2021

Understanding Principals' Perceptions of Leadership for Implementation of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Programs

Margaret Akinnusi
Walden University

Walden University

College of Education

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Margaret Iheoma Akinnusi

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee
Dr. Robert Flanders, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty
Dr. Alberto Gonzales, Committee Member, Education Faculty
Dr. Mary Lou Morton, University Reviewer, Education Faculty

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

Walden University
2021

Abstract

Understanding Principals' Perceptions of Leadership for Implementation of Social-

Emotional Learning (SEL) Programs

by

Margaret Iheoma Akinnusi

MA, California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, 2003

BS, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 1996

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

May 2021

Abstract

School principals' leadership strategies and collaborative efforts contribute immensely to defining and managing goals in response to any educational initiatives, including social-emotional learning (SEL) programs. The problem prompting this study was the disproportionate special education referral and school suspension of minority students. Although the focus school district adopted an SEL curriculum and tasked principals with implementation to reduce disproportionality, these disparities continue to persist. This qualitative descriptive study explored 10 principals' leadership strategies and implementation challenges regarding SEL program implementation to close the disparity of special education identification and the suspension and expulsion of minority students at an urban school district in the state of California. Transformational leadership and implementation science frameworks guided this study. Data gathering sources included semi-structured interviews with 10 principals on their leadership behaviors and challenges in implementing SEL programs. For data analysis, I used the NVivo software to organized and stored the data. The findings indicate that clear communications with staff, setting manageable goals, and conducting need assessments that address the disparity and intervention selections were vital. Simultaneously, lack of staff commitments, inadequate professional development, and insufficient time for planning impedes principals' leadership to support SEL implementation at their schools. The results of this study may contribute to social change by informing school leadership on how to provide culturally responsive training for the best practices necessary to support diverse learners, promote proactive practices, and create positive school cultures using SEL.

Understanding Principals' Perceptions of Leadership for Implementation of Social-

Emotional Learning (SEL) Programs

By

Margaret Iheoma Akinnusi

MA, California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, 2003

BS, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 1996

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

May 2021

Dedication

It brings me great pride to dedicate this dissertation to my family, Ayo, Oyindamola, Ben, and Freddie. Especially to Ayo, my husband, you have transformed my world in ways that I could have never anticipated. You are my love, my joy, my heart. I thank God every day for entrusting me to be the mother of your children. I want to acknowledge my late father, Mr. S.O. Onuoha, who instilled a passion for education within me at a very young age. He taught me the endearing love of humanity, a spirit of perseverance, and the belief that I could accomplish anything I wanted to achieve. A special thank you to my siblings for being my biggest cheerleaders.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

In the United States, schools are compulsory for children under 18 years of age. The mission of educating students is efficient when efforts of academic, social, and emotional learning are assimilated (Weissberg et al., 2015). Researchers agree that social-emotional learning (SEL) has demonstrated improved academic performance, behavior, and school attendance (Berkowitz et al., 2017; Dowling & Barry, 2020). According to Allbright et al. (2019), schools are expected to attend to students' social-emotional development, and leadership support is central to the achievement. Students attend school for most of their day, making SEL essential to every child's education (Corcoran & O'Flaherty, 2017; Oberle et al., 2016). Therefore, concerted leadership support in SEL program implementation is essential.

Researchers agree that for students to function as productive members of society, students must make responsible decisions, practice self-awareness (how students come across to others), manage their emotions, and build and maintain relationships. Yeager (2017) alluded that SEL competencies help students stay connected as they progress from elementary to middle school and high school. Locke et al. (2019) explored aspects of schools' implementation of Evidence-Based Programs (EBPs) such as SEL from the lens of implementation leadership, school climate, and student citizenship behavior. Locke et al. (2019) concluded that organizational factors such as implementation leadership (specific leadership behavior that supports SEL practice) play a vital role in successful SEL implementation.

This study may contribute to social change by allowing the principals to unearth the potential pitfalls in a color-blind SEL approach and re-envision leadership for SEL and reducing the disproportionate gap. Additionally, this study may contribute to social change by informing the district leadership team on how to provide culturally responsive training for principals on best practices necessary to support diverse learners and to promote proactive approaches and a positive school climate.

The rest of Chapter 1 includes the background of the study, problem statement, and purpose. Also included are the research questions, conceptual frameworks, and the nature of the study. The study's significance follows the definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, and limitations of the study.

Background

Public education lays the foundation for future opportunities and academic achievements of all students. School principals play an essential role in influencing curriculum and programming in the best interest of all students. Among the increasing expectations for accountability measures, school districts turn to SEL programs as a proactive and preventive way to impart skills that help develop positive skills, avoid negative behaviors in children, and address race disparities in U.S. schools (Gregory & Fergus, 2017; Locke et al., 2019). Weissberg et al. (2015) contended SEL helps children and adults acquire and apply skills to recognize and manage their emotions. Social-emotional traits have proven to benefit students, encourage cooperation among students, establish and maintain supportive relationships. Domitrovich et al. (2017) advocated teaching children SEL skills will help with responsible decision making, a positive

attitude about school, and how to handle personal and interpersonal situations. When SEL competencies are lacking, students may be less connected to school, which can affect their academic performance, attendance, behavior, and health (Schonert-Reichl, 2019). Constructively, schools can help young people improve their general well-being, not just their academic skills but also their social-emotional skills.

Educational leaders are responsible for the uptake of leadership roles in transforming schools into vibrant learning communities where all students are authentically engaged (Sheninger, 2014). To engage students, principals are tasked with implementing SEL programs, but principals may not understand how to provide leadership implementation strategies that encompass their diverse student populations through equitably oriented approaches (Hernandez, 2019; Shriver & Weissberg, 2020). For this research, I selected a specific school district in southern California because it has made a concerted effort to implement SEL programming across its schools since 2017. The district chose SEL in response to the disproportionate suspension rate and higher identification rate of minority students as students with emotional disturbance compared to white students. The district serves just over 10,500 students in Grades 7-12 across eight campuses; 20.8% are African American students, 11.3 % of the student population are English language learners, and 15% are students with disabilities (SWDs). The principals may not have a thorough understanding of their leadership role expectations in implementing an SEL program.

Although SEL programs have empirically demonstrated benefits for students, there is a lack of research addressing principals' leadership support to the implementation

process (McIntosh et al., 2016). Hernandez (2019) and Kennedy (2019) alluded to the insufficient research on SEL leadership supports that address race, gender, or sexual orientation and how leaders of diverse learners may struggle to position themselves at the forefront of SEL implementations. This shortage of research makes this study relevant and timely.

Problem Statement

The problem is disproportionate referrals of minority students to special education and suspension from school. Although the focus school district adopted an SEL curriculum and tasked principals with implementation to reduce disproportionality, these disparities persist despite leadership support to implementation (Tables 1 and Table 2). Scant literature exists on what leadership behavior or actions school principals charged with SEL implementation need to meet their students' needs (Allbright et al., 2019; Kennedy, 2019). There is scant empirical literature on the actions, interactions of school principals' leading SEL reforms from an equity lens. Authors have recommended that principals align SEL practices to narrow gaps between students from different racial groups and conceptualize SEL reforms using other leadership frameworks such as transformational leadership traits in addressing disparities.

In 2017, an urban school district in California adopted SEL programs as an alternative approach to managing student behavior and improving school climate. SEL programs are a requirement for all schools in the state, and principals are expected to provide leadership for implementation to address the disparity gap. A growing body of research across the United States has been conducted that indicates strong support for

SEL programs and successful implementation; however, there is a dearth of research on the leadership role during the execution of best practices (McIntosh et al., 2016; Meyers et al., 2015; Oberle et al., 2016; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2014). In 2018, the California Department of Education adopted SEL guiding principles to provide educational leaders and stakeholders the means to drive high-quality SEL implementation in all their school districts as a means to improve school climate and, consequently, student behavior.

Given the responsibilities principals have, their leadership activities are critical in elevating SEL's importance. Marzano et al. (2005) posited that leadership is the essential aspect of any school reforms, and principals are responsible for ensuring all students succeed. School leaders play a central role in actively supporting the management and overall planning and monitoring of students' educational improvement practices by enhancing implementation (Dyssegaard et al., 2017; Moullin et al., 2018). In achieving a vision that values all students' social and emotional development, Weissberg (2019) alluded that educators need to integrate SEL into their everyday practice. Students learn social-emotional competencies in the classroom when their teachers model appropriate behavior and allow them to learn and apply their skills.

Researchers have focused on SEL's success related to academic achievement (Taylor et al., 2017; Wigelsworth et al., 2016). Research indicated a strong case for schools to make nonacademic skills and competencies that lead to young individuals' personal and social development a central feature (Jones et al., 2017; Meyers et al., 2019). Therefore, support from school principals is critical and can influence a school's readiness to implement SEL.

Resurgence and interest in SEL are on the rise (Weissberg et al., 2015); it is now one of the most frequently discussed topics in education today. Every Student Succeeds Act legislation provides a significant opportunity for states to broaden their definition of student success (Young et al., 2017). Notwithstanding the progress toward evidence-based practices, there remains a need to delineate how SEL can be integrated into planned, ongoing, systemic initiatives rather than merely collected as fragmented practices, policies, or programs (Weissberg et al., 2015). For instance, the California Department of Education SEL guiding principles lacks explicit mention or recommendations of race or gender inequities in SEL or academic outcomes. According to Low et al. (2016), leadership support during implementation is lacking in obtaining the desired result of EBPs given the increasing number of schools adopting SEL. Aarons et al. (2016) found vast literature on leadership and a universal acknowledgment of leadership's role in implementing EBPs such as SEL and sustainment as critical, but it is rarely empirically analyzed. Metz and Easterling (2016) noted that choosing an evidence-based practice is one thing, and implementing it is another thing. Metz and Easterling recommended that practitioners identify and evaluate the starting point when selecting interventions.

Oberle et al. (2016) argued that practical implementation methods are required to ensure consistent use of SEL programs through a supportive environment to encourage positive benefits to children as they spend most of their day in school. While some practical guides list actions that principals should take when implementing and integrating SEL into schools, those guides do not explore the link to how a principal has

provided leadership for SEL program implementation (Durlak, 2016; Meyers et al.,

2019). Despite this growing interest, school leaders still struggle to implement SEL

programs and practices that effectively develop students' social-emotional skills.

Table 1 displays 4 years of data from the California State Department of

Education Dataquest of the urban school district's suspension rates by race and ethnicity.

Tables 2 shows data for race and ethnicity of students identified as emotionally disturbed

in the same school district. For the periods displayed, the suspension and special

education identification by a disability category have been consistently higher for

minority students than Caucasian students.

Table 1

Four Years' Suspension Data by Race/Ethnicity

School year	White	African American	Hispanic /Latin
2018-2019	17	495	148
2017-2018	102	479	306
2016-2017	97	274	543
2015-2016	63	159	455

Table 2

Rate of Racial and Ethnic Disproportionality by a Disability Category (Emotionally Disturbed)

	White	African American	Hispanic /Latin	Multiple Ethnicity
Students with disability	12	45	31	4
Risk ratio (max 3)	1.84	4.21	0.24	NC
Disproportionate?	NO	OVR	NO	NC

Purpose of the Study

In this qualitative descriptive study, I explored principals' leadership strategies and implementation challenges regarding SEL program implementation to close the disparity gap at an urban district in California. The SEL program has emerged as a significant aspect of education in the United States. School principals' leadership is vital in improving students' academic achievement and overall school effectiveness (Leithwood & Sun, 2012; Sebastian et al., 2019). School principals play an essential role in providing the support and guidance needed to implement effective SEL programming (Kendziora & Yoder, 2016). Given the responsibilities principals have, their leadership activities are critical in elevating SEL importance in the school and successfully implementing EBPs and practices (Redding, & Walberg, 2015). Ganon-Shilon and Schechter (2019) contended that school reforms are valid with policies or programs when implemented with fidelity. Principals need to have a clear perception of their leadership approaches to SEL implementation.

SEL is the process through which students acquire and apply knowledge, skill sets, and attitudes to understand and manage emotions to achieve positive goals, maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013). Effective SEL programming is a coordinated effort among school leadership, teachers, and support staff. Ehrhart et al. (2016) posited that school administrators are responsible for creating an organizational climate conducive to change. Administrators set the stage for proper implementation by defining the desirable implementation outcome practices for their schools. A practical, comprehensive approach to SEL implementation calls for

active administrative support and follow-through: ongoing training and professional development of instructional and non-instructional staff; integrations of SEL programs into the entire school, including academic instruction, student support, discipline, climate, routine, and curriculum structure, and varied and engaging instructional approaches (Elias, 2019; Kendziora & Yoder, 2016). Conveying the importance of SEL to team members before implementing new SEL programs is imperative. Therefore, I explored the leadership role of the principals in the implementation of SEL programming.

Research Questions

Qualitative research questions are open-ended and intended to explore and address gaps in knowledge (Wu et al., 2016). This study is not an exception and poised to answer the following questions:

RQ1: What leadership behaviors or strategies do principals describe as necessary to implement SEL programs in their schools?

RQ2: What challenges do principals encounter during SEL program implementation?

Conceptual Framework

Transformational leadership theory by Bass and Riggio (2006) and implementation science of EBPs by Domitrovich et al. (2008) provided the conceptual framework for this study. Successful leadership is critical to school reforms (Leithwood et al., 2004). Bass and Riggio (2006) postulated that a transformational leadership approach causes changes in individuals and social systems and is related to effective leadership practice behaviors that can impact subordinates to achieve their desired

outcomes. Bass and Riggio's (2006) recommendation of transformational leadership serves as a compass for improving its benefit. Avolio et al. (1999) contended that a transformational leader helps subordinates increase confidence and shift their mindsets from mere existence to achievement and growth organization.

Some factors ensure adequate uptake of EBPs, such as SEL, into routine practices. Domitrovich et al.'s (2008) approach to implementation quality is a multilevel framework of factors that may influence the quality of EBPs or interventions at schools. According to Cook and Odom (2013), researchers support that EBPs have meaningful effects on student outcomes. Their research focuses on how to move EBPs such as SEL into general practice with high-quality implementation. The field of implementation science guides the translation of theory to practice so that a service provider may access and support the adopted interventions with fidelity (Fixsen et al., 2013). Domitrovich et al. (2008) alluded that implementation quality is the discrepancy between a program's outcome and its implementation process.

Landes et al. (2019) agreed that implementation science is a study of adaptation, feasibility, and potential acceptability of EBP in schools. Consideration of the organizational and contextual factors such as leadership support and professional development is paramount. There is a need to facilitate administrative support in understanding how the implementation of EBP works (Aiello et al., 2019). Implementation science is developing EBPs such as SEL into routine practices to help students fulfill their potential through identifying and mitigating factors that affect intervention uptake into a routine by applying implementation strategies.

Transformational Leadership

Dow and Downton (1974) first introduced the transformational leadership concept, and several scholars have continued to develop the idea. Burns (1978) defined transformational leadership as a person's ability to engage others to build motivation. Burns' approach to addressing change aligning to transformation could be measured by how successful leaders and followers could mutually advance toward a shared goal.

Organizational change requires some essential and unique dynamics that demand a new leadership perspective and style. The transformational leadership style has the potential to shape a school organization. Holten and Brenner (2015) sought to determine how leadership style influences organizational change and concluded that transformational leaders have followers' buy-in. Transformational leaders tend to transform staff into committing to the organization's vision and goals. Principals with transformational leadership traits promote team members' use already committed to the shared goal. The transformational leadership style can significantly impact the organizational outlook by changing the mindset of staff members. Principals with transformational leadership traits can motivate and inspire their staff by challenging staff to achieve more (Bass & Riggio, 2006). To attain a desirable implementation outcome, a principal can foster an ethical work environment with clear priorities and standards by using leadership skills to guide the school staff.

Transformational leaders are dynamic and proactive, capable of leading themselves and their followers to embrace changes (Liu & Li, 2018). Transformational leaders perceive and engage culture holistically, recognizing the factors needed to initiate

fundamental change and mitigating resistance to change (Andersen, 2015; Carter et al., 2014). As transformational leaders, principals face the burden of school accountability responsibilities and the expectation to translate reform demands into school practices (Ganon-Shilon & Schechter, 2019). Principals with transformational leadership styles will motivate their staff to be more attuned to implementing SEL programs in their schools. Their relationship has a high degree of task-and-relations support.

Implementation Science

The second framework that guided this study was implementation science. According to Bauer et al. (2015), implementation quality is the scientific method to support the uptake of research findings and other EBPs like SEL into routine practice. Horner et al. (2017) suggested that implementation quality bridges the science to service gap of intervention programs, referring to the practical implementation methods that practitioners will need to disseminate and replicate to ensure consistent EBP and positive benefits to children and families. Taylor et al. (2017) contended that fidelity of implementation is vital in predicting an intervention program's effectiveness; it requires confidence in one's ability to execute a plan effectively and the belief in a program's effectiveness.

Implementation science increases the knowledge of how and why interventions such as SEL are successfully implemented in various contexts. Bauer and Kirchner (2019) concluded that implementation science identifies determinants of implementation, addresses resultant quality gaps, and provides hands-on support to the implementation process. According to Eslava-Schmalbach et al. (2019), implementation science helps to

identify common implementation problems and key barriers through seeking scientific evidence of programs, interventions, or policies on implementation outcomes. Goulet et al. (2020) found that school staff perceptions of their needs may hinder or contribute to change during a new practice implementation and affect the level of resources allotted to said practices. Dariotis et al. (2017) identified that factors relevant for the successful implementation of school-based interventions are essential to ensure that programs are delivered expertly and engagingly. Nilsen's (2015) assertion that implementing or integrating new practices within a setting influences desired outcomes makes the implementation science framework essential in understanding principals' perceptions of their leadership toward SEL program implementation.

The theme that emerged from the conceptual framework chosen for this study was that leadership and implementation are essential aspects of moving SEL initiatives from planning to fruition and answering the two research questions that guided this study. The two frameworks are discussed in depth in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

Leadership influences play a substantial role in school effectiveness; therefore, school leaders may need to examine their various leadership roles in the improvement process (Bruggencate et al., 2012). School principals play a crucial role as agents of change (Spillane & Kenney, 2012) and are at the forefront of the negotiation for school reforms and initiatives (Gawlik, 2015). School leaders are responsible for creating safe environments, guiding teachers to address student needs, and promoting equity (Minkos et al., 2017). Given the principal importance of implementing educational change

processes, it is crucial to understand better how they enact practices (Ganon-Shilon & Schechter, 2019). According to Armstrong et al. (2017), a qualitative descriptive approach is used to describe participants' accounts; it is a comprehensive summary of standard terms. A qualitative descriptive approach needs to be the design of choice for studies involving the description of participants' perceptions of their experiences (Kim et al., 2017). Using a quantitative or mixed-method approach would not produce descriptive data to answer the research questions specific to this study. The qualitative descriptive interview study approach will allow principals to account in their own words how they provide leadership toward SEL program implementation including their leadership role and the challenges they experienced during SEL implementation.

For this qualitative descriptive interview study, I explored 10 principals' perceptions of their leadership roles during SEL implementation using semi-structured interviews. According to Miles et al. (2014), an interview is a common data collection approach to a qualitative descriptive study to explore participants' experiences. Vasileiou et al. (2018) alluded that there is no straightforward answer to how sample size numbers for a qualitative interview are determined; instead, it is about practical methodology and epistemological issues. Vasileiou et al. (2018) explained that data saturation guides the selection of qualitative samples. The sample size is purposive based on their capacity to provide richly textured information to answer the research questions, terminated when no new information is elicited by sampling more units. Sim et al. (2018) posited that a qualitative study's sample size tends to be small and recommended 2-10 participants to achieve redundancy in a descriptive phenomenological method. The qualitative

descriptive method generates rich descriptive data, and the researcher looks for commonalities and differences in the participants' responses within the data using thematic analysis (Willis et al., 2016). Therefore, a qualitative descriptive approach is best suited to answer the research question using a semi-structured interview to explore principals' leadership perceptions for SEL implementation.

Definitions

Evidence-Based Program (EBP): An intervention is referred to as evidence-based if proven effective at reaching positive outcomes through rigorous evaluations, often including randomized controlled clinical trials (Wandersman et al., 2016). Shriver and Weissberg (2020) alluded that SEL programs are evidence-based because of the proven track record of practices that foster students' improved social and emotional skills development.

