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Elementary School Principals' Perspectives on Teacher Retention and Effective Leadership

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Walden University

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Tiffany Jones

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Walden University
2021

Abstract

Elementary School Principals' Perspectives on Teacher Retention and Effective

Leadership

by

Tiffany Jones

MA, University of Phoenix, 2009

BS, University of Houston, 2007

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

May 2021

Abstract

Low teacher retention negatively influences overall school culture, community, and student achievement. More specifics about what principals are doing to enhance teacher retention are needed. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand how elementary school principals address challenges when trying to retain teachers and the leadership practices principals believe encourage teachers to remain in the profession. The conceptual framework included Burns' transformational leadership theory and Fullan and Quinn's coherence model. Ten experienced elementary principals with higher retention rates within a suburban school district in the southern United States participated in semistructured interviews in which they were asked about challenges and leadership. A combination of a priori and open coding was used to support thematic analysis. Workload, culture and climate, and lifestyle changes were associated with challenges principals face when trying to retain teachers. Participants indicated that building relationships with teachers, supporting teachers consistently, and maintaining strong hiring practices, induction programs, and professional development offerings were key to retaining teachers. Recommendations include regularly providing mentors for new teachers, including those new to the building, and providing more professional development for principals who need to support teachers. Exit surveys and interviews with teachers, in addition to frequent conversations with teachers who stay, were suggested to inform both the principals and district-level personnel. This study has potential for positive social change because having stable and satisfied teachers influences the success of students and benefits communities.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Teacher turnover is a concern for school principals around the world. Research shows countries such as China, Brazil, Ghana, and the United States are experiencing high teacher turnover (Addai et al., 2018; Hayes, 2016; Hornick-Lockard, 2019; Thorburn, 2016). In this study, *teacher turnover* refers to teachers who migrate to another school or leave the teaching profession (Maready, 2018).

The underlying educational issue is that the southern region of the United States has higher teacher turnover than other regions (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). The research problem for this study is that principals face challenges related to retaining teachers. When comparing teacher turnover data for states in the southern region to those in the northern region, data show teachers in southern states, such as North Carolina, Mississippi, and South Carolina, have a turnover rate of 20%. In contrast, northern states, such as New Jersey, Illinois, and Pennsylvania, have annual teacher turnover rates below 10% (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). McKillip and Farrie (2019) completed a study in Georgia and concluded that statewide data show that teachers are leaving the profession in this state faster than in previous years. In this study, I addressed the challenges principals face when trying to retain teachers in a suburban school district in a southern state of the United States and leadership practices that principals believe encourage teachers to stay in the profession. The local setting is an example of a larger problem in the United States and the southern region. This research can lead to positive change as it may help elementary school principals understand how to address challenges when trying to retain teachers and leadership practices that may

encourage teachers to remain in the profession. Addressing teacher turnover is important for school effectiveness, as academic and financial costs of teacher turnover are significant for student learning and district budgets (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). In this chapter, I detail the background of teacher turnover, programs various states have implemented to address teacher turnover, the purpose and nature of the study, and definitions of terms used in the study.

Background

In the United States, 40%–50% of teachers leave the profession within the first 5 years (Hornick-Lockard, 2019; Uribe-Zarain et al., 2019). Research shows that this high percentage of turnover has been occurring for decades. The number of teachers leaving the profession has increased substantially over the past two decades, with the national annual turnover rate currently hovering over 8% (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Although other countries experience high teacher turnover, U.S. schools are experiencing higher teacher turnover than other countries (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Garcia & Weiss, 2019). Researchers who study teacher turnover in the United States have concluded that teacher turnover is highest in schools in the country's southern region (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Teacher turnover in southern states, such as North Carolina, South Carolina, and Mississippi, is about 20% annually, whereas teacher turnover in northern states, such as New Jersey, Illinois, and Pennsylvania, is below 10% annually (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

When looking at the teacher turnover rate, it is also important to determine why teachers are leaving. Teachers leave the profession for various reasons, some of which

are personal (Adnot et al., 2016). However, most teachers leave due to job attributes that include school culture, unsupportive working environment, and principal leadership (Adnot et al., 2016). Teachers leave due to dissatisfaction with testing and accountability, dissatisfaction with school administration, and dissatisfaction with the teaching career (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). In addition to dissatisfaction, teachers also leave due to a need for a higher salary, lack of influences over school policies and practices, and lack of autonomy over their classrooms (Podolsky et al., 2016). Santoro (2018) concluded that teachers leave due to dissatisfaction, lack of preparation, and inadequate administrative support.

High teacher turnover has a host of negative consequences for students (Torres, 2016). When schools experience high teacher turnover year after year, it is harmful to student achievement (Adnot et al., 2016; Burkhauser, 2016; Redding et al., 2019; Santoro, 2018; Young, 2018). Districts with high teacher turnover may be forced to focus on hiring rather than supporting teachers (Stover, 2017). These schools may have difficulty creating a climate conducive to student learning as institutional knowledge about students, school programs, and the curriculum are lost when teachers leave the school (Redding, 2018).

With research showing the negative impact of teacher turnover, many district leaders expect school principals to address teacher retention. Studies show that schools are having a difficult time retaining teachers (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). When trying to address teacher retention, principals may face challenges. School working conditions,

professional development opportunities, and a shrinking pipeline of potential teachers are challenges principals face when trying to retain teachers (Garcia & Weiss, 2019).

To address teacher turnover, policymakers at the federal, state, and local levels have implemented policies geared to decreasing teacher turnover (Johnson, 2018). The U.S. Department of Education provides federal grants to local education agencies to help fund various retention programs. With funds from the U.S. Department of Education, many states—such as Alaska, California, Mississippi, and South Carolina—have started or improved programs. For example, states use their Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) funds, for the Grow Your Own program (ESAA, n.d.). The Grow Your Own program is a strategy used by many states and districts to recruit and retain teachers (ESSA, n.d.). The program emphasizes equitable approaches and critical perspectives that combine homegrown teachers' roles, culturally relevant curriculum, and social justice pedagogy to help address achievement and opportunity gaps (Valenzuela, 2017).

In addition to the Grow Your Own programs, states also use federal funds for induction and mentorship programs. Hawaii uses federal funds from ESSA to fund its rigorous induction program (Hawaii Department of Education [DOE], n.d.). All beginning teachers in Hawaii participate in a comprehensive 3-year induction program, which ensures that trained mentors support beginning teachers to help accelerate teacher effectiveness and student learning (Hawaii Department of Education [DOE], n.d.). The goal of Hawaii's 3-year induction program is to improve quality teacher retention and strengthen teacher leadership (Hawaii Department of Education [DOE], n.d.). Data from

Hawaii's annual teacher induction survey show the program positively affects retention (Johnson, 2018).

Nebraska uses their ESSA funds to provide financial assistance to teachers via loan forgiveness programs. Under Nebraska's Attracting Excellence to Teaching Program, the Nebraska Department of Education provides forgivable loans to eligible students who enroll in an undergraduate or graduate teacher education program at an eligible Nebraska institution (Attracting Excellence to Teaching Program, n.d.). Teachers who participate in the program can receive a loan of \$3,000 per year for up to 5 consecutive years. After the first 2 years of full-time teaching in Nebraska, the \$3,000 loan is forgiven for each year of teaching or \$6,000 for each year if teaching in a remote area or in a school where 40% of students are socioeconomically disadvantaged (Attracting Excellence to Teaching Program, n.d.).

Although these programs are in place, principals are the key players in hiring and retaining teachers (Hornick-Lockard, 2019). The main factor in increasing teacher retention is administrative support, yet specific ways school principals directly or indirectly influence retention remains underexamined (Redding et al., 2019). There is a gap in practice regarding what principals are doing to address teacher retention and a gap in the literature. Researchers are now beginning to focus on exploring administrative roles, especially the principal, in addressing this critical topic of teacher retention (Holmes et al., 2019). The goal of this study was to provide insight into how principals address challenges when trying to retain teachers and leadership practices principals believe encourage teachers to remain in the profession.

Problem Statement

The underlying educational issue is that the southern region of the United States has higher teacher turnover than other regions (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). The research problem for this study was the challenges principals face related to retaining teachers. There is a gap in practice regarding what principals are doing to address teacher retention and a gap in the literature. Current literature fails to address how school principals directly or indirectly influence teacher retention (Redding et al., 2019). Researchers are now beginning to focus on exploring administrative roles, especially that of the principal, in addressing this critical topic of teacher retention (Holmes et al., 2019). The states included in the southern region of the United States as defined by the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) are Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas (SREB States, n.d.). In 2019, researchers analyzed each state's turnover data and concluded that states in the southern region had higher teacher turnover than states in other regions of the United States (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Understanding Teacher Shortage, 2019).

Teacher retention data has been researched for many years. In 2018, researchers reviewed teacher retention data for each state (Understanding Teacher Shortage, 2018). When compiling results, researchers assigned a teacher retention score to each state based on the number of teachers who left the profession, the number of teachers who left the school, and the number of teachers who planned to leave (Understanding Teacher Shortage, 2018). The researchers assigned a score of 1 to 5, with 5 being the best teacher

retention score (Understanding Teacher Shortage, 2018). States in the southern region had a lower teacher retention score than states in the northern region. Georgia, South Carolina, and Tennessee all received a teacher retention score of 2, and Florida received a 1 (Understanding Teacher Shortage, 2018). New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio, however, received a teacher retention score of 5, and New Jersey received a 4 (Understanding Teacher Shortage, 2018). Data from this study showed the difference in teacher retention rates of schools in the southern region compared to those of other regions, with schools in the southern region of the United States receiving, on average, a lower teacher retention score than other regions (Understanding Teacher Shortage, 2018).

High teacher turnover can be seen in Georgia. Statewide teacher turnover data show that teachers leave the profession faster than in previous years (McKillip & Farrie, 2019). Between the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 school year, approximately 16,000 teachers in the state left their school or the profession (McKillip & Farrie, 2019).

According to the Governor's Office of Student Achievement, the state's overall annual teacher retention rate where this study occurred is 86.3% (Teacher Workforce Retention by District, 2018). While the district's annual retention rate where this study took place is 88.2% (Teacher Workforce Retention by District, 2018). Although the district's annual retention rate is 1.9% above the state average, there are schools in the district with much lower teacher retention rates.

Per the district's 2017 improvement plan, there is a need to address teacher retention. The need to address teacher retention was also included in the district's 2018 strategic plan. Although the district's annual retention rate is 88.2%, a school in the

district has an annual teacher retention rate below 70% per the district's intermediate school's 2018–2019 strategic plan. Although the exact retention rates are not provided in the district's improvement plan, the district does include a collective list of its bottom 20 performing schools based on annual teacher retention. The plan does not list actual retention rates for each of the 20 schools; however, when reviewing the individual school's strategic plans, at least four schools in the district had a retention rate of 70% or higher.

The district's 2017 improvement plan explicitly stated the need to address teacher retention and stated that the district would develop interventions to support the retention of effective teachers and leaders. The intervention outlined in the plan included supporting teacher retention by providing targeted teacher development. The improvement plan stated that the district must develop a more precise and more seamless comprehensive plan for teacher support and retention.

Although teacher development is important for teacher retention, principals also impact a teacher's decision to stay or leave the profession (Jones & Watson, 2017). The specific gap in practice is indicated by the lack of research on how principal leadership is associated with teacher retention (Jones & Watson, 2017). In a 2017 study, Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond concluded that effective principals were associated with a higher teacher satisfaction rate and lower turnover rate. Research is available regarding teachers' perceptions of teacher retention. However, there is a gap in practice regarding what principals are doing to address the issue of teacher retention and a gap in the literature. Few researchers have studied teacher turnover from the principals' perspective,

even though principals play a vital role in a teacher's decision to leave or stay a school or the profession (Elyashiv, 2019). Current literature fails to address how school principals directly or indirectly influence teacher retention (Redding et al., 2019). Researchers are now beginning to focus on exploring administrative roles, especially the principal, in addressing this critical topic of teacher retention (Holmes et al., 2019). This study's data may help education programs and districts understand how principals address challenges when trying to retain teachers and leadership practices principals believe encourage teachers to remain in the profession. More research is necessary to understand principals' leadership and teacher turnover (Torres, 2016).

Although research is available regarding teacher retention, there is a gap in practice regarding what principals are doing to address the issue of teacher retention and a gap in the literature. Additional research can help educational programs and districts provide new and experienced principals with additional strategies to provide additional support that may also help increase teacher retention. For this study, as an initial step in developing participant selection criteria, principals were asked to complete a questionnaire to indicate the total number of teachers in their building and the number of teachers who left their school after the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 school year. These data were used to determine their annual retention rates. These data were not included in the data analysis. Principals with a higher retention rate than the district who had 3 years or more of experience at their current school were invited to participate in the study. The resulting insights may help principals in other schools in the district address teacher retention.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand how elementary school principals address challenges when trying to retain teachers in a suburban school district in a southern state of the United States and the leadership practices they believe encourage teachers to remain in the profession. School district personnel are faced with the challenge of recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers (Sutcher et al., 2016). Teacher turnover hurts student achievement, impedes instructional improvement and collaboration, and increases financial costs when replacing teachers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Due to the impact of teacher turnover, principals need to do everything possible to retain highly qualified teachers (Jones & Watson, 2017). Principals can deter turnover by providing support to teachers (Redding et al., 2019). With support from principals, teachers feel less isolated, contributing to higher teacher retention (Uribe-Zarain et al., 2019).

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: What challenges do principals face in trying to retain teachers and how do principals address the challenges?

