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Intermediate Schoolteachers' Perceptions of the Impact of Professional Development on Their Classroom Instruction

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Walden University
2021

Abstract

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MS, Walden University, 2010

BS, Southern University at New Orleans, 2004

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Despite increased district-provided professional development (PD) opportunities for teachers to improve classroom instruction, there has been a steady decline of academic achievement at an intermediate school in a large urban school district in the southwestern United States. One of the factors campus administrators attributed the lack of student success to was that the district does not provide PD that is effective in changing in intermediate schoolteachers' instructional practices. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore intermediate schoolteachers' perceptions of the impact PD provided by the district has on their classroom instruction, as well as the impact these trainings have on teacher self-efficacy. The constructivist theory of learning, Knowles' theory of andragogy, and Bandura's theory of self-efficacy were the conceptual framework for this basic qualitative study. Using a purposeful sample, data were collected via semistructured, face-to-face interviews with 10 intermediate schoolteachers and a focus group interview with an additional seven teachers. Data were analyzed using an inductive comparative process in which four themes emerged supporting the research question: (a) limited content-specific PD opportunities, (b) time/date conflict to attend PD, (c) repetitive PD topics, and (d) lack of differentiated PD for novice and veteran teachers. Findings from this study indicate that district-provided PD had no impact on the participants' classroom instruction or self-efficacy. A policy recommendation was developed based upon the results of the study; it is intended to help district leaders create a new policy for PD specific to new teachers. This study can promote positive social change by explaining the benefits of providing new teachers with the ongoing support and training they need as transition into their new roles in the classroom.

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. For I know that without HIM, I am nothing, and with HIM, I can do all things.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to thank God for giving me the wisdom, insight, and endurance as I completed this journey. Next, I would like to thank my best friend and husband, Derek Anthony Lockett Sr., for your support and encouragement throughout this endeavor--I Love You so much. To my kids, Derek Jr., Laila, and Amari, thank you for being my personal cheer squad and being a constant reminder of why I chose to pursue a higher education: to make a difference in the lives of children. To my mother, Bessie Reed, words could never express how truly grateful I am for all that you have done to help make my dream of becoming Dr. Gwendolyn Adams Lockett possible. To my ICCF church family, thank you for your prayers and words of encouragement throughout these years. To Dr. Maureen Ellis, my mentor and advisor, thank you for accepting the task of being my doctoral committee chairperson. I am so thankful for your prayers, friendship, guidance, and support throughout my doctoral journey. You taught me that I can do hard things, and I am forever grateful for constant words of encouragement. I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Ella Benson; thank you for agreeing to be my second member and providing me with the assistance and direction I needed to finish my project study. Additionally, I would like to recognize Dr. Wade Fish, my university research reviewer committee member, whose feedback and recommendations challenged me to be a better researcher and scholar. Last, but certainly not least, to the participants of this study, thank you for volunteering your time to share your stories with me. Through our interactions, I realized the importance of being an agent for social change… because our students deserve it.

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Section 1: The Problem

The Local Problem

Student achievement can be viewed as evidence of effective classroom instruction. When student achievement declines, school administrators have the responsibility to investigate the root cause of this issue (Meissel et al., 2016). The problem at the study site, hereafter referred to as District A, was a steady decline in student achievement. Over the past 5 years, students in District A have performed below the state averages in all content areas assessed by the state's high stakes testing program, per a 2018 curriculum audit performed by the Texas Association of School Administrators. According to the Texas Education Agency's 2016-2017 Academic Performance Report, which details school districts' accountability rating based upon state standardized test scores, the following percentages of all students in District A met the grade level standard in the respective subject areas: (a) reading (33%), (b) mathematics (39%), (c) writing (23%), (d) science (38%), and (e) social studies (40%).

In response to the deficiency in overall student achievement in District A, the Board of Trustees commissioned an external agency to conduct a curriculum audit to "reveal the extent to which officials and professional staff of a school district have developed and implemented a sound, valid, and operational system of curriculum management." One of the discrepancies identified in the curriculum audit pertained to the correlation between effective instruction and District A's current PD program; the audit's authors found "professional development, though abundant throughout the district, … to

be loosely aligned to district priorities and inadequately monitored for implementation or evaluated for effectiveness."

The current method of PD evaluation in District A is in-service session evaluation, which is an anonymous survey given to session attendees at the end of PD sessions. The in-service session evaluation contains four structured questions in which teachers respond using a Likert-scale. The in-service session evaluation includes questions on the following topics: (a) teachers' previous knowledge of the session content; (b) the session leader's knowledge about the topic; (c) the organization of the presentation; and (d) the interest, relevance, and/or helpfulness of information or material. Participants are not required to complete the in-service session evaluation; therefore, there is a disparity between the number of employees who attend PD and the responses to the in-service session evaluation. The gap in practice is the lack of evaluation regarding the impact PD provided by District A has on classroom instruction and student achievement.

Rationale

Although District A provides a robust and diverse quantity of PD opportunities for teachers, several schools in the district were failing to meet minimum state standards, according to the Executive Director of Accountability and 2017 academic performance data from the Texas Education Agency. An intermediate school in District A, hereafter referred to as Campus H, was identified as one of the schools with a significant percentage of students failing to meet grade-level academic standards in the Texas Education Agency data. Administrators at Campus H expressed concerns that one of the

factors contributing to the lack of student achievement was that District A does not provide PD that effectively elicits change in intermediate schoolteachers' instructional practices, according to the school's assistant principal. The purpose of this project study was to explore intermediate schoolteachers' perceptions of the impact PD provided by District A has on their classroom instruction, as well as the impact these trainings have on their self-efficacy. District A leaders can use the results of this project study for planning, focusing, and funding future high-quality effective PD opportunities to address the lack of student achievement at Campus H.

Definition of Terms

The following terms and definitions are used throughout this project study:

Andragogy/andragogical practices: The methods or techniques of teaching adults (Knowles, 1973).

Continuing professional education or *continuing professional development*: A comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach to providing teacher education, through presentations and workshops, after initial licensure whereby teachers engage in a career-long process to fine-tune teaching skills and improve their pedagogical practices (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Diaz-Maggioli, 2004; National Staff Development Council, 2009).

Intermediate schoolteachers: State-certified teachers who provide instruction to juvenile students in Grades 5 and 6 at one specific school (Campus H) within a large, public independent school district (District A) located in southwestern United States.

Professional development (*PD,* also referred to as *staff development* or *faculty development*): Ongoing learning opportunities available to teachers and other education personnel intended to help them enhance their content knowledge and develop new instructional practices (Ajani, 2019; Valiandes & Neophytou, 2018).

Self-efficacy: Confidence and belief in one's ability to attain new knowledge and perform newly acquired skills (Bandura, 1977).

Teacher self-efficacy: Teachers' beliefs in their capability to produce desired educational outcomes (Sasson et al., 2020).

Significance of the Study

Recent reformation in U.S. public education have been primarily focused on growing and developing teachers, as effective classroom instruction is a key factor in student academic growth (ESSA, 2015). The goal of PD is to grow the knowledge and skills necessary for teachers to provide high-quality instruction, and subsequently improve student achievement (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Teachers are expected to continually grow professionally and improve their practice throughout their career, and effective PD affords them the means to do so (Avidov-Ungar, 2016). As teachers grow professionally, this can lead to improvements in their pedagogy and increased student learning (Ajani, 2019; Simos & Smith, 2017). Through effective PD, teachers acquire the tools necessary to enhance their knowledge and develop or refine their instructional practices.

Currently, student achievement at Campus H does not measure up to the standards set forth by the state in which this study took place, and there is no evaluation plan to

identify the impact of district-provided PD on intermediate schoolteachers' classroom instruction as well as their self-efficacy. This study and resulting project, a policy recommendation with detail, can assist the administrators in District A in making changes to the current PD program to address the deficiencies in student growth and achievement at Campus H. The results of this study may also support District A's mission to "provide a rigorous and enriching educational experience that prepares every student for success in college, career, and life." Furthermore, there is currently no other research on this specific phenomenon, according to my review of the literature; therefore, the findings from this study can add to the body of professional literature to support future research concerning the impact of PD on classroom instruction.

Research Question

The problem at Campus H is a steady decline of student achievement, and one of the factors administrators have identified as contributing to this lack of student achievement is that District A does not provide PD that effectively elicits change in intermediate schoolteachers' instructional practices. The gap in practice is that there is a lack of evaluation regarding the impact PD provided by District A has on classroom instruction and student achievement. In this project study, I explored intermediate schoolteachers' perceptions about the impact of the PD provided by District A have on their classroom instruction, as well as the impact these trainings have on their self-efficacy. The following research question (RQ) and subquestion (SQ) were used to guide this study:

RQ: What are intermediate schoolteachers' perceptions about the impact of district-provided PD on their classroom instruction?

SQ: What are intermediate schoolteachers' perceptions about the impact of district-provided PD on their self-efficacy?

Review of the Literature

The purpose of the literature review was to examine scholarly articles and books about PD, the characteristics of effective PD, and the impact PD can have on teachers' classroom instruction and self-efficacy. I accomplished the review of the literature by accessing online scholarly databases from Walden University Library, including the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), Sage Premier, and ProQuest Central. In addition, I searched the U.S. Department of Education and the International Society for Technology in Education websites. The focus was on locating literature related to teacher PD, teachers' self-efficacy, and the impact of teachers' continuing education on student achievement.

To acquire current literature published between 2016 and 2021 on the aforementioned topics, I used the following search terms: *teacher/educator professional development*, *teacher/educator continuing professional education*, *effective professional development*, *teacher/educator professional learning*, *professional learning communities*, *professional development and student outcomes*, *professional development and pedagogical practices*, *professional development and classroom instruction*, *teachers' self-efficacy*, *professional development and teachers' self-efficacy*, and *professional learning and its impact on student achievement*. The literature search continued until no

additional relevant sources could be located, indicating that the literature search was complete. In the following literature review, I discuss the conceptual framework for the study, the significance of PD, the characteristics of effective PD, types of PD, school district leadership's role in providing PD, and the correlation between PD and teachers' classroom instruction and self-efficacy.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework undergirding this study was constructivism. Constructivism is a learning theory that explains how individuals attain knowledge and learn new information. Constructivism asserts that individuals learn (construct new knowledge) by building upon their previous knowledge or experiences (Misra, 2020). Piaget (1970) reported that the construction of knowledge is a process of maturation, social experiences, activity within our environment, and equilibration, which is the constant search for a balance between what one already knows and some new knowledge or experience. Constructivism is an active process in which individuals are constantly linking new information to preexisting knowledge and past experiences.

I selected constructivism for the foundation of this project study because through effective PD, learners acquire new knowledge through active participation and reflection during trainings, as opposed to imitation or repetition (Mohammed & Kinyo, 2020). PD also allows educators to construct new knowledge without eradicating past learning and/or skills (Pratiwi & Jailani, 2018). Additionally, constructivism is a framework that supports andragogy.

Andragogy

According to Knowles (1973), the term “andragogy” is an extension of adult learning theory, which identifies factors that should be considered when teaching adult learners. Andragogy posits that adults (a) take control of their learning; (b) have a desire for immediate efficacy; (c) focus on personal issues; (d) continually assess their learning; (e) anticipate how they will apply their learning; (f) expect to improve their performance; (g) maximize available resources; (h) require collaborative, respectful, cooperative and informal learning environments; and (i) expect to receive information that is developmentally appropriate (Knowles, 1973). PD for educators is a form of adult learning; therefore, providers must consider andragogy when developing professional learning opportunities (Zepeda et al., 2017). Andragogy was appropriate for this study because it supports the conceptual framework and is the foundation for effective PD design, presenter delivery, and active teacher participation.

Self-efficacy

Bandura (1977) defined self-efficacy as confidence in one’s abilities to attain new knowledge and perform newly acquired skills. Teachers’ self-efficacy refers to their confidence in their ability to deliver quality instruction and to accomplish a task; it is not contingent upon whether or not the accomplishment is earned (Sasson et al., 2020; West & Plevyak, 2018). When teachers believe they can achieve a goal, they tend to have a greater sense of self-efficacy, which can have a positive impact on their classroom instruction (Sasson et al., 2020; West & Plevyak, 2018).

Sehgal et al. (2017) reported that there is a correlation between teachers' self-efficacy and their years of classrooms experience, as beginning teachers are still developing self-efficacy, while experienced teachers tend to have more stable self-efficacy. Self-efficacy can affect teachers' new knowledge attainment during PD because individuals are more likely to engage in activities they believe they can execute successfully in the classroom (Fackler & Malmberg, 2016). Likewise, individuals are less likely to engage in an activity if they believe they will be unable to execute it successfully in the classroom (Fackler & Malmberg, 2016).

Review of the Broader Problem

Over the course of several years, the public education system in the United States has undergone a systematic reform with the goal of improving the quality of education students receive (O'Day & Smith, 2016). School reformation began with the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 (O'Day & Smith, 2016). The purpose of the ESEA was to provide federal funding to address the inadequacies of the public education programs in poverty-stricken areas of the United States (ESEA, 1965). The ESEA represented the federal government's commitment to provide an equal and quality education for all U.S. youth (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The objective of the ESEA was to close the achievement gap between students living in poverty and students living in areas that are more affluent.

The ESEA provided provisions and funding to improve the public education system, however it fell short of meeting the original goals of the law (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education

published a report entitled *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* hereafter referred to *A Nation at Risk*, which highlighted deficiencies that existed in the United States' public education system 18 years after the passing of the ESEA. *A Nation at Risk* urged the federal government to reexamine provisions set forth in the ESEA and revise the law to include measures that would effectively prepare U.S. youth to compete in a global economy, as well as prepare them to become productive citizens in society. *A Nation at Risk* identified a need for a systematic change in America's public education system.

A Nation at Risk was one of the catalysts that prompted the bipartisan reauthorization of the ESEA in 2001, and the passage of a new law, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 (O'Day & Smith, 2016). Lawmakers passed the NCLB Act to revise, reauthorize, and consolidate various programs of the ESEA. The NCLB Act also set various mandates that addressed, measured, and penalized public schools and districts that failed to meet Adequate Yearly Progress, a standard that measured student achievement (NCLB, 2001). The NCLB created a framework to hold public schools and districts accountable for student academic growth, and provided sanctions, including decreasing funding, when they failed to do so.

One pertinent objective of the NCLB Act was to ensure that all children in the United States, regardless of ethnicity, race, or income, be educated by high-quality teachers (NCLB, 2001). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2003), teacher quality is an important issue within the NCLB Act "because a well-prepared teacher is vitally important to a child's education" (U.S. Department of Education, 2003, para. 8).

Through the NCLB Act, the federal government drew a parallel between effective teacher PD and an increase in student academic achievement.

The NCLB Act was scheduled for revision in 2007; however no progress was made until 2010 when the Obama administration began responding to the plea of parents and educators for a better law with “the clear goal of fully preparing all students for success in college and careers” (U.S. Department of Education, 2015, para. 4). On December 10, 2015, the 144th Congress approved the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). ESSA not only provides safeguards for equitable educational opportunities for America's disadvantaged and high-need students, but it requires, for the first time, that all students in the United States be taught to high academic standards that will prepare them to succeed in college and careers (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The ESSA was designed to provide students with an effective public education that gives them choices and opportunities beyond a high school diploma.

The ESSA (2015) also revised the requirements of students being taught by highly qualified teachers as set forth in the NCLB Act, to effective teachers that meet state certification and licensure requirements (ESSA, 2015). According to the ESSA, increasing student achievement is contingent upon increasing instructional effectiveness. Effective instruction is no longer rooted in research-based teacher preparation, as previously mandated by the NCLB Act; it now requires ongoing evidence-based trainings that lead to student achievement and growth (ESSA, 2015; NCLB, 2001).

Title II, Part A of the ESSA provides federal funding for teacher training and preparation to states and school districts for PD opportunities that will strengthen

instruction in all schools (ESSA, 2015). PD funded by Title II, Part A must be (a) part of broader school improvement plans, (b) collaborative, (c) data driven, (d) developed with educator input, and (e) regularly evaluated (ESSA, 2015). These accountability measures provide a framework for continuity of PD programs; however, implementation, effectiveness, and the impact PD has on student achievement varies from state to state (Pierce, 2016).

The ESSA (2015) also updated the definition of PD to ensure personalized, ongoing, job-embedded training and support for not only teachers but all school staff, including paraprofessionals. School districts may utilize Title II, Part A funds to support a wide array of PD activities, provided said activities are grounded in evidence-based research (ESSA, 2015). Each state and/or school district has the autonomy to decide what types of PD opportunities will be offered; however, the PD must meet the specifications set forth in the ESSA (ESSA, 2015).

Teacher Professional Development

Teacher PD provides educators with a variety of learning opportunities designed to improve and strengthen their instructional practices and increase student achievement (Avidov-Ungar, 2016; DeLuca et al., 2019; Nam et al., 2016). Ajani (2019) described PD as ongoing learning opportunities available to teachers and other education personnel and intended to help them enhance their content knowledge and develop new instructional practices. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) defined effective PD as “structured professional learning that results in changes in teacher practices and improvements in student learning outcomes” (p. v).

Significance of Professional Development

High-quality instruction is noted as providing students with the knowledge and skills necessary to master the breadth and depth of the content, while employing instructional techniques that make the learning experience engaging, self-directed, and rigorous (Gordon & Ross-Gordon, 2018; de Jong et al., 2019). Student achievement is linked to knowledgeable and skillful teachers, and PD is a key factor in equipping educators with the necessary skills and abilities to provide quality instruction (Hynds et al., 2016). The goal of PD is to improve teacher learning, pedagogical practices, and ultimately student achievement (de Jong et al., 2019). PD supports teachers learning and transforming their knowledge into practice for the benefit of students' academic achievement.

Characteristics of Effective Teacher Professional Development

Effective PD focuses on providing teachers with learning opportunities that cultivate new knowledge, skills, values, and beliefs while reinforcing and enhancing pedagogical practices (Avidov-Ungar, 2016; Bates & Morgan, 2018; Copur-Gencturk et al., 2019; Desimone, 2009, 2018; Kennedy, 2016; Valiandes & Neophytou, 2018). Researchers have identified five core features of effective PD: (a) content focused; (b) incorporates active learning; (c) is coherent with school, district, and state reforms; (d) has sustained duration; and (e) has collective participation (Copur-Gencturk et al., 2019; Desimone, 2009, 2018; Garet et al., 2016; Overstreet, 2017; Pak et al., 2020; Valiandes & Neophytou, 2018; Wahlgren et al., 2016). Researchers reported that professional learning opportunities that incorporated these core features had a positive impact on teachers'

classroom instruction, pedagogy, and student achievement (Bates & Morgan, 2018; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Desimone, 2009, 2018; Overstreet, 2017).