Implementation Science: Refers to an approach for improvements and interventions adopted and integrated into the schools to account for the local context's desired outcomes (Nordstrum et al., 2017).

School Climate: School climate is the experiences of students, parents, and school personnel based on patterns of school life; it also reflects the teaching and learning practices, norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, and organizational structures (Thapa et al., 2013).

School Principal /Leaders: The leaders of an entire community within a school. Principals are responsible for managing the major administrative tasks and supervising all students and teachers. For this study, principals, assistant principals, and coordinators

collectively will be referred to as school leaders or administrators. School leaders lead others to do things expected to improve student learning outcomes (Tan, 2018).

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL): A process that focuses on developing individual qualities and allows for social-emotional competence development. The SEL competencies may be taught similar to how students learn other academic skills by successfully applying skills needed to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, and feel and show compassion for others (Weissberg et al., 2015). SEL's ultimate goal is for students to grow up and become productive citizens by acquiring the five interrelated sets of cognitive, affective, and behavioral competencies: (a) self-awareness, (b) self-management, (c) social awareness, (d) relationship skills, and (e) responsible decision making (Schonert-Reichl, 2019).

Transformational Leadership: A leader who encourages and motivates employees to create changes that shape and grow their organization's future success (Burns, 1978). A transformational leader places high value in the school community that encourages students and teachers to achieve greater achievement levels.

Assumptions

I assumed study participants would respond to the interview questions openly and honestly regarding their perceptions of how they provided leadership support to SEL program implementations. I assumed that a school principal would be an influencer regarding implementing EBP. I also assumed that schools with principals who demonstrated leadership support and commitment to best practices are well-prepared for SEL implementation. Finally, I assumed participants in this study had implemented the

SEL program with fidelity; understanding their perceptions is necessary for the study's context.

Scope and Delimitations

This qualitative descriptive study was conducted to explore principals' perceptions of leadership for implementing SEL using semi-structured interviews, which provided rich descriptive data that were analyzed to determine relevant themes on leadership for SEL implementation. The sample for this study included 10 middle and high school principals from the school district. The setting and population delimit the study as it is limited to one district and excludes elementary school principals.

Limitations

As with any study, there are limitations. However, these limitations do not lessen the core of the study. One of the limitations of this study was the time and manner of the data collection. Given the social distancing measures required by the COVID-19 pandemic, participants' interviews had to be conducted virtually instead of face-to-face, affecting the ability to capture non-verbal cues and limiting my ability to infer and ask follow-up questions. Another limitation was that the sample was limited to 10 middle and high school principals. However, purposeful sampling allowed for the selection of participants who thoroughly conveyed their experiences with SEL implementation. Additionally, I worked for the school district as a district-level manager; therefore, the participants may have felt discomfort in discussing their leadership roles in SEL implementation. To protect confidentiality, I kept participants' identities anonymous and created a reflexive journal of the research process to monitor any biases.

Significance

The study's findings may assist principals with the critical strategies needed to support SEL program implementation efforts. The study may provide opportunities and resources to work toward SEL leadership strategies that may bring about differentiated SEL programming for diverse learners. According to Cohen et al. (2019), schools can play a critical role in protective factors in students' lives by meeting their essential development needs and promoting skills and talents to support their lifelong success. Principals are in charge of creating the conditions for learning that support students' critical development by establishing policies, setting the vision, and creating strategic goals, all of which unite the many elements that comprise successful SEL programming. Fidelity with SEL implementation is essential as students acquire the necessary skills to succeed.

Principals' responses to questions in semi-structured interviews helped to develop an understanding of the leadership strategies principals describe as necessary to implement SEL programs in their schools through equitable-oriented approaches. This study may lead to a positive social change in the study district, which might offer the best practices necessary to ensure SEL program implementation and sustainability by discerning if the district level management may need to consider different policies and procedural approaches. Also, the results might increase the level of staff and student buy-ins for SEL program implementation, which may lead to measurable and potentially long-lasting improvements in various social and emotional domains in the development of their students.

Summary

Principals are responsible for navigating non-academic barriers to learning and education reforms. Significant education reform depends on its successful realization by the school leadership (Ganon-Shilon & Schechter, 2019). School leaders need to know how to conceptualize SEL reforms' implementation to include their diverse student populations by overcoming traditional management styles and encouraging their school team to commit to the change. Transformational leadership traits and the knowledge of implementation science may help a principal provide leadership to SEL implementation that addresses all students' needs. A transformational school leader inspires their followers to focus on teaching, learning, and student social-emotional development. Implementation science is used to understand and find solutions to the causes of variation in EBP outcomes related to program implementation (Nordstrum et al., 2017). In this qualitative descriptive study, I explored how 10 principals provided leadership strategies towards SEL program implementation through equitable-oriented approaches. Principals' understanding of their role is significant for determining how and to what extent they implement reform in a specific school (Urick & Bowers, 2014). Chapter 2 includes a review of the literature on SEL, transformational leadership, and implementation science.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The problem at the focus of this study is disproportionate suspensions and disproportionate referrals of minority students to special education. Although the focus school district adopted an SEL curriculum and tasked principals with implementation to reduce disproportionality, these disparities persist despite their leadership support to implementation. Scant literature exists on the leadership behavior or actions needed from school principals charged with SEL implementation to meet students' needs (Allbright et al., 2019; Hernandez, 2019; Kennedy, 2019). In this qualitative descriptive study, I explored principals' leadership challenges and implementation fidelity regarding SEL program implementation to close the disparity gap in an urban school district in California.

A literature review familiarizes readers with the research literature used to inform a study. SEL is beneficial for children to acquire the skills to build relationships and manage conflicts. In this literature review, I discuss research showing SEL as an EBP and SEL benefits to a positive school climate. In the literature review, I examine principal leadership support to the successful implementation of SEL in schools through the transformational leadership conceptual lens that centers on how a leader engages with followers by empowering and aligning them to the organization's goal. I examined school principals' role as change agents through their leadership support to implement and integrate SEL programs from theory to practice using the implementation science framework as a guide.

Principals are the primary drivers of school improvements; they are responsible for providing the guidance and support necessary to implement effective SEL programming (Kendziora & Yoder, 2016). Principals' perceptions of their leadership for implementing SEL programs are vital to explore and delineate past and current literature focusing on SEL programs, transformational leadership, effective principal leadership, and implementation science approach. Low et al. (2016) contended that implementation science plays a role in SEL programs and suggested addressing the implementation gap. The difference in SEL research, school climate, positive youth development, and character education lends itself to the entire school community's mobilization to address a healthy child (Metz, & Easterling, 2016). Interest in educational reforms that encompass all students is at the forefront, and school-based strategies to support students' social and emotional learning are robust (McKown, 2019). The focus district adopted SEL programs to address a particular student group's disparate impact, receiving more frequent or different discipline than another group. There are practical reasons to choose SEL programs; they create predictable positive environments for all students, resulting in higher school attendance and lower suspension rates.

In Chapter 2, I highlight the bodies of literature with theoretical and empirical applicability to the study topic. I introduce related research that served as a model for this study, including SEL, transformational leadership skills, implementation science, and principal roles to improve school climate and academic achievements.

Literature Search Strategy

My literature search strategies included an online peer-review journal, a review of published manuscripts, and book searches. The following search terms were used: *social-emotional learning, transformational leadership, principal leadership, qualitative or experiences or perceptions or attitudes, implementation science, evidence-based programs, student social and emotional development,* and *school reform*. Databases searched included EBSCO, Education Source, Education Research Complete, ERIC, ProQuest, PsychINFO, and Google Scholar. Additional literature relating to the key search terms was located using bibliographies to find relevant journals and books. The following professional journals were also accessed: *Educational Leadership* and the National Education Association. Findings from the literature were synthesized and compared to connect the past and present research related to this study topic.

Conceptual Framework

Transformational leadership theory by Bass and Riggio (2006) and implementation science of EBPs by Domitrovich et al. (2008) provided the conceptual framework for this study. According to Yahaya and Ebrahim (2016), transformational leadership involves the effective communication of a vision to motivate employees for better organizational outcomes. Researchers have agreed that implementation science promotes the systematic uptake of EBPs such as SEL into routine practice by helping practitioners become increasingly skillful, consistent, and committed to using the intervention (Durlak, 2015). The literature showed links between SEL program outcomes in children's improved behaviors; using the two conceptual frameworks helped me to

explore principals' perceptions of their leadership strategies towards SEL program implementation through an equitable-oriented approach. Because the target audiences are school principals who have implemented SEL at their schools, these conceptual frameworks were vital in understanding the principals' perceptions.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variable

The literature section offers mounting evidence regarding school-based SEL programs' success in promoting student adjustment, academic progress, and life progress and how implementation science guides leadership practice in integrating SEL into the schools. Related literature was organized in topical headings.

Social-Emotional Learning

Researchers have shown the link between SEL programs and improved student outcomes. Schools might address all students' behavioral needs in a proactive manner rather than a reactive one. According to Weissberg et al. (2015), SEL is the skill set that children acquire to manage their emotions, maintain a positive relationship, achieve positive goals, and make responsible decisions. Weissberg et al. confirmed the most substantial benefits of SEL programs occur when the programs are assimilated into school functioning areas with school leadership support.

Greenberg et al. (2017) and Jones et al. (2019) argued that SEL programs could enhance children's self-confidence and increase their school engagement when implemented effectively. Therefore, SEL can lead to potentially long-lasting improvements in many areas of students' lives. Jones et al. (2017) and Lawson et al. (2019) described SEL as encompassing skills that help children with positive replacement

behaviors and the ability to use cognitive regulation skills when appropriate to problem solve, inhibit impulses, and make conscious choices. Providing leadership for SEL programs can only enhance the impact of SEL on children.

There is considerable overlap between a principal's role and the implementation of EBPs in schools in practice. Murray et al. (2015) argued that SEL terms' commonality is developing essential social-emotional skills and the impact of these skills on students' functioning and learning. SEL programs can help students with life skills that lessen the likelihood of any subsequent adjustment problems. Murray et al. (2015) argued that a school's expectation of playing an essential role in promoting children's and adolescents' development by reducing learning barriers and improving health is possible with SEL programs. School principals are in a position to be responsible for ensuring the efficacy of all school programs and their implementation, including SEL programs. In keeping with the demand for school accountability, the focus is on students' achievement and success, and SEL is an essential part of this process. Schonert-Reichl et al. (2015) explained that the framework for SEL has evolved, fostering social and emotional competencies in children and creating nurturing competency in people. Additionally, children's social interactions are positively affected.

Dodge et al. (2015) conducted a randomized control trial involving 702 participants in early-starting conduct problems until age 25 on SEL interventions' efficacy in preventing adult psychopathology and crime. The participants were assigned by cluster to a 10-year intervention to develop social competencies that would carry them throughout life. Dodge et al.'s findings revealed that SEL is a crucial component of

school reforms, and students who receive quality, evidence-based SEL instruction demonstrates improved academic performance and behaviors. The participants had a significantly lower probability of antisocial personality disorder and were less likely to engage in substance abuse (Dodge et al., 2015). Unlike other researchers who explored SEL intervention's effects, Dodge et al. followed students from kindergarten to early adulthood and across multiple stages of their development and included administrative records. Districts have focused on using SEL in an ongoing effort to address this reform movement. SEL can be infused into the school curriculum and taught at school (Goldberg et al., 2019). Schools that promote SEL competencies encourage a culture of positivity and allow students to develop the skills to increase their interpersonal relationships and academics. Schonert-Reichl et al. (2015) posited that a well-designed SEL intervention and inclusion in the school's curriculum, such as mindfulness, is vital to foster students' cognitive and social development. Mahoney et al. (2018) conducted a meta-analysis of SEL implementation and concluded that SEL is the process whereby children and adults acquire knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and control their emotions.

Researchers have established SEL's success related to academic achievement and positive behavior in children, in a meta-analysis study, by Korpershoek et al. (2016). Korpershoek et al. found that when intervention focuses on students' social and emotional development, it is useful in enhancing students' academic, behavioral, and social-emotional outcomes when infused throughout the curriculum. Therefore, SEL is a process that helps students succeed in school and life. Researchers such as the

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), a national non-profit organization, have been a leading SEL voice. CASEL identified five SEL competencies through which adults and children develop and navigate the world. Osher et al. (2016) noted that the skills were:

- Self-awareness: Being able to know one's strengths and limitations.

- Social awareness: The aptitude to understand and empathize with others.

- Relationship skills: The ability to work in teams and resolve conflicts

- Responsible decision-making: The ability to make ethical and safe choices

- Self-management: The skill to stay in control and persevere through the challenge (p 646).

According to Jones et al. (2019) and Ross and Tolan (2018), SEL competencies facilitate students' academic performances, positive and social relationships, reduce inappropriate behaviors, and improve their academics during school years, preparing them for post-school life. The reoccurring theme from the meta-analyses' studies of school-based SEL programs, regardless of the study variations, such as location and data sizes, is the positive effects SEL has on children (Korpershoek et al., 2016; Taylor et al., 2017). Day et al. (2016) agreed that school leaders influence student outcomes, and schools strive to educate their pupils by promoting positive values. In conclusion, schools provide opportunities for students to acquire the skills to help them contribute to society.

Social-Emotional Learning Programs

According to Yeager (2017), there are two ways to describe SEL programs: teaching the child the skills or competencies. This idea of revising the student's abilities is

known as the skills model. The second perspective in defining an SEL program is when the adults in the student's environment change the environment to be more supportive and less harmful. This approach is known as a climate model. The Illinois Board of Education, in partnership with their Children's Mental Health and CASEL, created five SEL competencies, including benchmarks, to support educators' using the standards at the different grade levels (Greenberg et al., 2017). The SEL Standards frameworks have been adapted across districts in the United States as SEL competencies are compatible with existing learning standards (Kress et al., 2004). Performance descriptors of the SEL framework help to create specific learning targets for students. Different schools and districts use various SEL programs. The focus district utilized Response to Intervention, Multi-Tiered System of Support, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, Panorama Education Survey, Professional Learning Community, coaching and counseling models, positive school climate, and explicit SEL instructions that align with the CASEL's competencies. Students have the opportunity to practice SEL skills within the context of safe and supportive environments.

Social-Emotional Learning in Schools

The idea of SEL in schools has been ongoing; Schonert-Reichl (2019) alluded to the fact that there is a renewed interest in seeing SEL integration in schools and that SEL has added to the education transformation in the 21st century. Osher et al. (2016) articulated that schools are dynamic and complex systems that affect students' social and emotional outcomes and play an essential role in developing healthy children by fostering their cognitive development and social and emotional development. Jones and Doolittle

(2017) touched on the benefits of SEL beyond school. They contended that schools and similar organized settings should play a role in supporting SEL skills in children by integrating SEL developments into the structures and practices of schools that are culturally aligned to the needs of students across settings to include homes and community.

Evidence from researchers suggests the success of school-based SEL. Eslava-Schmalbach et al. (2019) supported SEL's basic skills as necessary for students to take advantage of and schools to provide the conditions for students to be engaged in the learning process. Nathanson et al. (2016) contended that the SEL field offers schools a framework to develop student's social and emotional competencies, leading to improved academic achievement and other significant life outcomes. The recognition of SEL benefits in children's development has catapulted interest in SEL's and makes schools critical for promoting SEL (Durlak et al., 2015). SEL in school could lead to measurable and potentially long-lasting improvements in many areas of children's lives.

Jones and Doolittle (2017) agreed that SEL in school would nurture students and help them integrate their thinking, emotions, and behavior in ways that lead to positive school and life outcomes. Studies on SEL have demonstrated the importance of SEL for several essential findings in children and adulthood, such as confidence in themselves; increase in academic's engagement in school, along with their test scores and grades; and reduction of conduct behaviors while promoting desirable practices (Greenberg et al., 2017). Domitrovich et al. (2008); and Oberle et al. (2016) reinforced the idea of incorporating high-quality SEL programming into the day-to-day classroom and school

practices. Durlak et al. (2015) contended that the SEL program provides opportunities for children and adults to develop self and social awareness and regulation, responsible decision-making, and relationship management. SEL helps students improve their social and emotional skills, attitudes, behaviors, and academic performance (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Leading to fewer conduct problems, positive attitudes, and improve academics.

There is a growing need to support developing the skills and knowledge children need to become responsible members of society. In a national survey of teachers, Bridgeland et al. (2013) found that 95 percent of respondents agree that SEL is teachable, while 97 percent said that SEL could benefit students from all socioeconomic backgrounds making SEL a fundamental part of education (Oberle et al., 2016). According to Greenberg et al. (2017), SEL seems to be a strong predictor of children's positive outcomes. The attributes of SEL to children's development make schools significant to promote SEL programs and frameworks, which aligns with Reinke et al. (2011) that public schools could serve as the prime providers of mental health services for children. Meyers et al. (2015) advocated the need for a school-wide SEL approach. Sancassiani et al. (2015); Wigelsworth et al. (2016) argued that SEL could boost students' learning when integrated into the academic environment.

Multiple reviews have found that school staff can successfully implement and integrate SEL into their school routines and different educational contexts. Given the broad positive impacts of SEL, Domitrovich et al. (2008) thought that SEL programs should be part of routine educational practice. School-wide SEL entails resource

allocation and a supportive educational system that prioritizes students' social and emotional competence (Mart et al., 2015). Taylor et al. (2017) and Wigelsworth et al. (2016) argued for a better understanding of how EBPs such as SEL are implemented into the daily school routines to ensure consistent use of EBPs to support academic and behavioral benefits in children. School-wide SEL programming is most likely to be successful, effective, and sustainable when school leaders provide the necessary support is in place (Mart et al., 2015) and implemented by school staff (Domitrovich et al., 2008).

Khanal and Park (2016), one of the challenges facing a school principal is creating a pathway that allows for families and community involvement for basis program implementation. According to Anderson (2017), school-based SEL competence intervention is necessary as it is beneficial and suitable for all students regardless of their background. It is never too late to introduce SEL skills to children; no matter what stage of development, not exposing or teaching SEL skills may lead to stress or poor physical and mental health. (Jones & Doolittle, 2017). Therefore, principals can provide leadership support and activities to maximize SEL benefits in students.

In conclusion, all students can benefit and hone the essential academic and social skills, understanding, and dispositions that support active participation in schools and reduce negative behaviors when evidence-based social and emotional programs become infused into traditional teaching and learning.

Social-Emotional Learning as an Evidence-Based-Program

The evidence-based practice originated within the medical community, with patient care expectations being dependent on best practices (Mackey & Bassendowski,

2017). At the same time, Evidence-Based-Intervention (EBI) or Evidence-Based-Programs (EBP) in social sciences relies on a combination of available research and client characteristics (Smolkowski et al., 2019). EBIs are part of the federal and state agencies' accountability requirements, leading to schools implementing SEL interventions more frequently than in the past (Wanless et al., 2015). Evidence-based interventions are research-based interventions with a strong empirical basis that have demonstrated positive outcomes over time used in schools to address students' related issues such as disruptive behavior in the classroom and academic interventions (Elias, 2019). Horner et al. (2017) establish clear defining standards of evidence-based and implementation during the adoption of these programs by determining expected outcomes, what will be involved, and the level of school personnel involvement. Research has proven SEL's effectiveness as an intervention that promotes children's social and emotional well-being, the ability to solve problems and maintain a positive relationship with others (McKevitt, 2012). Evidence shows that SEL has demonstrated to be useful as an intervention and a review of the literature supports the claim.

To support EBP implementation across the system requires leaders to enhance activities to promote the uptake of such intervention; Bosworth et al. (2018) argued that leadership commitment and guidance are vital to universal prevention within a school organization. For an intervention to be evidence-based, it must adhere to the fidelity principle and shown to be effective over time (Radatz, & Wright, 2016). According to Jones et al. (2019), SEL has proven effective in helping children develop their social-emotional competencies and skills, making SEL an EBP.

Social-Emotional Learning and School Climate

School climate can include shared beliefs that shape the interconnected experiences between students and adults within the perimeters of acceptable behaviors and norms. There is not an agreed-upon universal definition for school climate (Thapa et al., 2013). Hough et al. (2017) agreed that there is a link between school climate and SEL. A positive school climate leads to higher student academic achievements, less aggression, a sense of belonging, and bully prevention, making school-based programs a goal to promote children's social-emotional competencies. Minckler (2014) argued that school leaders need to establish a school climate of respect, care, and support to foster more significant organizational growth and improve outcomes by creating the time and space for staff to work together and establish expectations for the work. Bosworth et al. (2018) found school leadership's importance in changing and maintaining a school climate, which mediates negative behaviors and influences positive school climate changes. As such, it helps leaders establish a school climate that supports the success of all students.