RQ2: What leadership practices do elementary school principals believe encourage teachers to remain in the profession?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was based on Burns' transformational leadership theory. This leadership theory has been used in educational and business

contexts (Eliophotou-Menon & Ioannou, 2016). Transformational leadership is when leaders and followers work together to advance higher morale and motivation (Burns, 2012). Through a culture of collaboration, Burns (2012) believes leaders and followers engage with one another in such a way that leaders and followers raise each other to higher levels of motivation and morality. The leader's behavior provides a source of inspiration to the followers by providing them with meaning and challenges (Eliophotou-Menon & Ioannou, 2016).

The transformational leadership framework informed the research questions and allowed me to better understand how elementary school principals address challenges when trying to retain teachers and leadership practices they believe encourage teachers to remain in the profession. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand how elementary school principals address challenges when trying to retain teachers in a suburban school district in a southern state of the United States and the leadership practices principals believe encourage teachers to remain in the profession. When reviewing studies regarding transformational leaders in education research, transformational leadership has been tied to the successful implementation of positive school culture, increased teacher efficacy, and increased student achievement (Murphy, 2018). While transformational leadership is ideal, many leaders effectively use other leadership styles. Transformational leaders can substantially influence their followers' attitudes toward the job (Steinmann et al., 2018). This type of leadership is highly associated with a positive work attitude and job satisfaction (Kouni et al., 2018). Teachers feel substantially satisfied when school principals act as transformational

leaders (Kouni et al., 2018). Murphy (2018) outlined some best practices used by transformational leaders, including effectively communicating their vision, overcoming obstacles, and encouraging teachers to do the same.

When looking at the school system, the principal may consistently review school practices and policies to determine areas where changes are necessary. According to Fullan and Quinn's coherence model, whole-system improvement is necessary for a change to occur, and this improvement must involve transforming the current model (Fullan, 2016). According to Fullan and Quinn (2016), four essential components of the coherence framework must be implemented for a change to occur. First, the leader must focus direction (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). The principal must be clear about the moral purpose and specific goal that will best influence the change. The second component is cultivating a collaborative culture (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). With this component, the principal must establish a nonjudgmental culture of growth. The principal must show it is okay to make mistakes as long as you are working toward the goal and you are learning from your action. Deepening learning is the third component of Fullan and Quinn's coherence framework. When deepening learning rather than searching for a quick fix, the leader must create a collective inquiry community that deeply examines practices within the organization (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). The final component is securing accountability. In this component, the idea is to focus on internal accountability, which will lead to external accountability (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). Within the school, principals must build internal capacity to establish strong internal accountability. When taking all these components into account, the one force that holds these four elements together is

leadership (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). As the school leader, a principal must ensure all four coherence components are in place to effectively implement change within the school.

Nature of the Study

This qualitative study used the exploratory case study design to explore how elementary school principals address challenges when trying to retain teachers and leadership practices principals believe encourage teachers to remain in the profession. Of the five commonly used qualitative designs, the exploratory case study design was the best fit for this study. This design allows a researcher to understand and investigate the case in-depth within the real-world context (Yin, 2017). In this study, the case was bounded by the context in the suburban school district that was the focus of this study. In a phenomenological study, a researcher seeks to understand the essence and underlying structure of a phenomenon. A grounded theory researcher seeks to understand and build a substantive theory about the phenomenon of interest (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Basic qualitative study was not used for this research. With the basic design, a researcher seeks to discover and understand a phenomenon that is not in a bounded system (Keen & Marcus, 2019). Because I was analyzing a phenomenon in a bounded system, the basic qualitative approach was not the best fit for this study. In this study, I analyzed how elementary school principals address challenges when trying to retain teachers in a suburban school district in a southern state of the United States and leadership practices principals believe encourage teachers to remain in the profession.

In this research, I studied the phenomenon of teacher retention and principal leadership. I sought to understand how elementary school principals address challenges

when trying to retain teachers in a suburban school district in a southern state of the United States and leadership practices principals believe encourage teachers to remain in the profession. In a study in the same state where this study took place, McKillip and Farrie (2019) concluded that statewide data show that teachers are leaving the profession in this state faster than in previous years.

For this study, data were collected via interviews; limited additional data were obtained from reports on the school district's website regarding teacher retention and the district's strategic plan goals for retention. Each participant was an elementary school principal from a suburban school district in the United States. The final participant size was 10 principals. Each participant had at least 3 years of experience as a principal at their current school and had a higher annual teacher retention rate than the district. Before conducting the interviews, I determined the interview questions. After each interview, I transcribed the data and analyzed the data through the coding process. During this process, I carefully read each transcript and assigned a code to the data chunks related to the research questions. After coding, I developed higher-level themes for the data. These themes allowed me to draw together the codes in a coherent and meaningful way.

Definitions

Attrition: The percentage of teachers leaving the profession within a given school year (United Nations Educational Scientific & Cultural Organization, 2020).

Educators: All education professionals and paraprofessionals working in participating schools (as defined in this document), including principals or other heads of

a school, teachers, other professional instructional staff (e.g., assistant teachers, instructional aides; Definitions, n.d.).

Local educational agency: A public board of education within a state for either administrative control or direction of public elementary schools or secondary schools in a city, county, township, and school district (Definitions, n.d.).

Retention: A new teacher's decision to remain in the same school placement or the teaching profession (Maready, 2018).

Turnover: When a teacher migrates to another school or leaves the teaching profession (Maready, 2018).

Assumptions

In research, it is important for readers to clearly understand how a researcher analyzed the data and the assumptions used to inform the data (Nowell et al., 2017). Without clearly stated assumptions, it is difficult for readers to evaluate the research (Nowell et al., 2017). When completing this study, the following assumptions were made:

1. All the principals participating in this study would respond under their own free will to help identify challenges principals face when trying to retain teachers and leadership practices principals use to encourage teacher retention.
2. All participants would answer the interview questions thoughtfully and honestly.
3. The participants had experienced challenges related to teacher turnover.
4. Participants would understand how elementary school principals address challenges when trying to retain teachers in a suburban school district in a southern state of the United States.

5. The participants would have insight into leadership practices principals use to encourage teacher retention.

The preceding assumptions were necessary to complete the study as they helped provide the basis to conduct the research study.

Scope and Delimitations

The underlying educational issue is that the southern region of the United States has higher teacher turnover than other regions (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). The research problem for this study was that principals face challenges related to retaining teachers. Through this study, I sought to better understand how elementary school principals address challenges when trying to retain teachers in a suburban school district in a southern state of the United States and leadership practices principals believe encourage teachers to remain in the profession. This study included 10 elementary school principals from a suburban school district in a southern state of the United States.

When completing this qualitative study, I continually considered the transferability of the study. Transferability impacts the trustworthiness of a study and refers to the generalizability of a study (Nowell et al., 2017). Although a researcher may not know the sites that readers may wish to transfer the findings, it is the researcher's responsibility to provide thick descriptions so that those who wish to transfer the findings to their own site can judge transferability (Nowell et al., 2017). Transferability was addressed by taking detailed journal notes throughout the research process.

Limitations

As in most studies, there may be limitations. In this research, a possible limitation was the participants' willingness to participate in the study. With principals' busy schedules, some were reluctant to participate due to schedule constraints. Due to scheduling limitations, I was flexible and accommodating with interview times and locations. Another limitation was the small number of participants in the study. To address this limitation, I recruited more participants than needed, as I knew some participants may have dropped out before the study's conclusion. In addition to accessibility and the number of participants, another limitation was the variety of reasons teachers leave the profession. When conducting this study, it was vital to continually monitor the alignment to ensure the focus remained on the challenges principals face when trying to retain teachers and not the other factors that may cause a teacher to leave the profession.

Significance

It is challenging for teachers to meet highly effective U.S. public school demands due to teacher turnover (Burkhauser, 2016). To address this challenge, principals can create a supportive and motivating culture. This study's results can fill the gap in practice regarding what principals are doing to address the issue of teacher retention and a gap in the literature. Supportive leaders can motivate and increase the morale and performance of their followers (Burns, 2012). This study's findings provided principals with insight into ways to address challenges when trying to retain teachers and leadership practices that encourage teachers to remain in the profession. Research shows that schools with

high teacher turnover rates tend to have classrooms filled with inexperienced and underqualified teachers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). This inexperience has a negative impact on student achievement (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). This study could lead to positive social change by helping principals and other administrators understand how elementary school principals address challenges when trying to retain teachers and leadership practices elementary school principals believe encourage teachers to remain in the profession. This knowledge may help principals retain teachers within schools. Higher teacher retention will help increase student achievement, improve school culture, and allow principals to build capacity and coordinate instruction within the school (Kraft et al., 2016).

Research is currently available regarding teacher retention and teachers' perspectives of what is important for them to remain in the profession. According to research from Torres (2016), many researchers have studied the role of principals. However, additional direct research is needed to determine how these roles and relationships impact teachers' decisions to stay or leave the school or profession (Torres, 2016).

Summary

In Chapter 1, I described many aspects of teacher retention, including the background of teacher retention, the problem I addressed in this study, and the purpose of the study. This section also provided details regarding the conceptual framework that guided the study and the nature, limitations, and significance of the study. Chapter 2 will consist of a review of the literature regarding teacher retention. Through this study, I

sought to understand how principals address challenges when trying to retain teachers in a suburban school district in a southern state of the United States and leadership practices principals believe encourage teachers to remain in the profession.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In the United States, approximately 16% of teachers leave the profession annually (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). This turnover impacts districts, students, and the community in many ways. Researchers have studied why teachers leave the profession, the impact of teacher turnover (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Podolsky et al., 2016; Young, 2018), and why teachers remain or leave the profession (“What’s the Cost of Teacher Turnover,” 2017).

Retaining highly effective teachers is an essential driver of a well-functioning educational system (Podolsky et al., 2016). The purpose of this qualitative case study is to understand how elementary school principals address challenges when trying to retain teachers in a suburban school district in a southern state of the United States and the leadership practices principals believe encourage teachers to remain in the profession. Recent research has shown that effective principals influence teacher retention (Grissom & Bartanen, 2018).

While researching teacher turnover, I analyzed various aspects of the phenomenon. The literature review section will include research regarding the rate of teacher turnover, reasons teachers leave, the impact of teacher turnover, and programs implemented to address teacher turnover. In addition to reviewing these subjects, leadership will also be discussed. I will provide an overview of leadership and information regarding principal leadership and the role principals have in retaining teachers.

Literature Search Strategy

When conducting this review, I accessed several databases to gain an in-depth understanding of the topic. I located articles using the Walden University Library, Google Scholar, Education Resources Information Center database, ProQuest, SAGE Premier, scholarly books, and dissertations. I also reviewed reference sections of articles retrieved to identify additional publications related to teacher turnover. The key terms used to identify key literature were *teacher retention*, *job satisfaction*, *retention strategies*, *teacher turnover*, *attrition*, *teacher support*, *principal leadership*, and *the principal's role in teacher retention*. When searching, the following topics emerged: *rate of teacher turnover*, *impact on student achievement*, *reasons teachers are leaving the profession*, *federal and state efforts to assist with retention*, and *principal leadership practices used to encourage teacher retention*.

Conceptual Framework

This study's conceptual framework was based on political historian James Burns' 1978 transformational leadership theory (Burns, 2012). As a landmark historian and winner of the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award, Burns devoted his career to studying leadership (Burns, 2012). The framework's usage was determined based on a literature review regarding principal leadership and teacher retention. During his studies, Burns (2012) established transactional and transformational leadership theories.

Burns defined the characteristics of each leadership type. Transactional leaders approach followers with the idea of exchanging one thing for another (Burns, 2012). This leadership type occurs when one person contacts another person to exchange a valued

thing. With transactional leaders beyond this exchange, there is no other relationship. Under transactional leaders, the leader and follower have no enduring purpose that holds them together (Burns, 2012).

In contrast, transformational leadership is more complicated; these leaders recognize and exploit their followers' existing needs (Burns, 2012). Transformational leaders are more concerned with end values. These leaders raise their followers through levels of morality. A transformational leader looks for potential motives in followers, seeks to satisfy their followers' higher needs, and engages their followers. The use of this motivation and encouragement results in a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders (Burns, 2012).

In this study, I sought to understand leadership within a school district. Therefore, Burns' leadership theory was a valuable conceptual framework. I focused on how elementary school principals address challenges when trying to retain teachers in a suburban school district in a southern state of the United States and leadership practices principals believe encourage teachers to remain in the profession. This framework provided more information on the best practices of leadership within a school setting. Through this study, I gained a deeper understanding of how elementary school principals address challenges when trying to retain teachers and leadership practices principals believe encourage teachers to remain in the profession.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

In Chapter 2, I present a summary of the literature related to elements of teacher turnover. The literature review identifies theories related to teacher turnover, including

reasons teachers leave, teacher turnover rate, and impact. The chapter continues by detailing programs implemented to address teacher turnover. Chapter 2 concludes with sections related to leadership theories and research regarding how principals can encourage teachers to remain in the profession. Previous research has shown that teacher turnover is an area of concern. Dahlkamp et al. (2017) completed a correlational study that consisted of 11 principals from schools in southeast Texas. The researchers concluded that teacher turnover remains a challenge in education (Dahlkamp et al., 2017). Dahlkamp et al. (2017) stated that a principal's ability to run the school directly impacts teacher retention.

Rate of Teacher Turnover

Research has shown that teachers have a higher annual turnover rate than other occupations, and new teachers are especially prone to leave education after their first year (Young, 2018). Studies from China, Ghana, the United Kingdom, and the United States indicate that high teacher turnover is a problem (Den Brok et al., 2017). Each year, schools in China hire approximately 100,000 foreign teachers to work in mainland China due to the country's high teacher turnover (Thorburn, 2016). In a 2015 study in Ghana, Addai et al. (2018) indicated that high teacher turnover in Ghana is a significant threat to its educational sector. In the United Kingdom, 50% of trained teachers are not in the teaching profession 5 years after graduation (Den Brok et al., 2017). Teachers in the United States are entering and leaving the profession faster than ever (Hornick-Lockard, 2019), with approximately 16% of public-school teachers leaving annually (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). This turnover is causing policy makers at the state

and local school levels to shift resources, rethink practices, and enact policies to keep qualified educators in U.S. classrooms (“What’s the Cost of Teacher Turnover,” 2017).