Content focused. PD that is content focused involves teaching techniques and activities that focus on subject matter content and how students learn that content (Desimone, 2009, 2018; Garet et al., 2016). Content-focused PD also supports teachers' understanding of subject matter learning objectives that foster students' mastery of the curriculum (Copur-Gencturk et al., 2019; Garet et al., 2016). PD that provides learning opportunities focused on content and developing pedagogical skills can improve teacher practice and increase student achievement (Garet et al., 2016; Simos & Smith, 2017). Students' mastery of the curriculum provides an intentional focus on discipline-specific curriculum development and pedagogies in teachers' respective areas of instruction (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

Active learning. PD that incorporates active learning allows teachers to learn collaboratively and from one another (Overstreet, 2017). Active learning provides opportunities for teachers to observe others teach, receive feedback on pedagogical practice, analyze student work and data, lead discussions, and/or make presentations (Desimone, 2009, 2018; Overstreet, 2017). Additionally, active learning involves teachers directly experiencing the instructional techniques and engaging in the same learning modality used by students (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Santagata & Bray, 2016).

Coherence. Coherent PD aligns to school, district, and state reforms and policies (Desimone, 2009, 2018; Lindvall & Ryve, 2019). Coherence asserts that effective PD

provides learning opportunities in which the content, goals, and activities are consistent with the school's curriculum and goals, teachers' knowledge and belief systems, and the needs of the students (Desimone, 2009, 2018; Lindvall & Ryve, 2019). Effective PD establishes relevance to both educational initiatives and each teacher's belief system (Overstreet, 2017).

Sustained duration. PD with sustained duration provides teachers with adequate time to investigate, practice, implement, reflect, and enhance the new knowledge and skills attained (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Desimone, 2009, 2018; Lindvall & Ryve, 2019). PD with sustained duration provides ongoing opportunities throughout the school year and includes at least 20 hours of contact time (Desimone, 2009, 2018). PD that offers collaboration, sufficient time for implementing new techniques, and ongoing support can result in a positive change in classroom instruction (Dobbs et al., 2017).

Collective participation. PD that includes collective participation provides opportunities for teachers from the same grade, school, or subject area to work collaboratively to build an interactive community of learners (Desimone, 2009, 2018; Overstreet, 2017). According to Bates and Morgan (2018), PD may be most effective when done collectively over an extended period. Collective participation creates opportunities for teachers to share ideas and learn from other teachers in job-embedded contexts (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Overstreet, 2017). Collective participation also enables teachers to strengthen their professional learning by creating professional learning communities, which promote regular opportunities for teachers to collaborate and plan with their peers, with the assumption that this collaboration will improve their

instruction thus increasing student achievement (DuFour & Eaker, 2009; Sprott, 2019; Wan, 2020).

Literature Supporting the Five Core Features of Professional Development

In further reviewing the literature regarding characteristics of effective PD, I found several studies that aligned with the five core features. Simos and Smith (2017) affirms that "professional development must allow teachers to focus on content and pedagogical knowledge, provide opportunities for real-time implementation, and develop important collaboration and reflection that lead to improved teacher practice and student achievement" (p 2). Pedagogy-specific PD provides opportunities for teachers to improve the quality of their understanding of a variety of instructional practices for teaching, student learning, and the development of appropriate assessment strategies (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). According to Guskey (2017), learning opportunities should include activities that focus on specific goals for improving student learning and provide teachers with experiential learning facilitated in such a manner that mirrors the instructional approaches they are expected to master. Gögebakan-Yildiz (2018) argued that teachers could not be expected to provide their students with content knowledge and learning strategies if they are not equipped with such skills themselves.

Gore et al. (2017) asserted that effective PD should include consistent use of andragogical strategies such as experiential learning and explicit modeling. Furthermore, Hynds et al. (2016) suggested that effective PD should be ongoing, collaborative, and data- or interest-driven. Finally, Guskey (2017) discussed how learning experiences

should offer teachers opportunities to practice new strategies, be continuous and ongoing, and involve follow-up and support for future learning.

Formats of Professional Development

In the field of education, there are various styles of PD teachers can participate in (Bates & Morgan, 2018; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Overstreet, 2017; Sprott, 2019; Wasserman & Maymon, 2017). These learning experiences can be quite diverse in topic and/or delivery; however, they all generally employ techniques that are classified as traditional or nontraditional (Bates & Morgan, 2018; Desimone, 2018). According to Onurkan Aliusta and Özer (2017), the duration of PD opportunities is the key factor in determining whether the format is considered traditional or non-traditional.

Traditional PD consists of short, generic workshops or conferences, which generally feature the sit-and-get approach (Bates & Morgan, 2018; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). The sit-and-get PD is generally a one-time in-service in which an expert in the field models and disseminates various information to the audience in a lecture-approach manner (Ping et al., 2018; Valiandes & Neophytou, 2018). Traditional PD rarely results in a change in teacher practice or an increase in student growth (Bates & Morgan, 2018; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Desimone, 2009, 2018).

Nontraditional PD is characterized by providing sustained, extensive, coherent, and/or comprehensive learning opportunities for teachers (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Desimone, 2009, 2018; Valiandes & Neophytou, 2018). Nontraditional PD moves beyond singular one-shot trainings toward a more reform-oriented approach consisting of collaboration, mentoring, coaching, peer observation, and so forth, and tends to require

more time to effectively develop new knowledge and change teacher practice (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Desimone, 2009, 2018; Dobbs et al., 2017). Nontraditional PD provides teachers with opportunities to build and support their learning while practicing and implementing new strategies that can result in a change in practice (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Desimone, 2018; Dobbs et al., 2017).

District Leadership and Professional Development

In the United States, millions of dollars are invested in teacher PD annually (Gore et al., 2017; Shirrell et al., 2019). During the 2017-2018 academic year, District A spent over $4 million dollars to provide PD for all staff (members of the districts' finance department). Given the amount of resources District A spent on PD, district leadership could benefit by understanding the impact these trainings have on teachers' classroom instruction and the academic success of students.

School districts' investments in PD programs are based upon the assumption that teachers' training will ultimately benefit student performance. Therefore, administrators should carefully select PD offerings based upon the needs of the teachers (Shaha et al., 2016; Valiandes & Neophytou, 2018). School districts that provide funding for teachers' PD are responsible for overseeing and evaluating the effectiveness of the current PD program (Leithwood et al., 2019; MacLeod, 2020).

Providing effective PD for teachers requires the guidance, support, and leadership of district administrators (Johnston & George, 2018; Lynch et al., 2016). District leaders are able to design, implement, and oversee learning experiences that have a positive impact on teacher practice and student achievement (Johnston & George, 2018; Lynch et

al., 2016). Mette et al. (2016), stressed the importance of studying how various types of PD impacts teachers' everyday practice, along with the district leadership required to support this work. This investigation of the current PD system in District A became the foundation of the culmination project, a policy recommendation with detail, which I will share with district leadership with recommendations to evaluate and make modifications to the current PD program provided by the district.

Classroom Instruction and Professional Development

PD plays a significant role in determining the effectiveness of teachers, who in turn are responsible for providing quality classroom instruction (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Gümüş & Bellibaş, 2016). Teachers have reported that participating in learning opportunities that incorporated the identified core features of effective PD had a significant, positive effect on their knowledge and skills, which promoted positive changes in their classroom practice (Proffitt-White, 2017). Peercy and Troyan (2017) asserted that PD should be grounded in teachers learning about pedagogy and transforming that knowledge into quality classroom instruction. According to Guskey (2017), the effectiveness of teachers' classroom instruction is dependent upon the quality and quantity of PD received.

Teachers' Self-efficacy and Professional Development

According to Sasson et al. (2020), teachers' self-efficacy includes confidence in their instructional practices, classroom management, and peer collaboration skills. Several researchers have found a correlation between teacher self-efficacy and high-quality classroom instruction, which has subsequently had a positive impact on student

achievement (Fackler & Malmberg, 2016; Lopez, 2018; Miller et al., 2017; Son et al., 2016; Zee & Koomen, 2016). Wasserman and Maymon (2017) described how teachers' self-efficacy could be influenced by attending PD that incorporated the five core features of effective PD. Gümüş and Bellibaş (2021) and Hwang (2021) found that effective PD had a positive impact on teachers' self-efficacy and classroom practices. Providing high-quality classroom instruction will have a positive impact on student learning outcomes.

Implications

Post licensure, all educators in the study site state in the Southwest region of the United States must attain continuing professional education to renew or maintain their certification. District A is allocating a large amount capital and resources to provide PD opportunities for teachers (district finance department). However, there is a lack of evaluation describing the impact PD provided by District A has on classroom instruction and student achievement. Therefore, District A may benefit from understanding the types of PD intermediate schoolteachers perceive to have an impact on their classroom instruction as this could enhance student-learning outcomes.

Effective PD for educators is one method to achieve positive social change within the field of education (Brydon-Miller, 2018). According to Cody (2009), teachers can promote positive social change within their classrooms and through their collegial and community interactions, by demonstrating their commitment to professional growth and life-long learning. Furthermore, PD helps to build learning communities committed to continuous improvement, collective responsibility, and goal alignment (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

When designing PD for educators, there are two notions that should be considered. The first is that teachers possess different theoretical and professional knowledge bases, and the second is that teachers are at different stages in their careers (Diaz-Maggioli, 2004; Zepeda et al., 2017). In designing PD for teachers, administrators should also consider the unique needs of the education profession and offer learning opportunities that will support teachers' efforts for professional growth (Pratiwi & Jailani, 2018). PD programs should strive to meet organizational needs such as building a climate of continuous professional growth and being unified around common goals; however, they also need to be differentiated to meet needs of individual teachers due to variations in training, experience, and career stage (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Diaz-Maggioli, 2004; DuFour & Eaker, 2009; Zepeda et al., 2017). Through this project study, 17 intermediate schoolteachers at Campus H had the opportunity to share their perceptions regarding the impact of district-provided PD on their classroom instruction, as well as the impact these trainings had on their self-efficacy.

Summary

Post licensure continuing professional education is required for teachers in the state in which this study took place to renew or maintain their certification. Continuing professional education is one method teachers can use to foster their professional growth, increase their cognitive development, and support student academic achievement. Some school districts have taken on the responsibility of providing PD opportunities to their faculty; however, the methods appear to be a "one-size-fits-all" approach (Desimone, 2018).

Leaders of school districts that provide PD should consider several factors concerning the PD they offer. These include adult learning theories, educator needs, and the impact on student learning (Diaz-Maggioli, 2004; Shaha et al., 2016; and Valiandes & Neophytou, 2018). The literature supports an investigation of District A intermediate schoolteachers' perceptions of the impact district-provided PD has on their classroom instruction, as well as the impact these trainings have on their self-efficacy (Avidov-Ungar, 2016; Fackler & Malmberg, 2016; Simos & Smith, 2017).

In Section 2, I discuss the methodology used to obtain data, along with the research design and purposeful sampling of the participants. Section 2 also includes the methods of data collection, process of data analysis, research findings, and limitations of the study. Section 3 includes details on the project, the rationale, a review of the literature supporting the project, a project description, a project evaluation plan, and discussion of project implications. In Section 4, I reflect and offer conclusions regarding the project. Focal areas includes the project strengths and limitations; recommendations for alternative approaches; scholarship, project development, and leadership and change; reflection on the importance of the work; and implications, applications, and directions for future research.

Section 2: The Methodology

Qualitative Research Design and Approach

In this basic qualitative study, I explored the perceptions of intermediate schoolteachers at Campus H in District A, a large urban school district in the Southwest region of the United States. Considering the uniqueness of the Campus H and the nature of the targeted phenomenon (intermediate schoolteachers' perceptions), I chose the qualitative research methodology. Qualitative methodology allowed me to achieve an understanding of the phenomenon from the perspective of intermediate schoolteachers, as opposed to myself (see Merriam, 2009). I sought to answer the following RQ and supporting SQ in this study:

RQ: What are intermediate schoolteachers' perceptions about the impact of district-provided PD on their classroom instruction?

SQ: What are intermediate schoolteachers' perceptions about the impact of district-provided PD on their self-efficacy?

I used qualitative methodology to explore the previously identified problem and develop a detailed understanding of the central phenomenon (see Creswell, 2012). According to Glesne (2011), qualitative studies are best at contributing to greater understanding of perceptions, attitudes, and processes, unlike quantitative studies, which involve the identification of sets of variables and determination of their relationship. Qualitative methodology was the best approach for this study, as I was not seeking to collect data or evidence to prove or disprove a hypothesis, but rather attain intricate details about a phenomenon, intermediate schoolteachers' perceptions, which would be

challenging to understand through more conventional research methods (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). Furthermore, the description and interpretation of participants' perspectives are features of all qualitative approaches (Vaismoradi et al., 2016).

A qualitative approach allowed me to probe for additional information organically as the participants shared information, which is not available through quantitative data collection (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). I was also able to employ an inductive approach during data analysis, which allowed me to make meaning of intermediate schoolteachers' perceptions gathered during the interviews (see Vaismoradi et al., 2016). Interview data revealed a wealth of information regarding issues and concerns previously unbeknownst to me, information that would not have been attained via quantitative methodology.

I considered other qualitative designs for this study; however, those designs did not align to the data collection methods regarding the phenomenon of interest. For example, ethnography is widely used in the educational field; researchers using this method gather data concerning the development of shared patterns as groups interact over an extended period (Creswell, 2012). Ethnographic studies are undergirded by the precept that the researcher be immersed in the research site and spend an extensive period with the participants, and the primary method of data collection is taking on the role of a participant observer and in-depth interviews (Glesne, 2011; Merriam, 2009).

Like ethnography, action research is also a popular method used within the field of education; the goal of researchers who employ this method is to improve practice (Glesne, 2011). According to Stringer (1999), action research assists an organization in

defining a problem, better understanding the situation, and finally resolving the problem. The goal of the study was to better understand the phenomenon, not an organization. Furthermore, I am not resolving the problem, but rather using the data to address the problem by developing a PD opportunity that will focus on providing effective PD specific to the unique needs of intermediate schoolteachers.

I did not consider quantitative methodology for this study because it employs deductive processes, such as experimentation or correlation, in contrast to the inductive processes of qualitative research, which better aligns to this study (Lodico et al., 2010). Quantitative research also involves testing a hypothesis or predicting the outcome of the study using numerical data and statistical analysis (Lodico et al., 2010). In contrast, qualitative researchers strive to provide a rich, thick description through words of the study phenomenon (Lodico et al., 2010).

Participants

The research site was an intermediate school (Campus H) located in a large urban Title I public school district (District A) in the Southwestern region of the United States. District A student demographics in 2018 were 73.52% Hispanic, 22.76% African American, 1.68% White, 1.15% Asian, 0.07% American Indian or Alaska Native, 0.17% Pacific Islander or Hawaiian, and 0.64% multiethnic, according to the district's 2019 *Accountability Fast Facts* document. At the time of the study, District A employed approximately 4,200 teachers, according to the fact sheet. There is only one intermediate school in District A, Campus H, which had 37 teachers and 595 combined 5th and 6th grade students at the time of the study, according to the district's staff directory and

secretary. Table 1 illustrates the demographics of teachers in the district at the time of the study.

Table 1

Demographics of Teachers

Ethnicity	Percent of District A	Percent of Campus H	Percent of participants
Hispanic	25.5%	29.5%	17.6%
African American	43%	54.6%	58.8%
White	14.7%	26.6%	23.6%
Asian	2.6%	1.2%	0%
American Indian or Alaska Native	.7%	0%	0%
Pacific Islander or Hawaiian	0%	0%	0%
Multiethnic	1.5%	0%	0%

Seventeen intermediate schoolteachers participated in the study. Individual face-to-face semistructured interviews were conducted with 10 intermediate schoolteachers, and a face-to-face semistructured focus group interview was later conducted with an additional seven intermediate schoolteachers. The focus group members did not participate in the individual interviews. The demographics for all participants were grouped together to maintain confidentiality.

Criteria for Selecting Participants

I selected intermediate schoolteachers because of their unique position in District A. Campus H is considered a school within a school as it houses both elementary and middle school grade levels, along with serving a smaller population of students. The distinctive make-up of the school and teaching staff was the reason for selecting this group as the focus of the study. Additionally, there has been a steady decline of intermediate school students' academic achievement. Student achievement is linked to

knowledgeable and skillful teachers, and PD is a key factor in equipping educators with the necessary skills and abilities to provide quality instruction (Hynds et al., 2016). There were 37 intermediate schoolteachers, which is the entire staff of certified teachers, employed at Campus H when participant recruitment began.

Gaining Access to Participants

Before contacting participants, I first obtained permission to conduct the research study from the deputy superintendent of District A, along with a signed letter of cooperation from the principal at the study site. Upon receiving permission to carry out the study, I then began the process of obtaining approval to conduct the study from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The purpose of the IRB process is to ensure that a study meets the research ethical standards and adheres to U.S. federal regulations regarding the protection of human research participants (Walden Research Ethics and Compliance Policies, 2019).

The IRB confirms that there are appropriate informed consent forms, identifies and evaluates the risk of harm to participants, determines that there are adequate provisions for protecting the privacy of subjects and maintaining the confidentiality of data, and determines that the potential benefits of the research outweighed the potential risks (Walden University IRB for Ethical Standards in Research, 2019). The IRB also verified that my study adhered to the research-related aspects of the codes of conduct set forth in Walden University's student and faculty handbooks regarding accurate representation of researchers, research activities, datasets, analyses, and research products (see Walden Research Ethics and Compliance Policies, 2019). I received conditional

permission from the Walden University IRB (Approval No. 05-31-19-0158637) to complete one method of data collection, individual interviews, on May 31, 2019.

Conditional approval was granted to conduct only individual interviews because the data collected from those interviews framed the development of the focus group interview protocol. Walden University IRB had to review the focus group interview protocol before approval could be granted for the focus group interview. Upon completing the individual interviews, I developed the focus group interview protocol. The focus group interview protocol was vetted by my peer debriefer, chair, and committee and subsequently submitted for review by Walden University IRB. The focus group protocol was approved by Walden University IRB, and I was granted permission to conduct the focus group interview on June 20, 2019.