The SEL process is about creating a school and classroom community that is caring, supportive, and responsive to students' needs (Schonert-Reichl, 2019). Quality SEL programs attempt to establish a positive school climate, a term that refers to a sense of safety, relationships, teaching and learning, institutional environment, and school improvement process (Thapa et al., 2013). According to Allen et al. (2015), one contributing factor to the school climate is a transformational leader. Fraise and Brooks (2015) argued that educational leaders should define their school climate and values to

build upon the leadership approach that embraces the unique culture that their students and staff bring. McCarley et al. (2016) posited that a positive school climate is critical to a principal's success; subsequently, their action predicts the school climate. Wang and Degol (2015) agree that school climates are not limited to academics. However, it connects all that makes for school experiences, including school-community relationships, the teaching and learning process, and the entire school organization. They continued that school principals could support school climate through trust-building and tapping into staff individual needs and desires. Martinez (2016) asserts that students' social and emotional functioning, when addressed, leads to academic achievement, improvement in the school environment, and experiences. Previous literature provides evidence on participant's behaviors and how it facilitates understanding of program outcomes. Dusenbury et al. (2015) considered the participants' influence on implementation. They concluded that proper execution of an evidence-based intervention could positively change students' developmental trajectories across various academic, behavioral, and school communities when the quality of delivery, adaptation, and participants' behaviors are in place.

One of SEL requisites as an effective intervention and skill development can only occur in a supportive environment that is safe and well managed. Tichnor-Wagner et al. (2016) compared learning cultures between highly effective and less effective high schools in the United States. Tichnor-Wagner et al. concluded that highly effective schools are influential in their schools' learning cultures. Collaboration on instruction, a positive and supportive work environment that promotes individual and collective

efficacy, and high expectations for teachers and students results in a positive school environment. There is an association between positive school climate and transformational leadership; Allen et al. (2015) concluded that school principals could impact school climate by applying transformational leadership traits. Wang and Degol (2015) posit that school climate is malleable to school-based intervention by altering the school environment to improve student outcomes. Schonert-Reichl (2019) espoused that effective SEL interventions and skill development should happen in an environment that is safe, caring, supportive, participatory, and well managed. An environment that supports students' growth and provides opportunities for practicing the skills (p 227). According to Yeager (2017), effective SEL programs help connect high school-age students' mindset within the school environment, thereby feeling respected and part of the group.

Social-Emotional Learning and Leadership

A leader is to lead their team members to achieve a particular objective by motivating them to work better. Maizan et al. (2019) pointed out the lack of leadership activities in an organization and how essential the leadership traits are to their employees' abilities to perform their jobs. Martin (2016) suggested that leaders provide motivation, vision, and directions by developing their followers' potentials, which brings about substantial change in the organization. Thus, leaders help to realize the vision by garnering their team support. By the nature of their roles as principals, they are in ideal positions to provide support and leadership for school improvement efforts. The presence of a supportive principal is vital. Principals require a complex set of skills in performing

their functions as school leaders (Hitt & Tucker, 2016). There are correlations between high principal support and high-quality implementation of intervention programs; principals play a critical role in creating supportive policies and providing funding and time to integrate SEL into its core functions (Oberle et al., 2016). Providing leadership for SEL implementation will help principals build upon a vision of teaching and learning that prioritizes student and adult SEL competencies.

Strong principal support and guidance are related to the fidelity of implementing an SEL practice, and they play a significant role in education. Mahoney et al. (2018) demonstrated a need to understand approaches to SEL implementation. Researchers argued that proper administration and instructional leadership must be present to gain positive student outcomes (Dolph, 2017; Oberle et al., 2016). Maizan et al. (2019) alluded that a good leader leadership style affects an employee's efficiency in distinct ways as they can influence job output by their personality and relatability. School leaders are compelling influencers on student outcomes, such as achievements (McIntosh et al., 2016). Aarons et al. (2016) suggested a need to identify sustainment factors that are not evident at the initial implementation process that can lead to improvements during the implementation process and concluded that engaging strong leadership across the system may be critical for effective implementation and sustainment. Effective SEL implementation may reduce time spent on classroom management and allow more time for teaching and learning.

Principal as a Change Agent

School principals fuel real school transformation that disrupts standard operating procedures and brings about positive change. Al Khajeh (2018) evaluated the overlapping leadership behaviors in different leadership styles and noted that a leader's practice positively and negatively impacts an organization's performance. Al Khajeh suggested that leadership in an organization is crucial in creating a vision and mission and establishing organizational objectives. According to Kaume-Mwinzi (2016), principals are the primary agents of change in schools. Their effectiveness as leaders plays a crucial role in improving student achievement by making students the focus. A school principal, directly and indirectly, impacts students' performance; additionally, they exert the most considerable influence in the school organization (Khanal & Park, 2016). Therefore, principals should align their leadership behaviors to provide a positive and nurturing environment for all students.

Part of a school leader's role is their effects on the learning environment through teachers' direct influence in improving teacher quality and student achievement (Khanal, 2018; Minckler, 2014). There is an expectation for principals to provide learning resources, manage the learning process, and oversee programs and initiatives. Fullan (2014) postulates that influential school leaders are the key to large-scale sustainable education reform. Accordingly, school principals, given all the responsibilities and expectations, must share the organization's vision and develop new skills and knowledge to impact student achievement. They are the key determinants of student achievement

(Dutta & Sahney, 2016). Therefore, principal support is key to in adoption and implementation of a program at their schools.

Transformational Leadership

According to Sebastian et al. (2019), transformational leadership definition in educational research is different from the transformational leadership definition associated with management business research. Boer et al. (2016) contended that the transformational leadership style is most effective among other leadership approaches. Boer et al. continued that school leaders who practice this leadership style model the charisma to influence their followers by providing individual attention as needed. The followers, in turn, show unwavering loyalty to the organizational mission. Day et al. (2016), successful principals recognize the importance of creating a school community where staff and teachers felt inspired to realize the school vision of academic success for all students based on safety, cooperative spirit, and fruitful interactions with others. They are responsive to their teachers by drawing on their transformational leadership traits.

Principals are crucial; they set the conditions for transformative practice and change by inspiring their teachers McCarley et al. (2016). A principal who can successfully implement a transformational leadership style will positively impact the staff and the school community (Kaume-Mwinzi, 2016, p. 86). Allen et al. (2015) agreed that principals support school improvement success with transformational leadership skills. Anderson (2017) contended that transformational leaders and their employees work towards their organization's common good. According to Burns (1978), transformational leadership is a relational and ethical process of people together, attempting to accomplish

positive change as they value their followers to become leaders themselves. Bass (2000) defines transformational leadership as being constructed of four dimensions: *idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation,* and *individualized consideration.*

Bass and Riggio (2006); Niessen, Mäder et al. (2017) referred to transformational leadership with idealized influence as a leader admired, respected, and trusted by the followers who consider employees' needs over their own. An idealized leader is value-driven and a role model for their followers. An inspirational-motivational leader talks about what needs to transpire with the confidence of target attainment. They act in ways that motivate and inspire those around them by providing meaning and challenge to their followers' (p 6). The third subcomponent of transformational leadership, defined as intellectual stimulation, occurs when leaders "stimulate their followers' efforts to be innovative and inspire them to question assumptions, reframing problems, and approaching old situations in new ways" (Bass & Riggio, 2006, p.7). Finally, Individualized Consideration contributes to Transformational leadership behaviors characterized by the leaders paying "special attention to their follower's needs for achievement and growth by acting as a coach or mentor" (Bass & Riggio, 2006, p 7).

Researchers have established transformational leadership as having significant relationships with their followers. Anderson (2017) found that transformational leaders can generate a firm commitment from their followers through positive relationships; this makes such leaders a change agent. Fullan (2014) argued that the change agent involves

getting buy-ins of others who might not like one's ideas. Fullan (2014) offers

practitioners the following guidelines to understand transformation as noted:

- The ability of a leader to be selective on people to innovate, as not everyone can

  unify

- A change agent as a leader can lead others to commit to new ways through self-

  assessment.

- I appreciate the implementation dip, plan accordingly for the evitable that comes

  with change, or trying something new.

- Redefine resistance. Successful leaders do not mind when naysayers rock the

  boat. Doubters sometimes have essential points.

- Change comes at a price; it is about transforming culture, changing what people in

  the organization have come to know and value, and working together to

  accomplish it. Bringing about change leads to significant, lasting change.

- Transformation begins with complexity; therefore, a change agent is one with the

  willingness to withstand the day-day hard work (pp 17-18).

Differences persist when comparing other leadership styles. Ghasabeh and

Provitera (2017) contended that instructional leadership emphasizes a hierarchical model

with the principal as the focus and primary source of educational expertise, unlike the

transformational leadership model built on a collaborative culture. Transformational

leaders remain of crucial importance for the continued improvement of education.

Ghasabeh and Provitera (2017) argued that transformational leaders use inspirational

motivation to inspire their staff, leading to higher expectations for their organization.

Sebastian et al. (2019) compared the importance of leadership style to school performance and concluded that transformational leadership inspires followers to achieve unexpected or remarkable results. Transformational leaders motivate their followers to create a common goal, courage, confidence, and willingness to make sacrifices for the greater good, fostering social change by becoming a transformational leader.

A transformational leader can positively affect subordinates' motivation and performance by providing freedom for followers to investigate new ideas and knowledge (Ghasabeh & Provitera, 2017; Kaume-Mwinzi, 2016). Al Khajeh (2018) alluded to the importance of leadership styles and recommended that organizations focus on transformational leadership traits because it enhances organizational performance. Al Khajeh continued that a transformational leader is a bridge between followers to achieving organizational goals and can influence principal effectiveness and support for any program implementation. Principals who practice transformational leadership style can be considered agents of change whereby they have great potential to produce excellent performance in their schools by acknowledging followers' skills and capabilities. After all, they can influence, motivate, and stimulate their teaching and non-teaching staff because they practice the four transformational leadership qualities: idealized influence, individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, and inspirational motivation. As Anderson (2017) posits, principals who exhibit transformational leadership are vital to school improvement initiatives and promoting change (p 6). It is safe to assume that school leaders can develop their followers and move their organization forward under the premise of transformational leadership traits.

Implementation Science

Merriam-Webster defined implementation as the process of making something active or productive (Merriam-Webster, n. d.). Over the years, different schools have implemented various EBPs. Gottfredson and Gottfredson (2001) alluded that evidence exists that schools are not necessarily achieving desired results because they are failing to put sufficient effort into implementing initiatives systematically or cohesively. Implementation of an EBP is the process of using research-proven ideas to attain needed change. Kendziora and Yoder (2016) demonstrated that SEL implementation is essential as higher implementation levels are associated with students' improvements. McIntosh et al. (2016) found that administrative support is a top factor influencing the sustainability of a school-wide initiative such as SEL. Therefore, the time is right to translate the knowledge from research about social and emotional learning into action by making SEL relevant sustainable at every level. Abry et al. (2017) contended that EBPs are affected by the implementation process. Schools adopt intervention programs such as SEL with little understanding of the program components that have the most considerable leverage for improving targeted outcomes. Horner et al. (2017) concluded that the benefit of any intervention programs is dependent on how administrators incorporated the practices within their schools by attending carefully to the implementation's operation as the outcome is affected by it. Domitrovich et al. (2017) posited that if the application of SEL is understood, there is a better chance to support dissemination.

A correlation exists between implementation outcome and intervention outcome. According to Hargreaves and Ainscow (2015), implementing evidence-based social and

emotional learning programs with fidelity is challenging and requires setting clear expectations. Successful implementation is dependent on a practitioner's understanding of the execution and how to improve the process. It is the process that turns proposals into actions to accomplish strategic objectives and goals. In their study of introduction to implementation science, Smolkowski et al. (2019) contended that implementation science is about supporting evidence-based intervention and practices by offering strategies in bridging the research-practice gap. Metz et al. (2015) agree that the implementation process is critical in measuring intervention success and that leadership matters in minimizing ineffective implementation.

Implementation framework adoption is beneficial for practitioners and organizations to define leadership capacity and program components for successful implementation; understanding a principal's perceptions of leadership for implementing SEL programs is vital as they oversee every aspect of their school program. Horner et al. (2017) claimed that practitioners should establish clear defining standards of evidence-based initiatives such as SEL and implementation during the adoption of these programs by determining expected outcomes, the level of involvement, what they look like, and the school level personnel involvement. Blanchard et al. (2017) highlighted several contextual factors, like principal leadership, staff attitudes toward the intervention, and the availability of resources that impact implementation science. Wanless et al. (2015) examined the state of schools, teachers, and implementation challenges before implementing an intervention that helps determine the challenges they may encounter and the likelihood of implementation fidelity. Doing so helps to maximize positive outcomes.

There are several frameworks that practitioners can use to guide SEL implementation. Process models, determinant frameworks, classic theories, implementation theories, and evaluation frameworks were the five categories of approaches to implementation science proposed by Nilsen (2015). Dane and Schneider (1998) introduced the five aspects of the Implementation Process and were later built upon by Low et al. (2016). These aspects of the implementation process included fidelity, dosage, quality, participant responsiveness, and program differentiation. Low et al. (2016) clarified "Fidelity" as adherence to the original program, "Dosage" refers to the number of sessions an intervention is implemented, including duration and frequency. Participant responsiveness is an indication of the participants' level of response to the program. Quality of program implementation determines if the intervention is applied correctly, and program differentiation is benchmark checks to ensure intervention recipients received only planned interventions.

Another implementation process is CASEL's SEL implementation and sustainability process model. Their model is a 10-step implementation plan customized in three phases: (a) readiness, (b) planning, and (c) implementation. This model emphasizes administrative leadership's importance in setting organizational vision and generating SEL support throughout the school or district. The CASEL model recommends a program development time frame of three to 5 years from inception to implementation. Phase one involves two steps where leadership commits to school-wide SEL and forms a steering committee. Phase two consists of four stages: developing an SEL vision, conducting a needs assessment, developing an action plan, and selecting an evidence-

based SEL program. Phase three comprises of the final four steps; initial staff development conducted, pilot programs are launched and reviewed, the school-wide program initiated, and program adjustments and improvements made (CASEL, 2008). This model has been widely disseminated through CASEL's website and its collaborative work with school districts nationwide.

While the aspects of implementation delineated above offer valuable insight into understanding the implementation process's various facets, the CASEL's model guided the interpretation of the principals' perceptions of their leadership to SEL implementation to answer the research questions.

Summary and Conclusions

Using SEL to help create safe, caring, connected, participatory, and responsive schools is a complex, ongoing process that will involve somewhat different considerations, needs, and goals for every school. Strong transformational leadership will be needed to address what is attainable to encourage the larger-scale adoption of SEL's EBP to reach more students. According to Khanal (2018), the school principal plays the central role in establishing and bringing the stakeholders together as the school leadership is a web of relationships and not situated in the principal alone. Smolkowski et al. (2019) alluded that implementation science addresses the barriers to evidence-based practices' uptake and sustainability. They recommended assessing program implementation as a necessity to improve outcomes. Therefore, implementation science guided the exploration of participants' perceptions of their leadership strategies towards SEL program implementation through an equitable-oriented approach.

In the next chapter, I outlined the research method, including data sampling, ethical procedures, data collection techniques, analysis, and strategies to establish trust and protect participants.

Chapter 3: Research Method

In this qualitative descriptive study, I explored principals' leadership strategies and challenges regarding SEL program implementation to close the disparity gap in an urban school district in California. To accomplish this purpose, I investigated leadership behaviors the principals in this study describe as necessary to implement SEL programs in their schools, including any barriers or changes they perceive in their roles during the implementation process. The topics chosen for qualitative research are often individual and significant, and this kind of research typically begins with a concern, problem, or question a researcher has regarding a specific topic (Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Qualitative research allows for additional insight into the phenomena around the human experience, anchored on the appreciation of the sociological constructed nature of reality, giving meaning to human behavior, attitudes, actions, situations, and perspectives (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The methodology for this study was a qualitative descriptive design using semi-structured, open-ended, audio-taped interview techniques. This methodology helps a researcher to focus on describing participants' perspectives or their views.

In this chapter, I describe the purpose, research design, and rationale. I also outline the study's context, participant selection, data collection method, and data analysis. Finally, I address ethical considerations, integrity, trustworthiness, my role as a researcher, reflexivity, and a summary.

Research Design and Rationale

The two research questions guiding this study were:

RQ1: What leadership behaviors do principals describe as necessary to implement SEL programs in their schools?

RQ2: What challenges do principals encounter during SEL program implementation?

Few studies have been conducted to investigate how school leaders provide leadership in meeting diverse learners' needs (Kennedy, 2019). Therefore, this qualitative descriptive study was conducted to explore principals' perceptions.

Since its formalization in the 1960s, the use of qualitative research has grown significantly (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Sanjari et al. (2014) alluded that researchers use methods that result in text production rather than numerical output in qualitative studies. The qualitative research approach is used to capture the complexity of participants' understanding and thoughts about a program (Vaughn & Turner, 2016). Researchers agree that qualitative studies seek to shed light on less observable meanings and share similarities in exploring what, why, and how questions (Tuffour, 2017). According to Sanjari et al. (2014), qualitative research can be descriptive (interpretive) research, used to explain, clarify, and elaborate on the meanings of various aspects of the human life experience. Tuffour (2017) argued that qualitative research could enable a researcher to understand participants' perspectives. The qualitative approach allows for the nuances of being human. People are like snowflakes: Every person is different. While numerical data or quantitative study can capture a population's habits and trends, it does not describe the human element. Qualitative researchers collect "empirical materials bearing on the question and then analyze and write about those materials" (Denzin &

Lincoln, 2013, p. 28). Ravitch and Carl (2016) contended that the qualitative research method is just as important as quantitative research because it digs deeper into the human experience and accepts the complexity of that experience while being sensitive to overgeneralizations that quantitative analysis can sometimes make.

This study's context is based on a qualitative descriptive design using semi-structured audio-recorded interviews with participants, not to be confused with descriptive phenomenological research. Willis et al. (2016) contended the differences between qualitative descriptive and descriptive phenomenological approaches are in their purposes, approach to the research question, data analysis, and findings. Qualitative description design is more relevant in health care research but has crossed over to social science fields (Bradshaw et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2017). Qualitative description is ideal for descriptive studies to gain insight from the participants about their perceptions. Kim et al. (2017) contended that a qualitative descriptive approach's variability traits are desirable for obtaining rich data to understand a phenomenon. With the qualitative descriptive method, a researcher starts by asking the question; researchers seek to explore, analyze, and describe an experience from the perspective of those who experienced it and, at the same time, maintain a near picture of the study (Bradshaw et al., 2017; Matua & Van Der Wal, 2015). The qualitative design approach provides the target audience's range of behavior and perceptions of the study topics and allows participants to share their individual stories (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

According to Bradshaw et al. (2017), a qualitative descriptive design is applicable when information is required directly from those experiencing the phenomenon under

investigation. In this study, I sought out principal participants' perceptions of their leadership to implement SEL programs. Nassaji (2015) postulated that descriptive research design helps describe a phenomenon and its characteristics. In this method of research, data from semi-structured interviews with the participants are analyzed by identifying and interpreting relevant themes and concepts. In other words, a qualitative descriptive approach stresses the uniqueness of each individual's experiences.

I considered other qualitative methodologies for this study, such as case study, ethnography, grounded theory, narrative, and phenomenology but viewed them as unsuitable. The case study method requires observations of events or individuals. Also, data sources necessitate multiple sources and instrumentation (Yin, 2017); therefore, it would not be appropriate for this study. The ethnography methodology is another qualitative approach I considered. Ethnography requires immersion into a setting to learn the culture and experience firsthand and for as long as it takes rather than relying on interviews or surveys. This method is rooted in cultural anthropology (Burkholder et al., 2016). Ethnography was not an appropriate methodology for this study because the participants were not an entire cultural group.

The grounded theory method was not appropriate to this research because it builds on a particular, prescribed constellation of procedures and techniques (Creswell & Poth, 2017). In grounded theory research, researchers use interviews and existing documents to develop a concept based on the data; they recommended sample sizes are 20 to 30 participants. In this study, I sought to explore principals' perceptions of the expectation of their leadership to implement SEL. The narrative method relies on accounts of individual

experience (Ravitch & Carl, 2016), which made it unsuitable for this research. The phenomenological techniques were not appropriate for this study because the research questions were not focused on studying an individual's lived experience. Bradshaw et al. (2017) alluded that a qualitative descriptive design method provides a detailed description of a phenomenon from those experiencing it, thereby offering unique opportunities to gain insight and learn how they see the world. Thus, this study's qualitative descriptive approach was suitable to answer the research questions to understand principals' perceptions of their leadership experiences for implementing SEL in their schools.