Teacher turnover is high for new and veteran teachers (Olsen & Huang, 2019). Shaw and Newton concluded it takes 3 to 5 years for novice teachers to become highly effective teachers, yet over one third of teachers leave the profession within the first 5 years (Shaw & Newton, 2014). Georgia’s teacher turnover data indicate nearly half of its public-school teachers leave education within the first 5 years of employment (Owens, 2015). With this rate of turnover, many lawmakers are seeking to determine ways to increase teacher retention.

Reasons Teachers Leave

Research shows that hiring and retaining teachers significantly affects student achievement (Young, 2018). For this reason, principals must know why teachers are leaving (Young, 2018). Many studies have been completed regarding why teachers leave. Podolsky et al. (2016) identified five significant factors that influence a teacher’s decision to enter, stay, or leave the profession: (a) preparation, (b) salary, (c) hiring and personnel management, (d) new teachers’ support, and (e) working conditions. Elyashiv (2019) determined teachers leave due to the stressful working conditions and poor job conditions. Sribayak et al. (2018) determined that the main reason teachers leave is due to school policies, and the researchers’ data indicated that teachers also leave due to salary, limited opportunities to advance, stressful job assignments, and excessive paperwork. Researchers Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) determined teachers leave the teaching profession due to a lack of preparation.

When individuals decide to pursue a teaching career, various routes can be taken to become a certified teacher. Colleges offer a comprehensive preparation program for future educators that includes observing other teachers, student teaching, and course work (Podolsky et al., 2016). Alternative routes are also available for educators who choose not to obtain their teaching certificate through a traditional college or university via programs such as Teach for America or American Board programs. Teach for America is an organization that recruits teachers for areas where schools and students are struggling (“Become an Elementary Teacher,” n.d.). On the other hand, American Board is an online teacher certification program accepted in 12 states (“Become an Elementary Teacher,” n.d.).

Studies show that the route teachers take to obtain their teaching certificate can influence retention rates (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Teachers who enter the teaching profession via alternative programs are 25% more likely to leave the profession (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Espinoza et al., 2018; & Podolsky et al., 2016). Teachers who obtain their certification through the traditional route are three times more likely to stay in the profession after the first year (Podolsky et al., 2016). Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) attributed the higher turnover for teachers entering via alternative routes to lack of preparation. Although college-based and alternative programs are available, states across the United States are experiencing declining enrollment in teacher preparation programs and uncertainty regarding how best to prepare future teachers (Partelow, 2019).

Salary levels of educators also impact a teacher's decision to enter or remain in the profession (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Podolsky et al., 2016; Sutchter et al., 2016; "What's the Cost of Teacher Turnover," 2017; Young, 2018). Beginning teachers nationwide earn 20% less than individuals with a college degree in other fields (Podolsky et al., 2016). Teachers who work in districts with lower wages are more likely to quit. When controlling for other factors, the district with a maximum teacher salary greater than \$72,000 is 20% to 31% more likely to remain at their schools than a district with the maximum pay of \$60,000 (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). In a study in Alaska, Cano et al. (2019) concluded when controlling for teacher, school, and district factors, having a lower salary is associated with a lower teacher retention rate. Total turnover percentages are highest in southern states (16.7%) and lowest in northeastern states (10.3%), where states offer higher pay (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

According to Dahlkamp et al. (2017), the overall climate of a school can also impact teacher retention. Principal leadership can lead to a healthy school climate, reducing teacher frustration (Uribe-Zarain et al., 2019). Those schools with a healthy school climate resulted in more engaged teachers regardless of their challenges (Uribe-Zarain et al., 2019). In a study in Chicago Public Schools, Torres (2016) determined that a teacher's perspective of the school's climate is a significant variable in elementary school teacher stability rates. Principals who encourage teachers to have a voice by including them in discussing instructional issues and principals who visit classrooms are most likely to gain trust from their teachers (Maready, 2018). These actions increase

positive school climate, and teachers are more satisfied with the job, which results in increased teacher retention rates (Maready, 2018).

A school's culture is another factor that influences teacher retention decisions (DiSchiano, 2017). School culture is defined as what a person feels when they walk into the school building (Prokopchuk, 2016). A school's culture is defined by the behavior, unwritten rules, beliefs, how things are done, and how the staff acts (Prokopchuk, 2016). School principals play an important role in establishing and sustaining the school culture (Prokopchuk, 2016). School culture is a critical part of teacher retention (Ryan, 2017). When principals lack positivity and do not instill a community culture within the school, this negatively influences a teacher's decision to remain in the profession (Seymour, 2016). With high turnover, a school cannot develop a positive culture, leading to high-stress levels, which are detrimental to teachers' psychological well-being (Domers, 2015). Successful principals can create a culture of learning, mentoring, and improving teaching conditions (Olsen & Huang, 2019). Creating this culture of support can help increase retention rates (DiSchiano, 2017).

Multiple researchers have outlined that teachers leave the profession due to dissatisfaction with their principals (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Shaw & Newton, 2014; Watkins, 2016). Shaw and Newton (2014) determined that one third of the teachers leaving the profession left because they felt they were not getting administrative support (Shaw & Newton, 2014). Watkins (2016) concluded that school administrators' inadequate support was one of the three most reported reasons teachers leave the profession. Although other factors can predict teacher retention, the only

significant predictor of retention is strong principal leadership and support (Player et al., 2017).

Research completed outside the United States also led researchers to conclude that school leadership impacts teacher retention decisions (Player et al., 2017). In a study completed in Belgium with 1,500 teachers in 46 schools, Player et al. (2017) showed that school leadership's quality was strongly associated with teachers' plans to remain at their school. In addition to the Belgium study, a study completed in Norway with 2,500 elementary and middle-school teachers concluded principal support influences teacher retention (Player et al., 2017). Although many researchers have studied why teachers leave, research has also been conducted on the impact of high teacher turnover.

Impact of Teacher Turnover

Teacher turnover may cost districts billions of dollars each year. High teacher turnover imposes significant financial costs on schools (Cano et al., 2019; Kraft et al., 2016). The national cost of teacher turnover in the United States reached over \$7 billion a year in 2007 (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Hornick-Lockard, 2019); in 2017, the price tag exceeded \$8 billion (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Many researchers have pondered how the money being allocated for replacing teachers could be used elsewhere. The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future investigated the cost of teacher turnover, and regardless of the district's size, the amount of money spent toward recruitment, hiring, and retention due to teachers leaving the district substantially impacted the district's budget (Dahlkamp et al., 2017). The burden and cost of high turnover affect not just a single classroom but also the entire school and

encourages additional teachers to leave, which creates a cycle of turnover (DeFeo et al., 2017). In Alaska, teacher turnover costs the state approximately \$20 million per year, and the average total cost of teacher turnover in Alaska is \$20,431.08 per teacher (DeFeo et al., 2017).

High teacher turnover may also impact the climate of the school. When schools experience continuous teacher turnover, it is difficult for schools to create a climate conducive to learning, as the knowledge about the students, curriculum, and school program is lost when the teacher leaves (Redding, 2018). Researchers and policymakers continue to focus on measuring and improving teacher effectiveness, but it is essential to remember that teachers do not live in vacuums (Kraft et al., 2016). A school's climate can either enhance or undermine a teacher's ability to succeed with students (Kraft et al., 2016).

To help schools address school climate, the U.S. Department of Education provides schools with free school climate improvement resource packages (National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environment, 2020). The resource packages provided by the U.S. Department of Education include surveys. Districts can use the survey data to generate reports to guide innovative designs to measure and strengthen school climate (National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environment, 2020).

Georgia, California, and New York administer school climate surveys to students, parents, and teachers. The Georgia survey aims to measure parents, students, and teachers' perceptions of the school's climate (Georgia Parent Survey, 2020). In California, students, school staff, and parents are invited to take the California School

Climate, Health, and Learning Survey; the survey has been used as a model for the nation as the blueprint for reauthorizing the United States Elementary and Secondary Act (California School Staff survey, 2020). From 2016-2018 over 700 districts, 5,500 schools, 1.3 million students, and 120,000 staff members have taken the California School Climate, Health, and Learning Survey (California School Staff Survey, 2020). New York also uses parent, teacher, and student surveys annually to determine how the community perceives each school's learning environment (Kraft et al., 2016).

As researchers study teacher turnover, many have concluded high teacher turnover negatively impacts student achievement (Adnot et al., 2016; Hanushek et al., 2016; Kraft et al., 2016; Olsen & Huang, 2019; Shaw & Newton, 2014; Torres, 2016). Classroom teachers have the most significant influence on student achievement in the short and long term (Donley et al., 2019; Shaw & Newton, 2014). High teacher turnover undercuts the efforts to build capacity and coordinate instruction within the building (Kraft et al., 2016). Continuous turnover challenges curricular planning at the school level and impacts individual teacher quality (DeFeo et al., 2017). When teachers leave, learning is interrupted, and student achievement suffers (Dahlkamp et al., 2017).

Teacher turnover can also affect the overall effectiveness of teachers in the building. Inexperienced teachers do not have the same impact on student achievement as veteran teachers ("Understanding the importance of teacher retention," 2017). When teachers leave, they are typically replaced with teachers with less than 3 years of experience (Domers, 2015). New teachers must learn the curriculum, the school, district-level policies and procedures and get to know the classroom and students

(“Understanding the importance of teacher retention,” 2017). Each year, more than 100,000 classrooms across the United States are staffed with teachers who are not fully qualified (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). In fact, in a southern state of the United States, recent data shows that the districts in the state are increasingly hiring new teachers without a standard certification (McKillip & Farrie, 2019). In 2019 nearly a quarter of the newly hired teachers entered with an alternative certification, while in 2013, only 13% of new hires had an alternative certification (McKillip & Farrie, 2019). The increase in new teachers with alternative certification and a decline in teachers with more experience is troubling (McKillip & Farrie, 2019). Novice teachers are not as effective as more experienced teachers (Kini & Podolsky, 2016; Kraft et al., 2016). Data obtained from a southern state where this study took place shows that the proportion of teachers with less than 5 years of experience continues to increase (McKillip & Farrie, 2019). During the 2013 school year, approximately 15% of teachers in the state had 4 years or less experience (McKillip & Farrie, 2019). This number increased in 2019 to 19% of the states’ educators (McKillip & Farrie, 2019).

Teachers’ effectiveness increases with the accumulation of years of experience (Kini & Podolsky, 2016; Kraft et al., 2016). After researching for 9 years and reviewing 30 studies, Kini and Podolsky (2016) concluded that teaching experience is positively associated with student achievement gains. Data from one of the studies reviewed showed that teachers with more experience had a statistically significant impact on students’ mathematic achievement. A six-year longitudinal study completed in Florida also showed student achievement in math and reading increased when teachers had more

experience (Kini & Podolsky, 2016). The student achievement gains are steeper in the teacher's initial year but continue through the teacher's second and 3 years (Kini & Podolsky, 2016). Those teachers that enter the teaching profession with little hands-on training, such as teachers entering the profession through alternative routes without completing student teaching or residency programs, show the steepest gains in their initial years in the classroom (Kini & Podolsky, 2016). When teachers accumulate experience in the same grade level, subject, or district in a supportive and collegial working environment, they show a greater rate of improved effectiveness as measured by standardized test results (Kini & Podolsky, 2016).

Teachers whose colleagues are more experienced are more effective than those whose colleagues are less experienced (Kini & Podolsky, 2016). Experienced teachers provide an important benefit to their school community beyond increasing learning (Kini & Podolsky, 2016). In their 2016 study in North Carolina, Kini and Podolsky found that teachers could raise students' test scores when their peer teachers had at least 4 years of experience (Kini & Podolsky, 2016). They also found novice teachers benefit from having experienced teachers as a peer and having a quality teacher as a peer has a ripple effect on student achievement beyond the current school year (Kini & Podolsky, 2016).

Programs to Address Teacher Turnover

When addressing teacher turnover, state, local, and federal government officials play an essential role. Educational leaders must address staffing difficulties by developing and implementing strategies to build a strong and stable teacher workforce ("What's the cost of teacher turnover," 2017). A new approach must be taken to train,

recruit, and retain teachers as high teacher turnover negatively impacts students, teachers, and the district (Sutcher et al., 2016).

The U.S. Department of Education implemented ESSA, requiring all school districts in the United States to staff each classroom with an effective teacher and each school with an effective leader (Fuller et al., 2017). The Department of Education based their requirements on decades of research that consistently found that teachers have the most substantial influence on student outcomes, with principals having the second most substantial influence (Fuller et al., 2017). ESSA authorizes approximately \$230 million in grants for local education agencies to support performance-based compensation systems and human management systems (Podolsky et al., 2016). ESSA provides states with flexibility in creating state-specific policies, particularly regarding school accountability systems, flexibility in ways states identify their lowest-performing schools, interventions provided to address their low-performing schools, and flexibility with educator evaluation systems (Fuller et al., 2017). While strong accountability and school improvement are important, ensuring all classrooms are filled with excellent educators is just as important (Johnson, 2018).

The ESSA program allows districts to use federal funds to address teacher salaries and other impeding factors hindering schools' ability to attract and retain highly qualified teachers (Podolsky et al., 2016). With the flexibility given to states on ways to use the ESSA funds, many states have developed and implemented innovative ways to improve their schools via ESSA grants (Johnson, 2018). Many states have seen improvements in

student achievement, teacher recruitment, and teacher retention when implementing various programs (Johnson, 2018).