Participant Recruitment

Upon receiving approval from Walden University IRB, I began participant recruitment. Purposeful sampling was used to recruit participants for this study. Purposeful sampling is the most common procedure used in qualitative research in which the researcher intentionally selects the individuals and research sites to understand the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010). There are different types of purposeful sampling techniques (Creswell 2009, 2012; Glesne, 2011; Merriam, 2009). I used the convenience sampling method for this study. I chose convenience sampling as it was the best approach to answer the RQ and SQ for the study, and it provided greater accessibility of the participants and research site. The participants and I work in District A, which made them readily accessible to participate in the study (see Creswell, 2012).

However, I have very limited professional contact with the participants, and I do not supervise, evaluate, or provide any information regarding the performance of any teacher in District A.

To assist in the participant recruitment process, the principal at Campus H provided the email addresses for all 37 teachers. I then sent an email using the bcc recipient feature to all 37 teachers from my Walden University email account. The email invited teachers to participate in an individual interview for this study. The email invitation included information about the purpose of the study, my role as the researcher, an overview of the interview questions, the voluntary nature of the study, the approximate time for the interview to be completed (45–60 minutes), confidentiality, and measures to protect participants' privacy.

I asked intermediate schoolteachers at Campus H to send an email reply to my Walden University email address if they were interested in participating in the study. Six teachers replied to the initial email request, two of whom were asked to field-test the researcher-developed individual interview protocol. A follow-up email invitation was sent to the remaining 31 teachers 3 days after the initial email. Six additional teachers agreed to participate in an individual interview.

Upon receiving approval by Walden University IRB to conduct the focus group interview, I sent an email using the bcc recipient feature to the remaining 25 intermediate schoolteachers at Campus H from my Walden University email account. The email invited the teachers to participate in a focus group interview for this study. The email invitation included information about the purpose of the study, my role as the researcher,

an overview of the interview questions, the voluntary nature of the study, the approximate time for the interview to be completed (1-hour), confidentiality, and measures to protect participants' privacy. Additionally, the email invitation informed the teachers that the focus group interview consisted of a collective interview with other intermediate schoolteachers at Campus H. The email informed the teachers that their identity would be known by other members of the group and their responses would not be anonymous during the interview; however, I would make every effort to keep their identities hidden as far as I could.

I asked teachers to send an email reply to my Walden University email address if they were interested in participating in the study. Four teachers replied to the initial email request, and a follow-up e-mail invitation was sent to the remaining 21 teachers 2 days after the initial email. Three additional teachers agreed to participate in the focus group interview.

Establishing a Researcher-Participant Working Relationship

I established the researcher-participant relationship by explicitly explaining my role in the study as the primary instrument for data collection. I conveyed this information repeatedly to the teachers because we are all employed in District A; however, my position in District A is very different than that of a teacher. I am the curriculum program director for Elementary Social Studies in District A, and as such, my responsibilities include designing the curriculum, providing instructional resources, developing assessments, and providing PD for Grades PK-5 social studies content.

My position as a curriculum program director could have been misconstrued as one of privilege or superiority and that of an intermediate schoolteacher as inferior with respect to professional knowledge and administrative experience (see Råheim et al., 2016). However, as a curriculum program director, I have limited professional access to teachers, and I do not supervise, evaluate, or provide any information regarding the performance or employment status of any employee in District A. Furthermore, I have no personal relationships with any employee in District A.

Protection of Participant Rights

I took extensive measures to ensure that participants' rights were protected throughout the study. All teachers were informed that participating in the research study did not require a waiver of any legal rights. Furthermore, this study did not include any sensitive or vulnerable populations. Creswell (2009) identified vulnerable populations as minors, pregnant women or fetuses, mentally incompetent participants, prisoners, and persons with neurological impairments.

The participants for the study were 17 intermediate schoolteachers who were employed in District A and working at Campus H at the time of the interviews. The participants were adults who are fully licensed teachers by the state and hold at least a bachelor's degree from a 4–year institution. The participants did not meet the protected population criterion, which minimized the risk to the participants.

Maintaining privacy and confidentiality are critical components of qualitative research (Lahman et al., 2015). The use of pseudonyms is seen as an integral part of the social science research process (Creswell, 2012; Lahman et al., 2015; Saunders et al.,

2015). Creswell (2009) asserted that researchers should use a pseudonym, such as Participant 1, rather than the participants' legal name, when using interviews to collect data. I assigned each participant in this study a different alphanumeric pseudonym (P1, P2, FG1, FG2, etc.). These pseudonyms were used instead of legal names during data analysis and reporting (see Creswell, 2012; Saunders et al., 2015). Demographics of participants (number of years as a teacher; number of years as an intermediate schoolteacher; and highest level of education) were only used for coding and sorting purposes following data collection.

I followed Walden University IRB ethical standards for data collection. All data, results, and supporting documentation were stored in a secured digital format. To reduce risk of disclosure, I stored the master key, which identified the participant's name with their assigned pseudonym, in a password-protected codenamed folder that I uploaded to the cloud. Interview recordings, transcripts, and field notes were also stored in separate password-protected codenamed folders and uploaded to the cloud. As the only researcher, transcriber, and record keeper, those measures helped to further maintain the confidentiality of all participants. Per Walden University's research policy, I will keep the records for 5 years from the completion of this study at which time they will be permanently destroyed.

Informed consent is a statement that all participants must sign before they participate in research (see Creswell, 2012). The informed consent forms provided a description of the study, the purpose of the study, the participants' rights, including their right to withdraw at any time from the study, their voluntary participation, possible risks,

and the benefits of the study (see Creswell, 2012). I developed a separate informed consent form for each method of data collection, one for individual interviews and one for the focus group interview.

Each participant received and signed an informed consent form that explicitly stated that participation in the study was not anonymous; however, I would make every effort to keep their identities hidden. All participants were informed that I would not share their identities with anyone outside of the study, and the data collected would not be used for any purpose outside of this research study (see Creswell, 2012). I informed all participants that they did not have to answer every question and could choose to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. I informed all participants that refusal to participate in the study would have absolutely no bearing on their performance evaluation or employment status in District A nor a breach of confidentiality. No participant opted out of this study.

Due to the nature of qualitative studies, researchers must provide safeguards to protect all participants involved in the study, which includes disclosing all risks associated with participating in the study (Lune & Berg, 2016). I informed all teachers that there were some minimal risks associated with participating in the study. Additionally, I informed all teachers that all risks associated with participating in the study would be diminished as much as possible.

Data Collection

Data collection did not begin until I received Walden University IRB approval. Semistructured face-to-face individual interviews along with a semistructured face-to-

focus group interview were employed as the methods of data collection for this study. Individual interviews were conducted with 10 intermediate schoolteachers from Campus H. Data were also collected via a focus group interview with an additional seven intermediate schoolteachers. The focus group participants were not a part of the individual interview population. All interviews were conducted between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. Monday through Friday in a private conference room at a local public library.

The most common form of data collection in qualitative research is through person-to-person interviews (Merriam, 2009). According to Lune and Berg (2016), interviews are well suited for qualitative studies as they provide descriptive data in the form of words, not actions, which are shaped by the perspectives of the respondents. Castillo-Montoya (2016) stated that interviews provide in-depth detailed data that assists researchers in understanding participants' experiences, and how they make sense of those experiences. Interviews also provide useful information when participants cannot be observed, and they allow participants to provide detailed information about the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2012).

I used standardized semistructured interviews in this study. According to Kallio et al., (2016), the semistructured interview method is an appropriate technique when studying people's perceptions and opinions about a topic. Semistructured interviews use both open-ended and close-ended predetermined questions to elicit responses, while also providing flexibility for the researcher to deviate from the prepared questions and probe for additional information in response to emerging themes and new ideas about the topic of investigation (Lune & Berg, 2016; Merriam, 2009). Furthermore, during

semistructured interviews each participant is asked the same questions in systematic, consistent, and comprehensive manner, which allows for comparable data across all participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Lune & Berg, 2016; Patton, 2015).

Individual Interview Protocol

One of the most critical components of the interview process is constructing effective interview questions that are tightly aligned to the RQs (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Lune & Berg, 2016; Turner, 2010). I completed this process by constructing an interview protocol (see Appendix B). An interview protocol is a pre-determined list of questions that facilitates the interview process by providing a consistent and comprehensive framework to obtain information within an allotted time (Yeong et al., 2018).

The use of interview protocols was imperative for maintaining the reliability and credibility of the study (Merriam, 2009; Newcomer et al., 2015). The RQ and SQ informed the development of the questions for the individual interview protocol. The questions within the individual interview protocol directed the conversations and increased the effectiveness of the interviews by ensuring comprehensive information was obtained within the allocated time (Yeong et al., 2018).

The individual interview protocol consisted of semistructured open-ended interview questions. This format of questioning elicited specific information from all participants to answer the RQs (Lune & Berg, 2016; Merriam, 2009). Additionally, I had the autonomy and opportunity to probe beyond the individual interview protocol based upon the themes that emerged during the interviews that I wanted to expand upon (Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010; Lune & Berg, 2016).

According to Castillo-Montoya (2016), an effective method to check the alignment of questions is to create a matrix that maps interview questions to RQs. Confirming the alignment of the interview questions to the RQs ensures that the interview protocol is directly connected to the purpose of the study (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). The matrix used for the individual interview protocol alignment is illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2

Individual Interview Protocol Matrix

Interview question number	Demographic information	Warm-up questions	Research question	Research subquestion
Interview Q 1	X			
Interview Q 2	X			
Interview Q 3	X			
Interview Q 4		X		
Interview Q 5		X		
Interview Q 6		X		
Interview Q 7			X	
Interview Q 8			X	
Interview Q 9			X	
Interview Q 10			X	
Interview Q 11			X	
Interview Q 12				X
Interview Q 13			X	

The individual interview protocol was directly aligned to the RQ and SQ. The individual interview protocol was then vetted by my peer debriefer, chair, and committee and approved by Walden University IRB. Upon approval from Walden University IRB, the individual interview protocol was field-tested with two intermediate schoolteachers before data collection commenced.

Field-testing the Individual Interview Protocol

I field-tested the individual interview protocol with two intermediate schoolteachers from the targeted population. The purpose of field-testing was to confirm that the interview questions related to the topic of study identify any issues, and revise questions prior to formal data collection (Dikko, 2016; Kallio et al., 2016). Field-testing allows the researcher to make informed changes and adjustments to the interview questions and improve the quality of data collection (Kallio et al., 2016). According to Merriam (2009), the "best way to tell whether the order of your questions works or not is to try it out in a pilot interview" (p. 104). Field-testing the individual interview protocol was one method used to confirm alignment between the interview questions and the RQ and SQ. Field-testing the interview questions helped me gauge the time requirements for participating in an interview.

I selected the field-test teachers because they were the first two teachers to respond to the email invitation to participate in the study; they had knowledge about the central phenomenon and mirrored the targeted population for the study (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Lune & Berg, 2016). I informed the two field-test teachers that the information they shared would not be a part of the data used in the actual study, however the information they provided would be a critical part in the preparation for data collection (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). I informed the two field-test teachers that field-testing would involve scheduling and participating in an interview using the questions from the interview protocol, and this interview would replicate the actual data collection interviews as much as possible (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Lune & Berg, 2016).

I informed both field-test teachers that there was no consequence for non-participation, and if they chose to take part in the pilot-test interview, they could later withdraw at any time, without explanation, and without penalty or breach of confidentiality. Additionally, I informed both field-test teachers that there were no incentives for participation. Both teachers agreed to a field-test interview to verify the effectiveness of the individual interview protocol.

The field-test interviews simulated the actual study interviews, in that both teachers selected the time and date for their interviews. Before the field-test interviews began, I informed the field-test teachers of their rights as a participant, the measures that would be taken to protect their identity, and the confidential nature of the study. I also informed the field-test teachers of the risks involved in participating in the study, along with my role as the researcher. The field-test teachers then received and signed an informed consent form. None of the field-test participants later withdrew from the interviews.

Both field-test participants agreed to have the interviews audio recorded. I recorded the field-test interviews via the voice recording application on my cellphone and saved to the cloud in a password-protected folder. Audio recording the field-test interviews captured the words of the field-test participants verbatim and ensured the accuracy of the information shared (Creswell, 2012; Lune & Berg, 2016; Merriam, 2009). The field-test interviews followed the question sequence in the exact order of the approved individual interview protocol (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Lune & Berg, 2016). Audio recording the field-test interviews allowed me to focus most of my attention on the

conversation, as opposed to taking down extensive notes (Creswell, 2012; Lune & Berg, 2016; Merriam, 2009).

I also took field notes in my reflective journal during both field-test interviews. The field notes consisted of the field-test participants' body language, non-verbal cues, and identified the interview questions in which the field-test participants shared more detailed and lengthy information. Using field notes allowed me to assess the effectiveness of the interview process, which would have been difficult to do with audio recording alone (Lune & Berg, 2016).

Both field-test participants stated that the sequence of the questions did not need to be revised. During the interviews, I noted that both field-test participants provided more information for warm-up question 1 (purpose of PD), and main question 3 (new learning) than the other questions. Both field-test participants also stated the explanation of the term self-efficacy, which was included in the individual interview protocol, was needed to understand main interview question six. Additionally, I noted that both field-test participants viewed student achievement (main question 7) differently. I did not change the verbiage of this question, as I believed the formal study participants' responses to question 7 would provide pertinent data with respect to the central phenomenon. At the conclusion of the field-test interviews, it was confirmed that individual interviews would require approximately 45 minutes to 60 minutes to complete.

Upon completing the field-test interviews, all audio files were saved to the cloud in a password-protected folder. The audio files were placed in separate codenamed

folders. I then uploaded the audio files Nvivo Transcription, which transcribed the two field-test interview audio files from verbal to typewritten form.

Following transcription of the field-test interview audio files, I personally listened to each of the field-test interview audio files at a slower speed as I read the transcriptions to verify that the written information matched the verbal communication. I then corrected the written transcriptions as errors were found. I also personally transcribed the field notes that were taken during both field-test interviews. All field-test data were stored in separate codenamed folders in my personal password protected hard drive. The transcriptions were also saved to the cloud in a password-protected folder. Per Walden University's research policy, I will keep these records for 5 years from the completion of this study, at which time they will be permanently destroyed.

Lastly, I printed hard copies of the field-test data, and compared the participants' responses to the individual interview protocol. This process, though time consuming, allowed me to verify that the interview questions effectively answered the RQ and SQ (see Lune & Berg, 2016). The field-test interviews also confirmed that the individual interview protocol was sufficient in eliciting information from the formal study participants that would help me understand the central phenomenon. Per Walden University's research policy, I will keep the records for 5 years from the completion of this study, at which time they will be permanently destroyed.

Individual Interviews

Individual interviews are useful in qualitative studies as they can provide in-depth, or rich, data via "a conversation with a purpose" (Lune & Berg, 2016, pg. 66).

Additionally, interviewees were able to share information, as they would have in everyday communication about the topic under review (Van de Wiel, 2017). Conducting individual interviews also provided the opportunity for me to learn about intermediate schoolteachers' perceptions, an attribute that could not be observed (Glesne, 2011).

Formal data collection began after approval was granted by Walden University IRB and the individual interview protocol was field-tested. Standardized semistructured face-to-face interviews were conducted with 10 intermediate schoolteachers from Campus H. According to Fusch and Ness (2015), researchers should choose the sample size that has the best opportunity for the researcher to reach data saturation. The number of interviews needed for a qualitative study to reach data saturation is not a figure that can be quantified, rather the number participants willing to participate in the study (Namey et al., 2016). Guest et al., (2006), stated that depending on the size of the sample population, data saturation could be reached with as few as six in-depth interviews. Interviewing 10 intermediate schoolteachers was appropriate because this study focused on the different perspectives of the participants; thus reaching a point of data saturation was my priority, as opposed to depending upon the number of participants (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Hancock et al., 2016; Majid et al., 2018).

I conducted face-to-face individual interviews between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. beginning June 3 and ending June 12, 2019 in a private conference room at a public library. The individual interviews were scheduled at a mutually convenient time. Allowing the teachers to select their interview time contributed to the development of rapport as this demonstrated flexibility and my willingness to accommodate the teachers'

needs (Lune & Berg, 2016). Allowing teachers to schedule their interviews also decreased the likelihood of cancellation (Oltmann, 2016).

Before each individual interview began, I informed all teachers of their rights as a participant, the measures that would be taken to protect their identity, and the confidential nature of the study. I also informed all teachers of the risks involved in participating in the study, along with my role as the researcher, and that there were no incentives for participating in the study. Additionally, I informed all teachers that there was no consequence for non-participation, and if teachers chose to take part in the study, they could later withdraw at any time, without explanation, and without penalty or breach of confidentiality. I provided all teachers with an informed consent form that they signed and returned. No participants later withdrew from the individual interviews.

The individual interview protocol guided the interviews, which explored intermediate schoolteachers' perceptions about the impact PD provided by District A had on their classroom instruction, self-efficacy, and subsequently student achievement. All individual interviews followed the question sequence in the exact order of the approved individual interview protocol (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Lune & Berg, 2016). According to Lune and Berg (2016), following the same format for each interview provides a comprehensive collection of data despite differences among the participants.

All individual interview participants agreed to have the interviews audio recorded. I recorded all individual interviews via the voice recording application on my cellphone and saved to the cloud in a password-protected folder. A digital voice recorder was also available during the individual interviews in the event technological issues arose with my

cellphone. My personal cellphone effectively captured all individual interview conversations; therefore, there was no need to use the digital voice recorder.

Audio recording the individual interviews captured the words of the participants verbatim, thus confirming the accuracy of the information shared (Creswell, 2012; Lune & Berg, 2016; Merriam, 2009). Audio recording the individual interviews also allowed me to focus most of my attention on the conversation, as opposed to taking down extensive notes (Creswell, 2012; Lune & Berg, 2016; Merriam, 2009). Eye contact and listening attentively also helped to build rapport with participants, showed respect, and made participants feel as though what they must share is important (Lune & Berg, 2016).

I also asked probing questions during each of the individual interviews. Probing questions followed the predetermined questions that participants appeared to have additional significant information to share. Asking probing questions was an effective practice to gather clarifying information from the participants to ensure that I effectively captured all of their thoughts and/or interpretations about the topic of study (Lune & Berg, 2016; Merriam, 2009).

I also took field notes in my research log during all individual interviews. The field notes consisted of the individual interview participants' body language and non-verbal cues, which would not have been possible via an audio recording alone (Merriam, 2009). Using field notes was also beneficial during data analysis as it provided additional context to the varying tones of voice of the participants when they answered specific questions.

Upon completing all individual interviews, I transferred all audio files from my personal cellphone and saved them to the cloud in a password-protected folder. All audio files were placed in separate codenamed folders, one for each participant. I then uploaded the audio files to NVivo Transcription, which transcribed all individual interview audio files.