Role of the Researcher

The central role of a researcher as the primary instrument, the interactive relationship between a researcher and participants, and the meaning-making focus of qualitative researchers allow researchers the opportunity to delve into the research process, and experience life from another's perspective. According to Alase (2017), the qualitative methodology allows a researcher to apply their interpersonal and subjectivity skills into their research exploratory process and allows the participants to express themselves and their lived experiences. Sanjari et al. (2014) stated that a qualitative researcher's main task is to transform life experiences into words while being cautious against data flaws that can occur through self-reflection and self-monitoring. As a qualitative researcher, my responsibility was to attempt to access and understand the study participants' thoughts and feelings by analyzing the information they provided. Babbie (2017) suggested using interview techniques that allow for probing to elicit an

elaboration on an ambiguous answer. Doing so enabled me to make meaning of participants' responses. During the interviews, I established trust and reciprocity with the participants. Such a rapport brings the added assurance of confidentiality and anonymity for the participant and allows the participant to answer interview questions openly.

As I searched for an understanding of the principals' perceptions of their leadership during the implementation of SEL at their various schools, I acknowledged my prior and current experiences with the school district. I have been the director of special education since July 2019. From July 2015 to June 2019, I served as the director of student support services at the focus district. In that role, I was part of a district-level stakeholder member who brought SEL initiatives to the district schools, working closely with the administrators and their staff to develop a plan for implementing social-emotional programs. This personal experience shaped my perceptions of implementing SEL programs.

Throughout the study, I kept a reflexive journal to keep a critical account of the research process and monitor my own bias. Being thoughtful helped to control my preconceptions and helped me be less assumptive of participants' responses. Babbie (2017) alluded to the importance of reflectivity throughout a study to increase a researcher's focus on self-knowledge and monitor and minimize their biases and personal experiences. I engaged in active listening and kept track of time while staying focused and responding to shifts in participants' energy. As a current employee of the focus school district, there was a possibility of ethical issues arising. I declared no incentive for participation in this study, nor were participants pressured to represent answers they

thought I might want to hear; finally, I protected participants' identities from coercion or harm.

Methodology

Qualitative research espouses a relationship between a researcher and participants. This qualitative inquiry seeks to discover and describe in narrative people's everyday lives and what their actions mean to them (Erickson, 2011, p. 43). I conducted this qualitative descriptive research of the principals who have implemented SEL at their schools.

Participant Selection

Researchers argued that human participants are the instrument of choice for naturalistic research, Sanjari et al. (2014). Bradshaw et al. (2017) contended that convenience and purposive sampling techniques could reflect qualitative descriptive studies. Palinkas et al. (2015) argued that purposeful sampling is the go-to in qualitative research to identify and select information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest. Palinkas et al. (2015) continued that to increase the credibility of results, purposeful sampling allows for identifying and selecting participants who are exceptionally knowledgeable about the phenomenon of interest. Purposeful sampling will be used in participants' selection to understand how principals provide leadership toward SEL program implementation. Purposive sampling offers a range of participants whose qualities or experiences will contribute to this study (Bradshaw et al., 2017, p. 3). Morsa et al. (2018) stated that purposive sampling allows for a targeted selection strategy based on participants' criteria. Purposeful sampling as a credibility tool enables selecting

participants based on the study intent, knowledge, experience, and other eligibility criteria to help answer the research. As with all research, sampling techniques discussed for this study reflected the research design and questions. The study participants' commonality is that they are active school principals who have implemented SEL at their different schools.

Qualitative researchers need tools to evaluate sample size. Babbie (2017) concluded that the sample size rules are not specific; it is up to a researcher to determine the number of participants needed for a study. Malterud et al. (2016) posited that tools to guide sample size should not rely on procedures from a specific analysis method, but the more extensive information power the sample holds, the lower number needed. Malterud et al. (2016) continued that a study with robust and clear communication between researchers and participants requires fewer participants to offer sufficient information. Alase (2017) recommended that homogenous participants gauge and understand the participants' perceptions of their lived experiences and alluded that sample size of qualitative interpretative research approaches can be between two and twenty. Thus, these proposed participants included ten middle and high school principals from the focus district. The sample size of ten is adequate to capture rich data for this study since the focus district only operates eight schools.

The district website provided access to participants' contact information. An introductory email was sent to the potential participants' (see appendix A and B) to obtain informed consent. The email invitation was followed by a reminder phone call a week later to propose participants who did not respond to the request. Babbie (2017) argued

that getting participant informed consent allows for the research's quality and integrity. Therefore, participants were required to give their informed consent in writing as mandated by Walden University Institutional Review (IRB).

Instrumentation

Researchers agree that participants' interviews are frequently used as data collection tools in qualitative research (Ahabi & Anozie, 2017; Kim et al., 2017; Wu et al., 2016). Ahabi and Anozie (2017) described interview process as a form of consultation whereby a researcher seeks to know an issue as opinionated by the person answering. According to Kim et al. (2017), a qualitative interview is an interactive exchange of dialogue between two or more participants, both face-to-face or through audio. Interviews allow one person to asks questions of another. The researcher has a general plan of inquiry to gather information from participants. Using the interview data approach keeps the participants' voices present in the analysis and searches for the meaning constructed from their narratives.

For this study, semi-structured interviews via Goggle Meet were the instrument of choice. The interview questions were developed and informed by the related literature to facilitate this study's research questions. (see Appendix D). I scheduled the interview sessions based on participants' accessibility. The interviews took place virtually at the convenience of each participant's using the preset questions. See Appendix D. The interview questions were exact and were presented in a set sequence and in a set manner to the participants to ensure no variation between interviews. Using this approach

allowed access to the participants and the depth of knowledge from the descriptive data gathered.

Qualitative data eventually reaches a point of saturation when adding more participants to the study does not obtain additional perspectives or information (Burkholder et al., 2016). One can say there is a point of diminishing return with larger samples, as it leads to more data but does not necessarily lead to more information.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

The data sources are localized to the participant's communities and involve a semi-structured interview. Wu et al. (2016) explained that purposeful sampling is about which participants and settings will give the most fruitful information for the research questions. A purposeful criterion sampling strategy helps obtain the most productive possible source of information to answer the research questions. Therefore, this study's sample number was 10 middle to high school principals who have implemented SEL programs at their various schools in the school district. I obtained participants' contact information through the district website to invite participants to participate in the study and obtain informed consent. See Appendix A and B.

There are various means of collecting qualitative data. Qualitative research allows for data collection by focusing on multifaceted interviews and narratives to describe the participant's experiences (Sanjari et al., 2014). As Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) noted, qualitative data provides a detailed description of a phenomenon situated and embedded in local contexts (p. 20). Bengtsson (2016) contended that regardless of data collection strategies used for research, the collection method affects analysis depth. A

data collection source for this qualitative study includes interviews that consist of a series of questions focused on the topics to answer the research questions. I explored participants' perceptions using semi-structured interviews based on a loose structure comprised of open-ended questions.

Burkholder et al. (2016) established that a qualitative interview is about soliciting information. The interview process was a total of an hour, consisting of open-ended questions (see Appendix D) to determine principals' perspectives and leadership strategies in implementing social-emotional programs. This study data collected during phone interviews would be stored for up to 5 years on a password-protected computer and backed up to a cloud-based server. Sanjari et al. (2014) suggested that data collection strategies need to be overt and recorded. The participants' interviews were digitally recorded and subsequently transcribed, coded, and analyzed. VanderStoep and Johnston (2009) recommended closing the interview process as it offers a chance to affirm participants' contributions to the research. At the end of each interview session, I debriefed each participant for any additional comments or questions regarding the process. I also explained the process of what happens with the data collected and advised of a follow-up call to ensure that the interview summary capitulates their view and for validation.

Data Analysis Plan

Studies are meaningless if they are not analyzed to produce findings. Bengtsson (2016) posited that qualitative data analysis aims to describe, explain, and interpret qualitative patterns using words, numbers, matrices, pictures, sounds, or other

representation forms by allowing the researcher to elicit information from the data collected in making conclusions. Levitt (2018) contended that qualitative data sets were contextualized in descriptions and, therefore, engages data sets in intensive analysis for open-ended discovery of participants' experiences. Qualitative research faces difficulties in determining what is worth examining and what tool to use in data management (Vaughn & Turner, 2016), what counts as a theme or pattern, and how to identify themes. Therefore, data analysis determines the meaning of gathered materials about this study's purpose.

Miles et al. (2014) ascertained that code is the smallest point of meaning assigned to an excerpt of text in qualitative data, and a category is a word /phrase to describe a group of codes. Vaughn and Turner (2016) suggested using qualitative analysis strategies to identify categories by statistically grouping high frequently used words or concepts, map relationships, and set exclusion criteria by limiting data that is helpful to the study. Qualitative codes are essence capturing and essential elements of the research story; when clustered together according to similarity and regularity, the ideas facilitate the development of categories and analyze their connections (Miles et al., 2014). Bengtsson (2016) stated that regardless of the analysis method used, the result is to reduce the volume of the text collected, identify, and group categories, which help make sense of the data. For this study, the thematic analysis approach helped examined the principals' responses to the interview questions and gain insight into how they provided leadership for implementing SEL programs at their schools. According to Javadi and Zarea (2016), thematic analysis is an approach used to extract meaning and concepts from data by

pinpointing, examining, and recording patterns (themes). Thematic analysis is flexible,

allowing the researcher to focus on the data in different ways; and is not dependent on a

theoretical framework; instead, it helps a researcher identify, analyze, report, and

interpret patterns (Braun et al., 2016). The thematic analysis allows the researcher to

identified and abstract themes during data analysis. The ability to generate ideas and

make sense of data depends on researchers' closeness to data through immersion.

Braun et al. (2016) proposed six phases to thematic analysis that guides the study:

Step 1: The researcher familiarizes herself with the data through reading and

rereading the responses from the interviews that were audio-recorded and transcribed

verbatim. The essence is to make notes during the process, such as writing comments of

observations. Notations should prompt how the participants interpret and make sense of

their experiences. Step 2: According to Javadi and Zarea (2016), the next step is to

generate the initial codes. Codes are the smaller units of analysis that capture potential

relevance to the research questions; it is the building blocks of themes. The open code

approach will be applied to classify and label concepts. Different methods to achieve

code could be using computer software or cards to write down the transcript's summary

and location. Thomas (2017) recommended reading through the data repeatedly during

this process to determine concepts and how they relate. The cluster codes form the theme.

Step 3: Searching for themes: This phase allows for code mapping to create an

overarching theme. Step 4: Reviewing Potential Themes. This stage is about quality

checking involving refining ideas and checking it against collected extracts of the data to

determine if it works with the ongoing theme. Step 5: is about defining and naming

themes through dataset refinement and then compare across all data sets. Step 6 is the final analyzing stage for the report to be produced. This phase of the analysis is an indication that the researcher has a good set of themes (Javadi & Zarea, 2016). Using Braum and Clarke's approach will systematically analyze the coded information by arranging the data according to the thematic content while maintaining constant vigilance for atypical responses that may not align with the emerging thematic relations.

The NVivo software helped organize codes and analyze the data for this study and examine potential patterns or themes that emerged. I reviewed the research findings from participants' transcripts by engaging in a circular process of searching for and identifying emerging patterns and organizing the ideas into categories and themes. I utilized an open coding process to classify the textual data in this study, including transcripts from interviews, reflective notes, and follow-up questions. I read through each transcript before assigning preliminary codes. After a second comprehensive reading of the data, I tested and refined and identified overarching codes and sub codes. The new categories were grouped into related ideas to create a theme.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Qualitative studies do not use instruments with established metrics about validity and reliability; instead, qualitative studies use human participants. The researcher is the instrument; this study was not an exception. Multiple studies agree that credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability make qualitative study findings trustworthy (Wu et al., 2016). This study assures readers and future interested parties within and outside the academic environments of this study's trustworthiness by

discussing the multiple measures used in establishing the four components of trustworthiness.

Credibility

Credibility focuses on whether a study projects trueness and accuracy to the participant's experiences in the study. This study's primary data source added credibility as data were collected firsthand by the researcher directly from the participants who lived the experiences. I continually reviewed and dissected the data to ensure accurate conveyance and interpretation of participant's responses. Data transcripts were sent to participants before analysis and interpretation to reconfirm their interview responses. I compared data against the participants' SEL implementation plans, training agendas to achieve triangulation.

 Transferability

Being transparent as a researcher requires thoroughly documenting the research procedures so others can review, understand, and benefit from the findings. Transferability is how the qualitative researcher demonstrates that the research study's findings apply to other contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Levitt (2018) discussed transparency in qualitative research by having the researcher communicate their perspectives and influence upon the research process. For this study, I used thick descriptions by providing a detailed account of the experiences during data collection to show that the research study's findings could become applicable to different settings, circumstances, and situations. I established a non-hierarchical relationship between

participants, ensuring that participants play an active role in constructing and validating the data outcome.

Dependability

Consistency across the research process (methods, data, findings, and interpretation) ensures dependability given qualitative research's interpretive nature. According to VanderStoep and Johnston (2009), a qualitative descriptive approach allows for the generalization of the study findings through inductive analysis of the interview texts. Semi-structured interviews allowed for some objectivity in learning perceptions of the principals. Seitz (2016) suggested making sure that the connection is stable, repeating the questions, and slowing down during the data collection process. Checking and asking participants to evaluate the interpretations and explanations pulled from the data ensures accuracy. Yin (2017) suggested that qualitative researchers consider three critical objectives, (a) transparency, (b) methodic-ness, and (c) adherence to evidence. Methodic-ness requires a researcher to follow an orderly set of processes to ensure data accuracy and adhering to evidence reported in the results with validity (i.e., data reported is based solely on participant responses).

Confirmability

Rettke et al. (2018) noted reflexivity measures to include a log to document participants' comments verbatim, repeated review of the interview with a new lens to identify where the researcher's own experience interfered with understanding interviewees' responses and using peer consultation. I used reflexivity for self-awareness by recording how my frame of reference is situated in the study, including my

preconceived ideas, not influencing my interpretation of the interview responses, and minimizing the undue influence exerted on the participants. Reflexivity helped me recall events throughout the study process and check my reflections, increasing the study confidence and not skewing the interpretation. My responsibility was to remain alert to reduce my personal experiences on the participants' view to understand their experiences.

Ethical Procedures

Qualitative research is understanding people's beliefs, experiences, attitudes, behavior, and interactions. Request to conduct the study was provided in writing to the urban school district superintendent (see Appendix E), followed by request to the Walden Institutional Review Board (IRB). All potential participants received an introductory email that describes the nature of the study, motivations for participants' recruitment, steps to ensure confidentiality, and protection to all participants. Participants were encouraged to review and give written, informed consent to participate in the semi-structured interview. The researcher kept a copy of the participants' emailed informed consent form; the participants were also encouraged to keep a copy of their written consent. Sanjari et al. (2014) argued that researchers are responsible for protecting all participants from potential harmful consequences that might affect them due to their participation. Getting participant informed consent allows for the research's quality and integrity, making the participants not obligated or pressured to help out a researcher and possibly represent answers they thought the researcher wanted to hear or see in a study. Babbie (2017) defined informed consent as the norm in which participants base their voluntary participation in a research project on a complete understanding of the possible

risks involved. Houser (2018) articulated the process of information exchange with participants to fully disclose the risks or benefits of participating in a study. Houser continued that participants need assurance that withdrawal from participating is possible without consequences. This process begins with recruitment and ends with a signed agreement document.

I employed practical strategies to protect the participant's personal information from potential harm. In order words, the principle of "no harm" to participants was paramount; a researcher should be aware of the possible damages that the study could inflict upon the subjects (Sanjari et al., 2014, p 3). The idea of *no harm* to participants was vital since this study elicits human participants and involves my interactions with them. Tackling the ethics issue during this study required putting in place guidelines to prevent moral repercussions by following the agreed informed consent whereby participants feel reassured on an ongoing basis that they were protected. The consent forms and all other documents would be retained for 5 years and stored in a locked filing cabinet, and I have exclusive access to storage.

The reassurance of confidentiality reduces any conflict of information that might affect research findings and improves their validity and reliability. Sanjari et al. (2014) contended that an integral part of ethics in qualitative research is the idea of participants' informed consent. Researchers using the interview as a data approach must establish professional maturity as semi-structured gives the researcher the flexibility of manipulating certain variables to develop a good connection with participants to avoid

coercion (Ahabi & Anozie, 2017, p. 9). Minimizing ethical violations enhances the study's credibility.

Summary

In this Chapter, I outlined this study's research methodology, my role as the researcher, research site, participants' recruitment, the overall research design, data collection methods, and data analysis. Steps to protect participants were optimal, including the participant's letter describing this study purpose, an invitation to consider participating in the interview process, participants' selection criteria, and the knowledge that they can exit at any time during the process. Additional steps to reduce biases and enhance rigor and quality of data were optimal. I also discussed ethical considerations related to trustworthiness, informed consent, and prevention of harm to participants. Chapter 4 includes a focus on data collection, analysis, and findings.

Chapter 4: Results

In this qualitative descriptive study, I explored the leadership behaviors and strategies school principals describe as necessary to implementing SEL programs and the challenges they encountered. The two research questions guiding this study were:

RQ1: What leadership behaviors do principals describe as necessary to implement SEL programs in their schools?

RQ2: What challenges do principals encounter during SEL program implementation?

In Chapter 4, I provide a thorough description of the research setting. Then follows a detailed description of the data collection, including the sources used and the instrument. Next, I explain the methods to analyze the data, the study's relationships, themes, and findings. The conclusion includes a discussion of issues related to the study's credibility, quality control, and chapter summary.

Setting

The setting for this qualitative study was in an urban district in California. The school district comprises 12 schools and serves more than 15,000 students from grades 7 through 12, plus the young adult program serves individuals through age 22. For the 2019-2020 school year, the overall student population was 17.50% African American, 66.70% Hispanic, 7.62% White, and 8.18% other races. The district was identified as significantly disproportionate by their state department of education for the over-identification of minority students in special education; 32% of African American male students were referred as emotionally disturbed, and 46 African American students out of

96 students were removed from the school. The district made concerted efforts to address the disparity by adopting evidence-based SEL programs and charging their school administrators with overseeing implementation. The state department of education has been involved in this process by requiring the school district to complete a Comprehensive Coordinated Early Intervening Services plan that included the root causes and the district's action plan to address the disparities. Despite the district and school site administrators' efforts, the disproportionality issues continue.

There were few changes to the district organizational conditions. There were no personnel or budget cuts, but the district ceased all in-person schooling and implemented distance learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020. The district also recently replaced its student support services director, whose job included overseeing district-wide SEL and support to the site level administrators to the implementation. The new director was on the job 3 months before distance learning commences. The SEL program implementation across the district schools shifted to virtual implementations due to the pandemic. Administrators had to evaluate their programs and practices they had in place while grappling with providing support and preparing their teachers to teach online. Therefore, the principals' responses to the interview questions may have been affected by this situation, which could affect the interpretation of the study findings.

Participants Demographics

The participants were purposefully selected as part of a demographic crucial to this research because of the qualification's perimeter established. The 10 participants worked for the partner school district. As noted in Table 3, the demographic information

obtained from the participants indicated that all 10 were middle and high school principals who have implemented or are currently implementing social-emotional learning SEL programs at their schools. All participants had over 54.5 combined years of school leadership experience and 34 years of SEL implementation experience. Three of the participants were middle school administrators, and four were high school administrators.

The participation of these 10 school principals' in the semi-structured interviews shed light on possible solutions critical to successful SEL implementation that may reduce the disproportionate removal from school and identification into special education of minority students.