ESSA funds may help districts establish and support high-quality educator induction and mentorship programs (Johnson, 2018, “Non-Regulatory Guidance for Title II,” 2016). Research shows that high-quality induction and mentoring programs can increase teacher retention and student achievement (Espinoza et al., 2018; Partelow, 2019; “Non-Regulatory Guidance for Title II,” 2016). Arkansas has used its ESSA funds to expand its mentor program. Under the Opportunity Culture model used in Arkansas, master teachers are paid additional compensation to take hybrid roles within their schools (Johnson, 2018). In the hybrid role, master teachers split their time between mentoring novice teachers and teaching (Johnson, 2018). The use of these mentor programs is important as research shows that mentor programs can impact a teacher’s decision to leave or stay in the profession (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019).

While Arkansas uses its ESSA funds to address mentoring teachers, Tennessee uses its ESSA funds toward its induction program. Under Tennessee’s three-year induction program, novice teachers are provided instructional training with their mentor for one to two hours a week throughout the school year (Johnson, 2018). The mentor provides post-observation feedback, and novice teachers are provided with lesson plan support (Johnson, 2018). Research shows that induction programs help improve new teachers’ effectiveness, significantly improving teacher retention and student achievement (Harmsen et al., 2018).

Other states use their ESSA funds to implement or improve their Grow Your Own teacher program (Johnson, 2018). The goal of the Grow Your Own teacher preparation program is to recruit and train local community members, career changers, paraprofessionals, after-school program staff, and others currently working in schools to pursue a career in teaching (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Espinoza et al., 2018). This model capitalizes on the fact that teachers are more likely to stay or remain in teaching when they teach near where they grew up (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Currently, Alaska, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Delaware, Minnesota, Mississippi, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina use the Grow Your Own program (Espinoza et al., 2018). The Grow Your Own program comes in different forms, which commonly includes paraprofessional teacher training programs and “2+2” programs that allow candidates to begin teacher preparation in a community college and finish their program in a 4-year institution.

Arkansas Department of Education uses its ESSA funds for programs such as the Arkansas Teacher Cadet Program. The goal of the Arkansas Teacher Cadet Program is to increase online resources available to teachers, including sample lesson plans, scholarship opportunities, and specialized certifications (Johnson, 2018). This program has been implemented in 38 districts and has helped the state serve over 700 students (Johnson, 2018). Programs such as Arkansas’ Teacher Cadet Program may help teachers feel supported. Research shows that when teachers feel supported, they are more likely to remain in the profession (Sutcher et al., 2016).

Louisiana has developed a Believe and Prepare Educator Grant Program, which includes elements to address teacher preparation, mentorship, and compensation (Johnson, 2018). Under the Believe and Prepare Educator Grant Program, the goal is to strengthen support through pre-service preparation (Johnson, 2018). Louisiana looks to create a more robust cohort of new teachers (Johnson, 2018). In 2017 the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education approved \$2.2 million to be allocated to the Believe and Prepare Education Grant Program (Department of Education Louisiana Believes, 2017). Under the Believe and Prepare Education Grant, teachers are provided with a one-year residency alongside an experienced mentor teacher. (Department of Education Louisiana Believes, n.d.). During the residency, the undergraduates receive a \$2,000 stipend, and the mentor receives a \$1,000 stipend (Department of Education Louisiana Believes, n.d.). Mentor teachers are local educators that have been provided training to equip them with the skills necessary to support new and resident teachers (Department of Education Louisiana Believes, n.d.).

Georgia has used ESSA funds to create a four-tiered certification program (Johnson, 2018). This program includes pre-service, induction, professional, and advanced level educators (Johnson, 2018). Those teachers in Georgia who are advanced level educators are offered instructional leadership opportunities, including mentoring and coaching (Johnson, 2018). Advanced level educators can receive additional compensation when taking on those instructional leadership responsibilities (Johnson, 2018).

When addressing schools' educational needs, it is crucial to review what is being done at the federal and state levels. In some areas, districts are experiencing teacher shortages due to high teacher turnover and a small pool of available teachers (Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Redding et al., 2019). Researchers believe the cost of quality preparation is an obstacle to entering the teaching profession, and this obstacle is causing the pool of available teachers to shrink (Espinoza et al., 2018). Over 40 states have established service scholarships and loan forgiveness programs to counteract teacher preparation programs' costs (Espinoza et al., 2018). These programs help underwrite teacher preparation cost in exchange for service in the profession (Espinoza et al., 2018). Research has shown that loan forgiveness programs improve recruitment (Espinoza et al., 2018).

Overview of Leadership

Burns Transactional and Transformational Leadership

Leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena (Burns, 2012). Burns examined the qualities that make certain leaders succeed (Burns, 2012). Through his research, Burns developed and outlined transactional and transformational leadership theories (Burns, 2012). Burns' leadership taxonomy was built around the notion that leadership is an exchange between leaders and followers (Goethals et al., Sorensen, & Burns, 2004). He believed the leaders and followers both have something to offer (Goethals et al., 2004). The nature of what is exchanged is what formed Burns' ideas of transactional and transformational leadership theories (Goethals et al., 2004).

The transactional theory of leadership recognizes that leadership is not the property of a person. Instead, leadership is a relationship in which one person leads and the other follows (Goethals et al., 2004). Under transactional leadership, the leader gives something to their followers, and the leader receives esteem and latitude for their action in return. This type of leader operates within a defined system and follows those rules (Hussain et al., 2017). These leaders track the employee's performance, and when there is a problem, they take action to correct the problem (Smith, 2016).

Transformational leaders work together to increase morale and motivation within the organization (Burns, 2012). These leaders offer a transcendent purpose as their mission (Goethals et al., 2004). The purpose addresses the higher-order needs of their followers and themselves (Goethals et al., 2004). In achieving the mission, both the leader and follower can be transformed (Goethals et al., 2004). As a result of mutual stimulation and elevation, the leader may become a moral agent while the follower may become a leader (Goethals et al., 2004). According to Burns, transformational leaders are more potent than transactional leaders (Burns, 2012). Transformational leaders encourage their followers to collaborate rather than work in isolation ("Transformational Leadership," n.d.). Transformational leadership entails developing followers to their full potential and challenging them to take risks and view problems in new ways (Goethals et al., 2004). This leadership style is preferred in many cultures and positively affects many cultures (Goethals et al., 2004). These leaders encourage their followers to participate in the decision-making process (Goethals et al., 2004).

When reviewing transformational leaders' characteristics, authenticity is critical (Goethals et al., 2004). When leaders show authenticity, it can positively impact others (Goethals et al., 2004). Authenticity is achieved by exemplary leaders when they can successfully balance the organization's tripod of forces (Goethals et al., 2004).

Creativity is another characteristic associated with leadership and happiness (Goethals et al., 2004). Burns thought that leaders must encourage their followers to share new ideas and be creative thinkers (Ross & Kendall, n.d.). Burns believed that listening makes the employee feel valued, which can improve outdated rules or procedures (Ross & Kendall, n.d.). Leaders must always listen and remember that each person has a perspective and a role that shapes their concerns and their take on a situation (Goethals et al., 2004). Good leaders are open to new ideas and accept constructive criticism (Ross & Kendall, n.d.)

This study followed the transformational leadership theory. This framework informed the research questions, as it allowed me to explore how elementary school principals address challenges when trying to retain teachers in a suburban school district in the southern state of the United States and leadership practices they believe encourage teachers to remain in the profession. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand how elementary school principals address challenges when trying to retain teachers in a suburban school district in the southern state of the United States and the leadership practices they believe encourage teachers to remain in the profession. The information gathered from this study may help principals develop strategies to motivate teachers to remain in the profession, thereby improving teacher retention.

Principal Leadership

Principal leadership plays a vital role in recruiting, hiring, and retaining teachers (“What’s the cost of teacher turnover,” 2017). Teacher retention starts with effective principal leadership (Modan, 2019). Effective principals implement practices to improve the school organization, teaching, and student achievement (Tosh & Doss, 2019). These practices include communicating the school’s goal and mission, creating shared expectations for high student performance, clarifying roles and objectives, and promoting professional development (Tosh & Doss, 2019).

Principals must determine if they will take on the role of a CEO or be involved in the school’s daily details (Modan, 2019). The principal’s managerial ability plays a role in developing schools (Kempa et al., 2017). Principals must effectively manage educators, facilities, infrastructure, and the curriculum (Kempa et al., 2017). The ability to manage all elements will create an effective leadership style needed to achieve the expected school vision (Kempa et al., 2017). The way teachers perceive their work environment is closely linked to how they view their principal (Modan, 2019). Effective principal leadership can foster cooperative efforts and maintain a positive working climate in schools (Kempa et al., 2017).

Studies have shown that strong principal leadership can promote teacher retention (Espinoza et al., 2018; Player et al., 2017; Stover, 2017; Sutchter et al., 2017). Effective leaders are at the heart of all schools, and these leaders drive high-quality support for new teachers and work to improve teaching conditions (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). As researchers look at the impact of high teacher turnover, it has been concluded

that retaining and developing teachers must become the principal's priority (Maready, 2018). The Reforms Support Network has suggested that districts change parts of a principal's evaluation protocol to include evaluating principals on teacher retention data (Holmes et al., 2019). Principals are a critical factor in teachers' success within the building as the principal sets the tone regarding expectations and acceptable teaching behavior (Maready, 2018).

Many states have implemented principal leadership programs to help develop strong leaders. Idaho, Illinois, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Vermont all have school leadership development programs (Espinoza et al., 2018). North Carolina offers a \$30,000 service scholarship for its 2-year principal preparation program, including a yearlong paid residency (Espinoza et al., 2018). To qualify for this program, applicants must commit to 4 years of service in North Carolina as a principal or assistant principal. Applicants who receive this grant receive \$30,000 in their first year to assist with tuition, books, and living expenses (Espinoza et al., 2018). During the second year, recipients receive the second amount equal to the salary for a first-year assistant principal and an educational stipend (Espinoza et al., 2018). The scholarship recipient completes a full-time internship in a school under a veteran principal (Espinoza et al., 2018). Leaders that participate in North Carolina's principal preparation program positively impact student absences, teacher retention, and a school's working conditions (Espinoza et al., 2018).

North Dakota also has a principal preparation program. North Dakota uses its Title II Part A funds to create a multi-tiered leadership support system (Espinoza et al.,

2018). The academy provides professional support, career ladder opportunities, and a mentor during their first year as principal (Espinoza et al., 2018). The goal of providing a mentor to all new administrators is to increase the effectiveness of new administrators and decrease principal turnover in rural and struggling schools (Espinoza et al., 2018). Each trained mentor conducts a minimum of two site visits during the school year, and the mentor and new administrator are required to meet weekly (Espinoza et al., 2018).

Principals' Role in Retention

Principals may influence teacher retention during the hiring process. The hiring process is often complicated for school leaders (Young, 2018). Principals must seek to hire the most effective teacher to fill their vacancies (Young, 2018). Before hiring teachers, principals should know the personal attributes needed to fit into the school's culture (Vari et al., 2018). Principals must recruit teachers who will positively add to the school culture and challenge the students (Vari et al., 2018). Principals should also know the skills, expertise, and certifications needed for the new teacher to succeed (Vari et al., 2018). With each teacher candidate, principals should outline a clear vision and core value (Vari et al., 2018). During the hiring process, principals should be thorough, include performance tasks, and communicate the job's role during the interview (Vari et al., 2018). According to Vari et al. (2018), principals should provide support for growth after hiring a teacher, be present and praise teachers for their successes, balance risk and autonomy, and communicate the job's role through performance appraisals.

When a teacher is hired, it also influences the teacher's likelihood of remaining in the school or profession. Podolsky et al., 2016, concluded that teachers hired after the

start of the school year are more likely to leave the teaching workforce than a teacher hired before the school year. Teachers that enter after the start of the year are also associated with a significant and negative impact on student achievement (Podolsky et al., 2016). Teachers hired after the start of the school year have less time to plan their curriculum, develop an engaging lesson, and less time to understand the school and district operations (Podolsky et al., 2016).

Principals Impact on Work Conditions

The work conditions within a school may also impact teacher retention, and principals may impact those conditions. School districts can consider using strategies to ensure principals enter the leadership position with the skills needed to nurture a positive school environment (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Principals that create positive working conditions play a critical role in attracting and retaining qualified teachers (Dahlkamp et al., 2017; Espinoza et al., 2018; Holmes et al., 2019; & Podolsky et al., 2016). Work conditions impact a teacher's ability to teach and directly affect a teacher's attitude about their work and decision to remain at their school (Burkhauser, 2016; & Podolsky et al., 2016). Supportive principals create a positive working environment where students and teachers thrive (Redding, 2018). Principals help develop trusting relationships between teachers and other teachers and with parents and students (Torres, 2016).

Principal Support

The level of administrative support can impact teacher retention. Numerous studies have identified administrative support as an essential factor that impacts teacher

retention (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Holmes et al., 2019; Hughes et al., 2015; “What’s the cost of teacher turnover,” 2017; Podolsky et al., 2016; Thibodeaux et al., 2014). Schools with a supportive environment are more likely to retain teachers, which maximizes teacher and student learning opportunities (Kraft et al., 2016). The leadership of a supportive principal adds to student success (Espinoza et al., 2018). A principal interviewed in a study in a southwestern state of the United States stated that her primary role is setting a climate and culture that supports teachers (Podolsky et al., 2016). Research has shown that principals that provide ongoing support tend to have higher teacher retention (Holmes et al., 2019). Support from administrators can take many forms, including emotional, environmental, and instructional support (Podolsky et al., 2016). Olsen and Huang (2019) concluded in their 2019 study that principals that actively support teachers can create a culture of learning, mentoring, and improved teaching conditions. Principals must be aware of the challenges teachers face and remind veteran teachers that new teachers are still learning (Watkins, 2016).