Following transcription of the individual interview audio files, I personally listened to each of the individual interview audio files at a slower speed as I read the transcripts to verify that the written information matched the verbal communication. I then corrected the written transcriptions as errors were found. I also personally transcribed the field notes that were taken during each individual interview. The transcriptions were then saved to the cloud in a password-protected folder, in separate codenamed folders, one for each participant.

Upon verifying the accuracy of the written transcripts, I printed hard copies of each transcript, and compared the information to the individual interview protocol. This comparison was done to ensure that all of the questions on the individual interview protocol were asked verbatim and interviewees provided an answer to each question. After a cursory review of the transcripts, I noted reoccurring concepts amongst the individual interview participant responses that needed further review. These concepts, along with the RQ and SQ, informed the development of the focus group interview protocol.

Focus Group Interview Protocol

Following approval by Walden University IRB to conduct the focus group interview, I developed the focus group interview protocol (see Appendix C). The focus group interview protocol was constructed after the one-on-one, semistructured individual interviews were completed, transcribed, and a cursory review of the data had been performed. The purpose of developing the focus group interview protocol was to provide a structured format to facilitate the focus group interview. The focus group interview protocol also provided direction for participants' conversations, so they remained focused on the topic of study (Newcomer et al., 2015). The focus group interview could not be conducted until Walden University IRB approved the focus group interview protocol.

I purposefully developed and sequenced the questions for the focus group protocol based upon the reoccurring concepts that consistently arose during the individual interviews. The alignment of the focus group interview questions to the RQ and SQ was confirmed using the focus group interview protocol matrix, which is illustrated in Table 3. The focus group interview protocol was vetted by my peer debriefer and approved by my doctoral committee prior to submission for approval by Walden University IRB (Approval No. 05-31-19-0158637 on June 20, 2019).

Table 3

Focus Group Interview Protocol Matrix

Interview question number	Demographic information	Warm-Up questions	Research Question	Research Subquestion
Interview Q 1	X			
Interview Q 2	X			
Interview Q 3	X			
Interview Q 4		X		

Interview question number	Demographic information	Warm-Up questions	Research Question	Research Subquestion
Interview Q 5		X		
Interview Q 6		X		
Interview Q 7			X	
Interview Q 8			X	
Interview Q 9			X	
Interview Q 10			X	
Interview Q 11			X	
Interview Q 12				X
Interview Q 13			X	
Interview Q 14				X
Interview Q 15			X	
Interview Q 16			X	
Interview Q 17				X

The focus group interview protocol guided the interview which inquired about intermediate schoolteachers' perceptions about the impact PD provided by District A had on their classroom instruction, self-efficacy, and subsequently student achievement. The focus group interview followed the question sequence in the exact order of the approved focus group interview protocol (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Lune & Berg, 2016).

The use of the focus group interview protocol directed the interview in a systematic manner, which maximized the contributions of the participants (Hancock & Algozzine, 2016). I also asked follow-up questions, or probes, after the predetermined questions to delve deeper into the topics of interest to focus group participants. The probing questions invited the focus group participants to express themselves candidly and unreservedly from their own perspectives and not solely from the perspectives of the other group members (Hancock & Algozzine; 2016). Asking probing questions was an effective practice to gather clarifying information from the participants to ensure that I

effectively captured all of their thoughts and/or interpretations about the topic of study (Lune & Berg, 2016; Merriam, 2009).

Focus Group Interview

I conducted a standardized face-to-face focus group interview with seven intermediate schoolteachers from Campus H. The focus group members did not participate in the individual interviews. The focus group interview took place on June 30, 2019 at 2 p.m. in a private conference room at a public library. Participants selected and agreed upon the date and time for the interview. The intent of the focus group interview was not to collect data from the individuals in the group, rather the group as a whole (Lune & Berg, 2016).

Before the focus group interview began, I informed all participants of their rights as a participant, the measures that would be taken to protect their identity, and the confidential nature of the study. I informed all teachers of the risks involved in participating in the study, along with my role as the researcher, and that there were no incentives for participating in the study. Additionally, I informed all participants that there was no consequence for non-participation, and if teachers chose to take part in the study, they could later withdraw at any time, without explanation, and without penalty or breach of confidentiality.

I also informed all participants that their responses would not be anonymous during the interview; however, I would make every effort to keep their identities hidden as far as I could. I stressed to the participants the confidential nature of the focus group discussion and urged them not to share the dialogue outside the group. I informed all

participants that pseudonyms would be assigned to each participant, and of anyone else, they mentioned when utilizing any direct quotes in the analysis of information (Creswell, 2012; Saunders et al., 2015). I provided all participants with an informed consent form that they signed and returned. No participants later withdrew from the individual interviews.

I shared the following ground rules with the focus group participants before the focus group interview began: (a) my role as facilitator and discussion guide, (b) cell phone etiquette, (c) participant confidentiality, (d) participant discussion etiquette, and (e) focus group discussion process. The purpose of the ground rules was to inform the participants of my expectations during the group's discussion (Newcomer et al., 2015). All participants agreed to adhere to the ground rules throughout the focus group interview.

All focus group participants agreed to have the interview audio recorded. I recorded the focus group interview via the voice recording application on my personal biometric and password secured Android cellphone. After the interview was completed, I transferred the audio file from my personal cellphone and saved to the cloud in a password-protected folder. I then uploaded the audio files to NVivo Transcription, which transcribed the focus group interview audio file.

Audio recording the focus group interview captured the words of the participants verbatim, thus confirming the accuracy of the information shared (Creswell, 2012; Lune & Berg, 2016; Merriam, 2009). Audio recording the focus group interview also allowed me to focus most of my attention on the conversations, as opposed to taking down

extensive notes (Creswell, 2012; Lune & Berg, 2016; Merriam, 2009). Furthermore, the audio recordings allowed me to compare the written transcripts to the recordings, which helped me readily identify the participants that were speaking at specific points during the focus group interview.

I also took field notes in my research log during the focus group interview. The field notes consisted of the individual interview participants' body language and non-verbal cues, which would not have been possible via an audio recording alone (Merriam, 2009). According to Hancock and Algozzine (2016), using a combination of handwritten notes and audio recordings during a focus group interview is an effective practice for comprehensive data collection, while also decreasing the loss of valuable information. Using field notes was also beneficial during data analysis allowing deeper scrutiny as I compared the notes to the audio recording and the written transcripts.

The purpose of the focus group interview was to answer the RQ and SQ by drilling down on the semistructured individual interview responses to seek consensus about intermediate schoolteachers' perceptions of the impact PD provided by District A had on their classroom instruction, as well as the impact these trainings had on their self-efficacy. The focus group interview allowed me to collect data from multiple participants while observing the groups' dynamics and interactions. The advantage of using the focus group interview was that it allowed interaction and cooperation between participants, which yielded in-depth data about the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). The interactions, reactions, and dynamics amongst the group members were equally weighted with the conversations during data collection and analysis (Lodico et al., 2010; Lune &

Berg, 2016). The goal of the focus group interview was not to seek agreement amongst the members, instead gather high-quality data about individual's perceptions or experiences in comparison to other members of the group about the topic of inquiry to gain consensus among the group members (Newcomer et al., 2015; Patton, 2015).

The focus group interview also allowed me to collect data from multiple participants while observing and recording the groups' dynamics and interactions (Lodico et al., 2010; Merriam, 2009). Unlike the individual interviews, which depended upon dialogue between the respondents and me, the focus group interview depended upon the interaction of the group stimulated by the interview questions (Glesne, 2011; Rosenthal, 2016). The focus group interview was beneficial to this study as it allowed the participants to listen to other group members' personal experiences, note the similarities and differences, and share their thoughts and perspectives about the central phenomenon that could not have occurred if the participants were interviewed individually (Hancock & Algozzine, 2016).

Data Saturation

Interviews were concluded when the data reached a point of saturation, in that no new information was shared, no new codes or themes could be developed, and the data became redundant (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Fusch & Ness, 2015; Guest et al., 2006). Upon completing both the individual interviews and focus group interview, I determined that the data were comprehensive, and the process of data analysis could effectively be completed. According to Creswell (2012), data saturation "is a state in which the researcher makes the subjective determination that new data will not provide any new

information or insights for the developing categories" (pg. 433). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) asserted that qualitative researchers should have a clearly defined goal, and upon collecting enough data to meet that goal, they must stop and begin analyzing the data. All of the data collected proved to be rich, thick and abundant enough to provide a clear explanation of the findings and results. Data saturation was reached when the information shared by interviewees became redundant, and no new themes could be developed.

Role of the Researcher

Throughout the study, I maintained my role as the researcher, and did not transition to my position as the Curriculum Program Director for Elementary Social Studies in District A at any point during the study. As a curriculum program director my responsibilities include designing the curriculum, providing instructional resources, developing assessments, and providing PD for grades Prekindergarten through grade 5 social studies content. I have limited professional access to teachers, and I do not supervise, evaluate, nor provide any information regarding the performance of any employee in District A.

Before each of the interviews began, I explicitly communicated the limitations of my position as a curriculum program director, the purpose of the study, and that I would be the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009). I informed all teachers that there was no consequence for non-participation, and if they chose to take part in the study, they could later withdraw at any time, without explanation, and without penalty or breach of confidentiality. Additionally, I informed all teachers that there were no incentives for participation. No participants opted out of the

study after data collection began. I used the processes of member checking, data triangulation, and peer debriefing, as well as procedures for identifying dealing with case discrepancy to support evidence of quality and methods to address trustworthiness.

Researcher Bias

Greene (2014) described researcher bias as the influence of the researcher's personal beliefs, experiences, and values on the methodology, design, and/or results of a study. As a curriculum program director, one of my responsibilities is to design and provide PD opportunities for elementary social studies teachers in District A. As a PD provider, I was interested in understanding the types of district-provided PD that intermediate schoolteachers perceived to impact their classroom instruction, as well as their self-efficacy. The results from this study could prove to be beneficial as I planned PD opportunities in the future. Using my reflective journal and conferring with my peer debriefer, allowed me to identify potential biases and focus solely on the interview data.

I utilized the practice of reflexivity to reduce the potential of bias. Berger (2013) referred to reflexivity as the process of a continual and critical self-evaluation of the researcher's position throughout the study. Reflexivity required me to continually, and carefully self-monitor the influence of my beliefs, assumptions, and personal experiences on the research study (Berger, 2013). Using my reflective journal was an essential method employing the practice of reflexivity. During data analysis and reporting, reflexivity assisted me in remaining alert of trends in content that was over emphasized or understated based upon what appealed to me (Berger, 2013). Reflexivity also raised

awareness of my personal biases, thus enabling me to fully engage with the data and provide a deeper, more comprehensive, analysis of the data (Berger, 2013).

Data Analysis

Analyzing the data was an inductive and comparative process that involved organizing all the information gathered throughout the study to make sense of what I learned and to begin forming answers to the RQs (Creswell, 2012; Glesne 2011; Merriam, 2009). The data analysis process began by identifying data that was meaningful to the purpose of the study (Newcomer et al., 2015). Making sense of the data involved combining or relating several pieces of data to form broad, general codes and themes (Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010; Merriam, 2009).

Data Analysis Procedures

I conducted face-to-face individual interviews with 10 intermediate schoolteachers. I analyzed the data using an inductive comparative process, in which data collection and data analysis occurred simultaneously. The inductive comparative process was a continuous cycle of moving back-and-forth between obtaining concrete pieces of data and comparing that data to other pieces of data looking for recurring regularities in the data (Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010; Merriam, 2009). The inductive comparative process allowed me to identify trends in the data as they were collected and document this information in my research log (Lune & Berg, 2016). Through the inductive comparative process, I noted categories that began to emerge as information was compiled from the different participants.

The first step in data analysis required me to organize all of the information gathered during data collection into a form that could be easily analyzed by hand (Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010; Merriam, 2009; Newcomer et al., 2015). When data saturation was reached and data collection was complete, I used NVivo Transcription to transcribe the audio recordings and field notes from all individual interviews. I then downloaded each transcript into a separate Microsoft Word© document, which was then stored in codenamed folders on my personal password protected external hard drive. As a backup, copies of the transcripts were also saved to my password protected personal Google Drive online file storage service.

After transcribing all interview audio files, I listened to each individual interview and the focus group audio file at a slower speed as I read each of the transcripts to verify transcription accuracy. I then corrected the written transcripts as errors were found. I then added pseudonyms for the interviewees in the left margin of each section and/or sentence. Additionally, I typed and added the corresponding field notes transcript to the end of each audio recording transcript; however, I changed the font color of the field notes to differentiate between the two types of data in the Microsoft Word© documents.

Finally, I printed out two copies of each transcript. One copy of each transcript was enlarged to an 18-point font, which I later cut a part during the coding process. The second copy of the transcripts was left intact for the preliminary exploratory analysis process (Creswell, 2009). I then arranged the transcripts in the sequence in which the interviews were conducted.

The next step of data analysis was a preliminary exploratory analysis, which consisted of exploring, and reviewing all data collected (Creswell, 2012). The preliminary exploratory analysis involved me reading through all transcripts in one sitting. During this initial review of the data, I did not carefully read for detail; rather I read to get a comprehensive examination of all data together (Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010). The preliminary exploratory data analysis refreshed my memory of the conversations, which enabled me to identify where information was located and note responses that occurred in abundance. I also noted responses that could be used as quotes when I reported the data.

After my initial review of the data, I met with my peer debriefer to read and examine the data again. The feedback from my peer debriefer confirmed my position that the data collected was comprehensive, and effectively answered the RQ and SQ. My peer debriefer confirmed that the data effectively answered the RQ and SQ, identified the information that occurred in abundance, and concurred that I had collected enough data to reach the point of saturation (Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010; Newcomer et al., 2015).

The additional process of analyzing text in qualitative research involved coding the data (Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010). The coding process for the individual interviews was completed by hand using large (25”x 30”) sheets of self-stick paper, the enlarged 18-point font printed copies of each transcript, different colored highlighters, scissors, tape, and small (2”x 2”) different colored sticky notes. This method provided a concrete way for me to categorize and see the data (Newcomer et al., 2015). Coding the

data was an inductive process of data analysis that involved examining various pieces of information to determine regularities and patterns as well as topics the data covered (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010).

I began the coding process by writing each interview question at the top of the large sheets of self-stick paper. Each interview question was listed on a separate large sheet of self-stick paper and taped to the walls of my locked home office. I then cut up each printed individual interview transcript and extracted the interviewee's responses to each interview question. I read each quote to determine whether it met the following criteria: (a) the quote answered the interview question asked, (b) the quote answered a different interview question, (c) the quote provided important information about the topic, and/or (d) the quote mirrored a quote from another participant (Newcomer et al., 2015). The quotes that met these criteria were then taped to the large self-stick paper under the applicable RQ. The quotes that did not meet these criteria were discarded.

The inductive comparative data analysis process allowed me to divide all of the relevant text data into smaller segments of information that were easier to categorize and code (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010). I read the quotes on each large sheet of self-stick paper and used a different color highlighter to identify the statements that were similar, and those statements were then rearranged into clusters on the large sheets of self-stick paper, therefore, creating the initial categories of the data. After all of the initial categories were created, I reviewed the data again, to confirm that all of the responses in that specific category were appropriate, and used the small sticky notes to code, or label, the segments of information.

After all codes were created, I grouped the codes that were similar and redundant, which reduced the number of codes (Creswell, 2012). The reduced number of codes were aggregated together, which identified four themes. Themes are like codes, however; they are developed through deeper analysis of the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010; Merriam, 2009). I then compared the themes to the RQ and SQ for this study, which explored intermediate schoolteachers' perceptions about the impact of district-provided PD on their classroom instruction, and the impact of district-provided PD on their self-efficacy.

After the themes were identified, I reviewed the corresponding quotes again, and summarized the participants' responses to the interview questions. Specific quotes and descriptions were also added to the summaries to provide context, supporting details, and varied perspectives about the interview questions. My goal was to provide rich, thick descriptions of the interview conversations and detailed information about the participant's experiences with and perspectives about PD provided by District A (Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010; Merriam, 2009).

After completing the data analysis process for the individual interviews, the focus group interview protocol was developed (see Appendix C). The questions for the focus group protocol were systematically created and arranged based upon the themes that arose during the individual interviews. The focus group interview protocol was vetted by my peer debriefer and doctoral study committee. The finalized focus group protocol was then sent to Walden University IRB for approval before the focus group interview took place.

Seven intermediate schoolteachers participated in a face-to-face focus group interview. These focus group members were not a part of the individual interviews. The purpose of the focus group interview was to seek consensus about the central phenomenon. The focus group interview was also semistructured. I used the approved focus group interview protocol to guide the discussion. Data saturation and consensus were reached when the focus group interview responses duplicated the individual interview responses, the focus group participants' responses became repetitive, and no new themes emerged during the focus group interview.

I also used the inductive comparative process to analyze the data from the focus group interview, in which the information shared during the focus group interview was continually compared to the themes that were identified in the individual interviews. Throughout the focus group interview, I took notes in my research log about the specific members' responses that correlated to one or more of the themes identified during the individual interviews. I also looked for new themes that may have emerged during the focus group interview; however, none was discovered (Newcomer et al., 2015).

When focus group data collection was complete, I prepared and organized the data in the same manner as with the individual interviews. I used NVivo Transcription to transcribe the focus group interview audio recording. The transcripts were also downloaded and stored in a secured format as with the individual interviews.

I used the same transcript verification process for the focus group interview as I had previously completed with individual interview transcripts. I listened to the audio recording while reading through the transcript and corrected any errors that I found. I also

assigned a different pseudonym along with a different font color to each focus group participant in the left margin of the document.

Additionally, I typed and added the field notes from the focus group interview to the end of the transcript. The field notes section of the focus group transcript replicated the participant specific font color; however, this information was presented in all capital letters to differentiate between the two types of data in the document. According to Newcomer et al. (2015), using a consistent style when preparing data makes easy to identify participants' responses during the coding process.

Finally, I printed out two copies of the transcript. One copy of the focus group transcript was enlarged to an 18-point font, which I later cut a part during the coding process. The second copy of the transcript was left intact for the preliminary exploratory analysis process (Creswell, 2009).

Immediately after the focus group data was prepared and organized, I completed a preliminary exploratory analysis of the data. During the preliminary exploratory analysis, I read through the entire focus group transcript in one sitting, not looking for specific details, but rather identifying places in the data that correlated to the themes that were identified from the individual interview data analysis (Newcomer et al., 2015). Through this initial examination of the data, I also made note of the specific responses where there was agreement or disagreement amongst the group members, along with responses that could be used as quotes when I reported the data.