Table 3

Participant Demographics: Grade Level, Sex, Years of Experience, and Years Implementing SEL Programs

Participant ID	School	Years of principal experience	Years of implementation
Participant 1	High	8	5
Participant 2	High	6	4
Participant 3	High	4	4
Participant 4	Middle	2	2
Participant 5	High	5	3
Participant 6	High	11	5
Participant 7	Middle	1	1
Participant 8	Middle	4.5	3
Participant 9	High	6	5
Participant 10	High	7	2

Data Collection

The data collection began following Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, partner district permission (Appendix H), and return of the

participants' informed consent (Appendix B). Semi-structured interviews were conducted as the primary instrument to collect data to answer the research questions. The semi-structured interviews allowed me to elicit participants' perceptions and experiences of implementing SEL programs (Ahabi & Anozie, 2017). Ten principals participated in the interview sessions. Table 4 shows the questions that supplied the data for the study organized by research question. The interview questions used for data collection asked about leadership practices and SEL implementation challenges. As previously mentioned, the first phase of the data gathering process included sending emails and scheduling interviews with participants. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the interviews were conducted virtually through Google Meet. For confidentiality, interviews took place in private with only the participant and I attending. The interview sessions lasted approximately 1 hour, and I used open-ended questions (Appendix D) prepared ahead of time. The pre-set interview questions assisted the participants in discussing their perceptions regarding SEL implementation.

For reporting purposes and to protect participants' identities, participants were notified beforehand through informed consent that pseudonyms would be assigned, helping to elicit meaningful and honest responses. I requested permission to follow up via email with participants if clarifying questions were necessary. The interview questions embedded specific questions about leadership behaviors essential to implementing SEL programs and the challenges principals encounter at their various schools (see Table 4).

The participants' interviews were recorded using an external recorder and were transcribed using Ottar software. I reviewed the interview transcripts by replaying the

audio data and cross-checking it against the transcripts for accuracy four times. After I

reviewed the transcripts, I provided the participants with interview transcripts via email

for their review and gave them the opportunity to edit any portions they deemed

necessary for accuracy, thoroughness, and agreement to ensure that their responses were

as intended to increase the study's trustworthiness. I did not encounter any unusual

circumstances during the data collection phase; none of the participants wanted to make

any changes to their original answers. Also, there were no variations in the data collection

from the plan presented in Chapter 3. 1 saved the audio data and transcripts to a

password-protected external drive.

Table 4

Semi-Structured Interview Questions and Research Questions

Administrator interview questions	Research questions
2b. What are the most important methods for achieving the mission?	RQ1
4.Please describe your past experiences with SEL?	RQ1
5a. What strategies were used during implementation to help your staff understand the initiative's purpose or goal?	RQ1
5b. What steps or plans were taken to roll out any SEL program implementation in your school?	RQ1
5c. What SEL measures do you have in place at your school that addresses your diverse learners' needs?	RQ1
6.Please explain the ways you support SEL in your role?	RQ1
7.Describe your work with your staff in implementing SEL in your school. What are some of how you help staff members make sense of the program and understand why it is essential to implement SEL?	RQ1, RQ2
8.What strategy do you find fitting in	RQ1

providing leadership as it relates to SEL implementation?	
9.What importance does trust have on your work with your staff and students?	RQ2
9a. How do you go about building trust?	RQ2
9b. What have been barriers, if any, you have experienced in building trust?	RQ2
9c. What is your level of involvement in providing any professional development for your teachers and support staff to implement SEL?	RQ2
10.In what ways have you successfully supported a teacher struggling to build a positive relationship with and between students? Please describe	RQ1
11.What are there recommended practices you provided to your staff when implementing the SEL programs? Do you have to modify any practices to meet the needs of students or teachers better? Please explain.	RQ1
12.What are the biggest challenges you've faced in your role as you support teachers in SEL implementation?	RQ2
13.From your perspective, how has your role changed as a result of SEL implementation?	RQ1
14.What, if anything, would you do differently given your experience with the SEL implementation?	RQ1

Data Analysis

According to Nowell et al. (2017), data analysis reviews study data to assign

meaning through codes, themes, or other categorization processes to answer the research

questions. I analyzed the data using NVivo software, which allows data to be sorted,

coded, and examined to form relationships among the coded data that emerge and

develop into a theme. Unlike quantitative research that uses a deductive analysis

approach and is hypothesis-centered, qualitative study analysis is inductive in its method, thereby allowing meaning to emerge from the data (Levitt, 2018). This study's analysis followed an inductive approach without using any previously constructed framework for possible codes to address the study's research questions. I utilized the 6 phase thematic analysis process as suggested by Braun et al. (2016) outlined in Chapter 3. Braun et al.'s six phases approach allowed me the flexibility to classified, arranged, and sort the data in the NVivo software and to inductively discover codes and themes using the reach data transcripts. The first phase was becoming familiar with the data collected. As I read through the transcripts, I listened carefully to the audio recording to confirm the data's accuracy.

Phase 2: I conducted data cleaning by first assigning the participants an identifier such as Participant 1: P1, Participant 2: P2, etcetera, reading through the transcribed data and shortening it to the relevant pieces of information. I uploaded the data into NVivo software, organized by the assigned attributes. I engaged in reflective practice and was mindful not to assume categories. I reviewed the data several times, familiarizing myself to make sense of the interviews' responses while making notations of things that stood out and my assumptions. Conducting this process helps with an understanding of how the participants made sense of their experiences.

Phase 3: I began developing some preliminary codes based on the initial impressions, toggling between the notations I made during the data reviews and the data. I identified and coded significant information that was best fit based on the two research questions. I then cycled back to the codes to make sure nothing was missed and decide

which of the initial codes were most significant and made the most analytical sense (Nowell et al., 2017). A few essential coded phrases were staff attitude, *past SEL experiences, leadership tenure, consideration for diverse students, safe and secured learning environment, and SEL programs.*

Phase 4: The next step in the analysis process involves reviewing and categorizing by grouping and regrouping similar code words and phrases to include related concepts. I looked for relationships by clustering similar codes (child codes) that resorted to themes (parent code) using the research questions as my focus prompt. I repeated the process one more time, immersing in the data, carefully reading transcripts, noting recurring ideas, and sweeping through the codes. A final checked of the themes was made relative to the coded extracts.

Phase 5: I checked the themes against the two research questions as the central organizing concept; this process reduces the category codes from 22 to 15. These 15 category codes emerged to three overarching themes: (a) *SEL Interpretation,* (b) *Implementation Strategies,* and (c) *Potential Implementation Barriers.*

Theme 1: SEL Interpretation

The themes represent the abbreviated essence of the participants' responses. Participants explained their understanding of SEL, how they incorporated their diverse learners and how their past SEL experiences shape their current implementation practices. Participant 8 explained, "SEL to me means having an understanding that students have needs beyond the academics and that schools must be intentional in planning to support the needs of our students in this area." Conversely, Participant 1

stated, "it is intentional adult actions designed to develop a trusting empathetic rapport with students so that students can be open to learning about coping strategies to handle the stressors of life."

Regarding incorporating SEL programs that consider their diverse students' needs, Participant 3 explained that it is about understanding differences in cultures, religion and being mindful of that. Participant 3 continued that it is about getting programs that get everyone included and making that awareness.

When asked about past SEL experiences, one participant spoke about adding an assessment; another participant explained that she had been an administrator over the counseling department and have actively worked with students through emotional situations.

Theme 2: Implementation Strategies

Throughout the data, a recurring theme that participants considered was that implementation strategies are essential to SEL implementation. Participant 1 explained that "during our PLCs, we always begin our meeting by sharing the why, you know, we first look at the data, our achievement, discipline, attendance, and school climate survey to determine if there is a need. The participant continued that "as the principal, I want to ensure that we are addressing the gaps or whatever discrepancies. I think we get a lot of buy-ins from our staff following a systematic process". Participant 2 felt that it was a principal's responsibility to help their team narrow down the school's needs assessment. She believes that it is important to help staff to get them on board as stated here, "a lot of times when you show data, it does help those who struggle, and sometimes just that little

bit of awareness, looking at it through a data lens helps those staff to see through that different lens you know."

Participants discussed their reliance on their school's vision and mission and the consideration of their School Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA) that must include planned actions to support student outcomes and overall performance. Nine of the participants overwhelmingly shared that every plan or program initiation must justify how it aligned to the district's strategic plan; this drives what SEL programs schools adapted and implemented. Participant 8 shared that one of the implementation strategies she used was to remind staff why they are doing what they are doing. She spoke about beginning every staff meeting by reading the school mission statement, "so that would be the first step is looking at your organization mission and seeing where the needs fall, and then begin with it. I would say this is for every school." Participant 4 believes that principals responsible for implementing SEL programs must become more versed in SEL programs and resources. Participant 4 clarified that because teachers attend training that doesn't translate, they now understand how to implement what they have learned fully. "How can I support them better? So we learn from each other".

Participants also recalled from their past experiences with SEL implementation to identify what had worked and did not. Participant 7 noted that SEL programs were initiated with a small group of teachers at her last school, allowing them to review the data and progress and grow the program until it becomes part of the school environment. She continued that it will be ideal to repeat the process with her current school to ensure that teachers understand SEL before infusing it into the academics' instructions.

Participant 5 mentioned, "we gathered a team of adults who naturally possess the skills necessary to be an excellent collaborative team member and are student-focused to see the program in action, and then we implemented."

Theme 3: Potential Implementation Barriers

All participants articulated how building trust with their staff and communicating the "why" behind SEL program implementation diminishes implementation barriers. The participants also felt strongly that staff attitude, foundational and ongoing professional development are necessary for implementing SEL programs. Without staff engagement and training, the participants believed their schools could not meet the implementation target. The final **phase 6** in the Braun et al. (2016) thematic analysis is the write-up. The final narrative discusses the data and answers the study research questions to explore principals' perceptions of their leadership expectations towards SEL program implementation through an equitable-oriented approach detailed in the results session.

Discrepant Cases

Part of the responsibility of conducting qualitative research is to examine any evidence of discrepancies among the data (Bengtsson, 2016). The participant selection perimeter established for this study was helpful. The participants had similar experiences, and their responses to the semi-structured interview questions yielded consistent data among all participants. During the data analysis, I dealt with the possibility of a discrepant case by reviewing the entire data set to determine whether any of the codes did not conform with the rest. I was interested in finding out if the coded data developed into themes are not in line to answer the two research questions. Upon completing the coding

and categorization of the coded data, the participants provided valuable information that does not contradict the patterns or themes observed in the findings; therefore, there were no discrepancies found during data collection and analysis.

Results

The researcher's role is to use participants' thoughts and feelings to understand the meaning they ascribe to their experience. Ravitch and Carl (2016) contended that a researcher respectfully represents participants' experiences and readers to make sense of a study. This qualitative descriptive study's findings were in a narrative format, organized by the research questions using the three overlying themes derived from the 10 participants' responses to answer the two research questions. Tables 5 addresses research question 1, and Table 6 addresses research question 2.

The participants displayed a generally strong and positive view of their leadership behaviors and strategies to implement EBPs such as SEL. There were also areas the participants saw the need for continued improvement of the implementation process regarding how to respond to their diverse students' needs. Table 4 contains the interview questions that address each of the research questions.

The first research question gathered insights into how middle and high school principals perceive leadership behaviors or strategies necessary for SEL programs implementation.

Themes Addressing Research Question 1

Principals' interpretation of SEL indicated their perceptions of implementation at their various schools. The way a principal recognizes the meaning of SEL can shape their

understanding of their leadership behaviors and how they respond to SEL

implementation. Participants responded to their knowledge of what SEL is about, their

past SEL experiences, ways they supported staff struggling to build a positive

relationship with students, and what role SEL plays in creating a school environment

conducive to learning.

Theme 1: SEL Interpretation

Results from the participants demonstrated their perception of the SEL programs.

SEL programs have a more significant impact on students than individual efforts because

they provide teachers, the school community, and parents with consistent resources and a

common language to support students (Jones et al., 2017). Therefore, it was essential to

understand the participants' insight into their SEL interpretation, what SEL programs did

the school implemented, and the rationale used in selecting SEL programs. Additionally,

the participants described their prior experience with the SEL programs and how it

shaped their current implementation.

In some instances, during the interviews, some of the past experiences came out

in the conversations. Participant 7 stated that she was new to being in charge of SEL

implementation. However, at her last district, she volunteered to be the adult contact on

campus for their check-in /check-out program. She did make the connection that Check-

in/check-out is an intervention that provides students the opportunity to understand the

behavior expectations and goals to improve their motivation, develop the replacement

behaviors requirements and self-awareness, which is a component of SEL.

Participant 1 described the SEL program as intentional adult actions designed to develop a trusting empathetic rapport with students to learn about coping strategies to handle life stressors. We must do what we say we are going to do; this is about effective management in actions, speech, and experiences.

Four of the ten participants strongly believe that SEL addresses the need of the whole child. Participant 2 offered that SEL is looking at the whole child; you're not just looking at the academic. You're not just looking at behavioral; you're looking at their wellbeing within the school environment and their home environment.

Likewise, Participant 7 expressed,

Taking care of the whole child. Not just their academic learning, their emotional learning as well. It's the ability of students and staff alike to use skills necessary to understand and manage emotions. It also consists of the all-important social skills that all students need to know and understand. It is the lessons that students need to understand better what's going on with their emotions and behaviors.

Participant 7 explained how SEL has helped students in their tiered intervention group understand themselves as they work to understand the changes they are going through in their adolescent years.

Participant 9 suggested,

SEL is about teaching or providing students with the tools necessary to sustain and develop good behavior. I believe it a complete system that addresses the whole child; as a school, we have a better chance of supporting students' development through socio-emotional development.

There are numerous ways that school communities can support schools using EBP; Bryk et al. (2016) pointed out that principals play an essential role in developing, nurturing, and maintaining relational trust in schools. Participant 5 added that the SEL program is a complete system that addresses the whole child; we have a better chance of sustaining a student's development through socio-emotional development.

Rettke et al. (2018) argued that participants' verbatim quotes add credibility to qualitative study results; excerpts from participants emphasize relevance. For instance, the participants responded to questions about the SEL programs their schools adopted, implemented, or currently implementing. A few participants gave greater prominence to three SEL programs: (a) PBIS program, an evidence-based, tiered framework that focuses on identifying and encourages positive student behaviors instead of punishing students for negative behaviors. PBIS allows students to develop the social-emotional skills needed to meet the behavioral expectations while at school. (b) MTSS, another evidence-based tiered framework of interventions supporting students with academic and behavioral challenges; and (c) BARR program focuses on the whole student using SEL skills to increase academic performance and behavioral skills.

Participant 1 stated in her response that "the BARR program targeted our ninth graders' students. It addresses a need identified through our school-wide data analysis of grades and behaviors."

Participant 2, Participant P4, Participant 5, and Participant 6 echoed that they implemented the BARR program and PBIS at their schools as well. Less salient were the

other SEL programs used throughout the schools, including Rachel Challenge, Second Step, Tier Groups, Counseling, Panorama Survey, and LMFT.

Participant 10 acknowledged:

We created a Boot Camp to ensure that our seven grade students have the opportunity to develop peer to peer relationships, teacher to student relationships, and a chance to build a relationship with a mentor on campus, kind of mentor/mentee.

Participant 4 commented the MTSS program was central district-driven. "Our school hired an LMFT to work individually or in small groups to address our Tier II and Tier III mental health concerns.".

Theme 2: Implementation Strategies

According to Aiello et al. (2019), implementation strategy ensures that strategic planning is in place and executed when implementing an EBP. In order words, it is about starting with a simple framework to introduce a strategy lexicon that staff can understand and get behind. All 10 participants described staff relationship, communication, data, and staff empowerment as necessary to bring forth an EBP into fruition. Participant 1 explained that she approaches the task by getting staff buy-ins,

"I gathered a team of adults who naturally possess the skills necessary to be a good collaborative team member who is student-focused to see the program in action, and then we implemented."

Participant 4 sees the importance of being knowledgeable about the programs to provide the necessary leadership support; she explained,

I must become more versed in SEL learning and how to implement a program or

resources effectively. I send teachers to training but do they now understand how

to implement what they have learned fully. How can I support them better? So we

learn from each other.

Participant 7 ensures that teachers understand SEL before infusing it into the

academics' instructions. He explained:

We started with a small group of focused teachers instead of just rolling out the

programs and reviewing the data and progresses, expanding and growing the

program until it becomes part of the school environment. Remembering that

change doesn't happen overnight, therefore involving teacher leaders from the

onset, they will be the ones to spread the new program.

As Participant 3 explained:

Leadership strategy is necessary for us principals to determine when to decide

who we can put in charge, the rationale for SEL programs selection, and the best

time to roll out a program. She continued, "so the first thing would be getting

people on board; you do have data as empirical evidence to support the changes.

Participant 3's approach allows the stakeholders to see the relevance to the

implementation and its positive impact on student's academic and behavioral success.

Participant 5 mentioned that building capacity by empowering staff was a way she

motivates her team. She reported:

The first thing would be getting people on board; you do have data as empirical

evidence. We identify a team of staff members that have the capacity for SEL

programs. As a leader, you already know your staff members who are leaders among the peers you could put in charge.

Participant 2 added, "looking at our data to see where holes are, and using systematic strategies and thinking to execute our plans to fulfill our mission and vision.

Participant 4 suggested, "get a team of game-changers that have a strong following and influence factor. We started by setting small goals. Take action, evaluate, revise and repeat". Similarly, Participant 6 reported that they include their staff team in the decision-making process, explaining: "We also use data to guide what we do, so I call upon staff to generate ideas. We involve all stakeholders and conduct needs assessments to determine how to best support staff in SEL and the implementation".

It is only natural that administrators should be the leader in implementing and empowering their team. Participant 7 explained:

> As a leader, I practice a culture of solidarity and encouragement. I tend to lead by example by identifying the vision and work that is needed based on data. I bring my school staff along by showing them how we can all contribute to achieving our goal. I am strategic with choosing activities by identifying a team member who commends presences and pairing them with those who will do their work without being noticed.

All of the participants explained how data drives the decision-making process in the district. A collaborative approach to data usage will help catch students that may fail through the cracks. For example, reviewing attendance data, behavior data, and student test scores may diagnose the problems and determine the interventions to address the

gaps. Participant 4 added that she especially appreciated that at every meeting, it all connects back to data. As one of the more recently hired administrators, she continued that this practice impacted how she manages her school.

Participant 8 shared that the district purchased the Panorama Student Survey to respond to the student's excessive suspension. He recalled when their state department of education visited his school, a requirement of the compliance monitoring when a district becomes significantly disproportionate for the over-identification of minority student in special education. He added that he was interviewed as part of the process and remembered not articulating what his school used to gather information about staff, school community, and student experiences. Participated 8 added:

> We consistently look at our school climate surveys to determine the needs of our parents and students. I share the survey feedback at department and staff meetings. When we address survey feedback, it is to create a dialogue of what we need to address, change, and implement for supporting our students/parents.

Participant 7 also uses the panorama program; she shared:

> We use the panorama climate survey to understand student perceptions of the teaching and learning and their school experiences, which we use to identify strengths and growth areas for both teaching and non-teaching staff. Our school focus is to continue to improve our school climate to foster resilience and inclusiveness.

Participant 9 added that she purchased another program called Illuminate Education, a school information system to build a system that looked at attendance,

discipline, student achievement via grades. She added that they used the information and spent time looking at the correlation between those three components and exploring how to bring in the much-needed socio-emotional support.

Table 5

Overview of Codes and Emergent Themes for RQ1

RQ1: What leadership behaviors do principals describe as necessary to implement SEL programs in their schools?	

Category Codes	Themes
Codes 1: Past SEL Experiences Codes 2: Rationale for SEL Program Selection Codes 3: Consideration for Diverse Students Codes 4: Intentional Adult Actions	Theme 1: SEL Interpretation
Codes 5: Needs Assessment /Use of Data Strategies Codes 6: Selection of Dedicated Team Members Codes 7: Clear Explicit Communication Codes 8: Continued Professional Development Codes 9: Staff Empowerment /Engagement	Theme 2: Implementation

Theme Addressing Research Question 2

According to Durlak (2015), effectively implemented SEL programs could achieve the intended outcome to produce positive results for children with obstructions to implementation diminished. The second research question address any obstacle the participants may encounter during SEL program implementation. The participants' responses may lead to a transformation that results in positive social change for the district.

Theme 3: Potential Implementation Barriers

Implementation barriers are not unique to education (Cook & Odom, 2013). I asked the participants about any hurdles they have experienced with SEL implementation and how they get their team on board. The participants articulated how staff attitude, lack of trust, training, and administrative tenure were critical to their schools' success and their leadership success to implementation. The participants also felt that communication is necessary to successfully implement SEL programs and onboarding the naysayers that promote negativity through relationship-building to win them over. Figure 1 below displays theme three subcodes. Participant 4 declared that it is all about approach. She said,

> As a leader, I have to take the first step; I feel that we have the key, you know, beginning discussion with staff regarding the *why*. No change can happen

Participant 9 articulated, the most significant barrier is that administrators are seen as temporary. School teams struggle to welcome new initiatives when they don't trust that administrators will stay. She chimed, "do you remember that saying with staff? This, too, shall pass? Exactly their feelings".