Communication can also impact a teacher’s view of the level of support provided by principals. Teachers feel supported when principals communicate their support and encouragement (Maready, 2018). Principals can motivate their teachers by utilizing effective communication (Tyler, 2016). The communication needed to motivate teachers include frequent face-to-face and personal communications, minimal use of whole-school meetings, and principals participating in weekly grade-level meetings (Tyler, 2016). Communication skills are necessary for building trust between the school principals and teachers (Tyler, 2016).

Within any school, how principals communicate vary. Studies show face to face communication and daily walkthroughs are important (Tyler, 2016). These frequent and short walkthroughs help the principals understand the needs of the teachers and students (Tyler, 2016). Principals must be visible within their buildings (Tyler, 2016). In addition to daily walkthroughs, principals from a study stated they also send weekly written communication (Tyler, 2016). This weekly written communication is useful in reporting administrative and management-related items that do not require elaboration, explanation, or discussion (Tyler, 2016). The use of handwritten notes may also be effective. In a study, principals stated handwritten notes demonstrated to teachers that time and thought went into the note instead of a few seconds required to send an email (Tyler, 2016). Although emails are effective at times to reach groups, it may not be the best way to communicate with staff to build a relationship (Tyler, 2016). Social media can also be used to communicate. Participants in a 2016 study stated they use social media to give positive information and “shout-outs” about the positive things happening within their building (Tyler, 2016). Communication via social media is shared with all constituents, including parents, students, or community members (Tyler, 2016). Principals must be intentional about motivating teachers and honoring daily efforts and accomplishments (Tyler, 2016).

Although support is different, principals need to understand how their support plays a role in a teacher’s decision to remain in the profession. Torres (2016) conducted a study that consisted of 20 current teachers and teachers that recently left classrooms in New York City Schools. The findings from this study showed a meaningful connection

between administrative support and teacher retention. Dahlkamp et al. (2017) surveyed principals regarding how they support teacher retention; several principals stated they needed more confidence in their ability before being able to support their teachers properly. Although the principals stated they needed more confidence in the survey, all principals identified that retaining teachers' is their primary role and providing support is important (Dahlkamp et al., 2017). Principal support is imperative for retaining new and veteran teachers (Olsen & Huang, 2019). For this reason, it is vital to identify consistent practices principals can use to encourage teacher retention.

Mentor Program

Principals creating mentor programs within the school may also help increase teacher retention. Creating mentorship opportunities is an effective way for principals to support new teachers (Morettini, 2016). Mentor programs also increase teacher retention (Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017). Principals play a critical role in the induction of new teachers (Maready, 2018; Watkins, 2016). The principal sets expectations and supports the mentoring process and the culture of collaboration (Maready, 2018). Participants in Morettini's 2016 study indicated their mentor provided them with support with creating lesson plans, pedagogy, classroom management, and discipline; the mentor also provided the teacher with social and moral support. First-year teachers stated that one of the reasons they continued to teach in their current school despite the many challenges new teachers face was due to the mentoring services provided (Morettini, 2016). Supportive principals help new teachers and experienced teachers use practices to improve their classroom practices (Redding, 2018). Stover, 2017 concluded that ongoing support from

school leadership and one-on-one mentoring are key retention strategies (Stover, 2017). In addition to providing mentor opportunities, supportive principals ensure they spend time evaluating and coaching teachers, and these principals see more substantial achievement gains throughout the years (Redding, 2018). Teachers that receive induction support are less likely to leave teaching (Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017). Researchers Sutchter et al., (2016) recommended to improve teacher retention districts must develop active mentoring and induction programs.

Principals Leadership Style

Principal leadership style can influence a teacher's decision to leave a school or the profession ("What's the cost of teacher turnover," 2017). Fuller et al., 2018 concluded that effective leaders must be effective school managers, effective instructional leaders, and inclusive decision-makers. Results from studies show principals with low attrition rates did not view themselves as traditional top-down administrators; instead, these principals described their responsibility as facilitators, collaborators, team leaders, or leaders of leaders (Podolsky et al., 2016). These principals often use leadership teams, interview teams, or site-based management teams to make school decisions (Podolsky et al., 2016). During a 2016 study, a principal from a school with a low attrition rate stated that her leadership style includes encouraging people to share their opinions (Podolsky et al., 2016). She continued by saying she talks through her staff's issues to reach a consensus (Podolsky et al., 2016). When necessary, she makes a clear decision, but when she can, she tries to view her role as the facilitator of the entire team more than being the person that comes and says this is the way it must go (Podolsky et al., 2016). Effective

leaders practice inclusive decision-making by listening to teachers' ideas, engaging the teachers in changes, and providing autonomy within their classroom (Fuller et al., 2018). Results from teacher surveys found that teachers that believe they have more influence over the school's policies are more likely to remain in the profession (Podolsky et al., 2016). Principals must cultivate teachers' opportunities to have a voice in the decision-making process (Podolsky et al., 2016).

Summary and Conclusions

Teacher retention is a problem for schools throughout the United States, and researchers are consistently studying why teachers leave and what can be done to increase teacher retention. When teachers leave the profession, this influences student achievement. Those schools with a high turnover tend to have classrooms with a higher percentage of inexperienced or unqualified teachers. Principals can provide support in many ways to encourage teachers to remain in the profession. Retaining teachers requires a comprehensive approach (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). This approach must ensure teachers are prepared for the many challenges they may face, compensated for their labor, and provided training and a learning environment that supports them to become an effective teacher (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Although researchers have studied teacher retention, additional research is needed to understand the leadership challenges principals face when trying to retain teachers in the profession. When looking at the impact of teacher turnover, retaining teachers allows districts to reallocate funds for teaching and learning and promote instructional quality for all

students (DeFeo et al., 2017). The lack of qualified teachers harms students, teachers, and public education (Garcia & Weiss, 2019).

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand how elementary school principals address challenges when trying to retain teachers in a suburban school district in a southern state of the United States and the leadership practices principals believe encourage teachers to remain in the profession. This chapter includes a discussion of this study's design, methodology, and participant selection. The chapter also includes an overview of ethical considerations, data analysis plans, and steps that were taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the study.

Research Design and Rationale

In this qualitative study, I sought to answer the following questions:

RQ1: What challenges do elementary school principals face when trying to retain teachers and how do principals address the challenges?

RQ2: What leadership practices do elementary school principals believe encourage teachers to remain in the profession?

I selected the qualitative research approach for this study because it allowed me to access the participants' feelings and thoughts. The qualitative method allowed me to analyze how elementary school principals address challenges when trying to retain teachers in a suburban school district in a southern state of the United States and leadership practices principals believe encourage teachers to remain in the profession in the local setting by starting with the principals' thoughts.

Unlike qualitative research, quantitative research focuses on how much or how many, and results are usually presented in numerical form (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The quantitative approach was not used for this study as the quantitative design is an experimental approach to determine the cause of events and predict similar events (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). When completing quantitative research, a researcher analyzes trends, compares groups, or relates variables using statistical analysis and interprets the results by comparing them with prior predictions and past research (Creswell, 2012). For these reasons, the quantitative design was not selected for this study.

The case study method was chosen for this study from the other qualitative design methods, including basic, phenomenology, grounded theory, and ethnography. When completing this study, I explored the issue in-depth in the real-world context using a suburban school district in a southern state of the United States as the case. Researchers using case study design seek to answer how, what, or why research questions (Crowe et al., 2011). Due to the study taking place in the natural setting of the case and the research questions seeking to answer how and what questions, this study followed the exploratory case study design. Other designs separate the phenomenon from its context, thus only attending to the phenomenon of interest while completing the research (Yin, 2017). This type of case study is used to explore those situations in which the phenomenon being evaluated has no clear single set of outcomes (Yin, 2017). While case studies do not generalize to populations, the aim is to generalize to theories (Yin, 2017). Through this research, I sought to gain a better understanding of the challenges principals face related to retaining teachers.

Phenomenology was not selected for this study. Phenomenology design focuses on experiences and how those experiences transform into consciousness (Merriam &

Tisdell, 2016). The phenomenologist's task is to depict the experience's basic structure (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). These researchers often study intense human experiences such as love, anger, and betrayal (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As this research was not conducted to study human experiences and the transformation of those experiences, phenomenology was not a good fit for this study.

Grounded theory was also not selected for this study as the focus of this design is to build theory (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The theories developed under grounded theory typically relate to everyday world situations such as coping mechanisms, reading programs that work with low-income students, or dealing with grief (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This research design is useful for addressing questions regarding a process that has changed over time (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This study was not conducted to gain an understanding of a process that has changed over time; therefore, the grounded theory design was not a good fit for this study.

Ethnography is not a fit for this study because researchers using the ethnography design strive to understand participants' interactions with other individuals and their interactions within a culture (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). When using ethnography design, a researcher focuses on human society and culture (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I was not seeking to understand a group; therefore, ethnography was not selected for this study.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher's role in qualitative research is critical as the researcher must collect and analyze the data (Creswell, 2012). In this study, I am the researcher. As a

researcher, I upheld ethical standards throughout the research process. I conducted all interviews for the study and analyzed the findings from each interview.

My relationship with the principals who participate in the study was that we were all employees of the same district; however, we did not work in the same school. I did not interview my supervisory principal. During the study, there was no supervisory or instructor relationship involved.

I work as an assistant principal in the district where the study is taking place. Although this is positive, this could also have caused potential biases to occur in the study. To manage research bias, field notes were vital in reporting and analyzing the data. Throughout the research process, I kept detailed written records to avoid confirmation bias. Confirmation bias is when a researcher interprets the information based on their individual beliefs (Casad, 2019). This type of bias is typically unintentional and can result in a researcher ignoring conflicting information (Casad, 2019). According to Shah (2019), confirmation bias is the most common and highly recognized bias when researchers interpret data.

Within research, a researcher must also consider ethical issues. I followed Walden University's ethical standard of protecting each participant and their identity. While completing this study, the school district's name was masked. Masking the organization's name was one of the best ways to ensure I obtained honest responses and engagement from the participants (Academic guides, 2020). Masking helped ensure the integrity of the study (Academic guides, 2020). In addition to masking the name of the district, the participants' names remained confidential. Taking these steps helped ensure the

participants were not subject to risks such as retaliation (Academic guides, 2020).

Principals who chose not to participate in the study were not negatively affected. There were no incentives to participate in the study.

Methodology

Participant Selection

The participants for this study were elementary school principals from a suburban school district in a southern state of the United States. To reach the final sample size, purposeful sampling was used. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), purposeful sampling is based on the idea that a researcher wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and select a sample from which they can learn the most about the phenomenon. The criteria used to select the participants were the principal's annual teacher retention percentage and years of experience as a principal. After I received IRB approval # 12-14-20-0721519, the principals were asked to complete a short questionnaire to determine their annual retention rate. The questionnaire was not part of the data collection process; it was only used as a criterion for selection. The participants were principals with annual teacher retention rates higher than the district's rate. Participants were required to have 3 or more years of experience as an elementary school principal in their current school. Selecting principals who had at least 3 years of experience at their current school ensured the principal saw the retention pattern of the school. If principals with less experience were included, I would not have obtained a clear picture of the challenges the principals faced when trying to retain teachers at their school, as teachers may have left due to the prior principal or other factors the current principal did not influence. After receiving IRB

approval from Walden University, I reached out to the district's research department to obtain a list of participants with at least 3 years of experience. After obtaining the list, I invited the participants to the study via email. Those participants who chose to participate in the study completed the informed consent form. Of the 67 elementary school principals in the district, 10 principals who met the criteria of having a higher retention rate than that of the district and 3 or more years of experience were asked to participate in the study. Including 10 participants allowed me to obtain enough data to sufficiently explore the research questions.

Instrumentation

Data were collected via interviews with limited additional data from reports on the district's website regarding teacher retention and the district's strategic plan goals for retention. Due to the recent COVID-19 pandemic, teleconference interviews were used. By completing teleconference interviews, participants could participate in the research from their homes or schools. Each interview followed the interview protocol I created. Interview questions were designed to promote communication from principals through their own words about the challenges they face when trying to retain teachers in the profession and leadership practices they believe encourage teachers to remain in the profession. Before interviewing participants, I interviewed a principal who met the criteria but did not participate in the study using the interview protocol. Conducting this interview allowed me to refine the interview questions before conducting interviews with the study participants. These steps ensured content validity. This protocol allowed me to obtain feedback and clarify the interview questions' effectiveness and clarity.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

After receiving IRB approval to conduct the study, I obtained a list of principals who met the criteria from the district's research and accountability department. Principals who met the study's criteria received an email inviting them to participate. The email outlined the research purpose, expectations regarding the number of teleconference interviews needed to complete the study, an explanation of the participants' role, and ethical procedures. During this research teleconference, interviews were conducted instead of face-to-face interviews due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The email also included the informed consent. The participants replied to the email with "I consent" to identify they were willing to participate in the study.

After receiving informed consent, I contacted the participant to schedule their interview. Each interview was conducted via teleconference at a time and date based on the participant's availability. Interviews lasted approximately 1 hour. All interviews were recorded using two audio devices. After the interview, I thanked the participant for their time. If additional information was needed, I contacted the participant via telephone or email to ask follow-up questions. After each interview, I transcribed the interview before interviewing another participant. After transcribing the interviews, I provided the participants with a transcript of their interview. The participants were asked to review the transcript for accuracy. After the study, participants were debriefed. The debriefing procedure allowed participants to make comments regarding the study, ask questions, and it allowed me to ensure no harm occurred during the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Debriefing for this study was conducted via email.

