offering support, and creating a safe and secure environment are components of school culture (Polatcan, 2020). Employees tend to stay longer in an organization where appreciation is expressed by organization administrators.

Dickinson's (2007, 2011) and Senge's (1990) paradigms, the conceptual frameworks of this study, suggested leaders must demonstrate a willingness to support and care for teachers to increase retention practices. Senge highlighted that dialogue and discussions transform independent learning to a team effort filled with joint energy and talents, which improved the working culture. Furthermore, successful leaders evaluate systems to make adjustments as needed to continuously improve culture (Dickinson, 2007, 2011).

Commenting on high school campus culture in this rural school district, Participant 6 observed the responsibilities teachers undertake in school settings and stated,

A positive culture is built by providing support, guidance, and understanding in all situations. For example, teachers do not get to go off campus for lunch—lunch is with students. For this reason, teachers must be provided with compassion and empathy within the learning environment.

Another high school principal, Participant 4, stated,

A lot of them [teachers] say the work environment, they like it because it is almost like a family niche work environment. They also say [they] like communication. I try to make sure everything is clear, out in the open.

To further increase culture at the elementary school, Participant 7 expressed,

I always provide professional development . . . [and] assign mentors to answer questions or even serve as a guide. However, I explain that assistance is always

available, even if I am not available. Staff know they can text me at any time. I

may not respond immediately, but I will respond no matter the time of day.

Teachers' ability to adjust to a positive culture influences retention (Barth et al.,

2008). Rural school leaders in this study defined culture as an important component of

teacher retention and job satisfaction. Additionally, teachers often choose a positive

culture over monetary incentives as reasons to stay at a school.

Flexibility to Retain HQTs

In Theme 3, the category of flexibility emphasized the need to accommodate

schedules for HQTs to plan, teach, and obtain professional development in rural school

districts to retain educators. Student and teacher success depend on the ability to adapt to

the ever-changing educational demands and practices. Da'as (2019) found within

educational organizations a high demand for flexibility in planning, teaching, and

learning. According to Ucar and Ipek (2019), teachers have individual needs that require

leaders to demonstrate responsive practices. Administrator flexibility may be

demonstrated by leadership practices including patience, consistency, cooperation, and

the provision of personalized professional development. Senge's (1990) learning

organization paradigm included flexibility as a core value of effective organizations.

Dickinson's (2007) conceptual framework emphasized creating flexibility within the

organizational environment to accomplish the planned vision and mission.

Participant 8, an elementary school principal, described a flexible learning

environment as having monitoring systems to identify teachers' performance. Participant

8 communicated,

From the data, leaders are able to implement strategies to assist teachers with

professional burnout and stress. For example, teachers who teach our testing areas

[subjects that require standardized state tests] sometimes want to move down to

lower grades to avoid the testing anxiety. Additionally, administrators are able to

award teachers when expectations require performing duties beyond contractual

duties. We are a small school, so we wear a lot of hats.

Another elementary school principal, Participant 5, referred to allowing teachers to teach

using preferred methods:

Teachers are able to be creative in their classrooms. They have the ability to be

comfortable in their teaching. I do not micromanage teachers, but I do create an

environment that requires teachers and students to follow the expectations that

lead to success.

The middle school principal, Participant 1, also discussed creating a flexible environment

by refusing to micromanage situations. Participant 1 stated, "In everything teachers do, I

try to make the working environment as best as possible."

Leaders in this study implemented similar flexible practices, which were found to

increase teachers' retention. Flexibility transpires in all areas of an organization and

relates to teachers modifying practices to achieve educational requirements shared by

administrators (Da'as, 2019). One of the most noted practices among principal

participants was not requiring teachers to follow the same routine and procedures for

teaching students. Principals referred to not micromanaging teachers. They gave teachers

the freedom to choose the best practices needed for students. Moreover, flexibility practices were known to change daily based on the circumstances.