Principals have the constant situation of teachers who may be resistant to change. Participant 1 echoed that staff attitudes, especially teachers' acceptability of the SEL program, are significant in implementation, saying,

> You do have staff who will look at it say, well, you're going to leave too. I'll wait until the next person comes, which is a challenge as well. One of my teachers told

me that she was just waiting for retirement, as they don't want to implement the change because she was retiring in two years.

The participants overwhelmingly alluded that insufficient training on SEL programs that address the issues they face, such as dealing with diverse students and their families, negative behavior, absenteeism, and students' unwillingness to conform to the rules, impede implementation. Participant 7 noted that limited access to collaborative planning time for teachers and little time for targeted professional development was a struggle. Participant 10 surmised that professional development is a one-day event most times without built-in on-going support; it produces little to help the teachers implement the SEL programs adopted.

Participant 3 sees lack of staff engagement as a setback to implanting programs at his school. He said:

> Who can I trust that is truly a leader who will lead with our purpose and mission at their heart and help teachers get what they need. On the other hand, do they believe what they're a part of? Remember, the students are not going to engage if they don't feel that connection. They're not going to engage if they don't think that the teacher is aware of their possible issues, concerns, or instabilities.

Participant 10 expressed that addressing the misconceptions about SEL efforts with staff is key to implementation. She continued that as long as there are communications and good relationships between administration and staff, we know who we can trust to help certain kids because they're not all the same. Participant 7 continued to express,

But what derails the implementation is when there's no communication within the programs because then you can't vouch for each other. It's like going to a store and not knowing what you're selling. If you can't describe what you're selling, and they ask you a question, what's this? Is this good? I don't know. Well, staff will not want to be part of what you as a leader cannot explain.

Participants 2, 1, 6, 7, and 10 summed the role of trusting your team when bringing a new program or implementing fidelity. Participant 1 articulated, "trust makes collaboration between admins and teachers easier. It makes it easy to communicate the mission as staff sees the principal as being transparent when there is trust".

Participant 2 touted how she uses her past experiences with SEL to help the school understand the "why" behind getting the mission accomplished. She told a story about her struggle with weight loss and how she has to work out and give up junk food. Seeing the result of her sacrifice was a motivation for her to continue. She added,

Kids will not open up to you about what's going on in their home life if they don't trust or you don't' have a relationship built with them. The staff wouldn't follow you if there weren't a level of trust, by getting to know each other, building rapport and activities.

She concluded that storytelling is essential, it creates a bond when you learn students' stories, and when they hear the adult's story, it could impact their decision because they know your intentions are positive.

Participant 6 clarified that,

Trust is a big component to getting anything accomplished. You cannot be the principal and the teacher at the same time. Schools are not an island, you know? We need each other for the sake of getting the job done. It is not "I"; it is "We." I have to recognize myself and the supporting role I have to play; you know, be a little venerable to show my staff that I am a person first before being a boss.

When administrators have a working relationship with their team, it communicates that they are valued and believed in, most notably the commitment to build capacity within the school community.

Participant 10 commented,

The consequences of distrust can be significant. No one would appreciate working in an environment where they constantly look over my shoulders, where they can't share their knowledge or speak freely at meetings. Trust is a two-way street; it takes time to build and has to be continuously maintained. Trust is crucial to leaders to make decisions that impact the entire team. Having a trusting relationship with my staff helps me get buy-in with the school vision.

Participant 7 perhaps worded it best:

Mutual Trust is one of the most important relationships we can cultivate or have with our teachers and staff. With mutual understanding in the relationship, students and staff are willing to take risks and follow your lead when considering new and unfamiliar information and requirements. Staff and students do not trust liars and or people of no action. I have found that it is best to be honest about what can be done about a situation and be clear on your objectives.

Participant 5 explained how it takes two to three years for any real change to happen. She added, "Team needs sufficient time to implement a specific program, finances, and redoing the master schedule to accommodate their effort before modifying the program, providing time and resources to support their work has to be part of the process." Table 6 below displays the codes and themes derived from the data analysis in response to research question two.

Table 6

Overview of Codes and Emergent Theme for RQ2

RQ2: What are the challenges principals encounter during SEL program implementation?

Codes	Theme
Codes 10: Staff Attitude /Buy-In Codes 11: Lack of data usage in decision making Codes 12: Insufficient Resources Allocated to Program/Time to Develop Procedures Codes 13: Insufficient Professional Development/ Staff Training Code 14: Administrative tenure / Turn Over Code 15: No Clear Communication of Implementation Intent	Theme 3: Potential Implementation Barriers

The primary objective of this study was to understand principals' perceptions of leadership for implementation of SEL programs. I provided excerpts of participants' interviews and this study's themes based on participants' perceptions that aided in answering this research questions. The results presented accomplish this study's purpose

and provide recommendations to address the challenges administrators encounter during

SEL implementation that may lead to positive social change in the district.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthy results adhered to established guidelines for collecting and analyzing

qualitative data that yield an authentic representation of the data. Bengtsson (2016)

alluded that all research must be open to criticism; therefore, appraising this study's

trustworthiness is paramount. As the researcher, it was about my ability to balance the

participant's perceptions and interpret, communicate, and deliver the findings. The

interview as the primary data source for this study provided a persuasive stance for its

trustworthiness. Sanjari et al. (2014) offered that researchers rigorously follow ethical

considerations when dealing with human participants. I have worked to ensure

credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability throughout the study

process. The trustworthiness mirrors the same strategies outlined in chapter three; to

allow the readers to critique the study's credibility. Below are the steps that ensure the

credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the study;

Credibility

The participants provided first-hand information of their leadership experiences

and challenges in implementing SEL at their various schools. In presenting the results, I

selected the detailed descriptions the participants provided. The researcher's focus was

not about making inferences or predictions instead of exploring the principals' leadership

behaviors necessary to implement SEL support using the descriptive approach. Their

insights serve as the lens into the study purpose. Additionally, I engaged in member

checks by providing the interviews' transcripts to the participants for feedback before analyzing the data.

Transferability

The thick description of the study's data collection process, location, and the principals' perceptions will help the readers and interested parties understand the findings and could be able to extend, replicate or generalize this study.

Dependability

I detailed the specific strategies and procedures followed throughout this study to allow for any replication by another researcher with similar participants and conditions by provided detailed descriptions of how the data change from the collection, coding, categorizing, and analysis process. The reflective note was critical to ensuring this study's dependability; it allowed me to convey my thoughts and experiences throughout this study's progression and not let my assumptions cloud my judgment.

Confirmability

One approach to a sound study is to make reflexivity central to the audit trail (Rettke et al., 2018). Throughout the data collection process and analysis, I kept a reflective note, noting my thoughts, predispositions, and preconceived notions. I compared my thoughts to the participants' responses, gaining insight that helped me make sense of moving forward and presenting a more effective and impartial analysis. One approach to sound study is to make reflexivity central to the audit trail.

Summary

The data analysis provided answers to the two research questions posed for this study. The leadership characteristics of the participant's span across the ecological systems of their schools. The 10 participants saw their roles as supportive leaders who understood their leadership roles and behaviors in engaging their school teams to see to the SEL implementation. In addition to having a favorable opinion of themselves as leaders who saw the need for SEL in developing the whole child. This study's findings indicated that participants' professional experiences affected their dispositions and how they approached implementation, including the SEL programs adapted and how teams are selected to head implementations.

As part of their roles, the participants felt that staff empowerment is one way they get buy-in by ensuring transparent and manageable goals to meet the initiatives and organizational vision that helps create a school community where everyone is welcome. A recurring message throughout the interview data was the need to develop strong relationships with the staff. The participants gave various examples such as relationship building, holding individual conversations with those team members regarding the implementation of EBPs, and straightforward communication of the "why" behind the implementation using data as a guide.

The findings also revealed using data to support and present a strong argument for a system change, set baseline goals, tailor their program selections and rationale, and determine resources. Another area the participant felt vital was visibility; being visible as a leader and modeling the expectations they wish to see from their staff regarding how

they relate to them, open communication, and problem-solving. They also felt the need for continuous professional development (PD) opportunities for them and their teachers. A few of the principals pointed to the need to identify staff members that are high-performers who may become trainers, bring the PD to their staff, as well as sending the team to training.

Finally, the participants discussed their perceptions of various hindrances to implementation. The recurring ones were staff's attitudes and dispositions towards SEL, inadequate time and resources, administrator's tenure, lack of trust and relationship between administrators and staff, lack of competencies due to insufficient professional development, and adapting the wrong SEL programs not inclusive of their different student groups.

Chapter 4 contains the data collection results obtained through semi-structured interviews of 10 participants, the analysis process, the study results, and evidence of trustworthiness. Chapter 5 summarizes the key findings, interpretation, limitation of the study, the recommendation for further research, and the positive social change implications.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

For the last 200 years, educational reforms have been focused on implementing learning standards and increasing accountability (Hargreaves & Ainscow, 2015). In this study, I explored participants' leadership strategies and challenges regarding SEL program implementation to close the disproportionate representation of minority students in special education programs. The district conducted a programmatic self-assessment and adopted evidence-based SEL programs to address the lack of culturally responsive and inconsistent progressive behavior intervention in addressing discipline and promoting proactive practices that administer appropriate consequences.

The district principals were responsible for overseeing the implementation of SEL at their various schools. There is a lack of research on leadership support of SEL programs in urban schools used to engage and address the needs of minority students (Kendziora & Yoder, 2016). I extended Kennedy's (2019) findings that school leaders must consider diverse learners' needs in SEL implementation using a transformational conceptual framework and the importance of an equity-based approach. I addressed the gap in practice evident in the literature regarding leadership strategies, challenges, and implementation perceptions of the principals charged with the schools' SEL reforms.

The first research question in this study focused on principals' perceptions of their leadership strategies appropriate to implementing SEL programs. The participants felt they were committed to providing top-quality programs and environments for their students to achieve the best possible outcomes. Principals reported that they applied their past SEL experiences to correct previous missteps with their current programs and that

students and staff needs were of utmost importance to the SEL program adoption. Participants felt competent in the ways they assessed their schools' readiness to commence implementation; participants alluded to conducting needs assessments using surveys and data to guide their communications with their team members and to guide the decision-making process. The participants' perceptions were that they communicated the visions and the why to their stakeholders, organized professional development, and made sure they were familiar and comfortable with the program to allow them to be knowledgeable to support their team as they transition to the new program.

The second research question was about the challenge's principals encounter during SEL program implementation. The data revealed that principals perceived staff attitude, time, ill-prepared staff charged with the day-to-day implementation, and adapting SEL program that does not address the needs of their school as hindrances.

Interpretation of the Findings

In this study, I explored the perceptions of 10 middle and high school principals regarding their leadership for SEL implementation. Past researchers did not address school principals' actions with leading SEL reforms from the lens of equity (Kennedy, 2019). Schonert-Reichl (2019) contended that SEL research comprises the programs, implementation science, leadership strategies, and SEL transformation. The interpretation of the findings is arranged under each of the research questions and represents the participants' perceptions.

Study Interpretation Relating to Research Question 1

There has been an increase in links that SEL in schools positively addresses the development of the whole child (Taylor et al., 2017). The results of this study establish the participants' beliefs in their interpretation of SEL. Their perceptions of SEL were to approach implementation on the mantra of educating the whole child; they also noted that they were using the interventions to address their Tier 111 student's interventions. This response aligns with Gregory and Fergus (2017) and Locke et al. (2019) that teaching SEL competencies in school helps manage behaviors and increase children's positive attitudes and responsible behaviors.

Findings Related to School Leadership

Researchers have documented that school leaders are the key facilitators of implementing EBPs (Hudson et al., 2020; Oberle et al., 2016). Dolph (2017) contended that educational leaders play an essential role in developing and implementing SEL. The participants in this study oversaw the SEL implementation process by identifying the areas of need for their schools. Participants were responsible for communicating their school's vision and setting directions regarding the intervention they advocated for and SEL program selection for their schools to address the gap. The participants revealed that they used data to assess their school's needs to align program selections and implementation.

Findings indicated that the participants' perceptions align with Holten and Brenner's (2015) ideas that a leader with transformational traits can promote their team

and commit them to organizational goals. The participants acknowledged that they work to identify staff members who their peers respect to lead the process.

Findings Related to Transformational Leadership

Although researchers have documented the benefits of SEL on student development (Jones & Doolittle, 2017), only a few have addressed the leadership strategies administrators need to address diverse learners' needs. Kennedy (2019) noted that school leaders need to have a more central role in school accountability from the lens of equity and recommended a transformational leadership approach to implementation. Research on transformational leadership has suggested that staff empowerment in shared decision-making is vital (Ghasabeh & Provitera 2017). An analysis of the data clearly shows that study participants believe they motivated their staff, encouraged their team in the change process through a mutual relationship with their team, and positively affected their team's motivation. The participants also believed that they provided opportunities through SEL implementation to address appropriate socialization skills and address their students' emotional well-being, which positively impacted their students and is consistent with supporting a lens of cultural proficiency.

Findings Related to Implementation Science

Implementation science is about awareness of what intervention is needed, and successful implementation depends on a practitioner's knowledge of the execution and how to improve the process (Dusenbury et al., 2015). Adapting SEL programs based on need can influence organizational change by addressing the district's need. The participants indicated that they conducted needs assessments using surveys; four

participants noted that this assessment influenced their school's adopted SEL programs. Low et al.'s (2016) implementation science models refer to dosage, practitioner responsiveness, and benchmark checks. Six participants noted that they set small goals and started by gathering a small team of game-changers to implement their programs before extending them school-wide. Only two of the participants discussed reviewing how they were doing as they progress through the implementation process.

The participants reported that implementing EBPs takes time. Two of the administrators shared that they were new to the district and had to start over again to gain staff commitments and the shared understanding of SEL. Hudson et al. (2020) and Yahaya and Ebrahim (2016) placed emphasis on clear goals and staff communication. A few of the participants agreed that communicating clear goals encourages staff members.

Findings Related to Research Question 2

Understanding the barriers to EBPs for SEL implementation is vital. Evans et al. (2015) contended that knowledge of implementation fidelity and challenges before program adoption aid in improving the process, including determining why it succeeds or fails. The idea of using evidence-based SEL to change student courses is dependent on how well the implementation process goes with principals' leadership support. Although the participants reported positive SEL outcomes, implementation did not come without challenges. Participants noted that they continue to encounter challenges in implementing SEL programs and find ways to support and motivate their team members. Participants reported teacher attitude as one challenge impeding the implementation process. Participants alluded to some of their teachers' lack of social awareness, building

empathy, and appreciating the diversity that reflects their classroom environment. To mitigate staff attitudes, Martinez (2016) noted that leaders must work on gaining their teachers' commitment as implementation success depends heavily on teachers' perception of how their leaders support them.

The participants described a lack of trust between administrators and their team as one of the hindrances to implementation. Eight participants explained, when there is no explicit communication or lack of clarity about the vision or the program's why it leads to distrust. Participants' perception of trust aligns with Osher et al. (2016) suggested ongoing communications with team members to lessen mistrust between the administration and their team.

SEL programs require time and a continuous focus (Durlak et al., 2015). Participants shared that loss of instruction time affects the integration of SEL throughout the school community. Five participants agreed that restructuring master schedules to add time for SEL instructions and mapping out time for team planning meetings and collegial collaboration are challenging with the required academic demands. Silveira-Zaldivar and Curtis (2019) suggested implementing EBPs requires adequate planning time, implementing the intervention, and staff collaborations. Another facet of time revealed through the data was that implementation of an EBPs takes time. Osher et al. (2016) suggested that administrators plan and allow for adequate time for team members to plan how to infuse SEL into implementation.

The administrators voiced a concern that ill-prepared team members posed a barrier to implementation. They added that additional training would help move the program

forward by guiding how teachers can support students' SEL development through teaching practices and how administrators can support teachers implementing them. The participant's views aligned with Durlak (2015), Jones et al. (2019), and Osher et al. (2016) that professional development on SEL at every level for the school staff, including monitoring and communicating progress in supporting SEL implementation, is crucial for achieving quality implementation.

The minority students' disproportionate representation in special education has plagued the district; it is critical to address the disparity gap. Given this study findings, it is my opinion that SEL implementation can reduce the over-representation of minorities in special education through staff development that addresses the underlying theories, approaches, and ideologies of the multicultural education process. Finally, the adoption of SEL programs that address students with emotional disturbance in a culturally competent manner and establish a district-wide equity institute program will prepare both administrators and teachers on culturally and linguistically relevant training and how to work with students from diverse backgrounds.

Limitations of the Study

This study explored middle and high school principal's leadership strategies and implementation challenges regarding SEL program implementation to close the disparity gap in one urban school district. One of this study's limitations to trustworthiness addressed in chapter 1 was the issue of generalization due to sample size. Data collection was limited to middle and high school principals only, eliminating the elementary school principals' perspectives. The interview questions aligned to the SEL implementation, and

purposive sampling mitigated this limitation as the participants reported based on their lived experiences.

The district study location was in distance learning during the data collection process due to the pandemic; therefore, interviews were via Google Meet, allowing me to see and read participants' body language.

Recommendations

The current study provides perceptions of middle and high school leadership strategies and their challenges during SEL implementation to address the disparity in the focus school district. Additional research is needed to help districts coordinate and sustain systemic efforts to support all students using SEL. To realize the full potential of SEL, schools must design programs that are responsive to diverse students' needs, engage and collaborate with families and school communities. The suggested study would be inclusive of elementary principals across multiple districts as participants.

Implications

According to Cook and Odom (2013), no practice will work for every student without planning; therefore, SEL programs require effort. This study's findings may contribute to social change by addressing the identified challenges participants perceived based on their concerted efforts and practices during SEL implementation. Participants' perceptions were that professional development in equity, diversity, and inclusion was lacking. District-level management may need to provide training that is inclusive and addresses the areas participants felt were lacking. Conduct needs assessments on SEL programs' effectiveness in addressing disparity within the district.

Conclusion

As seen in this study, the principals were invested in their students' social-emotional needs and, in their perceptions, have worked hard to provide leadership support to SEL implementation. Aside from district management providing their schools with the funding needed, competing programs are happening at once aimed at the social-emotional needs. Participants reported that so many programs were pushed out without clear communication and long-term continued support to the school sites that included training. There is a lack of district-wide action to ensure that administrators at their schools and their teams get the training that focuses on implementing SEL programs that address the issues that affect minority students and lack of informed progress monitoring. Instead, most of the SEL initiatives implemented were perceptions of programs the principals believe will work for their students.

Participants struggle with selecting SEL programs that specifically target students of color; there remains a void in how principals address inclusion, diversity, and equity (Kennedy, 2019) for their diverse students to benefit from the SEL competencies. Lipscombe et al. (2019) argued that leadership must ensure clear and manageable goals for any educational change initiative, such as social and emotional skills. Additionally, targeted SEL programs at the various schools have a narrow focus. They lack culturally relevant ways that students of color could benefit from and do not specify how students identified as needing help receive interventions. The ability to adapt the implementation to fit school-specific needs is vital.