Data Analysis Plan

Analyzing qualitative data requires a researcher to understand how to make sense of the data obtained and answer the research questions (Creswell, 2012). Data for this study were obtained through the participants' responses to open-ended interview questions. The data analysis process took place in three steps. These steps included organizing and interpreting the data, coding the data, and completing data synthesis.

During this process, I sought to answer the research questions based on the participants' responses to the interview questions. As I analyzed the data, I determined how elementary school principals address challenges when trying to retain teachers in a suburban school district in a southern state of the United States and leadership practices they believe encourage teachers to remain in the profession. The data analysis process allowed me to organize the data from specific concepts to abstract categories and concepts.

To begin the thematic coding process, I first organized the data as this is critical in qualitative research because a large amount of information is gathered during a study (Creswell, 2012). To organize the data, I created a file folder that included all field notes. After conducting an interview, I listened to the interview's audio recording and transcribed the interview. Transcribing interviews is an arduous process, but it must be done to convert spoken words into written words to facilitate analysis (Sutton & Austin, 2015). For this reason, I transcribed one participant's interview before conducting interviews with another participant. All audio records were transcribed verbatim. As I transcribed, I numbered each line. When writing the transcript, I created a two-inch

margin on each side of the text. The margins allowed me to jot down notes in the margins during the coding process. I also left extra space on the page between the participant's comments and my comments. The margins allowed me to distinguish between the participant's comments and my comments during the data analysis process. I used detailed headers that contained information about the interview. After transcribing an interview, I read the transcription while listening to the recording. As I listened, I checked for spelling and other errors, anonymized the transcript, and inserted pauses, laughter, and punctuation. I continued this process for each participant.

As I completed the process above, I began to feel the participants' experiences. I began to understand what the participants were saying and what they were not saying. For example, the pauses may have indicated that a participant found a subject difficult or was trying to decide what to say (Sutton & Austin, 2015). The data analysis process's goal is to tell the participants' stories, thus grounding the research findings into the participants' experiences (Sutton & Austin, 2015).

When all interviews were transcribed and reviewed, I began the coding process. As I coded, I made notes in the margin, highlighted, and named each section. A code is a word or short phrase representing a portion of language based on the interview data (Saldana, 2015). During the coding process, codes such as *work conditions*, *salary*, and *teacher preparation* emerged when discussing challenges principals face when trying to retain teachers. When coding leadership practices principals believe encourage teachers to remain in the profession, codes such as *mentor programs*, *professional development*, and *principal support* emerged. Through the coding process, I analyzed the data deeper

and interpreted the meaning of the data obtained (Miles et al., 2013). This process allowed me to understand the world from each participant's perspective (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Coding was done by hand with a hard copy of the transcript. First, I determined the code by carefully reading and reflecting on the data collected. I then assigned a code to the data chunks. The data chunks allowed me to detect reoccurring patterns and allowed me to pull out and find clusters related to the research questions (Miles et al., 2013). I then looked at each interrelationship of categories and developed higher-level themes (Miles et al., 2013).

The next step in the data analysis process was to create themes. Theming allows the researcher to draw together codes from one or more transcripts to present coherent and meaningful findings (Sutton & Austin, 2015). The use of themes is an important process as it makes it possible for the researcher to present the data from interviews using quotes from individual transcripts (Sutton & Austin, 2015). These quotes allow the researcher to illustrate the source of their interpretation (Sutton & Austin, 2015). When I organized the research findings, each theme was used as a heading for each section. Under each theme, I included codes and examples from the transcript and my interpretation of the theme.

The final step of the data analysis process was the synthesis of the data. Synthesizing the data is a critical step in qualitative research (Sutton & Austin, 2015). This step allowed me to summarize the findings and tell the participants' stories in a respectful way for the participants and meaningful to the reader (Sutton & Austin, 2015). All conclusions presented were supported by direct quotes from the participants.

Including direct quotes allowed me to show the reader that the themes emerged from the participants' interviews and not my views (Sutton & Austin, 2015).

For this study, I used inductive coding. With this type of coding, I thought inductively and moved from specific raw data to abstract categories and concepts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This study did not use deductive coding as researchers that use deductive coding are seeking to test the hypothesis of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Due to this study not testing a hypothesis, deductive coding is not a good fit.

During the data collection and interpretation process, discrepant cases may emerge (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Spending adequate time to collect and interpret data should be coupled with purposely looking for variation in understanding the phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As suggested by researchers, I purposefully sought data that disconfirms or challenges the expectations or emerging findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) by selecting principals from schools across the district. When discrepant cases were confirmed, it forced me to examine the data's context, thus developing more trustworthy findings (Saldana, 2015). When discrepant cases were identified, I rethought the code, category, theme, or concept (Saldana, 2015).

Trustworthiness

Within qualitative research, four elements must be considered to ensure the quality of the research. These four elements include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility refers to the fit between respondents' views and the researcher's representation of those views (Nowell et al., 2017). Credibility can be obtained with thick descriptions and the process of member checking (Tracy &

Hinrichs, 2017). Member checking allows the researcher to test the findings and interpretations with the participants (Nowell et al., 2017). During the research, I conducted member checking. The member checking process was completed in two steps. After conducting the interview and transcribing the interview, I gave the participants a copy of the transcript for their review. After analyzing the data, interpreting the data, and identifying themes, I gave the participants a copy of the analyzed data. This allowed the participants to review the analysis to confirm accuracy. This two-step member checking process allowed me to gauge the transcript's accuracy and my interpretation of the data with the participants.

Although credibility is important, transferability is also important. Transferability refers to the generalizability of the inquiry (Nowell et al., 2017). Although the researcher does not know the exact sites that may wish to transfer the findings, it is the researcher's responsibility to provide detailed descriptions so that other researchers who wish to transfer the findings to their own site can judge the transferability (Nowell et al., 2017).

When conducting this study transferability was maintained. To ensure transferability, I provided thick descriptions regarding all steps of the research process. This documentation allowed me to provide a vivid picture that can inform and resonate with readers (Connelly, 2016).

The qualitative element of dependability refers to the consistency of the data (Golafshani, 2003). To ensure dependability, the research process must be logical, traceable, and documented (Nowell et al., 2017). To ensure the dependability of the

study, I kept detailed field notes. The field notes outlined all steps throughout the study to ensure an external researcher can repeat the inquiry and achieve similar results.

Within qualitative research, confirmability refers to the neutrality or the degree to which the findings of a study are consistent and repeated (Connelly, 2016).

Confirmability is established when credibility, transferability, and dependability are achieved (Nowell et al., 2017). In qualitative research, the audit trail is used to ensure confirmability (Connelly, 2016). An audit trail was used to confirm the dependability and confirmability of the study. The audit trail provided readers with evidence of the researcher's decisions regarding theoretical and methodological issues encountered throughout the study (Nowell et al., 2017).

Ethical Procedures

Throughout this study, several ethical procedures were used to protect the participants' rights. The study was conducted according to the policies and procedures adopted by Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for studies conducted with human subjects. Participation in the study was voluntary, and participants had the autonomy to withdraw from the study without question. Before beginning research, IRB approval must be obtained from the University. Throughout the study, confidentiality was maintained. The participant's names and the district name were kept confidential. I was the only person that had access to the participant and district name or other personal information. At the start of the study, each participant was assigned a number to help ensure confidentiality with the data obtained. All computer notes from the study were saved on Office 365 on a password-protected computer. Handwritten notes were stored in

a locked file cabinet that only I can access. All documentation collected will be shredded after 5 years.

Summary

In Chapter 3, I described the research method used to investigate how elementary school principals address challenges when trying to retain teachers in a suburban school district in the southern state of the United States and leadership practices they believe encourage teachers to remain in the profession. This section has clarified the study's purpose and goals while outlining the appropriateness of the research design. This chapter outlined the study's population selection, threats to validity, and ethical procedures. The data from the study will be presented and analyzed in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand how elementary school principals address challenges when trying to retain teachers in a suburban school district in a southern state of the United States and the leadership practices principals believe encourage teachers to remain in the profession. In this chapter, I outline the study's setting, demographics, data collection process, data analysis, evidence of the study's trustworthiness, and the results of the study.

Setting

This study took place in a suburban school district in a southern state of the United States with elementary school principals. In this study, no organizational conditions influenced the participants' interpretation of the study. Principals who participated in this study had higher retention rates than that of the district and were principals at their current school for 3 or more years.

Data Collection

For this study, I interviewed 10 principals using the interview protocol I created before conducting interviews. The interview consisted of 11 questions. The principals participated in one 1-hour teleconference interview. Each interview's audio was recorded using an audio recording device, and both video and audio were recorded on the computer via Microsoft TEAMS. During the interview process, there were no variations in the data collection process outlined in Chapter 3. There were also no unusual circumstances encountered when collecting data.

Data Analysis

When all interviews were transcribed, I begin the coding process. As I reviewed the transcripts, I added notes to the margin, highlighted parts of participants' responses for keywords, and named each section. After carefully reading each response, codes and themes were created based on how participants' responses answered the research questions. When all codes were determined, I created a spreadsheet and added the codes from each principal's interview. I then reviewed the codes to determine reoccurring patterns. Determining patterns allowed me to determine the interrelationship of categories and develop level themes. The following table shows the grouping of codes and themes used in the data analysis process.

Table 1*Codes Grouping and Themes*

Codes	Grouping	Theme
Lesson planning Grading Teaching and assessing standards Classroom management	Classroom expectations	Workload
Parent communication	Communication	
Staff meeting Team meeting Response to intervention Data meetings	Meeting	
State testing District testing Grade level common assessments	Testing	
School culture Teachers feeling supported School climate Teacher voice Student discipline	Culture and climate	Culture and climate
Parental involvement Supportive community	Community and parents	
Marriage Pregnancy	Family	Lifestyle changes
Closer to home	Commute	
Retirement Change level Career opportunities	Profession	
Travel	Travel	
Being visible Fair Accessible	Open-door policy	Building strong relationship
Listen Communicate Teacher voice Transparent	Communication	
Attend meetings Model	Visible	Support
Teacher of month Handwritten notes Shout-outs	Recognition	
Purchase what is needed	Resources	
Show you care In this together Mindful of workload	Empathy	
Support career growth	Career	
Hire right person Ask hard questions Set expectation during an interview	Interview and hiring	Hiring and teacher development
Develop teacher leaders Give teachers leadership Opportunity Teacher-led professional development	Teacher development	
Mentor Induction	Support	

After codes were grouped and themes were developed, I ordered the data in a chart. The chart allowed me to analyze the data to determine how each theme and the corresponding codes answered each research question. The following table shows the code used to form each theme regarding challenges principals face when retaining teachers.

Table 2

Challenges Principal Face when Retaining Teachers

Themes	Codes used to form theme	
Workload	Lesson planning expectations	Staff meetings
	Parent communication	After school activities
	Data meetings	Team meetings
	Grading expectations	Teaching expectations and assessing standards
	Response to intervention	State testing
	District testing	Grade level common assessments
	Testing and accountability	
Culture and climate	Overall culture of school	Supportive community
	Teacher voice	Parent voice
	Parental involvement	Student discipline
	Support	
Lifestyle changes	Marriage	Pregnancy
	Retirement	Closer to home
	Wanting to travel	Desire to change levels (elementary to middle or high school)
	Other career opportunities	

When reviewing challenges elementary school principals face when trying to retain teachers, the codes of lesson planning expectation, meetings, grading expectations, and testing, among others, were labeled under the theme *workload*. Principal 5 stated, “I think all the high stakes testing and accountability requirements discourages many teachers and causes them to leave the profession.” Principal 2 stated teaching has

changed tremendously, and teachers' increased requirements are causing teachers to leave their school and the profession.

School culture, support, and student discipline were a few of the codes used under the theme of culture and climate. Principal 1 stated during his first years as principal, he had to work on improving the school's culture and climate. He stated that during his first few years, the retention rate was lower, and as he improved the school's culture and climate, the school's retention rate improved. Principal 1 stated, "As principal, you must set up the right climate in the building, and this can be a challenge for principals."

The final theme used regarding challenges principals face when trying to retain teachers was the theme of lifestyle changes. The codes included under the theme of lifestyle changes were retirement, desire to travel, and the desire to pursue other career opportunities. Principal 6 stated that when her teachers leave, they leave due to lifestyle changes. While principal 7 stated he has had teachers leave to pursue other career opportunities: "People may think [education] is the right fit, but they realize after a few years that education or elementary school is not the right fit for them."

The themes of workload, culture and climate, and lifestyle changes were associated with challenges principals face when trying to retain teachers. The themes related to leadership practices used to retain teachers of building stronger relationships, support, and hiring and teacher development emerged from the codes. The following table shows the codes used to form the themes regarding leadership practices used to retain teachers.

Table 3*Leadership Practices Used to Retention Teachers*

Themes	Codes used to form theme	
Building strong relationship	Being visible	Celebrate success
	Fair	Open door policy
	Communicate	Teacher voice
	Listen	Being transparent
	Get to know staff personally and professionally	
Support	Attending grade level meeting	Teacher of the month
	Model what you expect of teachers	Provide resources
	Let teachers know you are in it with them	Show you care about family
	Shout-outs	Be mindful of what are you adding to workload
	Handwritten notes	Take off what you can
	Say yes when you can	Support career goals
Hiring and teacher development	Hire the right people for your school	Find the right spot of the new teacher
	Ask hard questions	Set expectations during interview
	Provide new teachers mentor	Induction program for new teachers and teachers new to building
	Develop teacher leaders	Provide teachers opportunity to lead

As I analyzed the principals' responses regarding leadership practices principals implement to encourage teacher retention, the importance of being transparent, communicating with teachers, being fair, and being visible throughout the building were mentioned. These codes were grouped for the theme of *building strong relationships*. Principal 2 stated, "I have an open-door policy. I'm available all the time, and I think they appreciate that." Principal 5 stated that this year it is important to communicate and be transparent with the teachers more than ever. "I try to be transparent and

communicate. That's one thing they really appreciated, and especially this year when communication has not been the best."