In summary, school leaders from a rural school district in a southern state described the process of recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs as an important and challenging process. Principals at elementary, middle, or high schools used a variety of strategies and leadership skills to provide proficient classroom instruction to increase student academic achievement. The results of this study revealed that principals depend on advertising vacancies to recruit teachers connected with the community and who share the school mission and vision. Principals conducted interviews with each applicant using an interview team equipped with knowledge of the teaching requirement. These teams used a rating scale or rubric to evaluate each potential staff member's ability to not only exhibit content expertise and classroom management but also adjust to the culture of the school. To retain teachers, building administrators use flexible practices that support collaboration to create and maintain a positive learning and teaching environment. Principals in this rural school district exhibited administrative adroitness when creating strategies to recruit, hire, and retain HQTs for continued success.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness relates to the authenticity displayed during the research process. In qualitative studies, establishing trustworthy processes during all phases of the study is important, including the preparation of the study, data collection, analysis, and the reporting of study results (Yin, 2016). I used content analysis for this basic qualitative

study and applied credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability practices to increase the trustworthiness of this study.

Credibility

Credibility relates to producing valid and reliable data using a consistent and accurate approach (Ravitch & Carl, 2016) and provides internal credibility of a qualitative study (Yin, 2016). I used (a) member checking and (b) reflexivity to provide credibility for this study. Participants performed member checks of the findings to ensure accuracy of the data analysis I used in this study. Member checking involves allowing participants to review the findings of a study for accuracy (Birt et al., 2016). Finally, to enhance credibility for the study, I used reflexivity (Da'as, 2019) by taking notes of personal bias or assumptions, while conducting each interview and during the analysis process. I identified and described each step of the research process to increase credibility within the study.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the applicability of the findings of a study to a different context (Amankwaa, 2016). Although the findings of a qualitative study may not generalize to another setting, I provided detailed descriptions of this study that may allow a reader to make judgments about the applicability of the findings within a similar context. Thick descriptions ensure external validity of a qualitative study (Yin, 2016). I provided a thorough description of the steps used to conduct this study, including selecting participants, gaining permission to conduct the study, describing the setting, conducting interviews, collecting data, documenting participants' behaviors, recalling

and notating personal bias, providing data analysis steps, creating trustworthiness, and reporting findings. By providing these details, a reader may determine whether the results are transferable to other contexts or settings (Amankwaa, 2016).

Dependability

Dependability relates to the extent that a study can be replicated with consistent findings (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To increase the dependability of this research, I used an audit trail and journaling. An audit trail allowed me to share information in sequence to allow others to replicate the study (see Bengtsson, 2016). Records that I included in this study include (a) the development of the interview protocol and questions, (b) the procedure by which I chose participants for this study, (c) the details of individual interviews to allow participants to choose either an in-person interview or a video conference call, and (d) the verbatim transcription of the audio recordings noted in the data analysis section. To further dependability, I obtained three administrators, not participating in the study, to provide feedback relating to the research questions and interview questions. Administrators shared whether the interview questions would create an opportunity to collect reliable and valid data to answer the research questions. Additionally, I used a reflective journal to assist with audit trails to keep personal bias from interfering with developing themes. Finally, I detailed the methodological process in Chapter 3 and described the data analysis in Chapter 4 along with examples of the authenticity of participants' responses. Each of these records provided reliability and objectivity of the study.

Confirmability

Confirmability relates to being aware of personal bias to help ensure findings are free of researcher subjectivity and based on the participants' perceptions (Connelly, 2016). Throughout the study, I used reflexivity, bracketing, and peer debriefing. During the interviews, I used reflexivity by keeping a record of personal bias in a reflexive journal to avoid skewing the interpretation of participants' responses. I also recorded each interview and transcribed each verbatim. Yin (2016) referred to reflexivity as being self-aware of any bias developed during the data collection process. To further increase confirmability, I implemented bracketing (Fischer, 2009). As I interviewed each participant, I made notes of personal feelings, experiences, and opinions on the interview protocol to avoid including personal bias in the data collection process. I also used a bracketing process by keeping a record of biases or presumptions that could skew the outcome during the data analysis process. To conclude, two peer debriefers reviewed the developed categories and themes to provide feedback related to content alignment and reliability. Peer debriefers provided clarity of interpretations and identified possible bias by viewing the findings, research questions, and purpose of the study (see Hadi & Closs, 2016). Both peer debriefers assisted me in determining if developed themes aligned with the findings presented by participants.