After my initial review of the focus group data, I met with my peer debriefer again to read and examine the focus group data. The feedback from my peer debriefer

confirmed that the focus group data effectively answered the RQ and SQ. My peer debriefer also concurred with my position that the focus group data demonstrated a consensus about the central phenomenon, and that I had collected enough data to reach the point of saturation (Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010; Newcomer et al., 2015).

The coding process for the focus group interview was also completed by hand using a similar coding process as with the individual interview data analysis. I used large (25”x 30”) sheets of self-stick paper, the enlarged 18-point font printed copy of the focus group transcript, scissors, and tape. Using a similar process to code the focus group data helped with the efficiency of the coding process, as I had a concrete model to refer back to if necessary.

I began the coding process of the focus group data by writing each theme that was identified from the individual data analysis at the top of the large sheets of self-stick paper. Each theme was listed on a separate large sheet of self-stick paper and taped to the walls of my locked home office. I then cut up the printed focus group interview transcript and separated each focus group participant’s response to the interview questions. I created one pile for each of the interview questions.

I then read each quote to determine if it met the following criteria: (a) the quote answered the interview question posed, (b) the quote related to one or more of the identified themes, and/or (c) the quote provided specific and detailed information that could be cited in the results (Newcomer et al., 2015). The quotes that met these criteria were then taped to the large self-stick paper under the applicable theme. The quotes that did not meet these criteria were discarded.

Upon completing a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the data, four themes emerged that supported the RQ. The four themes that emerged were: (a) limited PD opportunities that directly related to the participants' content areas, (b) time/date conflict to attend PD offered, and (c) repetitive PD topics, and (d) lack of differentiated content for novice and veteran teachers. These four themes were developed based upon the responses to the RQ and SQ, frequency, uniqueness of the code, and/or an extensive amount of supporting details (Creswell, 2012). All four themes were substantiated by the focus group interview.

Data Analysis Results

The problem that prompted this qualitative study was a steady decline of academic achievement in District A, the local study site. This academic decline continued over 5 years as measured and reported by the state's accountability system (Texas Education Agency, 2017). In response to the lack of student achievement, the Board of Trustees in District A commissioned an external company, the Texas Association of School Administrators, to conduct a curriculum audit, which identified a discrepancy between effective instruction and District A's current PD program. Furthermore, based upon the data collected during the curriculum audit, the Texas Association of School Administrators found a lack of evaluation with respect to the impact of PD provided by District A on classroom instruction and student achievement.

The purpose of this study was to explore intermediate schoolteachers' perceptions of the impact PD provided by District A had on their classroom instruction, as well as the impact these trainings had on their self-efficacy. Intermediate schoolteachers were

selected because of the uncommon composition of the school in which they teach, Campus H, as it is the only intermediate school in District A. Campus H serves only 5th and 6th grade, whereas the elementary campuses serve Grades 1-5 and middle school campuses serve Grades 6-8. Additionally, data collected from intermediate schoolteachers during the curriculum audit revealed that the PD provided by District A did not meet their specific professional needs. To address the PD concerns intermediate schoolteachers expressed during the curriculum audit, administrators at Campus H reached out to the Professional Learning department in an effort to garner additional support for the teachers. Campus H administrators explained that student achievement at Campus H continued to decline; however, the district did not provide adequate grade-level and content-specific PD to address the needs of intermediate schoolteachers.

I selected PD as the focus of this study because the Texas Association of School Administrators, in a curriculum audit, determined there was a discrepancy between District A's current PD program and effective classroom instruction. According to Hynds et al. (2016), student achievement is linked to knowledgeable and skillful teachers, and PD is a key factor to equip educators with the necessary skills and abilities to provide effective classroom instruction. The relationship between effective classroom instruction and student learning outcomes warranted an exploration into the impact of district-provided PD on intermediate schoolteachers' classroom instruction.

The results section includes the demographics of the participants and the themes that emerged from data analysis. In the results section I also discuss the relationship

between the themes and the RQ. Additionally, this section provides professional literature to support the themes that emerged.

To protect the identity of each participant, I assigned pseudonyms (e.g., P1, P2, P3) for the one-on-one semistructured interviews and (FG1, FG2, FG3, etc.) for the focus group participants. The first three questions from the interview protocol collected basic demographic data about the participants. Participants were asked about their total years of teaching, their total years teaching as an intermediate schoolteacher, and their highest level of education. Table 4 illustrates the demographics of the participants.

Table 4

Participant Demographic Information

Demographics	Number of participants
Total years of teaching experience	
0 – 5	6
6 – 10	3
10 years or more	8
Total years as an intermediate school teacher	
0 – 5	9
6 – 10	3
10 years or more	5
Highest level of education	
Bachelor's Degree	11
Master's Degree	5
Doctorate Degree	1

Following data collection and data analysis from one-on-one, semistructured interviews and one focus group interview, four themes emerged. The constructivist theory of learning and Bandura's theory of self-efficacy guided how the themes address the problem that prompted this study. The following themes supported the RQ discussing

intermediate schoolteachers' perceptions about the impact of district-provided PD on their classroom instruction: (a) limited PD opportunities that directly related to the participants' content areas, (b) time/date conflict to attend PD offered, (c) repetitive PD topics, and (d) lack of differentiated PD for novice and veteran teachers. Table 5 illustrates the themes and their respective codes that address the RQ.

Table 5

Research Question, Categories, and Their Respective Themes

Research Question	Categories	Theme
What are intermediate schoolteachers' perceptions about the impact of district provided PD on their classroom instruction?	Classroom Instruction Student Achievement Professional Growth	Limited PD opportunities that directly related to the participants' content areas PD
	Afterschool PD Saturday PD Summer PD	Time/date conflict to attend PD offered
	Generic PD Standardized PD	Repetitive PD topics
	Novice Teachers Veteran Teachers	Need for differentiated PD

Research Question

The RQ asked intermediate schoolteachers' their perceptions about the impact of district-provided PD on their classroom instruction. Questions 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 13 on the individual interview protocol directly addressed the RQ (see Appendix B). Questions

7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 15, and 16 on the focus group interview protocol directly addressed the RQ (see Appendix C). The purpose of the focus group interview was to drill down on the responses from the individual interviews with the goal of group consensus.

Student achievement at the local study site has consistently declined over the past 5 years, and an external curriculum audit by the Texas Association of School Administrators identified a discrepancy between the district's current PD program and effective classroom instruction. In response to this discrepancy, the auditors recommended that District A develop a plan for the effective delivery of instruction to include providing high-quality, tightly aligned PD at the system, campus/department, and individual levels that is carefully monitored for fidelity. The curriculum audit identified a gap in practice, as there was a lack of evaluation describing the impact of district-provided PD on teachers' classroom instruction and student achievement.

According to Akiba and Liang (2016), effective PD should facilitate the construction of new knowledge, which leads to changes in teaching practice, and an increase in student learning. Researchers identified five core features of effective PD: (a) focuses on content, (b) incorporates active learning, (c) is coherent with school, district, and state reforms (d) has sustained duration, and (e) has collective participation (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Valiandes & Neophytou, 2018; Wahlgren et al., 2016). Additionally, researchers reported professional learning opportunities that incorporated these core features had a positive impact on teachers' classroom instruction, pedagogy, and student achievement (Bates & Morgan, 2018; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Lindvall & Ryve, 2019). Effective PD is a catalyst to increase teachers' competency and

instructional practices, which can lead to an increase in student learning. Through effective PD, teachers get the tools necessary to refine their practice and deliver high-quality instruction to students.

Theme 1: Limited Content-specific PD Opportunities

The first major theme that emerged from the data was that District A provided limited PD opportunities that directly related to the participants' content areas. According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), changes in teacher practice and improvement in student learning outcomes are contingent upon school districts providing teachers with effective content-specific professional learning opportunities. District A provided multiple PD opportunities to support teachers in maintaining state licensure certification and meeting district annual appraisal requirements. According to the PD records for District A, 107 PD sessions, totaling 357 hours were offered between June 2018 and April 2019 (Internal Document from District A, 2019). Participants' responses did not identify a concern regarding the number of PD opportunities provided by District A; rather the types of PD provided. The recurring comments from participants suggested District A did not provide enough content-specific PD to impact their classroom instruction, increase student achievement, or meet their professional needs.

Several participants stated District A did not provide many content-specific PD opportunities to impact their classroom instruction. P5, a first-year teacher, appeared frustrated during the semistructured interview when this question was posed:

> There was no district-provided PD for my content area this year, and as a new teacher, I really needed help understanding the concepts I needed to teach. In

> college, we learned about pedagogy, not content. I did not know what subject I was going to teach until I got hired, and I don't feel like the district effectively prepared me to teach [Content Area]. Because of the lack of content PD, I did not fully understand what I was supposed to be teaching, or how I was supposed to be teaching it.

Similarly, P10, a veteran teacher, appeared upset discussing the lack of district-provided content-specific PD and stated, "I teach [Content Area], and [District A] has not provided any PD for [Content Area] in years. With the world focusing on STEM education, I think I need it [PD] now more than ever." Additionally, P10 stated, "How am I supposed to stay current with the rest of world if the district does not provide me with the training to do so". Supporting information was also provided by P9, a novice teacher, who reported,

> There were only two trainings offered for [Content Area] this year. It is as if the district does not believe teachers need training in my subject area. [District A] has a responsibility to prepare teachers for providing quality instruction, and the most important part of that preparation is content knowledge.

According to Avidov-Ungar and Herscu (2020), both entry-level and advanced teachers need to learn material they can use to enhance their classroom instruction and promote student learning. P5, P9, and P10 all appeared agitated discussing the lack of district-provided content-specific PD. Over the course of the semistructured interviews, comments, body language, and tone of voice indicated a strong desire to receive content-specific PD and their discontentment with the lack of availability. According to Kennedy (2016), teacher PD that focuses on teachers' knowledge of the subject or curriculum has a

greater impact on classroom instruction than those that focus on pedagogy. Participants repeatedly expressed a need to receive PD that would help them increase knowledge in their subject matter and improve their classroom instruction.

During the focus group interview, participants also discussed their experiences with limited content-specific district-provided PD. "[District A] offered a lot of PD; however, often times it was generic. I wish it was more content specific" (FG1). When prompted to expand upon the term "generic", FG1, a novice teacher, explained, "you know the teaching strategies you can use in any subject, like *turn and talk*". FG3, a veteran teacher, nodded in agreement and stated, "Like [FG1] said, it really needs to be more specific to grade level and content. Kids can't learn the content if teachers don't know the content". FG5, a novice teacher, added, "Generic teaching strategies will not help my students learn [Content Area], my knowledge of [Content Area], and how to teach [Content Area], is what will help my students to learn and master [Content Area]". FG4, a veteran teacher, offered a similar perception,

> Teachers need to know what they have to teach before anything else. They need to understand the cognitive level of the state standards, the academic vocabulary needed for content acquisition, and the state student expectations that must be met to demonstrate mastery. The state determines student achievement based on content mastery, not strategies they used while learning the content.

Participants suggested that teachers needed to receive content-specific PD to gain a deeper understanding of the subject matter before they could effectively teach the content to their students. According to Allen and Penuel (2015), PD that is focused on content is

associated with an increase in teacher knowledge, positive changes to teachers' classroom instruction, and improvement in student learning outcomes. Furthermore, Didion et al., (2020) suggested that improving student achievement is contingent upon teachers providing effective classroom instruction, and receiving ongoing, adequate in-service training is critical for teachers to provide high-quality instruction across all content areas. The consistent emphasis on the need for content-specific PD indicated participants perceived teachers' proficiency in their subject matter as a significant factor for providing effective classroom instruction and increasing student achievement, thus the PD provided by District A should focus on increasing teachers' competence in their subject matter, not cross-curricular teaching strategies.

Several participants agreed a shift from providing PD centered on teaching strategies to trainings aimed at building teachers' content knowledge would have a positive impact on classroom instruction, and consequently student achievement. P1, a novice teacher, discussed teaching strategies PD and the state assessment, "the district keeps providing cookie cutter PD for teaching strategies they believe can be applied to all content areas, but if that type of PD was effective, then our [State Assessment] scores would not be so low". A similar perception was expressed by P3, a veteran teacher,

> Our [State Assessment] scores are terrible, and the majority of the PD the district continues to provide are on teaching strategies. Kids are assessed on content, not strategies. Having students complete a gallery walk is not going to help them when they sit down to take [State Assessment].

According to Slavin (2018), due to state and federal accountability systems, effective teachers must continually develop their subject knowledge to provide high-quality instruction to students. Teaching strategies are used to help students access and interact with the content; however, the subject matter must be at the center of instruction, as the state assessment measures student learning and mastery of the content, not the strategies students applied as they were learning the content. Given the steady decline of student achievement in District A, as reported by the state accountability system, the PD provided by the district should focus on building teachers' content knowledge.

During the focus group discussion, participants' responses reinforced the position of student achievement being contingent upon teachers' knowledge of the subject matter, and the need for the district to focus on providing teachers with content specific PD. FG6, a novice teacher, candidly stated, "first and foremost, teachers need to understand the content. Content is what students' need to learn and master for [State Assessment] and teachers need to be trained on content". FG3 shared that with new changes associated with state standards, content specific PD would have been beneficial. "I needed content PD, but unfortunately, it was not available. The [Content Area] state standards changed; however, the district did not offer PD to address those changes" (FG3). FG1 nodded in agreement and reported, "I know several teachers that struggled with [Content Area] because they did not how to teach the new standards." Content-specific PD prepares teachers to design effective classroom instruction to increase student learning and academic achievement.

Additionally, some participants discussed the importance of content-specific PD and their professional growth. Tantawy (2020) argued that teachers, like other professionals, have the responsibility to continually grow professionally and develop their craft. P2, a veteran teacher, shared, “even though I have been teaching a long time, I do not know everything there is to know about [Content Area]. I need to keep learning, and I need the district to do a better job at supporting my learning.” The comments shared by P2 did not suggest that their need, nor desire, for content-specific PD had diminished over the years.

Supporting comments regarding the need for content specific PD to grow professionally were also shared during the focus group. FG7, a veteran teacher, described themselves as being a “lifelong learner” and wanting to “continue to grow professionally”. “Understanding the content is growth for me, and the district did not help me grow this year” (FG7). FG2, a novice teacher, then stated, “I am a nerd, and I’m always looking for content professional development that will help me better serve my students. If I am growing professionally, then I know my students will grow academically”. The consensus among participants indicated they needed content specific PD to help them gain a deeper understanding of the subject matter to grow professionally. Responses provided evidence that the amount of content specific PD provided by District A was insufficient in meeting participants’ needs for professional growth and development.

The recurring comments from participants indicated that the current PD program in District A did not adequately align to one of the five core features of effective PD,

ensuring PD is content focused. Though District A provided numerous PD opportunities, data revealed the bulk of the PD was focused on cross-curricular teaching strategies, not subject matter. Participants perceived the non-content specific PD provided by District A to be ineffective and indicated the trainings had no impact on their classroom instruction or student achievement, nor did the PD contribute to their professional growth.

Theme 2: Time/date Conflict to Attend District-Provided PD

The second major theme that arose from the data collected was time/date conflict participants encountered to attend district-provided PD. To receive the highest rating in one of the four domains of the teacher appraisal system in District A, teachers are required to obtain at least 36 hours of off-contract PD. Off-contract PD hours are those that are obtained outside of the school day, or scheduled district PD days, in which teachers are not being financially compensated. Derrington and Kirk (2017) posited that to maximize teachers' professional learning success, PD must be provided during the workday, and should focus on teacher growth, not appraisal compliance. Because off-contract PD attendance is directly related to the District's annual appraisal system, teachers must attend PD after school, on Saturday, or during the summer months. Repetitive comments from participants indicated conflicts with attending off-contract PD during the times and dates the trainings were provided by the district.

Some participants shared their challenges with attending afterschool PD. Repetitive comments revealed that one of the barriers with attending afterschool PD was the times the trainings were offered. All afterschool PD begins at 4:30 p.m. and ends at 6:30 p.m., and the intermediate school day begins at 7:00 a.m. and ends at 2:30 p.m.

Responses indicated that attending afterschool PD posed challenges to participants due to the timeframe of the intermediate school day, in relation to the times afterschool PD was offered. For example, P4, a first-year teacher, explained waiting two hours after their workday ended to attend a 2-hour PD was “frustrating and mentally and physically exhausting”. Likewise, P7, a veteran teacher, appeared agitated as they shared that attending afterschool PD significantly extended their workday, and once they made it home in the evening, they were “so tired, all I can do is go to bed. Nothing else. Just shower and go to bed” (P7). According to Palmer and Noltemeyer (2019), effective PD for teachers considered their professional and personal needs, was school based, and took place during the school day. Khan and Afridi (2017) asserted that most of the most successful educational systems of the world made PD a part of a regular working day and an adequate amount of time was allotted for those activities. Data indicated that the practice of District A providing PD outside of the school day did not align with the professional literature about the impact of time on the effectiveness of teacher PD.

Similar responses were provided during the focus group interview. FG7 explained that District A does not consider the extra time commitment of intermediate schoolteachers to attend afterschool PD. “I am tired at the end of the school day, so it takes a lot of willpower for me to stay afterschool for PD” (FG7). FG1 added, “I do not want to sound like a broken record, but the PD we have to wait two hours to attend is not even content-specific, so I really struggle mentally to attend”. FG3 nodded in agreement and stated, “Attending afterschool PD is exhausting, and honestly, by the time I get there I have mentally checked out. If it wasn’t for [Appraisal System], I would not go.”

According to Derrington and Kirk (2017), PD should take place during existing professional learning opportunities, such a collaborative planning or staff meetings, and not added on to the ever-increasing time demands of teachers. Darling-Hammond et al., (2017) stated that administrators should be responsive to the personal and professional needs of educators and evaluate and/or redesign school schedules to increase opportunities for professional learning. The consensus amongst participants revealed that attending afterschool PD was challenging due to the time the trainings were scheduled. District A could address this concern by evaluating the current PD time schedule and adjust based upon teacher needs and best practices identified in professional literature.

Participants also expressed there was a conflict with attending PD on Saturday. Saturday PD sessions are either 8:30 a.m. until 11:30 a.m., or 8:30 a.m. until 3:30 p.m. Some participants shared they would not attend PD on a Saturday because they needed the weekend to refresh after the workweek. For example, P10 stated, “I work hard all week, I come to work early, and I leave late. I give up so much time during the week, that I need the entire weekend to relax and mentally prepare for the next week”. Similarly, P5 shared after teaching six hours each day and planning lessons for an additional two hours, they needed the whole weekend to “recuperate”.