The codes of attending meetings, supporting career aspirations, and understanding teacher's personal and professional needs were discussed. These codes were grouped for the theme of *support*. Principals 3,8,9, and 10 stated that to retain teachers, they must attend meetings, provide necessary resources, and understand each teacher's personal situation.

The final theme that was used when analyzing the data was *hiring and teacher development*. The codes of mentor programs, hiring process, induction programs, career goals, and teacher development were included when developing this theme. Principals 1,2,3,4,5,6,9 and 10 stated the importance of the hiring process. Principal 1 stated, "The greatest charge as principal is the hiring and retaining of quality teachers." Principals 2,4,6,7, and 10 also discussed the importance of having an induction or teacher mentor program. When asked, principal 4 said,

It is imperative you have some kind of induction program, whether it's for new teachers or new people to your building. I've learned this is important even if the teacher is not new to teaching, you need to treat them as if they are new because they don't feel supported when they come if you don't have some type of induction program.

Results

The data obtained by interviewing elementary school principals in the suburban school district in a southern state show challenges principals face when trying to retain

teachers and leadership practices the participants believe encourage teachers to remain in the profession. In this section, I will include additional information regarding the challenges principals face when trying to retain teachers and leadership practices the principals believe encourage teachers to remain in the profession.

Principals around the world experience challenges when retaining teachers. Although all principals do not experience the same challenges, there are common challenges principals face. When analyzing the themes of workload, culture and climate of the school, lifestyle changes were used to represent the challenges principals face when retaining teachers. The information in the following sections will outline those challenges. Table 4 shows how each theme aligns with each research question.

Table 4

Theme Alignment with Research Questions

Research question	Themes
What challenges do principals face in trying to retain teachers and how do principals address the challenges?	Workload
	Climate and culture
	Lifestyle changes
What leadership practices do elementary school principals believe encourage teachers to remain in the profession?	Building strong relationship
	Support
	Hiring and teacher development

Challenges Principals Face in Teacher Retention

Themes Related to RQ1

Workload. Within the classroom, teachers have many responsibilities. For some teachers, the expectation and responsibilities placed on them may be overwhelming. When interviewing principals, ten of the ten principals interviewed mentioned at least one aspect of teacher responsibility as a challenge they face when retaining teachers. Principal 2 used the comparison of expectations versus reality. She stated, “There’s a lot of expectations, and there’s not enough time in a day.” She continued by saying,

You have RTI, team meetings, common assessments, data meetings, parent meetings, lesson planning, and it’s just too much. Many teachers coming into the profession think they have it, but they really don’t have any idea about all the other things, and it’s non-stop. Many times, this kind of thing deters teachers.

Principal 5 stated, “The workload is so heavy, and they choose to leave the profession even when provided a mentor.” During a separate interview, a principal said, “It can be a challenge retaining new teachers because they just get burned out with the workload. It’s like they hit a five-year wall.” Although the workload is a challenge there are practices principals can implement to help address this challenge.

Climate and Culture. In addition to the workload, the overall school culture and the climate was used as a theme when analyzing the data. Several principals interviewed stated the school climate and culture significantly impact the teacher’s decision to stay at the school. It can be challenging to maintain a positive school culture and climate. According to principals interviewed in the study, principals have a significant role in

ensuring the school has a positive school culture and climate. One principal in the study stated she has been at a school with high teacher turnover, and through her experience as a principal, she has learned the importance of having a good culture and climate. She believes it starts with listening to the staff and their concerns. Principals also mentioned student discipline as a challenge they face when trying to retain teachers. Principal 9 stated,

As a principal, you must ensure you have a positive behavior support system in place for your school. If the school has a high incidence of student discipline problems, it may cause teachers to become overwhelmed and result in teacher turnover.

Lifestyle Changes. Principals also mentioned lifestyle changes as a challenge they face when trying to retain teachers. One principal stated she has had many young teachers leave the profession as they wanted to travel. Principal 2 said,

I've seen young teachers in my time here that are like, you know I've got friends that are in different careers, and they are getting to travel, and they're getting to do all these different things, and they are living their best life, and I'm just under papers on the weekend.

The principal continued by saying this happens with some of her best teachers. She said teachers entering the career do not realize what is expected of teachers. Therefore, soon after becoming a teacher, they decide to leave the profession. Three of the ten principals interviewed stated they have had teachers leave to pursue other career opportunities. One

principal stated soon after entering the profession, many teachers realize this is not what they want, and they decide to leave the profession to pursue another career.

In addition to better understanding the challenges principals face when trying to retain teachers, I am also seeking to better understand the leadership practices principals believe encourage teacher retention. All principals interviewed stated they influence teachers' retention decisions. The principals also agree as principals it is their responsibility to hire and retain quality teachers. When teachers continually leave the school, this has a negative impact on student achievement. Principal 1 said as a principal, one of the biggest charges is to retain effective teachers. Another principal who participated in the study stated principals need to retain teachers because that is what the students need. When analyzing the interview data, the themes of building a strong relationship with teachers, being supportive, hiring practices and teacher development were leadership practices the principals stated they use to retain their teachers.

Themes Related to RQ2

Building Strong Relationships. As I analyzed the data, it became apparent that building strong relationships with the teachers is very important to retain teachers. Principals interview stated the leadership practices they use to build strong relationships with their teacher is listening to the teachers' concerns and being fair. One principal stated, "I feel like people respect fairness. Fairness and communication, and if you do that, you can start building those relationships with your teachers." While being fair was mentioned, the need to listen to the teachers' concerns was a leadership practice mentioned by five of the ten principals interviewed. Principals stated that when you listen

to the teachers, you can get to know them, and understand their needs and concerns.

Another principal interviewed stated that, “It all comes back to listening, which allows you to build a relationship with the teacher.”

Support. The next theme developed during the data analysis process was being supportive. Principals stated an important leadership practice that encourages teacher retention is supporting teachers. During the interviews, principals stated they support their teachers by attending grade-level meetings, being understanding of teacher’s personal situations, supporting career goals, and providing teachers with the necessary resources. A principal interviewed stated she attends her grade-level meetings. According to the principal, when she attends the meeting, she can reduce a barrier and possibly reduce the time it takes to implement ideas within the grade level because she is there to answer questions or concerns right away. During a separate interview, principal 6 stated,

Nobody walks through these doors without carrying some sort of baggage, you have your health, it could be financial, it could be they’re caring for their parents, or they could have a sick child, or they’re going through a divorce. We have to really be aware of that as we’re leading people, and we must support them.

Principals also stated they believe supporting teachers with their career aspirations can increase teacher retention. A principal interviewed stated when she knows a teacher wants to take on a leadership role, she supports and develops that teacher.

Hiring and Teacher Development. The final theme used when analyzing data was hiring and teacher development. Eight of the ten principals stated it is crucial to hire the right teachers the first time. One principal said, “The most important thing to retain

teachers is to hire well.” Principal 7 said, during the hiring process, you must ensure you find teachers that fit into your school’s culture and climate, and you must put those teachers in the right spot. Simply hiring a certified teacher is not enough. A principal interviewed stated, “If you hire a teacher and the teacher is not a good fit for the team, that one teacher can negatively impact the entire team.” Another principal said it is important not to rush the hiring process, do your research and hire right the first time. In addition to hiring the right staff, principals also said it is important to provide teachers with the necessary teacher development. Principal 4 stated that when she first became principal, she provided her new teachers a mentor, but she later realized teachers new to the building also needed support. Experienced teachers who were new to the building felt they were not supported because they did not have any induction program. This principal said she now ensures she has an induction program for new teachers to the profession and new teachers to the building.

Principals face many challenges when trying to retain teachers, but principals can retain teachers when the proper strategies are in place. This study has demonstrated those challenges and outlined leadership practices principals can implement to increase teacher retention. The principals interviewed stated with their experience as principals, they have learned various leadership practices that can encourage teacher retention. Of the leadership practices mentioned building strong relations with the teachers, supporting teachers both personally and professionally, and having effective hiring and teacher development were the most mentioned leadership practices that principals stated that they felt encouraged teacher retention. When these leadership practices are implementing,

teacher retention will increase. When asked, a principal who participated in the study stated, “We want to keep our teachers in the building as long as possible because that is what the students need.”

Evidence of Trustworthiness

During the research process, credibility was obtained through the process of member checking. The member checking process was completed in two steps. After each interview was conducted and transcribed, the participants received a copy of the transcript for their review. After analyzing the data, interpreting the data, and identifying themes, the participants received a copy of the analyzed data. This process allowed each participant to review the documents to confirm accuracy. Through this two-step member checking process, I gauged each transcript for accuracy and confirmed my participant’s data interpretation.

In addition to maintaining credibility, transferability was obtained during the study. I ensured the study’s transferability by maintaining thick descriptions regarding all steps of the research process. With this documentation, other researchers can transfer this study’s findings regardless of their research site.

During this study, dependability was maintained as detailed field notes were kept throughout the research process. The notes provide an outline of all steps that were taken throughout the research process. These notes help ensure external researchers can repeat the inquiry and achieve similar results.

Within qualitative research, confirmability is also essential. Confirmability can be obtained when credibility, transferability, and dependability are achieved. During this qualitative case study, an audit trail was used to ensure confirmability.

Summary

Chapter 4 discussed the setting of the study, demographics, data collection process, data analysis, evidence of the study's trustworthiness, and the results of the study. In this chapter, I outlined the data that was collected and analyzed during the interviews. Chapter 5 will include information regarding the interpretation of the data as well as limitations to the study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Teacher retention continues to be a topic studied by many researchers. In the United States, approximately 16% of teachers leave the profession annually (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Through an extensive review of the literature, I found little research focused on what principals do to address teacher retention. The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to understand how elementary school principals address challenges when trying to retain teachers in a suburban school district in a southern state of the United States and the leadership practices principals believe encourage teachers to remain in the profession. The conceptual framework was constructed around Burns' 1978 transformational leadership theory and Fullan and Quinn's coherence model.

Data were collected through teleconference interviews. Through data analysis, I identified three themes regarding the challenges principals face when retaining teachers: (a) workload, (b) culture and climate, and (c) lifestyle changes. The increased workload has pushed some teachers to leave the profession. Principals also stated that it could be challenging to maintain the right culture and climate needed to retain teachers. Data analysis regarding leadership practices principals believe encourage teacher retention led me to identify three themes: (a) building strong relationships with teachers, (b) providing support to teachers, and (c) ensuring effective hiring and professional development for teachers.

In addition to the data obtained via interviews, data were also obtained by analyzing the district's strategic plan. The need to address teacher retention was

mentioned in the plan. The plan explicitly stated that the district would develop interventions to support the retention of teachers. When interviewing principals for the study, all 10 principals interviewed stated district leaders discuss teacher retention and the importance of retaining teachers; however, principals are not provided with targeted professional development regarding teacher retention. When asked if the district provides principals with professional development on teacher retention, Principal 2 stated, “Nothing specific other than it is our job to retain highly qualified teachers, how we go about doing that is not discussed.” Principal 1 stated, “There’s times that we have principal meetings, and there’s [human resources] sessions, and they go over a few things but no professional development.” Although teacher retention has been indicated as an area of need for the district, the district does not provide principals with direct professional development regarding this topic. In Chapter 5, I discuss my interpretation of the finding and the limitations of the study. I also discuss the next steps and recommendations for future research.

Review of the Conceptual Framework

When completing this study, I used Burns’ transformational leadership theory, which describes how certain leadership characters can influence a person’s attitude toward the job. Through transformational leadership, principals can maintain a positive work environment where teachers feel supported. Transformational leaders lead through a culture of collaboration where leaders provide a source of inspiration to their teachers. Transformational leaders effectively communicate with their teachers and work together to increase morale and motivation within the building (Burns, 2012).

In addition to Burns' transformational leadership theory, Fullan and Quinn's coherence model was also used in the study. According to this model, leaders can improve the system when four essential components of the coherence framework are implemented. For a system-wide change, principals should (a) focus their direction, (b) be clear about their purpose, (c) cultivate collaboration, and (d) establish a nonjudgement culture of growth.

Interpretation of the Findings

The study's findings support existing literature related to challenges principals face when trying to retain teachers and leadership practices principals believe encourage teacher retention. The main themes regarding challenges principals face when trying to retain teachers were workload, culture and climate, and lifestyle changes.

Findings of Research Question 1

RQ 1: What challenges do principals face in trying to retain teachers and how do principals address the challenges?

Workload

The main criterion for the workload theme was that teachers' ongoing expectations can be a challenge principals encounter when trying to retain teachers. All of the participating principals mentioned an aspect of teacher workload, such as testing and accountability, required meetings, lesson planning, Response to Intervention, and teaching expectations as a challenge they face when trying to retain teachers. Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) concluded that teachers leave due to dissatisfaction with testing and accountability. Elyashiv (2019) determined teachers leave

due to stressful working conditions and poor job conditions. Sribayak et al. (2018) concluded teachers' leave due to excessive paperwork.

Culture and Climate

Maintaining a positive culture and climate is important for teacher retention. Participating principals stated that maintaining a positive and collaborative culture and climate is a challenge they face when trying to retain teachers. Maready (2018) stated a positive school climate results in more satisfied teachers, resulting in higher teacher retention. School principals play an important role in establishing and maintaining the school culture and climate (Prokopchuk, 2016). A positive culture and climate are critical to teacher retention (Ryan, 2017). Seven of the principals interviewed mentioned culture and climate as a challenge they face when retaining teachers.