Summary

The purpose of the basic qualitative study was to investigate the perceptions of rural school district principals from a southern state regarding recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs. Over 3 weeks, I interviewed eight administrators from elementary,

middle, and high schools. Aligned with the purpose of the study, I used three research questions to investigate principals' perceptions relating to recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs. Semistructured, open-ended interview questions were the sole questioning technique used to gather data for this study.

Results for RQ1 revealed rural school district leaders depend on personal and professional referrals, advertisements, and local candidate investment to increase the hiring of HQTs. Related to RQ2, rural school district administrators shared that the recruitment of HQTs is enhanced by using interview teams capable of selecting new members willing to perform based on the mission and vision of the organization. The results of RQ3 indicated rural school district administrators increase retention of HQTs by using collaborative leadership practices, implementing a positive work environment, and demonstrating flexibility with teachers. Throughout the data collection process, participants relied on personal experiences to share strategies for recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs. In Chapter 5, I provide a detailed discussion of the implications, interpretations, and recommendations for further research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic exploratory qualitative study was to investigate the perceptions of elementary, middle, and high school principals from a rural school district in a southern state. A basic exploratory qualitative study was suitable for this study because this manner of research is studied in a natural setting (see Cypress, 2018; Yin, 2016). Also, qualitative studies guide the research based on the data and preliminary results (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013). A basic approach was appropriate and purposeful sampling was used to select eight elementary, middle, and high school principals to participate in this study. I collected data via video conference calls and one in-person interview.

The findings of this study, using Senge's (1990) paradigm of a learning organization and Dickinson's (2007) model for recruiting, selecting, and retaining child welfare workers, aligned with principals' perceptions that vision, leadership style, culture, students, parents, and educational demands are important aspects that lead to student academic achievement. Communicating effectively, recruiting the appropriate candidates, and creating collaborative cultures also improve recruitment, hiring, and retention of HQTs. The following themes emerged from the data:

- Administrators from a rural school district recruit HQTs through personal and professional referrals, local candidates' investment, and advertisement.

- Administrators from a rural school district hire HQTs by selecting interview teams capable of judging whether candidates' experiences align with schools' vision and culture.

- Administrators from a rural school district retain HQTs by maintaining collaborative leadership practices and a positive school culture that allow teachers to be flexible in their planning, teaching, and professional development.

In this chapter, I discuss the conclusions of this study based on the data collected from interviews regarding the perceptions of the elementary, middle, and high school principals from a rural school district in a southern state.

Interpretation of the Findings

The findings of this basic exploratory qualitative study help reduce a gap in the research regarding the perceptions of elementary, middle, and high school principals from a rural school district in a southern state concerning practices for recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs. I used Dickinson's (2007) model for recruiting, selecting, and retaining child welfare workers and Senge's (1990) paradigm of a learning organization to analyze the data. In the following section, I present the three themes that emerged from the data analysis regarding rural school district principals who recruit, hire, and retain HQTs.

Principals' Responsibilities in Rural School Districts to Recruit HQTs

Based on the findings from this study, the first theme that emerged from the data was: Administrators from a rural school district recruit HQTs through personal and professional referrals, local candidates' investment, and advertisement. This theme aligns with Dickinson's (2007) conceptual framework that advertising positive aspects of an organization supports recruiting new employees willing to commit to the success of the organization. Participants in this study advertised school vacancies and academic success

stories to improve teacher recruitment. Advertising took place on social media platforms and district websites. Acikgoz (2018) reported that advertising helps attract new employees. Principals in this study stated that advertisement improves the recruitment of HQTs in rural school districts.