During the focus group interview, participants shared similar concerns about attending Saturday PD. Examples of their responses included FG4, who said, “Good teaching happens when you are on your feet, not in a seat”, and explained that they consistently moved around their classroom during instruction. “I pride myself on being visible and available to my students at all times, so I am always on the move (FG4). FG4

then laughed and added, “All that exercise I get while teaching during the week has me so tired by the weekend all I can do is rest”. FG2 laughed and added, “My college classes left out the part about teachers also being marathon walkers. I knew teaching was going to required mental endurance, but I had no idea it would be this physically demanding”. Participants concurred that the mental and physical demands of providing “good” classroom instruction during the workweek made attending PD on Saturday uninviting as they needed time to recharge before returning to the classroom.

Additionally, participants shared the conflict with attending PD during the summer. District A provides the majority of its PD in June and July, and the hours of PD attained during the summer months can be used to meet the required 36 hours for teachers’ appraisal ratings. Some participants expressed their displeasure with attending summer PD due to the workload required by District A during the school year. P8, a veteran teacher angrily purported,

> I am going to be brutally honest with you, [District A] works their teachers to death and by the end of the year, I am mentally and physically drained. I am tired, and I simply cannot give up any of my summer for PD.

Similarly, during their interview P2 leaned back in their chair, sighed and frustratingly expressed District A required a lot of “extra work” from them during the school year, and because of their workload they were “burned out June”, and needed the entire summer to refresh.

Likewise, during the focus group interview FG3 explained that during the year they spent a lot of their “off-time” planning for instruction and attending PD, so they

would not have to do anything during the summer. “I do so much during the year, I wear myself out, and I need the entire summer to recover” (FG3). FG5 added, “After providing 177 days of instruction, I desperately need all 70 days of the summer break to get myself mentally and spiritually prepared for the new school year”. Recurring responses revealed that attending off-contract PD impacted both individual participants and focus group members’ mental and physical health. This data was significant because several studies have found that the increasing time requirements and job demands of teachers, regardless of their years in the profession, can lead to stress, physical ailments, and ultimately teacher burnout (Arvidsson et al., 2016; Cherniss, 2016; Kamtsios, 2018; Kamtsios & Lolis, 2016; Zysberg & Maskit, 2017). Teacher burnout has been described as work-related condition of general emotional and mental exhaustion resulting from extended exposure to job-related stress (Maslach et al., 2001; Zysberg & Maskit, 2017). According to Chan (2010), teacher burnout should be a great concern, as it might negatively impact classroom instruction as well as lead to job dissatisfaction, physical and emotional ill health, and teacher attrition. Data indicated that attending off-contract PD posed mental and physical challenges to participants, and District A should consider mitigating these factors when designing and scheduling PD and modify where necessary to avoid potential teacher burnout.

Theme 3: Repetitive PD Topics

The third major theme that emerged from the data collected related to the topics of the PD provided by District A. Several participants expressed that the topics were repetitive, and the majority of PD offered were the same trainings presented “over and

over" (P10). According to the PD records for District A, there were 107 trainings offered between June 2018 and April 2019 (Internal Document for District A, 2019). Of those 107 trainings, 19 topics were repeated five times (95 sessions), and they were all non-content specific teaching strategy trainings (Internal Document for District A, 2019). Liao et al. (2017) asserted that effective PD programs give teachers choices and options, in terms of both subject matter and the format in which the PD is presented. Participant responses indicated that though District A offered a substantial amount of PD sessions, the subject matter for several trainings were repetitive, thus limiting the PD topics for participants to choose from.

During the individual interviews, some participants shared that due to the lack of novel PD sessions, and the time and date conflict associated with attending off-contract PD, they often attended the same PD more than once. For example, P3 said that they attended one particular teaching strategies PD session three times and explained, "The sessions had the same title, and provided the same content; the only difference was the presenters." When asked why they attended the same PD more than once, P3 explained that the training was offered at times that were convenient for them, and that they "needed hours for [appraisal system], and it didn't matter what the PD was about, so long as it provided the hours I needed to get a good appraisal rating." Likewise, P10 shared that they attended a few trainings "enough times that I could have taught the sessions myself". P10 continued, "There were not a lot of PD options to choose from, and I needed hours for [appraisal system], so I went to the same sessions over and over because they were offered at the times that I could attend". Similarly, P6, a veteran teacher, stated

that it was a challenge to attend a PD session that they have never attended before because “[District A] has been providing the same PD [topics] over and over for years. If I want to have enough hours for [appraisal system], I have to attend the same training more than once”. Recurring comments indicated that the majority of the PD provided by District A consisted of topics that have been repeated several times. The lack of new PD topics resulted in some participants attending the same training multiple times to meet annual appraisal requirements. According to Bozkuş and Bayrak (2019), school administrators should tailor PD topics and activities to meet the needs of teachers, and the goal of providing PD should be to help teachers improve their practice, not meet PD hours quota. District A should consider diversifying the subject matter provided in their PD program, as this could help meet the learning needs of teachers while also providing them with PD hours required for annual appraisal.

During the focus group interview, participants shared corresponding remarks about the repetitive PD sessions provided by District A. For example, FG4 stated, “Our PD choices are very limited, we get the same recycled teaching strategies trainings year-after-year. I need PD hours for [appraisal system], so I have go to trainings that I have attended before”. FG3 added, “[District A] requires us to get off-contract hours for [appraisal system], but the only PD they offer consists of the same topics presented over-and-over. There is nothing new, so I have to sit through a training that I have attended already”. FG1 shared a similar perspective when they said, “My concern is not the quantity of PD provided, rather the quality of the PD provided. If teachers are not learning anything new, it’s really a waste of their time”. Participant responses suggested

that attending repetitive PD sessions was prompted by appraisal compliance, as opposed to improving their practice.

The consensus amongst the individual interviewees and focus group participants indicated that District A's current PD program provided several PD opportunities; however, the bulk of the trainings were non-content specific, and consisted of PD topics that were repeated several times throughout the year. Some participants indicated they had to attend the same PD sessions more than once to ensure that they had enough PD hours to meet annual appraisal requirements. Fekede (2017) stated that for PD to be considered effective it should not be viewed as a top-down command from administrators; rather it should consist of engaging and relevant learning opportunities that empower teachers to enhance their skills and improve their practice. Data indicated that due to the repetitive topics of district-provided PD; participants did not perceive their attendance to be a means to enhance their craft, instead a way to meet their appraisal obligations.

Theme 4: Need for Differentiated PD

The fourth major theme that emerged from the data collected was the need for differentiated PD for novice and veteran teachers. For the purpose of this study, novice, or new/inexperienced, teachers are those who have been in the profession for three years or less. Conversely, veteran, or experienced, teachers are those that have been in the profession for more than three years.

Novice teachers do not have the same competencies as veteran teachers; however, they are expected to provide the same level and quality of instruction as their more

experienced colleagues (Miulescu, 2020; Sözen, 2018). During the individual interviews, many participants expressed that preservice training does not adequately prepare novice teachers for the classroom. For example, P8 expressed that novice teachers needed more PD than veteran teachers, including specific PD topics, such as classroom management and lesson planning because “theory and practice are very different”. When probed to explain their statement, P8 added, “Learning about how to teach in a college classroom, and actually teaching in your own classroom, are not the same”. Some participants stated that novice teachers could benefit from PD that addressed the specific challenges many novice teachers encounter. Topics of PD that were suggested that would be beneficial for novice teachers included: understanding district policies and procedures, planning and managing their classroom instruction, using effective teaching strategies, motivating students, and communicating with parents.

Novice teachers may enter the profession with no training and no experience in what to do when they become fully responsible for their classes. Novice teachers do not have a repertoire of skills they can utilize as they attempt to carry out the same tasks as a veteran teacher, so for many novices the transition from preservice training to classroom practice comes as somewhat of a ‘transition shock’ (Corcoran, 1981; Voss & Kunter, 2020). During their individual interview, P4 stated that as a first-year teacher they were “overwhelmed” because their college classes and student teaching did not provide them with an accurate real-world teaching experience, resulting in them feeling “woefully unprepared for their position”. Additionally, P4 purported that, “after 10 months in the classroom, I am still lost. I had no idea about all of the additional responsibilities teachers

have beyond classroom instruction". P4 described the need for PD focusing on content that supports the novice teacher before they enter the classroom. "I 'desperately' needed PD that focused on lesson planning, classroom management, culturally responsive teaching, and district policies and procedures; however, those PD topics were not provided by District A" (P4). Martin et al. (2016) asserted, "New teachers, regardless of their pathways into teaching, are not fully prepared for the first day and have much to learn" (p.4). School districts should ensure that novice teachers receive the necessary training to quickly learn the tools of the trade and take measures to prevent good teachers from dropping out of the profession (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2018). Responses from P4 indicated a need for District A to provide specific PD that would have better prepared them for the transition from a student to a practitioner.

Supporting comments were also shared by P3, who said that many novice teachers do not identify the gaps in their learning until a situation occurs. "They [novice teachers] do not know that they did something wrong, or didn't do a task that was required, until after someone informs them, or an issue arises". Before novice teachers enter the classroom for the first time, they need the district to provide PD on "the basics" (P3). When asked to explain what 'the basics' are, P3 stated, "classroom management, district policies and administrative procedures, student discipline procedures, communicating will colleagues, evidence-based instructional techniques, and addressing the specific instructional needs of Special Education students and English Language Learners". Recurring responses indicated that navigating the demands of the teaching

profession can be arduous for novice teachers, and they could benefit from specific PD topics that would effectively prepare them for their new roles in the classroom.

During the focus group interview, participant responses were consistent with those of the individual interviewees about the need for specific topics of PD for novice teachers. For example, FG7 stated, “Becoming a teacher is on-the-job training. Textbooks and lectures cannot effectively prepare you for this job, which is why targeted professional development for new teachers is vital if we want to keep them in the profession”. When probed about what would be considered as targeted PD, FG7 stated, “Training that focuses on classroom management, classroom routines and procedures, instructional resources, teaching techniques, and building relationships with students”. FG6 added,

I agree with [FG7]. Those are key areas that I am constantly trying to improve upon, and this is my third year teaching. I wish [District A] would have provided PD that addressed those specific topics before I entered the classroom for the first time.

Similarly, FG5 said that administrators in District A should survey novice teachers and inquire about the topics of PD they perceived would have the greatest impact on their professional success, and provide those trainings often. Hirsch et al. (2019) stated during the first three years teaching, novice teachers can become better acclimated and thrive in the profession if administrators provided specific PD to assist with instructional deficits, such as ineffective classroom management strategies, and provide training on effective practices to increase teacher capacity and self-efficacy. The consensus amongst the individual interviewees and the focus group participants was

novice teachers needed targeted PD that would assist them in connecting pedagogy with practice. District A could better support novice teachers by developing a PD plan to provide them with training in specific areas, such as classroom management, instructional strategies, and district policies and procedures. Targeted PD could also assist novice teachers as they develop an understanding of how to integrate what they learned in their university coursework into their everyday instructional practices.

Learning to teach effectively is an ongoing process and school districts should ensure that they are provide meaningful PD opportunities to address the specific needs of both experienced and inexperienced teachers (Avidov-Ungar & Herscu, 2020; Bressman et al., 2018). Participant responses indicated that veteran teachers needed PD that was focused on building their content knowledge, as opposed to pedagogy. During the individual interviews, some participants expressed that veteran teachers have a firm grasp on how to provide effective classroom instruction; therefore, PD for veteran teachers needed to focus on gaining a deeper understanding of their content, along with the depth of knowledge required for students to master the content. For example, P7 stated that veteran teachers needed PD that would help them increase their understanding of the subject matter they teach, and attending PD that focused on teaching strategies or classroom management was not beneficial to veteran teachers in improving their craft. “We [veteran teachers] don’t need PD about tips and tools on how to teach the content; we [veteran teachers] need PD about the content itself” (P7). When asked to elaborate on that statement, P7 explained that content-specific PD on topics such as subject specific academic vocabulary, the context and complexity of the content standards, and

summative and formative assessments to determine student mastery of the content would be useful in helping them enhance their classroom instruction.

Similarly, P2 shared that as a veteran teacher they needed PD that was specific to the content they taught, and said “I consider myself to be a life-long learner, and enjoy going to PD that actually ‘teaches’ me something new about [Content Area].” P2 added, “I have mastered lesson planning, classroom management, and all of the other procedural aspects of my job. I need PD to help me master the content I teach; which the district does a poor job of providing”. Supporting comments were also provided by P6, who stated,

I have been teaching a long time, and the activities teachers can use for providing instruction have not changed much over the years, but the content standards have. As a seasoned teacher, I need training on the knowledge and skills students need to master [Content Area], and how mastery can be assessed.

Goodwin et al. (2019) asserted that once veteran teachers have mastered foundational practices and are meeting the procedural expectations of the school and district, the PD they attend should be focused on building their content knowledge. Data indicated that District A was not adequately addressing the PD needs of veteran teachers, as there was a limited amount of content-specific PD provided.

During the focus group interview, participant responses were consistent with those of the individual interviewees about veteran teachers needing PD that was different from novice teachers. Some focus group members expressed that PD focused on building veteran teachers’ content knowledge would increase novice teachers’ instructional

capacity and have a positive impact on student achievement. For example, FG2 stated that as a novice teacher they were “still learning how to teach”, and depended on the veteran teachers at Campus H to help them with understanding the content. “If they [veteran teachers] don’t have a firm grasp of the content, then they can’t help us newbies”. FG3 added, “We [veteran teachers] are often viewed as mentors for the new teachers. We offer support with classroom practices and administrative duties, but I think our [veteran teachers] biggest impact comes from helping them [novices teachers] understand the content”. Similarly, FG7 shared that veteran teachers cannot help novice teachers learn the content, if they [veteran teachers] do not fully comprehend the content themselves. “I need to understand the knowledge and skills students are expected to learn in [Content Area], before I can explain that information to the new teachers”. Sowell (2017) asserted that veteran teachers are important to the professional success of novice teachers because they [veteran teachers] are readily available on the campus, and can provide the content area support and guidance novice teachers need to develop and deliver effective classroom instruction. The consensus amongst the individual interviewees and the focus group participants was that teachers have different levels of classroom experience; thus, novice and veteran teachers needed different categories of PD. Recurring responses indicated that novice teachers needed PD that was targeted towards building their pedagogical skills, whereas veteran teachers needed PD focused on building their content knowledge. Data suggested that District A could better support all teachers by designing a PD program that differentiated the types of PD provided based upon teachers’ years of classroom experience.

Research Subquestion

The research RQ inquired about intermediate schoolteachers' perceptions about the impact of district-provided PD on their self-efficacy. Question 12 on the individual interview protocol directly addressed the research SQ. Questions 12, 14, and 17 on the focus group interview protocol directly addressed the research SQ. The purpose of the focus group interview was to drill down on the responses from the one-on-one interviews with the goal of group consensus.

Teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy are one of the few individual qualities that predict teacher practice (Poulou et al., 2019). Bandura (1977) described self-efficacy as confidence in one's abilities to attain new knowledge and perform newly acquired skills. Teacher's self-efficacy refers to confidence in their instructional practices and belief in their ability to accomplish a task, as opposed to whether or not the accomplishment is earned (Sasson et al., 2020; West & Plevyak, 2018). During the semistructured individual interviews and focus group interview, participants were asked to describe their self-efficacy, or confidence in their ability, to implement new knowledge obtained from district-provided PD into their classroom instruction. Participants were also informed that self-efficacy was not determined by whether they implemented the new knowledge into their classroom instruction, but their belief in their ability to implement the new knowledge. Participants' responses to the research SQ aligned to themes one and three, further substantiating the findings for this study.

Several participants expressed that district-provided PD had no impact on their self-efficacy due to the lack of content-specific trainings and/or repetitive PD topics;

therefore, self-efficacy was not a possibility. Recurring comments indicated that district-provided PD did not enhance participants' skills nor did it provide them with any fresh ideas or novel learning experiences. Examples of their responses include P6, who expressed that district-provided PD had no impact on their self-efficacy because they "Did not learn anything during PD this year, so there was nothing new to bring back to my classroom. All the sessions I attended were basic teaching strategy trainings that [District A] has been providing for years". Likewise, P1 explained that the district-provided PD they attended had no impact on their self-efficacy because the trainings were not content-specific, and "were all trainings I had taken before." Additionally, P8 shared that they did not attend any district-provided PD; therefore, there was nothing to impact their self-efficacy. When probed about their non-attendance to district-provided PD, P8 explained, "The ones [PD] that [District A] provided were generic and redundant. I was not going to waste my time going to a training that was not going to be beneficial". Responses indicated that District A's current PD program did not impact participants' self-efficacy because the trainings were non-content specific and/or redundant.

During the focus group interview, participants shared supporting statements about district-provided PD having no impact on their self-efficacy due to the lack of content-specific trainings and/or repetitive PD topics. For example, FG6 said,

> I went to PD expecting to get fresh ideas and/or new information about my content area, but I was gravely disappointed. The trainings had nothing to do with the subject I teach, and I didn't learn anything, so there was no impact on my self-efficacy.

FG5 added, “Old PD does not provide new learning”. When prompted to expand upon their statement, FG5 explained that the PD District A provided was “nothing that I have never seen before and I did not learn anything. The trainings I attended did not provide me with any new skills, so there wasn’t anything to impact my self-efficacy”. The consensus amongst participants was the district-provided PD they attended had no impact on their self-efficacy because the trainings did not relate to the subject matter they teach, and the session topics were repetitive. Teacher self-efficacy is important as it has been found to be a key determinant of instructional quality and teacher effectiveness, and the types of PD teachers participate in can shape and reshape their self-efficacy beliefs. (Perera et al., 2019; Yoo, 2016). Given that district-provided PD has had no impact on participants’ self-efficacy, District A could benefit by modifying their current PD program to provide teachers with the trainings they identified as a need to increase their self-efficacy and improve their classroom instruction.

All Salient Data and Discrepant Cases

Discrepant cases include data that are considered inconsistent with the identified themes. Discrepant cases provide contrary evidence regarding the perspectives in relation to the central phenomenon (Yin, 2014). Identifying and analyzing discrepant data cases is a vital aspect of validity testing in qualitative research (Kaplan & Maxwell, 2005). When crosschecking during data analysis, information that does not correlate to the themes can suggest discrepancies in the data (Merriam, 2009). No discrepant cases were found in the data.