Lifestyle Changes

The final theme used to identify challenges principals face when trying to retain teachers was lifestyle changes. Principals interviewed stated their teachers leave due to lifestyle changes, such as retirement, marriage, or starting a family. Principal 6 stated, "They (teachers) don't leave when they come, they stay, but I have had many teachers retire." Principals interviewed stated that when teachers decide to leave due to lifestyle changes, it is harder to encourage them to stay.

Findings of Research Question 2

RQ 2: What leadership practices do elementary school principals believe encourage teachers to remain in the profession?

Building Strong Relationships

The principals in this study indicated that building strong relationships with teachers encourages teachers to remain in the profession. Communicating with teachers helps build strong relationships (Tyler, 2016). While principals can communicate with teachers in various ways, Tyler (2016) concluded that writing handwritten notes instead of emailing a teacher is more effective in building a relationship. Although emails, face-to-face meetings, and handwritten notes are important to building a relationship with teachers, it is also important that principals listen. According to Burns transformational leadership theory, listening makes teachers feel valued (Ross & Kendall, n.d.). Principals must listen and remember each person has a perspective and a role that shapes the concern and the situation (Goethals et al., 2004). Principal 5 stated the way she builds relationships with her teachers is by listening. Principal 6 stated with 12 years of experience as a principal, she has learned the biggest thing is to listen.

Support

In addition to building relationships, the principals interviewed found that being supportive was an important leadership practice they implement to encourage teacher retention. Administrative support is an essential factor that impacts teacher retention (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Holmes et al., 2019; Hughes et al., 2015; “What’s the Cost of Teacher Turnover,” 2017; Podolsky et al., 2016; Thibodeaux et al., 2014). Schools with supportive environments retain more teachers (Kraft et al., 2016). Although other factors can influence teacher retention, strong principal leadership and support are the only significant predictors of retention (Player et al., 2017). Principals in

this study emphasized the importance of supporting teachers. The principals said they support their teachers by being visible throughout the building, celebrating successes, providing resources, and helping teachers achieve their career goals.

Hiring and Teacher Development

Eight of the principals interviewed found that hiring and teacher development were important leadership practices to retain teachers. Principals must look to hire the most effective teacher for the job (Young, 2018). Before hiring teachers, principals must know the personal attributes needed to fit into the school's culture (Vari et al., 2018). Although hiring is important, principals must also continue to support the teacher after hiring. The participants in this study stated that principals must have a detailed hiring process to ensure they hire the right person the first time and put that person on the right team of teachers. After hiring, it is also important to provide ongoing support to the teachers. According to Vari et al. (2018), principals must support growth after hiring a teacher.

The participants of this study also believe that mentor programs are important. Six of the 10 principals interviewed mentioned the importance of mentor programs. When principal 4 was asked what leadership practices she believes encourage teacher retention, she stated, "Setting them up with a good mentor when they arrive and providing professional development and support for whatever your instructional initiatives are in your building." Other principals also mentioned mentor and induction programs as leadership practices they believe encourages teacher retention. Principal 3 mentioned the importance of providing a mentor to new teachers and experienced teachers that are new

to the building. According to Ronfeldt and McQueen (2017), mentor programs are an effective way for principals to support teachers. Maready (2018) concluded that mentor programs can increase teacher retention.

Upon reviewing the literature for this study, one research finding was that teachers leave the profession due to salary. Salary levels vary across districts and states, and in this study, salary was not identified as a factor in teachers leaving their schools or the profession. When completing the literature review, the research indicated that salary levels of educators impact teachers' decisions to remain in the profession (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Podolsky et al., 2016; Sutchter et al., 2016; Young, 2018). When completing this study, none of the principals interviewed stated teachers left their school or the profession due to salary. In the district where this study took place, teachers have received raises within the last 2 years. In addition to pay increases, teachers in the district where the study took place have also received bonuses in the last 2 years. The pay increases and bonuses may be one reason principals do not feel teacher salaries are a reason teachers leave the profession or district.

Limitations of the Study

When completing research, there are limitations to any study. In this study, one limitation was the small sample size. Although the small size is consistent with a case study, a higher number of interviews would have allowed the findings to be more generalized. Another limitation of this study was that I am an employee of the district where the study took place. To minimize bias, field notes were taken, and an interview

protocol was used for all interviews. Although these were the study's limitations, steps were taken to reduce these limitations' impact on the study's trustworthiness.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Future Study

This qualitative case study provides recommendations for further research grounded in the strengths and limitations of the current study. This study provided a comprehensive description of challenges principals face when trying to retain teachers and leadership practices principals believe encourage teacher retention. Based on the data collected for this study, the following may be of interest to future researchers to examine challenges principals face when trying to retain teachers and leadership practices principals believe encourage teacher retention. The sample size of this study only represented the opinion of 10 experienced principals with high teacher retention. The sample size should consist of more principals and principals with both high and low teacher retention. By obtaining insight from principals with high and low teacher retention, a researcher can better understand if principals with low retention experience the same challenges when trying to retain teachers. Future research should also include principals from middle schools and high schools. By including middle- and high-school principals, a researcher can determine if principals at different levels experience different challenges and if middle- and high-school principals believe different leadership practices encourage teacher retention. Future research should include a larger and more diverse sample size, which would allow a researcher to gain a more well-rounded perspective of

challenges principals face when trying to retain teachers and leadership practices principals believe encourage teacher retention.

Recommendations for School Principals

During the data analysis process, workload, culture and climate, and lifestyle changes were identified as challenges principals face when trying to retain teachers. To address the challenge of workload, it is recommended that principals consider teachers' workload before adding new expectations or school-wide initiatives. Principal 1 stated,

When things come up with the district, I take my teachers' workload into consideration. I do not want to put unnecessary stress on my teachers. Too often, people jump on the latest trend, and we keep adding to the teacher's plate.

When adding to a teacher's workload, a principal must ensure the additional responsibilities do not put unnecessary stress on teachers.

It is also recommended that principals take steps to maintain a positive culture and climate within the building. To create and maintain this positive culture and climate, principals must listen to teachers' concerns, maintain a positive behavior support system within the school, and celebrate teachers' successes. Principal 8 stated, "Principals must create a culture and climate within the school where people enjoy being in your school." To create this positive culture and climate, a principal must be a supportive leader and create a collaborative culture where everyone feels supported.

Although principals face challenges when retaining teachers, principals can encourage teacher retention by building strong relationships with teachers, being supportive, and developing effective hiring and teacher development systems. It is

recommended that principals be intentional with building strong relationships with their teachers. To build relationships with teachers, principals need to listen to teachers' concerns and communicate with teachers. Principals should set a reoccurring time when they are available to talk with teachers. During this time, teachers should be allowed to voice their concerns, discuss career goals, or share ideas. Taking these steps can help principals understand their teachers' needs, gather new ideas, and show teachers their opinion and ideas matter.

It is also recommended that principals develop comprehensive hiring and teacher development systems. Before interviewing teachers, principals must determine the qualities needed in the new teacher. Principals must also develop an interview protocol that will allow them to get to know each teacher candidate. During the interview process, the principal should clearly state their vision for the school and teachers' expectations. Setting these clear expectations during the interview process can help ensure the right teacher is hired for the position. In addition, to developing effective hiring procedures, principals should also develop a teacher development committee. The principal must set clear expectations regarding teacher mentors, induction programs, and teacher professional development. The teacher development committee should consist of experienced teachers and a school administrator. The committee should develop a professional development calendar, mentor observation and feedback expectations, and determine how first-year teachers and new teachers to the building will be supported.

Recommendations for District Leadership

Based on the data obtained in this study, principals play an important role in teacher retention. Principals must understand how they can influence a teacher's retention decision, and the principals need to have leadership practices they can implement to encourage teacher retention. When conducting interviews, all the principals interviewed stated the district does not provide professional development to principals regarding teacher retention. The principals stated they are told retaining teachers is part of their job, but they are not provided with targeted professional development regarding this topic. Principals must be provided with professional development regarding the necessary skills and strategies they can implement to retain teachers.

Data from this study note the importance of mentor programs for teachers. These programs provide teachers with the necessary support they need to be successful. Research shows mentor programs help improve new teachers' effectiveness, improves teacher retention, and student achievement (Harmsen et al., 2018). It is recommended that the district implement districtwide expectations regarding teacher mentor and induction programs. Although many principals interviewed in the study stated that they provide their new teachers with a mentor, there is no set expectation for mentor or induction programs from the district. The use of mentor programs is only implemented at the school level. The district should develop a new teacher one-year mentor or induction program. During this year, new teachers should attend professional development sessions and be provided support from experienced teachers.

The final recommendation for district leadership is to review annual retention rates with building principals. As noted in the district strategic plan retaining teachers is an area of need. The district should have teachers complete an exit survey when leaving the district or leaving a school. The survey data should then be shared with principals and discussed. Reviewing these data may help principals gain a better understanding as to why teachers are leaving. These exit surveys would also provide district personnel with data regarding why teachers are leaving. The survey data could then be used to determine topics to discuss during targeted professional development with principals and topics to discuss with new teachers during new teacher mentor professional development sessions.

Implications

This data can inform both new and experienced principals. With this information, principals can be proactive in determining challenges they may face when trying to retain teachers. This study's data also provide principals with insight into leadership practices they can implement to increase teacher retention. Increasing teacher retention would positively impact the school's overall culture and climate, the community, and student achievement.

This study followed the qualitative study using the exploratory case study design to explore how elementary school principals address challenges when retaining teachers and leadership practices they believe encourage teachers to remain in the profession. The design allows me to understand and investigate the case in-depth within a real-world context. When selecting participants, purposeful sampling was used. Selecting participants via purposeful sampling allowed me to gain insight and select a sample from

which I could learn the most about the phenomenon. By selecting principals with at least 3 years of experience at their schools ensured the principal had experience over time and have seen the school's retention pattern. If principals with less experience were included, I would not have gotten a clear picture of the principal's challenges when trying to retain teachers at their school, as teachers may have left due to the prior principal or other facts that the current principal did not influence. During the interview process, a principal mentioned that her retention rate was lower than her current retention rate during her first 2 years as principal. She attributed the retention rate difference to a change in leadership and a change in leadership practices and priorities.

During the interview process, interviewing participants via teleconference interviews using an interview protocol allowed the participants to participate in the research safely from their homes or schools. The interview questions were designed to promote communication from the principals through their own words about challenges they face when trying to retain teachers and the leadership practices they believe encourage teachers to remain in the profession. Conducting the interviews via teleconference instead of conducting the interviewing via phone conference allowed me to connect with the participants as if we were in the same room. Due to the coronavirus outbreak face to face interviews were not possible.

Conclusion

Previous researchers focused on teacher retention. However, there was limited research on challenges principals face when trying to retain teachers and leadership practices principals can implement to retain teachers. Although previous research focused

on teacher retention, studies showed that principals impact a teacher retention decision. Due to the impact of low teacher retention on the overall school culture and climate, the community, and student achievement, it was important to study the challenges principals face when trying to retain teachers and leadership practices principals can implement to encourage teacher retention.

This study's data showed principals can encourage teacher retention by building a relationship with the teachers, supporting teachers, and maintaining effective hiring and professional development for teachers. The principals interviewed in this study all agreed their leadership impacts teacher retention. With the findings from this study, principals can implement the leadership practices mentioned in the study to increase their teacher retention.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Instructions:

Good morning (afternoon). My name is Tiffany Jones. Thank you for participating in this study. This interview will take about one hour. I will start the interview by asking you about your experience as a principal. I would like you to feel comfortable with saying what you really think and how you truly feel. There is no right or wrong answer or desirable answer. I will then ask you about teacher retention within your school.

Tape Recorder Instructions:

I will be recording this interview. The purpose of this is to ensure I can get all the details but also be able to carry on an attentive conversation with you. All your comments will remain confidential.

Consent Form:

My records show you signed the consent form online.

We will now proceed to the interview questions.

Q1: How long have you been a principal?

Q2: How long have you been a principal at (name of school)?

Q3: What leadership challenges have you face when trying to retain teachers?

Q4: What leadership practices do you believe encourage teachers to remain in the profession?

Q5: Why do you think teachers leave (name of school) or the profession?

Q6: What do you think makes teachers stay at (name of school)?

Q7: Does the district provide professional development on teacher retention for principals?

Q8: With your experience as principal what have you learned about retaining teachers?

Q9: How do you support the teachers in your building?

Q10: What degree of influence do you think you have on a teacher's decision to leave or stay in your school or the profession?

Q11: Describe the behavior you think principals can use to influence a teacher's decision to leave or stay in your school or the profession?

Debriefing:

Thank you so much for participating in the interview. Your time is appreciated, and your comments are very helpful.

The purpose of this interview is to better understand the challenges principals face when trying to retain teachers. I am interested in your perception of the challenges principals face when trying to retain teachers.

Within the next 7 days, I will transcribe this interview. If I have questions while transcribing the interview, I will reach out to you via email or phone. After I transcribe the interview, I will email you a copy of the transcription for you to check the accuracy. During the data analysis process, I will be analyzing the data and identifying themes. After completing the data analysis process, I will send you the transcript for your review.

The results of this research will help principals understand the challenges elementary school principals face when trying to retain teachers.

Confidentiality will be maintained throughout all phases of this study. Procedures for maintaining confidentiality are as follows: (1) I will be the only person that has access to the participant and district name or other personal information; (2) at the start of the study, each participant will be assigned a number to help ensure confidentiality (3) all computer notes from the study will be saved on Microsoft Office 365 on a password-protected computer (4) handwritten notes will be stored in a locked file cabinet that I can only access; (5) all documentation collected during the study will be shredded after 5 years.

DQ1: Is there any other information you feel will be useful for me to know?

Again, thank you for your time. I will now turn off the recorder.