According to principals in this study, professional and personal referrals were useful in recruiting HQTs. Principals engaged in conversations with local college professors and current educators about potential candidates for teaching. College professors were able to connect upcoming graduates with principals to improve recruitment. According to Minifie et al. (2018), recruiting HQTs using personal references increases the ability to recruit local candidates. Dickinson (2007) stated that communication among internal and external networks offers opportunities to share vacancies and provide recruiting information. Although Senge (1990) did not directly discuss personal and professional references, communication was acknowledged as a key factor to improve a learning organization.

Rural leaders also suggested recruiting local candidates knowledgeable of the community resources and amenities. Local candidates were more likely to stay in familiar areas. Coffey et al. (2019) confirmed an important process of recruitment is to recruit local teachers familiar with the community and who share similar experiences as students. This finding corroborates with Senge's (1990) paradigm that employees' abilities to adapt to organizational needs and requirements increases success.

Principals acknowledged the difficulty of recruiting HQTs while using different strategies. As noted by Acheampong and Gyasi (2019), recruiting teachers is often

influenced by limited number of applicants, leader support, and professional experiences. The participants of this study indicated that a principal's leadership style, the ability to hold teachers responsible for attaining certification, providing professional development, understanding teachers' job requirements, and meeting other educational demands positively influence recruitment of HQTs in a rural school district.

In summary, participants in this study agreed that significant limitations persist with the recruitment of classroom instructors in rural settings and offered strategies to recruit qualified candidates. Limited rural community resources, such as housing, dining facilities, and social events, deter recruitment of HQTs. The findings that formed this theme are that employing purposive advertising, recruiting local community candidates, and using local referrals are strategies to improve recruitment of HQTs in rural school districts.

Principals' Responsibilities in Rural School Districts to Hire HQTs

Theme 2 revealed by the data was: Administrators from a rural school district hire HQTs by selecting interview teams capable of judging whether candidates' experiences align with schools' vision and culture. Administrators in this study used interview committees consisting of teachers, counselors, administrators, and other staff members to assist in hiring HQTs. Dickinson's (2007) model for recruitment, selection, and retention of child welfare workers did not include using interview teams to hire new employees but did note the importance of selecting candidates with skills and interests matching job requirements.

Minifie et al. (2018) found that interviews allow leaders to gather basic information and present the school campus to potential candidates. Flowers and Hancock (2010) found that scoring rubrics focus on professional standards and teachers' ability to improve student learning. Stronge and Hindman (2003) stated that interview questions should be aligned to teaching domains to ensure selection is based on objective information rather than intuition.

Principals in this study used interview teams to assist with hiring HQTs. During interviews, principals ask preplanned questions that align with the mission and vision of the school. Rubrics were required when a large number of applicants applied for the same position. Principals hired candidates with the highest rating. Effective approaches to articulate experiences, plans, and pedagogy were evaluated during interviews. Principals hired teachers who articulated and possessed similar qualities of the mission and vision of the school.

In this study, principals focused on hiring teachers capable of adapting to the school culture. A positive school culture is an essential factor identified by the participants of this study that creates a positive work environment when hiring HQTs. The principals of these rural elementary, middle, and high school campuses have sought passionate, knowledgeable, and dependable candidates. Dicke et al. (2019) identified culture as the experiences students and teachers encounter in school environments. Principals in this study acknowledged that a negative culture creates chaos in increasing student academic performance. Senge (1990) explained that culture must be continuously improved and modified based on demographics and educational expectations. The

findings of this study of hiring HQTs corroborate Olsen and Huang's (2019) conclusion that a positive school culture creates a caring and supportive environment.

The findings that formed this theme lead to the suggestion that principals use interview committees to hire candidates who culturally fit organizational expectations. Principals found rubrics and predeveloped questions added to the quality of the interview process. The findings of this study also revealed the most qualified teachers have the pedagogical skills that align with educational requirements.