References

Aarons, G. A., Green, A. E., Trott, E., Willging, C. E., Torres, E. M., Ehrhart, M. G., & Roesch, S. C. (2016). The roles of system and organizational leadership in system-wide evidence-based intervention sustainment: A mixed-method study. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research, 43*(6), 991-1008. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10488-016-0751-4

Abry, T., Rimm-Kaufman, S. E., & Curby, T. W. (2017). Are all program elements created equal? Relations between specific social and emotional learning components and teacher-student classroom interaction quality."*Prevention Science,18*(2),193–203. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11121-016-0743-3

Ahabi, E., & Anozie, C. B. (2017). Literature review for the type of interview in qualitative research. *International Journal of Education, 9*(3), 1-12. https://doi.org/10.5296/ije. v9i3.11483

Aiello, P., Agrillo, F., Russo, I., Zappala, E., & Sibilo, M. (2019). Group-based Early Start Denver Model: An educational approach for pupils with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Italian preschools. *Italian Journal of Special Education for Inclusion,7* (1),155-170. https://doi.org/10.7346/sipes 01-2019-13

Alase, A. (2017). The interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA): A guide to a good qualitative research approach. *International Journal of Education & Literacy Studies,5* (2), 9-19. https://doi.org/.7575/aiac.ijels.v.5n.2p.9

Al Khajeh, E. H. (2018). Impact of leadership styles on organizational performance. *Journal of Human Resources Management Research*, 1-10.

https://doi.org/10.5171/2018.687849

Allbright, T. N., Marsh, J. A., Kennedy, K. E., Hough, H. J., & McKibben, S. (2019).
Social-emotional learning practices: insights from outlier schools. *Journal of Research in Innovative Teaching & Learning,12*(1), 35- 52.
https://doi.org/10.1108/JRIT-02-2019-0020

Allen, N., Grigsby, B., & Peters, M. L. (2015). Does leadership matter? Examining the relationship among transformational leadership, school climate, and student achievement. *International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation, 10*(2), 1–22. https://doi.org/ EJ1083099
and practice (4th ed.). Sage Publication.

Andersen, J. A. (2015). Barking up the wrong tree. On the fallacies of the transformational leadership theory. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal, 36*,765-777. https://doi.org/:10.1108/lodj-12-2013-0168

Anderson, M. (2017). Transformational leadership in education: A review of existing literature. *International Social Science Review, 93*(1), 1–13.
http://digitalcommons.northgeorgia.edu/issr/vol93/iss1/4

Armstrong, M. J., Mullins, C. D., Gronseth, G. S., & Gagliardi, A. R. (2017).
Recommendations for patient engagement in guideline development panels: A qualitative focus group study of guideline-naïve patients. *PLoS One,12*(3).
https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0174329

Avolio, B. J., Bass, B. M., & Jung, D. I. (1999). Re-examining the components of transformational and transactional leadership using the multifactor leadership

questionnaire. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology,72*(4),

441-462. https://doi.org/10.1348/096317999166789

Babbie, E. (2017). *Basics of social research* (7th ed.). Cengage Learning.

Bass, B. M. (2000). The future of leadership in learning organizations. *Journal of*

Leadership & Organizational Studies,7(3), 18-40.

https://doi.org/10.1177/107179190000700302

Bass, B. M., & Riggio, R. E. (2006). Transformational leadership. 2nd ed. Lawrence

Erlbaum Associates Publishers.

Bauer, M. S., Damschroder, L., Hagedorn, H., Smith, J., & Kilbourne, A. M. (2015). An

introduction to implementation science for the non-specialist. *BMC*

psychology, *3*(1), 32. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-015-0089-9

Bauer, M. S., & Kirchner, J. (2019). Implementation science: What is it and why should I

care? *Psychiatry Res*, 283,112-376.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2019.04.025

Bengtsson, M. (2016). How to plan and perform a qualitative study using content

analysis. *NursingPlus Open 2,* 8-14. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.npls.2016.01.001

Berkowitz, R., Astor, R. A., Pineda, D., DePedro, K. T., Weiss, E. L., & Benbenishty, R.

(2017). Parental involvement and perceptions of school climate in California.

Urban Education, 1-31. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085916685764

Blanchard, C., Livet, M., Ward, C., Sorge, L., Sorensen, T. D., & McClurg, M. R. (2017).

The active implementation frameworks: A roadmap for advancing

implementation of comprehensive medication management in primary care.

Research in Social and Administrative Pharmacy,13(5), 922-929.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sapharm.2017.05.006

Boer, D., Deinert, A., Homan, A. C., & Voelpel, S. C. (2016). Revisiting the mediating

role of leader-member exchange in transformational leadership: the differential

impact model. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, *25*(6),

883-899. https://doi.org/10.1080/1359432X.2016.1170007

Bosworth, K., Garcia, R., Judkins, M., & Saliba, M. (2018). The impact of leadership

involvement in enhancing high school climate and reducing bullying: An

exploratory study. *Journal of School Violence, 17*(3), 354-366.

https://doi.org/10.1080/15388220.2017.1376208

Bradshaw, C., Atkinson, S., & Doody, O. (2017). Employing a qualitative description

approach in health care research. *Global Qualitative Nursing Research, 4,*1-8.

https://doi.org/10.1177/2333393617742282

Braun, V., Clarke, V., & Weate, P. (2016). Using thematic analysis in sport and exercise

research. In B. Smith & A. C. Sparkes (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of qualitative

research in sport and exercise*.191-205. Routledge.

Bridgeland, J., Bruce, M., & Hariharan, A. (2013). *The missing piece: A national teacher

survey on how social and emotional learning can empower children and

transform schools.* Civic Enterprises. https://casel.org/wp-

content/uploads/2016/01/the-missing-piece.pdf

Bruggencate, G., Luyten, H., Scheerens, J., & Sleegers, P. (2012). Modeling the

Influence of school leaders on student achievement: How can school leaders make

a difference? *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *48*(4), 699–732.

https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X11436272

Bryk, A., Gomez, L., Grunow, A., & LeMahieu, P. (2016). *Learning to improve: How America's schools can get better at getting better.* Education Press.

Burkholder, G. J., Cox, K., & Crawford, L. M. (Eds). (2016). *The scholar-practitioner's guide to research design* (1st ed.). Laureate Publishing.

Burns, J. M. (1978). *Leadership*. Harper Collins.

California Department of Education. (2018). California's social and emotional learning, *"Guiding Principles."* https://www.cde.ca.gov/eo/in/socialemotionallearning.asp.

Carter, M. Z., Self, D. R., Bandow, D. F., Wheatley, R. L., Thompson, W. F., Wright, D. N., & Li, J. (2014). Unit-focused and individual-focused transformational leadership: The role of middle leaders in the midst of incremental organizational change. *Journal of Management Policy & Practice, 15*(5), 44-53.

https://doi.org/0096/ab16f28a48339c27d61aaaeb920978f4978a.pdf

Cohen, J., Gordon, E., & Kendziora, K. (2019). School safety, wellness, and learning: Conditions for learning, barriers to learning, and school improvement. In D. Osher, M. J. Mayer, R. J. Jagers, K. Kendziora, & L. Wood (Eds*.), Keeping Students Safe and Helping Them Thrive: A collaborative handbook on school safety, mental health, and wellness,* (pp. 240-260). ABC-CLIO Publishers.

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. (2008). *Leading an SEL school.* National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention, Education Development Center, Inc. http://casel.org/

Cook, B., & Odom, S. (2013). Evidence-based practices and implementation in special education. *Exceptional Children,79*(2), 135–144. https://doi.org/10.1177/001440291307900201

Corcoran, R. P., & O'Flaherty, J. (2017). Longitudinal tracking of academic progress during teacher preparation. *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 87*(4), 664-682. https://doi.org/10.1111/bjep.12171

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2017). Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches, 4th ed., SAGE Publishing.

Dane, A. V., & Schneider, B. H. (1998). Program integrity in primary and early secondary prevention: Are implementation effects out of control. *Clinical Psychology Review,18*, 23–45. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0272-7358(97)00043-3

Dariotis, J. K., Mirabal-Beltran, R., Cluxton-Keller, F., Gould, L. F., Greenberg, M. T., & Mendelson, T. (2017). A qualitative exploration of implementation factors in a school-based mindfulness and yoga program: Lessons learned from students and teachers. *Psychology in the Schools, 54*(1), 53–69. https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.21979

Darling-Hammond, L., Flook, L., Cook-Harvey, C., Barron, B., & Osher, D. (2020). Implications for educational practice of the science of learning and development. *Applied Developmental Science, 24*(2), 97-140. https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2018.1537791

Day, C., Gu, Q., & Sammons, P. (2016). The impact of leadership on student outcomes: How successful school leaders use transformational and instructional strategies to

make a difference. *Educational Administration Quarterly,52*(2), 221–258. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X15616863

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2013). *The Landscape of qualitative research*. Sage Publications.

Dodge, K. A., Bierman, k. L., Coie, j. D., Greenberg, M. T., Lochman, J. E., McMahon, R. J., & Pinderhughes, E. E. (2015). Impact of early intervention on psychopathology, crime, and well-being at age 25. *American Journal of Psychiatry, 172*(1), 59-70. https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ajp.2014.13060786

Dolph, D. (2017). Challenges and opportunities for school improvement: Recommendations for urban school principals. *Education and Urban Society, 49*(4), 363–387. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124516659110

Domitrovich, C. E., Bradshaw, C. P., Poduska, J. M., Hoagwood, K., Buckley, J. A., Olin, S., Romanelli, L. H., Leaf, P. J., Greenberg, M. T., & Ialongo, N. S. (2008). Maximizing the implementation quality of evidence-based preventive interventions in schools: A conceptual framework. *Advances in School Mental Health Promotion,1*(3), 6-28. https://doi.org/10.1080/1754730x.2008.9715730

Domitrovich, C. E., Durlak, J. A., Staley, K. C., & Weissberg, R. P. (2017). Social-emotional competence: An essential factor for promoting positive adjustment and reducing risk in school children. *Child Development, 88* (2), 408–416. https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12739

Dow, T. E., & Downton, J. V. (1974). Rebel Leadership: Commitment and charisma in the revolutionary process. *Contemporary Sociology, 3*(6), 519.

https://doi.org/10.2307/2063573

Dowling, K., & Barry, M. M. (2020). Evaluating the implementation quality of a social and emotional learning program: A mixed-methods approach. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 17* (9), 32-49. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17093249

Durlak, J. A. (2015). What everyone should know about implementation. In J. A. Durlak, C.E. Domitrovich, R. P. Weissberg, T.P. Gullotta (Eds.) *Handbook of social and emotional learning: Research and practice* (pp. 395-405). The Guilford Press.

Durlak, J. A. (2016). Programme implementation in social and emotional learning: Basic issues and research findings. *Cambridge Journal of Education, 46*(3), 333–345. https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764x.2016.1142504

Durlak, J. A., Domitrovich, C. E., Weissberg, R. P., & Gullotta, T. P. (Eds.). (2015). *Handbook of social and emotional learning: Research and practice.*The Guilford Press.

Dusenbury, L., Calin, S., Domitrovich, C., & Weissberg, R. (2015). What does evidence-based instruction in social and emotional learning actually look like in practice? http://www.casel.org/statestandards-for-social-and-emotional-learning/

Dutta, V., & Sahney, S. (2016). School leadership and its impact on student achievement: The mediating role of school climate and teacher job satisfaction. *International Journal of Educational Management,30*(6), 941-958. https://doi.org/10.1108/ijem-12-2014-0170

Dyssegaard, C. B., Egelund, N., & Sommersel, H. B. (2017). *A systematic review of what*

enables or hinders the use of research-based knowledge in primary and lower secondary school: Aarhus University, Danish Clearinghouse for Educational Research.

Ehrhart, M. G., Torres, E. M., Wright, L. A., Martinez, S. Y., & Aarons, G. A. (2016). Validating the implementation climate scale (ICS) in child welfare organizations. *Child Abuse & Neglect.* 53, 17-26. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2015.10.017

Elias, M. J. (2019). What if the doors of every schoolhouse opened to social-emotional learning tomorrow: Reflections on how to feasibly scale up high-quality SEL. *Educational Psychologist, 54* (3), 233–245. https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2019.1636655

Erickson, F. (2011). A history of qualitative inquiry in social and educational research. In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (4th ed., pp.43-59). Sage Publications.

Eslava-Schmalbach, J., Garzón-Orjuela, N., Elias, V., Reveiz, L., Tran, N., & Langlois, E. V. (2019). Conceptual framework of equity-focused implementation research for health programs (EquIR). *International Journal for Equity in Health,18*(1), 1-11. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12939-019-0984-4

Evans, R., Murphy, S., & Scourfield, J. (2015). Implementation of a school-based social and emotional learning intervention: Understanding diffusion processes within complex systems. *Prevention Science,16* (5), 754–764. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11121-015-0552-0

Fixsen, D., Blasé, K., Metz, A., & Van Dyke, M. (2013). Statewide implementation of

evidence-based programs. *Exceptional Children, 79* (3), 213-230.

https://doi.org/10.1177/001440291307900206

Fraise, N. J., & Brooks, J. S. (2015). Towards a theory of culturally relevant leadership

for school-community culture. *International Journal of Multicultural*

Education,17(1), 6-21. https://doi.org/10.18251/ijme.v17i1.983

Fullan, M. (2014). *The principal: Maximizing impact.* Jossey-Bass.

Ganon-Shilon, S., & Schechter, C. (2019). School principals' sense-making of their

leadership role during reform implementation. *International Journal of*

Leadership in Education, 22 (3), 279 300.

https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2018.1450996

Gawlik, M. A. (2015). Shared sense-making: How charter school leaders ascribe meaning

to accountability. *Journal of Educational Administration*, *53*(3) 393–415.

https://doi.org/10.1108/JEA-08-2013-0092

Ghasabeh, M. S., & Provitera, M. J. (2017). Transformational leadership: Building an

effective culture to manage organizational knowledge. *The Journal of Values-*

Based Leadership,10(2). https://doi.org/10.22543/0733.102.1187.

Goldberg, J. M., Sklad, M., Elfrink, T. R., Schreurs, K. M. G., Bohlmeijer, E. T., &

Clarke, A. M. (2019). Effectiveness of interventions adopting a whole school

approach to enhancing social and emotional development: A meta-analysis.

European Journal of Psychology of Education, *34*(4) 755-782.

https://doi.org/10.1007/s10212-018-0406-9

Gottfredson, G. D., & Gottfredson, D. C. (2001). What schools do to prevent problem

behavior and promote safe environments. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation,12*(4), 313-344. https://doi.org/10.1207/S1532768XJEPC1204_02

Goulet, M., Archambault, I., Janosz, M., Bélanger, J., & Christenson, S. L. (2020). Understanding the dynamic interinfluences of implementation processes: An illustration by multiple case studies. *Evaluation and Program Planning, 80*, 101-798. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evalprogplan.2020.101798

Greenberg, M. T., Domitrovich, C. E., Weissberg, R. P., & Durlak, J. A. (2017). Social and Emotional Learning as a Public Health Approach to Education. *Future of Children,27*(1).13-32. https://doi.org/10.1353/foc.2017.0001

Gregory, A., & Fergus, E. (2017). Social-emotional learning and equity in school discipline. *The Future of Children, 27*(1), 117–136.doi:10.1353/foc.2017.0006

Hargreaves, A., & Ainscow, M. (2015). The top and bottom of leadership and change. *Phi Delta Kappan, 97*(3), 42–48. https://doi.org/10.1177/0031721715614828

Hernandez, F. (2019). Introduction to the journal of school leadership Special issue: Educational leadership serving diverse learners. *Journal of School Leadership, 29*(6), 451–453. https://doi.org/10.1177/1052684619870404

Hitt, D. H., & Tucker, P. D. (2016). Systematic review of key leader practices found to influence student achievement: A Unified Framework. *Review of Educational Research*, *86*(2), 531–569. https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654315614911

Holten, A. L., & Brenner, S. (2015). Leadership style and the process of organizational change. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal, 36*(1), 2-16.

https://doi.org/10.1108/lodj-11-2012-0155

Horner, R. H., Sugai, G., & Fixsen, D. L. (2017). Implementing effective educational

practices at scales of social importance. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology*

Review, 20(1), 25–35. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10567-017-0224-7

Hough, H., Kalogrides, D., & Loeb, S. (2017). *Using surveys of students' social-*

emotional learning and school climate for accountability and continuous

improvement. http://edpolicyinca.org/sites/default/files/SEL-CC_report.pdf

Houser, J. (2018). *Nursing research: Reading, using and creating evidence.* Jones &

Bartlett Learning.

Hudson, K. G., Lawton, R., & Hugh-Jones, S. (2020). Factors affecting the

implementation of a whole school mindfulness program: a qualitative study using

the consolidated framework for implementation research. BMC Health Services

Research, 20(1), 133. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-020-4942-z

Implementation. (n.d.). In *Merriam-Webster's online dictionary*. Retrieved

https://www.merriam webster.com/dictionary/implementation

Javadi, M., & Zarea, K. (2016). Understanding thematic analysis and its pitfall. *Journal*

of Client Care 1(1), 33-39. https://doi.org/10.15412/J.JCC.02010107

Johnson, R. B., & Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2004). Mixed methods research: A research

paradigm whose time has come. *Educational Researcher, 33*(7),14–26.

https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X033007014

Jones, S. M., Barnes, S. P., Bailey, R., & Doolittle, E. J. (2017). Promoting social and

emotional competencies in elementary school. *Future of Children, 27*(1), 49 –72.

Retrieved https://www.jstor.org/stable/44219021

Jones, S. M., & Doolittle, E. J. (2017). Social and emotional learning: Introducing the issue. *Future of Children, 27*(1), 3 –11. https://doi.org/10.1353/foc.2017.0000

Jones, S. M., McGarrah, M. W., & Kahn, J. (2019). Social and emotional learning: A principled science of human development in context. *Educational Psychologist, 54*(3), 129–143. https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2019.1625776

Kaume-Mwinzi, R. K. (2016). Administrative and leadership innovation in the 21st century: A secondary school sub-sector perspective in Kenya. *Research in Pedagogy, 6*(2), 85-94. https://doi.org/10.17810/2015.37

Kendziora, K., & Yoder, I. N. (2016*).When districts support and integrate social and emotional learning (SEL): Findings from an ongoing evaluation of district-wide implementation of SEL."* American Institutes for Research. https://casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/When-Districts-Support-SEL-Brief.pdf

Kennedy, K. (2019). Centering Equity and Caring in Leadership for Social-Emotional Learning: Toward a conceptual framework for diverse learners. *Journal of School Leadership, 29*(6), 473–492. https://doi.org/10.1177/1052684619867469

Khanal, J. (2018). Differentiating the principals' leadership behavior in high and low-achieving schools of Nepal: A quantitative study. Journal of Education and Practice, 9(22), 51-63.

https://www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/JEP/article/view/44005

Khanal, J., & Park, S. H. (2016). Impact of school principal leadership. *Journal of American Academic Research,4*(6), 1-19. https://www.academia.edu/37459635/Impact_of_School_Principal_Leadership

Kim, H., Sefcik, J. S., & Bradway, C. (2017). Characteristics of qualitative descriptive studies: A systematic review. *Research in Nursing & Health. 40*(1), 23-42. https://doi.org/10.1002/nur.21768

Korpershoek, H., Harms, T., de Boer, H., van Kuijk, M., & Doolaard, S. (2016). A meta-analysis of the effects of classroom management strategies and classroom management programs on students' academic, behavioral, emotional, and motivational outcomes. *Review of Educational Research, 86*(3), 643–680. https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654315626799

Kress, J., Norris, J., Schoenholz, D., Elias, M., & Seigle, P. (2004). Bringing together educational standards and social and emotional learning: Making a case for educators. *American Journal of Education,111*(1),68–89. https://doi.org/10.1086/424720

Landes, S. J., McBain, S. A., & Curran, G. M. (2019). An introduction to effectiveness-implementation hybrid designs. *Psychiatry Research, 280*, 112-513. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2019.112630

Lawson, G. M., McKenzie, M. E., Becker, K. D., Selby, L., & Hoover, S. A. (2019). The core components of evidence-based social-emotional learning programs. *Prevention Science, 20*(4), 457-467. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11121-018-0953-y

Leithwood, K., Louis, K. B., Anderson, S., & Wahlstrom, K. (2004). *How leadership influences student learning*. The Wallace Foundation. http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/school-leadership/key-research/Documents/How-Leadership-Influences-Student-Learning.pdf

Leithwood, K., & Sun, J. (2012). The nature and effects of transformational school leadership: A meta-analytic review of unpublished research. *Educational Administration Quarterly*,*48*(3), 387– 423. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161x11436268

Levitt, H. M. (2018). How to conduct a qualitative meta-analysis: Tailoring methods to enhance methodological integrity. *Psychotherapy Research, 28*(3), 367-378. https://doi.org/10.1080/10503307.2018.1447708

Lipscombe, K., Tindall-Ford, S., & Kirk, M. (2019). Leading a top-down directive from the bottom up. A school and university partnership. *Leading & Managing, 25*(1), 29–43. https://ro.uow.edu.au/sspapers/4347/

Liu, H., & Li, G. (2018). Linking transformational leadership and knowledge sharing: The mediating roles of perceived team goal commitment and perceived team identification. *Frontiers in Psychology,* 9,1-10. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01331

Locke, J., Lee, K., Cook, C. R., Frederick, L., Vázquez-Colón, C., Ehrhart, M. G., Aarons, G. A., Davis, C., & Lyon, A. R. (2019). Understanding the organizational implementation context of schools: A qualitative study of school district administrators, principals, and teachers. *School Mental Health,11*(3), 379–399.

https://doi.org/10.1007/s12310-018-9292-1

Low, S., Smolkowski, K., & Cook, C. (2016). What constitutes high-quality

implementation of SEL programs? A latent class analysis of second step®

implementation. *Prevention Science,17*(8), 981-991.

https://doi.org/10.1007/s11121-016-0670-3

Mackey, A., & Bassendowski, S. (2017). The History of Evidence-Based Practice in

Nursing Education and Practice. *Journal of Professional Nursing*, *33*(1), 51–55.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.profnurs.2016.05.009

Mahoney, J. L., Durlak, J. A., & Weissberg, R. P. (2018). An update on social and

emotional learning outcome research. *Phi Delta Kappan,100*(4), 18-23.

https://doi.org/10.1177/0031721718815668

Maizan, C., Florianna, L. M., & Hamidi, H. (2019). Preferred leadership traits by

Employees: A case study in telecommunication organization. *Journal of*

Cognitive Sciences and Human Development,5(2), 53-65.

https://doi.org/10.33736/jcshd.1919.2019

Malterud, K., Siersma, V. D., & Guassora, A. D. (2016). Sample size in qualitative

interview studies: Guided by information power. *Qualitative Health Research,*

26(13), 1753-1760. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732315617444

Mart, A. K., Weissberg, R. P., & Kensziora, K. (2015). Systemic support for SEL in

school districts. In J. A. Durlak, C. E. Domitrovich, R. P.Weissberg, & T.P.