Evidence of Quality and Procedures to Address Accuracy of the Data

Validation of the accuracy, or credibility, of the data was completed via triangulating the data, member checking, and peer debriefing. Triangulation is the process of using multiple methods of data collection, multiple sources of data, multiple investigators, or multiple theories to confirm the findings (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009). Triangulation is common strategy in qualitative studies as it ensures the dependability and credibility of the study by drawing information from multiple sources, individuals of processes (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009).

Triangulation

I utilized triangulation within this study by means of multiple methods of data collection, multiple sources of data, and multiple perspectives of data (Merriam, 2009). Data was collected via semistructured individual interviews and a focus group interview. The individual interview data was collected and analyzed before the focus group interview. The individual interview data allowed me to construct the focus group interview questions and obtain additional information and perspectives from participants that were not a part of the individual interview process. I then crosschecked the data from each source for evidence that supported a theme within the study (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009).

Member Checking

Upon completing data collection, I employed the member checking technique, also known as participant or respondent validation, to explore the credibility of research findings (Birt et al., 2016). During the member checking process, I returned the

transcripts of the individual interviews and focus group interview, to the participants to verify the accuracy of the data. According to Thomas (2017), member checks can be useful for obtaining participant approval for using quotations where anonymity cannot be guaranteed. Member checking allowed me to improve the quality of interpretation and rigor of my study, while strengthening the trustworthiness of the findings.

Peer Debriefing

I also utilized a peer debriefer to work with me throughout pre and post data collection and data analysis. Peer debriefing is a technique to establish credibility as it allows for someone to external to the study to evaluate the data (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The purpose of peer debriefing is to enhance the validity or credibility of the research results (Spillett, 2003). Peer debriefers can promote reflective dialogue that challenges the researcher to clarify their views, identify potential biases, and uncover ways in which values and beliefs may factor into analyzing and reporting the data (Spillett, 2003).

My peer debriefer was an impartial colleague with 15 years of experience in the field of education, all of which has been in District A. This colleague is also familiar with the types of PD provided by District A for intermediate schoolteachers. This colleague holds the position of Executive Director, which is a senior level position within District A, however, is not my supervisor. My peer debriefer was involved throughout the data collection and data analysis processes. My peer debriefer reviewed the interview protocols and provided feedback regarding the proposed questions. Upon completion of the interviews, my peer debriefer also examined the raw data, final report, and general

methodology to assess whether the findings for the study were credible based upon the data (Merriam, 2009). After reviewing these elements of the study, my peer debriefer did not detect any issues with the study.

Summary

Within Section 2, I provided the methodology used for this project study. I presented a description of, and justification for, the research design and approach. Section 2 also detailed the criteria for selecting participants, justification for the number of participants, procedures for gaining access to participants, an explanation of how I established a relationship with participants, and measures for the ethical protections of participants. The methods and instruments used for data collection, role of the researcher, the process by which the data were generated, gathered, and recorded, data analysis procedures, data analysis results, and a summation of the evidence of quality and procedures to address accuracy and credibility of the data is also provided in this section.

A qualitative study was employed to understand the impact of PD provided by District A on intermediate schoolteachers' classroom instruction and self-efficacy. After I received IRB approval, I conducted face-to-face semistructured individual interviews with 10 intermediate schoolteachers. Upon analysis of the data collected during the individual interviews, and receiving IRB approval, I conducted a face-to-face focus group interview with an additional seven intermediate schoolteachers, to seek consensus about the central phenomenon. I sought to answer the following RQ and supporting SQ in this study:

RQ: What are intermediate schoolteachers' perceptions about the impact of district-provided PD on their classroom instruction?

SQ: What are intermediate schoolteachers' perceptions about the impact of district-provided PD on their self-efficacy?

Through data analysis of the individual interviews, four major themes arose that answered the RQ: (a) limited PD opportunities that directly related to the participants' content areas, (b) time/date conflict to attend PD offered, (c) repetitive PD topics, and (d) lack of differentiated PD for novice and veteran teachers. These four themes were later substantiated by the focus group interview.

Description of the Project

Based upon the data analysis results, supporting literature, and conceptual framework, I believe the most appropriate culminating project for this study is a policy recommendation with detail (see Appendix A). The policy recommendation will present background information about the existing problem and a summary of data analysis and findings from the study. The policy recommendation will also include evidence from professional literature and related research to address the identified problem. Additionally, it will outline recommendations for creating a district policy regarding PD provided by District A. The policy recommendation will be presented to the superintendent of schools and board of trustees for District A, as they are the major stakeholders that enact regulatory and policy changes within the district.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

Over the course of 5 years, District A, a large urban school district in the Southwest region of the United States, had a steady decline of student achievement. In response to the deficits in student learning, the Board of Trustees in District A commissioned an external agency to conduct a curriculum audit to analyze the effectiveness of processes and programs at the organizational level. One of the discrepancies identified in the audit was between effective classroom instruction and District A's current PD program.

The local study site, Campus H, an intermediate school in District A, was identified as one of the schools with a significant percentage of students failing to make adequate academic progress as measured by the state's high stakes assessments. One of the factors administrators at Campus H identified as contributing to the lack of student achievement was that the school district does not provide PD that effectively elicits change in intermediate schoolteachers' instructional practices. The gap in practice is that there is a lack of evaluation regarding the impact PD provided by District A has on teachers' classroom instruction and student achievement.

The purpose of this study was to explore intermediate schoolteachers' perceptions of the impact PD provided by District A has on their classroom instruction, as well as the impact of these trainings on their self-efficacy. All participants were intermediate schoolteachers at Campus H at the time of the study. I collected qualitative data via semistructured, face-to-face, individual interviews with 10 intermediate schoolteachers

and a semistructured, face-to-face focus group interview with an additional seven intermediate schoolteachers. The focus group members did not participate in the individual interviews.

Findings from this study indicated that district-provided PD had no impact on the participants' classroom instruction or self-efficacy. The consensus of the participants was that the lack of impact was due to District A providing limited PD opportunities that directly related to the participants' content areas. PD was offered at times and days that were not convenient for participants to attend, the same topics of PD were repeated several times throughout the year, and the district did not provide PD that was differentiated based upon teachers' years of service. Participants collectively expressed a need for District A to address those four areas and provide a structured and systematic process for providing PD that met the needs of teachers at various stages of their career.

According to Lune and Berg (2016), researchers have a professional obligation to share the results of their study with the scientific community, and/or bring their findings back to the local community that could use the findings. I will present the results of this study via a policy recommendation with detail (see Appendix A), hereafter referred to as a policy recommendation, to the superintendent of schools and board of trustees in District A. The policy recommendation will communicate the research findings and propose actions District A can take to address the information uncovered from the study.

The goal for developing this policy recommendation is to share information with District A's major stakeholders about evidence-based PD practices to provide the support and training new teachers need to be successful in the profession. The policy

recommendation can be used as the foundation for creating a district policy that requires new teachers entering the profession to participate in a district-provided induction program for the first 2 years of their employment, as there is currently no policy to address PD for new teachers in District A. The proposed policy could benefit all stakeholders in District A by providing a PD program that would build the instructional capacity of teachers who are new to the profession, improve their instructional effectiveness, increase student-learning outcomes, and supply the ongoing support and training new teachers need as they transition into their new roles in the classroom.

In Section 3, I present a rationale for the selection of the policy recommendation genre, a scholarly review of the literature related to the policy recommendation, and a description of the project. Additionally, I explain the overall goals of the project and describe the type of evaluation planned for the policy recommendation. I conclude Section 3 with a discussion on the implications for social change and the importance of the policy recommendation to stakeholders in District A and the scholarly community.

Rationale

Through data analysis of the semistructured individual interviews, I identified four major themes that answered the RQ exploring intermediate schoolteachers' perceptions about the impact of district-provided PD on their classroom instruction and the impact of district-provided PD on their self-efficacy. The themes are (a) limited PD opportunities that directly related to the participants' content areas, (b) time/date conflict to attend PD offered, (c) repetitive PD topics, and (d) lack of differentiated PD for novice and veteran teachers. These four themes were later substantiated by the focus group

interview. Results from the study indicated that the current PD provided by District A had no impact on participants' classroom instruction or self-efficacy. Participants agreed that district-provided PD did not align to the characteristics of effective PD and that it did not help them improve their practice, increase student achievement, or meet their professional needs. Upon discussing the results of the study with my committee, I determined that a policy recommendation would be the most appropriate project deliverable.

I selected a policy recommendation because this project genre is best aligned to the data that were collected and analyzed and the supporting literature. Findings suggest that teachers who are new to the profession need different formats, topics, and quantities of PD in comparison to their more experienced colleagues. The 3-day PD genre was not considered for this study because data indicated a systematic problem with district-provided PD that could not be effectively addressed via a short-term training. A curriculum plan was not considered for this project study as that genre centers on students learning academic content, and this study focused on developing and refining knowledge and skills for teachers. I opted against creating an evaluation report because an evaluation study was not the methodology used for data collection.

The purpose of this policy recommendation is to provide background information about the local problem and share the results of this study along with major evidence from research and literature. The policy recommendation will also include detailed suggestions to District A to address the gap in practice and local problem. I will present the policy recommendation to the superintendent of schools and board of trustees for

District A, as they are the key decision makers who can create or change policies within the district.

Review of the Literature

The purpose of the literature review is to examine scholarly articles, academic reports, and books about policy recommendations for education, new teacher induction, job-embedded PD, instructional coaching, peer mentoring, and best practices for providing new teachers entering the profession with the knowledge, skills, and support necessary to take on the challenges and complexities of teaching today's students. I accomplished the review of the literature by accessing online scholarly databases from Walden University Library, including the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), Sage Premier, and ProQuest Central. I also searched the U.S. Department of Education website and Google Scholar. The focus of this literature review was to locate credible, peer-reviewed, informational texts related to topics that aligned to the project.

To acquire current literature, published between 2016 and 2021 on the aforementioned topics, I used the following search terms: *policy recommendations*; *white papers*; *position papers*; *new teacher/educator*; *novice teacher/educator*; *entering the teaching/education profession*; *supporting new teachers/educators*; *teacher/educator professional development*; *teacher/educator continuing professional education*; *effective teacher/educator professional development*; *new teacher induction*; *instructional coaching*; *peer mentoring*; *mentoring teachers*; *professional learning communities*; *job-embedded professional development*; *alternative teacher/educator certification programs*; *traditional teacher/educator programs*; *pre-service teachers/educators; in-*

service teachers/educators; *Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timely (S.M.A.R.T.) goals*; *S.M.A.R.T. goals for teachers/educators*; and *teacher/educator attrition*. The literature search continued until no additional relevant sources could be located, indicating that the literature search was complete.

Policy Recommendation

Doyle (2013) defined a policy recommendation as a "simply written policy advice prepared for some group that has the authority to make decisions" (p. 1). A policy recommendation paper is a tool used in the policymaking process to explain, persuade, and suggest changes to address a problem (Stelzner, 2013; Young & Quinn, 2002). Additionally, policy recommendations are developed based upon research findings and are used to advocate for changing and/or creating a specific policy (Young & Quinn, 2002). Based on the findings from this study and the supporting literature, I am confident that this policy recommendation will aid District A leaders in creating a policy to address the practice problem. Such a policy would require new teachers entering the profession to participate in a district-provided induction program for the first 2 years of their employment. Currently, District A has one policy that relates to PD, which only specifies the number of PD hours all teachers must acquire to meet annual appraisal requirements. This policy recommendation outlines a plan for a new teacher induction program that will address the specific PD needs of new teachers and offer the ongoing support and training needed as they transition from students to practitioners.

New Teachers

Transitioning from a preservice teacher education program to the classroom is the one of the most critical phases for novice teachers (Jokikokko et al., 2017). New teachers transition very quickly from being students to assuming the responsibility for their students' learning (Petersen, 2017). In the context of this project, new teachers are those who are entering the profession for the first time through a traditional teacher preparation program or an alternative teacher preparation/certification program.

Traditional teacher preparation programs are the most common pathway teachers take to the profession (Hegwood, 2018). A traditional teacher preparation program generally refers to an undergraduate program at a college or university in which students major in education; focus on a specific content area; and are trained as an early childhood, elementary, secondary, or special education teacher (Whitford et al., 2018). Through traditional teacher preparation programs, preservice teachers typically have no prior teaching experience, and their education customarily leads to at least a bachelor's degree and full teaching credentials (Jang & Horn, 2017; U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, 2016; Whitford et al., 2018). Traditional teacher preparation programs provide preservice teachers with supervised, preplanned, and structured access to students through residencies or student teaching before they obtain their degree and teacher license (Golf, 2021; Whitford et al., 2018).

In contrast, alternative teacher preparation/certification programs provide an accelerated path to licensure and typically encompass training and credentialing teachers who have obtained a bachelor's degree in a field other than education and have later

decided to transition to the teaching profession (Jang & Horn, 2017; Whitford et al., 2018). Alternative teacher preparation/certification programs are “intended to expand the pool of potential teachers and enable a more diverse array of people to gain certification and enter the teaching profession” (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service, 2015, p.1). The requirements of alternative teacher preparation/certification programs vary by state; however, most programs allow candidates full access to teaching students while they complete their coursework for full state certification (Hegwood, 2018; U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service, 2015; Whitford et al., 2018).

Regardless of the route that new teachers take to the classroom, foundational guidance and extensive support are needed for beginning teachers to meet and excel in their personal and professional development (Shikalepo, 2019). The first few years of a novice teacher’s career are considered the most formative, and school districts should provide the PD, resources, and support new teachers need as they make the transition from preparation to practice (Kutsyuruba, 2020). Failure to provide the needed support and PD for new teachers could lead to errors in practice, obstacles to student achievement, or high teacher attrition (Ardley et al., 2020). Podolsky et al. (2019) argued that the quantity and quality of training and support school districts offer to new teachers can determine if they (new teachers) will grow into highly competent practitioners-or develop ineffective instructional practices or leave the profession. Scholars have suggested that new teacher induction is one approach school districts can take to provide

the extensive and ongoing support new teachers need during their first few years in the profession (Bastian & Marks, 2017; Kini & Podolsky, 2016).

Induction Programs

Induction "is the name given to a comprehensive, coherent, and sustained professional development process that is organized by a school district to train, support, and retain new teachers, which then seamlessly progresses them into a lifelong learning program" (Wong, 2005, p. 43). Induction programs should offer a variety of PD activities for new teachers including job-embedded PD, instructional coaching, and mentoring and feedback from veteran teachers (Carver-Thomas, 2018; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). A quality teacher induction program that provides clearly communicated goals and has a structured and nurturing system of PD and support for new teachers can result in higher retention rates, accelerated professional growth, and improved student learning (Bastian & Marks, 2017; Wong, 2005).

Providing a high-quality induction program would address the four concerns about district-provided PD that emerged from the data. To begin with, there would be no time and date conflict for new teachers to attend PD, as it would be job-embedded. Also, instructional coaches would provide content focused and differentiated PD that would be specific to the needs of the new teachers they are working with. Furthermore, the PD topics provided would be based upon the areas of need new teachers identify as they work with their instructional coaches and mentors; therefore, PD would be personalized, and repetitive topics would be solely based on new teachers' request, not lack of availability.

According to Ronfeldt and McQueen (2017), state, district, and school policy makers are increasingly creating and requiring induction programs for new teachers. Although induction programs are becoming more common, Martin et al. (2016) found that less than 1% of new teachers participate in them. New teachers who participate in an induction program during their first few years are shown how to systematically transition into the profession and are more likely to become and remain effective teachers over time (Bastian & Marks, 2017; Bowden & Portis-Woodson, 2017). Providing a focused and effective induction program for new teachers can have a positive impact on their classroom instruction, self-efficacy, and retention rates and ultimately increase student achievement (Horn, 2018; Khanam et al. (2020).

Job-embedded PD

Job-embedded PD is one component of an effective teacher induction program (Carver-Thomas, 2018; Flores, 2019; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Campbell et al. (2016) described job-embedded PD as "professional learning that is practical for teachers, is personalized to their learning needs, relevant to their instructional and classroom practices and contributes to valued student outcomes" (p. 221). Job-embedded PD involves teachers collaborating, identifying areas in which they need additional training and support, and making decisions throughout the process about the best methods to address those specific professional learning needs (Cavazos et al., 2018). Additionally, job-embedded PD is school-based or classroom-based, is provided during teachers' contract hours, and is embedded into existing procedures and practices (Dennis & Hemmings, 2019). New teachers to the profession can benefit from an induction program

that includes job-embedded PD, as this allows them to remain actively involved in the process of recognizing and addressing the areas in which they need additional training and support (Semon et al., 2020).

The goal of job-embedded PD is to provide teachers with the knowledge, training and learning styles best suited for their individual needs (Owens et al., 2016). Additionally, through job-embedded PD, new teachers can immediately incorporate the new content learned into their work (Wiedow, 2018). Pacchiano et al. (2016) argue that consistent and collaborative job-embedded PD, which is supported, facilitated, and sustained by school leaders, is effective in changing and improving teacher practice and sustaining student achievement.

Instructional Coaching

Instructional coaching is another strategy that school districts are utilizing during new teacher induction and ongoing job-embedded professional learning (Desimone & Pak, 2017). Policymakers are increasing mandating instructional coaching programs for new teachers to build their competence and promote individual and systematic instructional change (Woulfin & Rigby, 2017). Instructional coaching is a sustainable form of professional learning that will likely lead to improved classroom instruction and increased student achievement (Connor, 2017).

Instructional coaches are experienced educators that have proven to be well versed in their subject matter, collecting and analyzing teacher and student-level data to identify strengths and weaknesses, targeting areas in need of improvement, and measuring student achievement (Crawford et al., 2017). Instructional coaches provide

focused assistance and on-the-job training to teachers in need of additional support (Vikaraman et al., 2017). Instructional coaches strive to increase teacher effectiveness and improve student-learning outcomes (Kraft et al., 2018; Kurz et al., 2017).

Instructional coaching is deemed a valuable tool for ongoing, coherent, and collaborative PD because coaches provide the onsite training and support new teachers need to be successful in the classroom (Hammond & Moore, 2018). Effective instructional coaching for new teachers includes guidance in areas of pedagogy, instructional techniques, and content knowledge (Vikaraman et al., 2017). Instructional coaching focuses on new teachers' professional growth and development, whereas mentoring focuses on their personal growth and development, such as their self-efficacy, social-emotional well-being, and self-confidence (Vikaraman et al., 2017). There are some facets of instructional coaching and mentoring that overlap; however, instructional coaching tends to focus on building new teachers' content knowledge and developing effective classroom practices, whereas mentoring leans toward cultivating interpersonal relationships and meeting the social and emotional needs of new teachers.