Principals' Responsibilities in Rural School Districts to Retain HQTs

The third theme that developed from the data of the perceptions of elementary, middle, and high school principals concerning the retention of HQTs was as follows: Administrators apply collaborative leadership practices and create positive school cultures with flexibility in planning, teaching, and professional development. Teachers are responsible for improving students' personal and professional performance (Mammadov & Cimen, 2019).

The findings of this study substantiated Senge's (1990) paradigm of a learning organization in which leaders use the strengths of employees to provide success and collaboration within an organization. Dickinson's (2007) conceptual framework for this study reinforced concepts that retention is based on having vision, support systems, and flexible practices. Teachers stay in organizations where expectations are clearly articulated.

Administrators should allow teachers the freedom to deliver instructions using prior knowledge and their individual teaching styles and techniques. According to

principals in this rural school district, teachers must be allowed flexible practices for teaching and planning. Teachers are responsible for teaching academic standards. Principals provided each teacher with a grade-level curriculum guide to inform goals for students at each grade level. To improve teaching practices, principals conducted ongoing observations to provide instructional feedback. Moreover, principals acknowledged being able to identify quality teaching as a major aspect of leadership in the effort to improve students' achievement. Yoo et al. (2015) indicated teacher flexibility influences student learning. Adams and Wood (2015) corroborated that when teachers are free to use autonomous teaching practices to engage students in learning in the classroom, student academic achievement increases and teachers are retained. Yakes and Star (2011) found teachers who use flexible instructional practices experience improved students learning. Akram (2019) noted effective teaching include knowledge of subject matter, assessments, and different instructional practices that contribute to students' academic growth.

Principals in this study also offered teachers professional development based on their observations and teachers' request. Acheampong and Gyasi (2019) found teachers leave the profession when professional development is lacking. Professional development should be offered to teachers to increase teaching skills and techniques and to support areas of deficiencies displayed in teaching practices. Principals in this rural school district also provided mentorship as a form of professional development to increase retention of new teachers. The findings for this theme support the Dickinson (2007) concept that employees need quality training to meet organizational expectations.

In summary, the findings of this study support the peer-reviewed literature and the conceptual framework and suggest a need to further investigate practices of principals from rural school districts to recruit, hire, and retain HQTs. Findings revealed the importance of principals (a) recruiting HQTs through personal and professional referrals, local candidates' investment, and advertisement; (b) hiring HQTs by selecting interview teams capable of judging whether candidates' experiences align with schools' vision and culture; and (c) retaining HQTs by maintaining collaborative leadership practices and a positive school culture that allow teachers to be flexible in their planning, teaching, and professional development.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations within a study design or methodology may influence interpretations of the findings (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010; Yin, 2016). In this basic exploratory qualitative study, I experienced three methodological limitations: (a) my potential bias, (b) the limited number of purposely chosen participants, and (c) transferability.

Bias occurs when personal assumptions, experiences, and attitudes influence the data analysis process (see Ahern, 1999). I used a self-reflexive journal, bracketing, and member checking to avoid personal bias in the research process. I used a self-reflexive journal during each interview to notate personal feelings, experiences, or thoughts that appeared (see Ahern, 1999). I use bracketing to address my bias before, during, and after each interview. Bracketing includes reflecting on potential bias and assumptions to avoid collecting unreliable data (see Ahern, 1999). I continued to use self-reflection and bracketing during the analysis process to reduce my bias. Second, I invited each

participant to member check the findings for accuracy (see Yin, 2016). Finally, I had two peer debriefers who helped me to limit any bias that I experienced while interpreting the data and developing the findings of this study.

In a qualitative basic study, the sample size could serve as a potential limitation. I initially projected 10-12 participants for this study, but was only able to confirm eight participants. However, saturation was reached during the data analysis process when further coding was not feasible and no new themes emerged from the data (see Yin, 2016). Participants were able to answer the research questions for the study. Starks and Trinidad (2007) stated that an adequate sample size for a qualitative research study is 1–10, because even one individual can generate a multitude of data (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). A small number of participants is both normal and adequate for a qualitative study (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2012; Yin, 2016). Eight school principals with at least 2 years of experience in a rural school district volunteered their time to participate in this study. Their level of leadership experience ranged from 5–20 years in rural school districts. One principal was European American, and seven were African American. The participants included five women and three men. Each was qualified to answer the research questions of this study.