Gullotta (Eds.), *Handbook of social and emotional learning: Research and*

practice (pp.482-499). Sage Publication.

Martin, J. (2016). Perceptions of transformational leadership in academic libraries.

 Journal of Library Administration, 56(3), 266–284.

 https://doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2015.1105069

Martinez, L. (2016). Teacher's voices on social and emotional learning: Identifying the

 conditions that make implementation possible.*The International Journal of*

 Educational Emotion. 8(2), 6-24.

 https://www.um.edu.mt/library/oar//handle/123456789/14429

Marzano, R., Water, T., & McNulty, B. (2005). *School leadership that works. From*

 research to results: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Matua, G. A., & Van Der Wal, D. M. (2015). Differentiating between descriptive and

 interpretive phenomenological research approaches. *Nurse Researcher, 22*(6), 22-

 27. https://doi.org/10.7748/nr.22.6.22.e134

McCarley, T. A., Peters, M. L., & Decman, J. M. (2016). Transformational leadership

 related to school climate: A multi-level analysis. *Educational Management*

 Administration & Leadership, *44*(2), 322–342.

 https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143214549966

McIntosh, K., Kelm, J. L., & Canizal Delabra, A. (2016). In search of how principals

 change: A qualitative study of events that help and hinder administrator support

 for school-wide Positive Behavior Intervention Support. *Journal of Positive*

 Behavior Interventions,18(2), 100–110.

 https://doi.org/10.1177/1098300715599960.

McKevitt, B. C. (2012). School psychologists' knowledge and use of evidence-based,

social-emotional learning interventions. *Contemporary School Psychology,16*, 33– 45. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03340974

McKown, C. (2019). Challenges and opportunities in the applied assessment of student social and emotional learning. *Journal of Educational Psychologist, 54*(3), 205-221. https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2019.1614446

Metz, A., Bartley, L., Ball, H., Wilson, D., Naoom, S., & Redmond, P. (2015). Active implementation frameworks for successful service delivery: Catawba county child wellbeing project. *Research on Social Work Practice*, *25*(4), 415–422. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049731514543667

Metz, A., & Easterling, D. (2016). Using implementation science to translate foundation strategy. *The Foundation Review, 8*(2),116. https://doi.org/10.9707/1944-5660.1302.

Meyers, D. C., Domitrovich, C. E., Dissi, R., Trejo, J., & Greenberg, M. T. (2019). Supporting systemic social and emotional learning with a schoolwide implementation model. *Evaluation And Program Planning*, *73*, 53–61. https://doi.org/ 10.1016/j.evalprogplan.2018.11.005

Meyers, D. C., Gil, L., Cross, R., Keister, S., Domitrovich, C. E., & Weissberg, R. P. (2015). *Collaborative for academic, social, and emotional learning* (*CASEL) guide for school-wide social and emotional learning*. Retrieved, http://secondaryguide.casel.org/casel-secondary-guide.pdf

Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). Sage Publication.

Minckler, C. H. (2014). School leadership that builds teacher social capital. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 42*(5), 657–679. https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143213510502

Minkos, M. L., Sassu, K. A., Gregory, J. L., Patwa, S. S., Theodore, L. A., & Femc-Bagwell, M. (2017). Culturally responsive practice and the role of school administrators. *Psychology in the Schools, 54*(10), 1260–1266. https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22072

Morsa, M., Lombrail, P., Boudailliez, B., Godot, C., Jeantils, V., & Gagnayre, R. (2018). A qualitative study on the educational needs of young people with chronic conditions transitioning from pediatric to adult care. *Patient Preference and Adherence,12,* 2649–2660. https://doi.org/10.2147/ppa.s184991

Moullin, J. C., Ehrhart, M. G., & Aarons, G. A. (2018). The role of leadership in organizational implementation and sustainment in service agencies. *Research on Social Work Practice. 28*(5), 558-567. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049731517718361

Murray, S. D., Hurley, J., & Ahmed, S. R. (2015). Supporting the whole child through coordinated policies, processes, and practices. *Journal of School Health, 85*, 795-801. https://doi.org/10.1111/josh.12306

Nassaji, H. (2015). Qualitative and descriptive research: Data type versus data analysis. *Language Teaching Research*, *19*(2), 129–132. https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168815572747

Nathanson, L., Rivers, S. E., Flynn, L. M., & Brackett, M. A. (2016). Creating emotionally intelligent schools with RULER. *Emotion Review, 8*(4), 305–310.

https://doi.org/10.1177/1754073916650495

Niessen, C., Mäder, I., Stride, C., & Jimmieson, N. L. (2017). Thriving when exhausted: The role of perceived transformational leadership. *Journal of Vocational Behavior,103*, 41-51. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2017.07.012

Nilsen, P. (2015). Making sense of implementation theories, models and frameworks. *Implementation Science*, *10*: https://doi.org/10.1186/s13012-015-0242-0

Nordstrum, L. E., LeMahieu, P. G., & Berrena, E. (2017). Implementation science: Understanding and finding solutions to variation in program implementation. *Quality Assurance in Education, 25*(1), 58-73. https://doi.org/10.1108/QAE-12-2016-0080

Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*. https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847

Oberle, E., Domitrovich, C. E., Meyers, D. C., & Weissberg, R. P. (2016). Establishing systemic social and emotional learning approaches in schools: A framework for school-wide implementation. *Cambridge Journal of Education, 46*(3), 277-297. https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764x.2015.1125450

Osher, D., Kidron, Y., Brackett, M., Dymnicki, A., Jones, S., & Weissberg, R. P. (2016). Advancing the science and practice of social and emotional learning. *Review of Research in Education, 40*(1), 644–681. https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732x16673595

Palinkas, L. A., Horwitz, S. M., Green, C. A., Wisdom, J. P., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, K.

(2015). Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed

method implementation research. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and*

Mental Health Services Research, 42(5), 533-544.

https://doi.org/10.1007/s10488-013-0528-y

Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. *Integrating theory*

Radatz, D. L., & Wright, E. M. (2016). Integrating the principles of effective intervention

into batterer intervention programming: The case for moving toward more

evidence-based programming. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, *17*(1), 72–87.

https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838014566695

Ravitch, S. M., & Carl, N. M. (2016). *Qualitative research: Bridging the conceptual,*

theoretical, and methodological. Sage Publication.

Redding, S., & Walberg, J. (2015). Indicator of effective SEL practice. In J. A. Durlak, C.

E. Domitrovich, R. P. Weissberg, & T. P. Gullotta (Eds.), Handbook of social and

emotional learning: Research and practice (pp. 327- 389). The Guilford Press.

Reinke, W. M., Stormont, M., Herman, K. C., Puri, R., & Goel, N. (2011). Supporting

children's mental health in schools: Teacher perceptions of needs, roles, and

barriers. *School Psychology Quarterly, 26* (1), 1–13.

https://doi.org/10.1037/a0022714

Rettke, H., Pretto, M., Spichiger, E., Frei, I. A., & Spirig, R. (2018). Using reflexive

thinking to establish rigor in qualitative research. *Nursing Research, 67*, 490-497.

https://doi.org/10.1097/NNR.0000000000000307

Rimm-Kaufman, S. E., Larsen, R. A. A., Baroody, A. E., Curby, T. W., Ko, M., Thomas,

J. B., Merritt, E. G., Abry, T., & DeCoster, J. (2014). Efficacy of the "responsive classroom" approach: Results from a 3-Year, longitudinal randomized controlled trial. *American Educational Research Journal, 51*(3), 567–603. https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831214523821

Ross, K. M., & Tolan, P. (2018). Social and emotional learning in adolescence: Testing the CASEL model in a normative sample. *The Journal of Early Adolescence, 38*(8),1170–1199. https://doi.org/10.1177/0272431617725198

Sancassiani, F., Pintus, E., Holte, A., Paulus, P., Moro, M. F., Cossu, G., Angermeyer, M. C., Carta, M. G., & Lindert, J. (2015). Enhancing the emotional and social skills of the youth to promote their wellbeing and positive development: a systematic review of universal school-based randomized controlled trials. *Clinical Practice Epidemiol & Mental Health,11*(1), 21-40. https://doi.org/10.2174/1745017901511010021

Sanjari, M., Bahramnezhad, F., Fomani, F. K., Shoghi, M., & Cheraghi, M. A. (2014). Ethical challenges of researchers in qualitative studies: the necessity to develop a specific guideline. *Journal of Medical Ethics and History of Medicine, 7*(14). https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/Pmc4263394/

Schonert-Reichl, K. A. (2019). Advancements in the landscape of social and emotional learning and emerging topics on the horizon. *Educational Psychologist, 54* (3), 222-232. https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2019.1633925

Schonert-Reichl, K. A., Oberle, E., Lawlor, M. S., Abbott, D., Thomson, K., Oberlander, T. F., & Diamond, A. (2015). Enhancing cognitive and social-emotional

development through a simple-to-administer mindfulness-based school program

for elementary school children: a randomized controlled trial. *Developmental*

psychology,51(1), 52– 66. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0038454

Sebastian, J., Allensworth, E., Wiedermann, W., Hochbein, C., & Cunningham, M.

(2019). Principal leadership and school performance: An examination of

instructional leadership and organizational management. *Leadership and policy in*

schools, 18 (4), 591-613. https://doi.org/10.1080/15700763.2018.151315

Seitz, S. (2016). Pixilated partnerships, overcoming obstacles in qualitative interviews via

Skype: a research note. *Qualitative Research,16* (2), 229–235.

https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794115577011

Sheninger, E. (2014). *A review of digital leadership: Changing paradigms for changing*

times. Corwin Press.

Shriver, T. P., & Weissberg, R. P. (2020). A Response to Constructive Criticism of Social

and Emotional Learning. *Phi Delta Kappan, 101*(7), 52–57.

https://doi.org/10.1177/0031721720917543

Silveira-Zaldivar, T., & Curtis, H. (2019). "I'm Not Trained for This!" and Other Barriers

to Evidence-Based Social Skills Interventions for Elementary Students with High

Functioning Autism in Inclusion. *International Electronic Journal of Elementary*

Education, 12(1), 53 – 66. https://doi.org/10.26822/iejee.2019155337

Sim, J., Saunders, B., Waterfield, J., & Kingstone, T. (2018). Can sample size in

qualitative research be determined a priori? *International Journal of Social*

Research Methodology, 21(5), 619–634.

https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2018.1454643

Smolkowski, K., Crawford, L., Seeley, J. R., & Rochelle, J. (2019). Introduction to
implementation science for research on learning disabilities. *Learning Disability
Quarterly, 42* (4),192–203. doi:10.1177/0731948719851512

Spillane, J. P., & Kenney, A. W. (2012). School administration in a changing education
sector: The US experience. *Journal of Educational Administration, 50* (5), 541–
561. https://10.1108/09578231211249817

State Department of Education (SDE). (2019). *Annual Dataquest Report.*
https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/content.asp

Tan, C. Y. (2018). Examining school leadership effects on student achievement: the role
of contextual challenges and constraints. *Cambridge Journal of Education, 48* (1),
21-45. https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2016.1221885

Taylor, R. D., Oberle, E., Durlak, J. A., & Weissberg, R. P. (2017). Promoting positive
youth development through school-based social and emotional learning
interventions: A meta-analysis of follow-up effects. *Child Development, 88* (4),
1156–1171. https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12864

Thapa, A., Cohen, J., Guffey, S., & Higgins-D'Alessandro, A. (2013). A review of school
climate research. *Review of Educational Research, 83* (3), 357–385.
https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654313483907

Thomas, D. R. (2017). Feedback from research participants: Are member checks useful
in qualitative research? *Qualitative Research in Psychology,14*, 23–41.

Tichnor-Wagner, A., Harrison, C., & Cohen-Vogel, L. (2016). Cultures of learning in

effective high schools. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *52*(4), 602–642.

https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X16644957

Tuffour, I. (2017). A critical overview of interpretative phenomenological analysis: A

contemporary qualitative research approach. *Journal of Healthcare*

Communications, 2(4), 1-5. https://doi.org/10.4172/2472-1654.100093

Urick, A., & Bowers, A. J. (2014). What are the different types of principals across the

United States? A latent class analysis of principal perception of

leadership. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *50* (1), 96–134.

https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X13489019

VanderStoep, S. W., & Johnston, D. D. (2009). *Research methods for everyday life:*

Blending qualitative and quantitative approaches: John Wiley & Sons.

Vasileiou, K., Barnett, J., Thorpe, S., & Young, T. (2018). Characterizing and justifying

sample size sufficiency in interview-based studies: systematic analysis of

qualitative health research over a 15-year period. *BMC Medical Research*

Methodology, 18(1), 1-18. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12874-018-0594-7

Vaughn, P., & Turner, C. (2016). Decoding via coding: Analyzing qualitative text data

through coding and survey methodologies. *Journal of Library Administration,*

56(1), 41-51. https://doi.org/:10.1080/01930826.2015.1105035

Wandersman, A., Alia, K., Cook, B. S., Hsu, L. L., & Ramaswamy, R. (2016). Evidence-

based interventions are necessary but not sufficient for achieving outcomes in

each setting in a complex world: Empowerment evaluation, getting to outcomes

and demonstrating accountability. *American Journal of Evaluation, 37*(4), 544–

561. https://doi.org/10.1177/1098214016660613

Wang, M. T., & Degol, J. L. (2015). School climate: A review of the construct, measurement, and impact on student outcomes. *Educational Psychology Review, 28*(2), 315-352. https://doi.org/10.1080/01443410.2015.1099618.

Wanless, S., Domitrovich, C., Wanless, S. B., & Domitrovich, C. E. (2015). Readiness to implement school-based social-emotional learning interventions: Using research on factors related to implementation to maximize quality. *Prevention Science,16*(8),1037-1043. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11121-015-0612-5

Weissberg, R. P. (2019). Promoting the social and emotional learning of millions of school children. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, *14*(1),65-69. https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691619831699

Weissberg, R. P., & Cascarino, J. (2013). Academic learning + social-emotional learning = national priority. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *95*(2), 8–13. https://doi.org/10.1177/003172171309500203

Weissberg, R. P., Durlak, J. A., Domitrovich, C. E., & Gullotta, T. P. (2015). Social and emotional learning: Past, present, and future. In J. A. Durlak, C. E. Domitrovich, R. P. Weissberg, & T. P. Gullotta (Eds.), *Handbook for social and emotional learning: Research and practice* (pp. 3–19). The Guilford Press.

Wigelsworth, M., Lendrum, A., Oldfield, J., Scott, A., ten Bokkel, I., Tate, K., & Emery, C. (2016). The impact of trial stage, developer involvement and international transferability on universal social and emotional learning programme outcomes: A meta-analysis. *Cambridge Journal of Education, 46*(3), 347–376.

https://doi.org/10.1080/ 0305764X.2016.1195791

Willis, D. G., Sullivan-Bolyai, S., Knafl, K., & Cohen, M. Z. (2016). Distinguishing

features and similarities between descriptive phenomenological and qualitative

description research. *Western Journal of Nursing Research, 38*(9), 1185–1204.

https://doi.org/10.1177/0193945916645499

Wu, Y. P., Thompson, D., Aroian, K. J., McQuaid, E. L., & Deatrick, J. A. (2016).

Commentary: Writing and evaluating qualitative research reports. *Journal of

Pediatric Psychology, 41*(5), 493–505. https://doi.org/10.1093/jpepsy/jsw032

Yahaya, R., & Ebrahim, F. (2016). Leadership styles and organizational commitment:

Literature review. *Journal of Management Development, 35*(2), 190-216.

https://doi.org/10.1108/JMD-01-2015-0004

Yeager, D. S. (2017). Social and emotional learning programs for adolescents. *The

Future of Children, 27*(1),73-94. https://doi.org/10.1353/foc.2017.0004

Yin, R. K. (2017). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods*. Sage

Publication.

Young, M. D., Winn, K. M., & Reedy, M. A. (2017). The every student succeeds act:

Strengthening the focus on educational leadership. *Educational Administration

Quarterly, 53*(5), 705–726. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X17735871

Appendix A: Interview Protocol

1. Thank the interview participants for volunteering their time to participate in the study and give a quick recap of the study.

2. Explain to the interview participant that participation in the study is voluntary and can be retracted at any time by contacting me via email or during the interview.

3. Explain to the interview participant that their identity will remain confidential and not included in the study report.

4. Advise the participant that the interview will be audio-recorded and with note-taking.

5. Advise the participant that the interview will take approximately one hour.

6. Ask the participant if he or she would like to choose a pseudonym before proceeding with the interview.

7. Begin the interview.

8. Ask follow-up questions as needed.

9. Thank the interview participant for their time and participation.

10. Forty-eight hours following the interview, the participants will be provided with the interview transcripts via email to ensure that their responses are as intended.

11. Participants who wish to make any changes will have a fifteen-minute session to do so.

Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Research Questions:

1. What leadership behaviors do principals describe as necessary to implement
   SEL programs in their schools?

2. What are the challenges principals encounter during SEL program
   implementation?

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. How many years have you been the principal at your current school?

2. How would you describe the central mission of your school?

   a. What are the primary goals? What is your highest priority?

   b. What are the most important methods for achieving the mission?

3. What does social and emotional learning (SEL) mean to you?

4. Please describe your past experiences with SEL?

5. What are the SEL programs that your school focuses on or has implemented or
   currently implementing? Why were those programs chosen?

   a. What strategies were used during implementation to help your staff
      understand the initiative's purpose or goal?

   b. What initiatives, steps, or plans were taken to initiates the implementation
      of any SEL program in your school

   c. What SEL measures do you have in place at your school that addresses
      your diverse learners' needs?

    d. How well are school climate perspectives integrated as part of SEL programs at your school

6. Please explain the ways you support SEL in your role?

7. Describe your work with your staff in implementing SEL in your school

   What are some of how you help staff members make sense of the program and understand why it is essential to implement SEL?

8. What strategy do you find fitting in providing leadership as it relates to SEL implementation?

9. What importance does trust have on your work with your staff and students?

       a. How do you go about building trust?

       b. What have been barriers, if any, you have experienced in building trust?

       c. What is your level of involvement in providing any professional development for your teachers and support staff to implement SEL?

10. In what ways have you successfully supported a teacher struggling to build a positive relationship with and between students? Please describe.

11. What are the recommended practices you provided to your staff when implementing the SEL programs? Do you have to modify any practices to meet the needs of students or teachers better? Please explain.

12. What are the biggest challenges you've faced in your role as you support teachers in SEL implementation?

13. From your perspective, how has your role changed as a result of SEL implementation?

14. What, if anything, would you do differently given your experience with the SEL implementation?

15. Is there anything else you would like to add to your information?

We have concluded the interview. Your participation has been beneficial for this study, and I appreciate the time and information you have provided. Thank you very much.