Transferability relates to the findings being applicable in other contexts or settings (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2012). To enhance transferability in this study, I presented a thick description of the research process. Thick descriptions include describing the setting, culture, participants, and the data collection process (Amankwaa, 2016). I sought participants with 2 or more years of administrative experience to participate in this study

who could provide information during the semistructured interviews that might allow potential transferability to readers of this study in rural school districts. Participants capable of providing meaningful data to support the purpose of the study are viable for research (see Yin, 2016). Overcoming limitations in this study enhanced the trustworthiness of findings and resulted in the study being applicable in similar contexts.

Recommendations

This study added to the research about practice concerning how elementary, middle, and high school principals from a rural school district in a southern state recruit, hire, and retain HQTs. I found limited research concerning effective practices used by principals to recruit, hire, and retain HQTs in rural communities. Further research would benefit principals to determine the best methods to improve recruitment, hiring, and retaining HQTs. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations for future research may improve principals' ability to recruit, hire, and retain HQTs to help increase student academic achievement and decrease teacher turnover.

The results of this study revealed that principals in rural school districts encounter significant challenges recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs. Reoccurring dilemmas include limited available community resources, lack of teacher certifications, competitive salaries from other school districts, and difficulty of potential candidates to adapt to a rural school culture. A future quantitative study to identify the relationship between key variables relating to evidence-based practices for recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs could provide insight for community and district leaders. Research exploring competitive

practices of other rural and suburban school districts to compensate teachers would be another study that may help to improve obtaining HQTs in rural school districts.

Research exploring competitive practices of other rural and suburban school districts to compensate teachers would be another study that may help to improve obtaining HQTs in rural school districts. Additionally, a future study focusing on teachers' perceptions of recruitment, hiring, and retention could enhance principals' ability to recruit, hire, and retain HQTs. Professional development opportunities could be modified based on data obtained from such a study to improve the type of training required for principals in rural environments. Additionally, other qualitative studies may add to literature about practice to inform principals of quality leadership skills to enhance recruitment, hiring, and retention of HQTs. A quantitative study correlating successful leadership practices of administrators in rural school communities to student achievement could identify specific practices that rural school leaders exemplify where students achieve academically. Principals in this study acknowledged interviews, referrals, communication, culture, advertisements, flexibility, planning, teaching, and collaboration as key components to enhance recruitment, hiring, and retention of HQTs; in turn, HQTs correlate with student performance.

Implications

The purpose of this basic exploratory qualitative study was to investigate the perceptions of elementary, middle, and high school principals from a rural school district in a southern state concerning practices of recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs. The following themes were revealed in this study:

1. Administrators from a rural school district recruit HQTs through personal and professional referrals, local candidates' investment, and advertisement.

2. Administrators from a rural school district hire HQTs by selecting interview teams capable of judging whether candidates' experiences align with schools' vision and culture.

3. Administrators from a rural school district retain HQTs by maintaining collaborative leadership practices and a positive school culture that allow teachers to be flexible in their planning, teaching, and professional development.

This study provides educationally relevant implications as viewed through the lens of rural school district principals recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs.

The findings of this study indicate that rural principals relied on different sources of referrals to improve recruitment of HQTs. Referrals included social media, district webpages, and internal and external communication. Advertisement provided opportunities to share positive aspects relating to the school's mission and vision. Principals depended on interview committees capable of developing questions and rubrics to guide the interview process for hiring HQTs. Interview questions aligned with academic standards, culture expectations, and teacher accountability. Interview teams also created rubrics. Rubrics offered a rating scale to evaluate teacher candidates' experiences, qualifications, communication skills, and adaptability. Overall, principals sought new teachers who exhibit passion, dependability, and resourcefulness.

Rural principals in this study recommended creating a positive school culture of shared responsibility, effective leadership practices, incentives, and educational resources. Teacher candidates from rural communities were identified as an essential asset to teacher retention because of familiarity with rural resources and culture. Principals also acknowledged the importance of working collaboratively with teachers and allowing them to teach based on individual strengths rather than a using a script or micromanaging the classroom instructor. Overall, principals in this study identified a positive school culture as the paramount pivotal factor to improve recruitment, hiring, and retention of HQTs.

Positive social change in rural school districts may occur if principals hire HQTs and students are able to learn from quality teachers capable of facilitating effective lessons. I recommend that school administrators in rural school districts view the results of this study to highlight positive social change that may improve techniques and strategies principals use to recruit, hire, and retain HQTs.

Conclusion

The purpose of this basic exploratory qualitative study was to investigate the perceptions of elementary, middle, and high school principals from a rural school district in a southern state concerning practices of recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs. The literature review for this study revealed that principals play a vital role in recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs. Despite a plethora of studies related to leadership practices of recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs, few have addressed rural school districts. Senge's (1990) paradigm revealed that successful organizations need to implement collaborative

practices, provide shared visions and missions, and include partnerships. Dickinson (2007) explained that recruiting, selecting, and retaining new employees begins with leaders' perceptions and performance.

Through investigating the perceptions and practices of administrators in rural school districts, this study reveals the importance in recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs of using targeted advertising, using local school district programs, employing team interviews, providing incentives, using portfolios, and offering mentors and administrative support. Most importantly, as found in this study, a positive school culture on rural school campuses encourages collaborative leadership and flexibility for classroom teachers and is essential to improve the recruitment, hiring, and retention of HQTs in rural school districts. Administrators in rural school districts should build a positive school culture, exhibit strong communication skills, and establish collaborative problem-solving techniques to recruit, hire, and retain HQTs and increase student academic achievement.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol and Questions

Interview date: _____

Interview start time: _____

Interviewee code: _____

Interview Outline	Observation and Reflective Notes
I. Introduction and Greeting Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study. I appreciate the time you've carved out of your busy schedule. My study focuses on investigating the perceptions of elementary, middle, and high school principals from a rural school district in a southern state concerning practices of recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs. As a Walden University candidate, I am eager to begin this interview and gather data for this research. Throughout the interview I will ask questions to guide us through a conversation to gain information and insight on your perceptions. All the interview questions are aligned to the research questions in my study.	
II. Review Consent Form Before I begin the interview, I would like to review the consent form	
III. Obtain Background Information 1. Name: _____ 2. Male___ Female ___ 3.Years as a principal in your current school: _____ 4. Total years as a principal:___ 5. Other pertinent information:_	

IV. Interview Questions
 	
1. What practices do you use to recruit highly qualified teachers?
   • Tell me more about…
   • Can you elaborate on ways district leaders help with recruiting?
   • What are some limitations for adding other recruitment methods?	

2. What practices do you use to hire highly qualified teachers?
   - Tell me more about…
   - Can you elaborate on ways district leaders help with hiring?
   - What are some limitations to using other hiring methods?

3. What practices do you use to retain highly qualified teachers?
   - Tell me more about…
   - Can you elaborate on ways district leaders help with retention?
   - What are some limitations for adding other retention methods?
   - How does school culture influence teacher retention?

4. What are some reasons teachers have given for denying employment with your school?

5. What have been some reasons given by teachers who leave your school?

6. What are some reasons teachers chose to stay at your school?

7. Is there anything further you want to add?

V. Close of Interview

Thank you for taking the time to participate in the research for my study. Your unique experiences and perceptions concerning practices of recruiting, hiring, and retaining HQTs will be included in my data analysis.

Once I've completed transcribing, coding, and looking for themes from our interview, I will provide you with a draft of my findings. After you receive the findings, if, want to add additional information, or have questions please email me so that we can set up a time to discuss the findings.

Do you have any questions for me before we stop the audio recording?

Turn off the recording

VI. End of Interview
Interview end time:_____