Mentoring

Mentoring is another essential part of the induction process; however, mentoring and induction are not the same and these terms cannot be used interchangeably or synonymously (Wong, 2005). Induction is an ongoing and collective process for new teachers, and mentoring is one facet of that process (Wong, 2005). Mentoring involves pairing a veteran teacher, who have consistently demonstrated effective classroom instruction as evidenced by performance appraisals and student achievement data, with a

new teacher to provide the encouragement, professional and personal guidance, feedback and support they (new teachers) need during the first few years in the classroom (Vikaraman et al., 2017; Weisling & Gardiner, 2018; Zembytska, 2016).

Effective mentoring programs help pave the way for new teachers to make a successful transition into the profession (Curtis & Taylor, 2018). Hong and Matsko (2019) asserted,

> Mentoring needs to comprehensively address an array of areas essential to the development of new teachers, from strengthening classroom management skills to deepening instructional repertoires, and also to include information about school and district policies and contexts, rather than focus on a single area (pp. 2376-2377).

When school districts incorporate mentoring into their induction program, new teachers are more likely to have greater confidence in their capabilities, improved job satisfaction, increased productivity, and decreased attrition (Daresh, 2002; Howe, 2006; Sparks et al., 2017).

In summary, a review of recent peer-reviewed literature revealed that effective new teacher induction programs incorporate job-embedded PD, instructional coaching, and peer mentoring. New teacher induction programs provide the resources, guidance, and differentiated support new teachers need during their first few years in the classroom, which would be beneficial to their (new teachers') and student success.

Project Description

Overview

The project deliverable for this study is a policy recommendation directed to the superintendent and board of trustees of District A, as they are the key decision makers in the district. Based upon the findings and supporting literature answering the RQ and SQ from this study, I recommend that District A create a policy that would require new teachers entering the profession to participate in a district-provided induction program for 2 years. Currently, there is one policy District A has that relates to PD, which only specifies the number of PD hours all teachers must acquire to meet annual appraisal requirements.

Data indicated that District A provided limited content-specific PD; PD was offered at inconvenient times and days; the topics of PD were repetitive; and PD was not differentiated based upon teachers' years of service. Participants collectively expressed a need for District A to provide a structured and systematic process for providing PD that would address those four areas and meet the needs of teachers at various stages of their career. This policy recommendation focuses on District A providing targeted PD for new teachers entering the profession for the first time.

A recommendation for District A to create and adopt a policy that requires new teachers entering the profession to participate in a new teacher induction program for the first 2 years of employment will be presented to major stakeholders. New teachers were selected as the focus of this policy recommendation because according to the U.S. Department of Education (2016), the demand for new teachers in the United States is less

than the supply. Over the next 10 years, this gap in teacher availability is projected to widen due to the steady increase of the population of students entering U.S. schools; however, the supply of teachers will continue to decrease due to retirement, promotion, or attrition (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018; Hussar & Bailey, 2017). To address the teacher shortage, school districts must hire new teachers from traditional teacher preparation programs or alternative teacher preparation/certification programs (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Regardless of the path new teachers take to the classroom, districts must ensure they (new teachers) are effectively prepared and supported when they enter the profession (Van Overschelde & Wiggins, 2020). One method that District A can use to successfully offer the differentiated PD and extensive support new teachers need is through the creation of a new teacher induction program. A new teacher induction program would address the four areas of concern identified in the research findings, creating and adopting a new district policy could prove effective in developing the professional knowledge and skills new teachers need to be successful in the classroom, increasing new teachers' self-efficacy, and reducing new teacher attrition.

Needed Resources

Creating a policy that would require new teachers to attend an induction program for the first 2 years of employment would entail developing a program that has never been offered in District A. Creating the new teacher induction program would require additional human and financial resources. Allocating the funds needed to hire, train, and provide the tools and resources needed for additional personnel will be vital to the successful establishment, implementation, and maintenance of the program.

District A would need to allot capital to hire additional personnel at the executive, management, and operational levels. At the executive level, District A would need to add the Executive Director of Teacher Induction position. At the managerial level, a Director of New Teacher Instructional Coaching, and a Director of New Teacher Mentoring District A would be needed. The operational level would require Instructional Coaches and new teacher mentors.

These additional positions at the executive, managerial, and operational levels will be critical to the systematic process of analyzing, designing, developing, implementing, and evaluating a comprehensive new teacher induction program. The Executive Director of New Teacher Induction, Director of New Teacher Instructional Coaching, Director of New Teacher Mentoring, new teacher instructional coaches, and new teacher mentors will work collectively and cohesively to ensure that new teachers have the differentiated professional learning and personalized guidance and support they (new teachers) need to become effective practitioners. Employing, compensating, and providing the tools and resources necessary for the new personnel will require District A to reallocate capital to guarantee the viability and sustainability of the new teacher induction program.

Existing Supports

District A receives Title II, Part A funds from the federal government, which can be used to establish and support high-quality educator induction and mentorship programs that where possible are evidence-based and are designed to improve classroom instruction, student learning and achievement and increase the retention of effective

teachers (ESEA sections 2101(c)(4)(B)(vii)(III) and 2103(b)(3)(B)(iv)). A portion of the Title II, Part A funds that District A receives can be reallocated to finance the development and maintenance of the new teacher induction program. Additionally, District A can utilize a portion of state subsidies and local revenue received to pay the salaries of the Executive Director of New Teacher Induction, Director of New Teacher Instructional Coaching, Director of New Teacher Mentoring, new teacher instructional coaches, and provide stipends to the new teacher mentors. Title II, Part A, state and local funds can also be used to purchase the tools and resources staff will need to perform their duties effectively and successfully.

Potential Barriers

Developing a new teacher induction program is contingent upon District A implementing the recommendation to create a policy requiring new teachers to participate in the program for the first 2 years of employment. The Board of Trustees of District A would have to endorse and have the support of the superintendent of schools to authorize and institute a new board policy. A new district-wide policy supporting mandatory participation in the new teacher induction program could improve teacher retention rates and improve student-learning outcomes. In addition, the Board of Trustees would have to consent to the reallocation of capital from the federal, state, and local levels to fund the development and sustainment of the program. Without finances, the new teacher induction program could not come into fruition.

Challenges may arise identifying and hiring qualified individuals for the Executive Director of New Teacher Induction, Director of New Teacher Instructional

Coaching, Director of New Teacher Mentoring, and new teacher instructional coach positions. It may also be difficult to locate qualified veteran teachers on the same campus as new teachers that would be willing to commit to serve as a mentor for 2 years. Furthermore, the new teacher induction program would be novel to District A, thus a detailed program plan, and a new teacher induction handbook with participation guidelines and expectations would need to be created by the Executive Director of New Teacher Induction at the inception of the program.

Potential Solutions to Barriers

A solution to one of the barriers would be to create a district policy requiring new teachers to participate in the program for 2 years of employment. The proposed new policy would then require District A to develop a new teacher induction program. A solution to the barrier of funding the induction program would be receiving approval from the Board of Trustees to reallocate capital from the federal, state, and local levels would fund the development and sustainment of the program.

Additionally, a solution to the barrier of hiring new people to fill the required administrative roles (Executive Director of New Teacher Induction, Director of New Teacher Instructional Coaching, Director of New Teacher Mentoring, and new teacher instructional coaches) would be to hire internally from District A. District A may also have job descriptions that can be customized to detail the specific duties of the proposed new positions, thus expediting the staffing of the New Teacher Induction department. Finally, other school districts may have a framework for an induction program that can be

modified to meet the needs of the new teachers in District A, thus, removing the challenge of creating a completely new program.

Implementation and Timetable

I propose that the board of trustees and superintendent of District A adopt a policy by September 2021 requiring new teachers entering the profession in District A participate in a new teacher induction program for the first 2 years of employment. The design and development of the induction program would be completed by June 2022 and implemented beginning August 2022 for the 2022-2023 academic year. Table 5 illustrates a timetable for the creation and implementation of the new district policy and the new teacher induction program.

Table 6

Timetable for Implementation

Action	Anticipated Completion Date
Create and adopt board policy for new teacher induction program	September 2021
Hire Executive Director of New Teacher Induction	October 2021
Hire Director of Instructional coaches and Director of New Teacher Mentoring	December 2021
Design a comprehensive new teacher induction program	February 2022
Develop a new teacher induction handbook	March 2022
Select an instructional coaching framework	March 2022
Hire and train new teacher instructional coaches	April 2022

Action	Anticipated Completion Date
Select a new teacher mentoring framework	May 2022
Complete development of new teacher induction program	June 2022
Recruit and train veteran teachers to serve as mentors	Beginning July 2022 - Ongoing
Implement the new teacher induction program	August 2022

Roles and Responsibilities

My role as the researcher is to share the findings and supporting literature answering the RQ and SQ from this study. Based upon the results of the study, I provide a recommendation that District A create a policy that would require new teachers entering the profession to participate in a district-provided induction program for the first 2 years of employment. I will present this policy recommendation to the board of trustees and superintendent of District A, as they are the key decision makers that can create district policies.

Roles and responsibilities for other individuals involve creating the new policy and developing the new teacher induction program. Specific roles and responsibilities include:

Board of Trustees

- Review policy recommendation
- Seek clarification on any information within the policy recommendation that is ambiguous or unfamiliar
- Approve the new district policy

- Approve the reallocation of capital to fund the creation of a new teacher induction program

Superintendent of Schools

- Review policy recommendation
- Seek clarification on any information within the policy recommendation that is ambiguous or unfamiliar
- If approved by the board of trustees, ensure implementation of the new district policy
- Ensuring funding is allocated to create and sustain the new teacher induction program
- Hire executive director of new teacher induction

Executive Director of New Teacher Induction

- Develop, execute, manage, and evaluate the new teacher induction program
- Set program goals, and align current and newly proposed PD initiatives with larger district strategic priorities and goals
- Oversee, support, plan, and consistently communicate with designated staff both within and across departments and teams
- Monitor implementation of the new teacher induction program to ensure that the program goals are being met
- Collaborate with district leadership and offices – including human resources, communications, teaching and learning, and finance

- Interview and hire two personnel at the department's managerial level, the director of new teacher instructional coaching and the director of new teacher mentoring

Director of New Teacher Instructional Coaching

- Lead the instructional coaching area of the new teacher induction program.
- Develop, implement, and continuously monitor ongoing district implementation of the instructional coaching facet of the new teacher induction process
- Collaborate and coordinate with the executive director of new teacher induction and director of new teacher mentoring, other district departments, and campus leaders
- Gather, analyze, and communicate new teacher instructional coaching outcomes and fidelity of implementation
- Hire additional operational-level staff, new teacher instructional coaches, who will work directly with new teachers
- Manage and supervise the new teacher instructional coaches and facilitate the training and support they (new teacher instructional coaches) need by providing ongoing PD that capitalizes on their strengths and improves areas of development

Director of New Teacher Mentoring

- Lead the mentoring component of the new teacher induction program

- Establish a vision, goals, and plan to provide new teachers to the district with the professional and personal campus-based support needed for a successful transition into the classroom
- Research and select an evidence-based effective new teacher-mentoring framework to implement as a part of the new teacher induction program
- Monitor the fidelity of implementation of the new teacher mentoring program throughout the district
- Recruit, select, and train veteran teachers to serve as campus-based mentors to new teachers for 2 years
- Regularly communicate with mentors and new teachers to gather feedback on the successes, challenges, and effectiveness of the mentoring process.

New Teacher Instructional Coaches

- Meet with assigned new teachers two times each week to help with long term curriculum and lesson planning
- Collaborate with new teachers to set professional learning goals
- Provide job-embedded, onsite, content and strategy PD to assigned new teachers
- Help new teachers analyze student data, and suggest resources to help meet the instructional needs of students
- Model lessons
- Use an observation checklist to provide regular written feedback to the new teacher about his/her teaching

New Teacher Mentors

- Communicate with director of new teacher mentoring as needed about the new teacher's progress, or problems or concerns that arise
- Be a role model for mentee in dress, demeanor, and communication
- Establish regular times to meet with mentee during school hours
- Participate in mentor teacher meetings and trainings during the academic year
- Reflect with the mentee about her/his teaching, about student learning, and about supports and strategies needed for continued growth and long-term success

New Teachers

- Upon being hired, participate in the new teacher induction program for two consecutive years
- Meet with instructional coach and mentor during established times
- Set professional learning goals, and discuss with instructional coach and mentor
- Communicate supports and resources needed for professional growth and development
- Acknowledge and remain receptive to feedback, and seek assistance in areas of need

Project Evaluation Plan

The evaluation for this project will be goal-based. This evaluation plan focuses on the project, a policy recommendation, not the outcome of the project. The policy

recommendation will be presented to the board of trustees and superintendent of District A for review with the goal of District A using the suggestions provided to create and adopt new district policy.

Project Implications

Possible Social Change Implications

This project has implications for social change because, if developed and implemented effectively, the policy and subsequent new teacher induction program could serve as a model for other school districts to implement. New teachers entering the profession are not limited to District A, therefore participating in an induction program would be beneficial to new teachers beyond the local study site. Having a framework for a comprehensive induction program could assist other school districts in developing a program that would provide the differentiated and sustained support, and guidance new teachers need to be successful in the classroom.

Importance of Project to Key Stakeholders

Based upon the findings from this study, and supporting literature, a policy recommendation will be provided to key decision makers suggesting the creation and adoption of a district policy that would require new teachers entering the profession to participate in an induction program for the first 2 years of their employment. Currently, District A has no policy related to new teacher PD or induction. Induction programs offer the continued professional learning, support, and guidance new teachers need to become successful practitioners. Participation in an induction program can be beneficial in building new teachers' instructional capacity, improving their classroom practices, and

increasing student achievement. This policy recommendation can offer guidance to major stakeholders for developing a policy that focuses on the needs of new teachers, and subsequently create an induction program that provides them (new teachers) with differentiated and sustained support as they transition from the classroom into the profession.

Conclusion

Section 3 describes the project deliverable for the qualitative study, a policy recommendation with detail, which was developed based upon the findings, and supporting literature, that answered the RQ and SQ. This section also presents the rationale for selecting this project genre, along with an exhaustive review of the literature related to the project. Additionally, Section 3 includes a description of the project, needed resources, existing district supports, potential barriers and solutions, and a plan for implementation and evaluation of the project. This section concludes with an explanation of the importance and benefits of the project to local stakeholders, along with possible social change implications. Section 4 will discuss my reflections and conclusions on the project study.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

Despite increased district-provided PD opportunities for teachers to improve classroom instruction, there has been a steady decline of academic achievement at an intermediate school in a large urban school district in the southwestern United States. One of the factors campus administrators attributed the lack of student success was that the district does not provide PD that effectively elicits change in intermediate schoolteachers' instructional practices. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore intermediate schoolteachers' perceptions of the impact PD provided by the district has on their classroom instruction, as well as the impact these trainings have on teacher self-efficacy.

The project deliverable for this study is a policy recommendation with detail directed to the superintendent and board of trustees of District A. The goal for developing this policy recommendation is to share information with District A's key decision makers about evidence-based PD practices to provide the support and training new teachers need to be successful in the profession. The recommendations provided are based upon the findings and supporting literature answering the RQ and SQ from this study.

In Section 4, I explain the strengths and limitations of the project and provide recommendations for alternative approaches to address the local problem identified in this study. I also describe what I learned about the research process and project development and present a reflective analysis about my personal learning and growth as a scholar, practitioner, and project developer. Additionally, I discuss the importance of my

work overall and what I learned. I conclude this section with an explanation of the potential impact the project may have in promoting positive social change, along with recommendations for future research.

Project Strengths and Limitations

Findings from the study suggest that teachers need PD that is content specific and offered at convenient days and times, with topics that are not repetitive and that are differentiated based upon years of experience. Additionally, teachers who are new to the profession need different formats, topics, and quantities of PD in comparison to their more experienced colleagues. The purpose of the policy recommendation with detail project is to share the results of my study and convey the rationale and benefits of creating and adopting a policy that that would require new teachers entering the profession to participate in a district-provided induction program for 2 years. Currently, District A has no policy related to new teacher PD or induction. Creating a policy to address this gap in practice would subsequently result in the district developing an induction program that provides new teachers with the differentiated PD and sustained support needed to successfully transition from the classroom into the profession.

Project Strengths

The greatest strength of this project is that it provides a platform to share my research findings with key stakeholders in District A and provide recommendations, supported by scholarly literature, about the need and benefits of developing and adopting a policy that focuses on the specific PD needs for new teachers. As a researcher, I have the professional responsibility to share the results of my study with key decision makers

in District A and use the data to support my recommendations to create a new policy (see Lune & Berg, 2016; Young & Quinn, 2002). Findings from the study suggest that teachers need PD that is content specific, offered at convenient days and times, with topics that are not repetitive, and differentiated based upon years of experience. Additionally, teachers who are new to the profession need different formats, topics, and quantities of PD in comparison to their more experienced colleagues, and District A should provide a structured and systematic process for providing PD that meets the needs of teachers at various stages of their career. Results from the study and the supporting literature prompted my decision to develop a policy recommendation with detail suggesting that District A create and adopt a new district policy that would require new teachers entering the profession to participate in a district-provided induction program for the first 2 years of their employment. Currently, District A has no policy directly related to new teacher PD or induction programs.

Another strength of this project is that it focuses on new teachers. In developing the policy recommendation, I reflected on the research that indicates over the next decade the number of school-aged children will steadily increase; however, the supply of teachers will continue to decrease due to retirement, promotion, or attrition (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018; Hussar & Bailey, 2017; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). This information suggests that there will be a continuous increase of new teachers entering the profession.

I also considered Ardley et al.'s (2020) assertion that when school districts fail to provide the extensive support and differentiated PD new teachers need, classroom

instruction, student achievement, and teacher retention can be negatively impacted. Researchers have suggested that providing a quality induction program is one approach that school districts can take to provide the extensive and ongoing support new teachers need during their first few years in the profession (Bastian & Marks, 2017; Kini & Podolsky, 2016; Wong, 2005). Additionally, providing a high-quality induction program for new teachers would address the four concerns about district-provided PD that emerged from the data, as it will provide job-embedded, content focused, and differentiated training based upon the topics new teachers identify as a need for growth. The results from my study and scholarly research supported my decision to present a policy recommendation to the superintendent and board of trustees to create a new policy that would require new teachers entering the profession to participate in a district-provided induction program for the first 2 years of employment.

Project Limitations

A policy recommendation is the most appropriate genre for this study; however, there are some limitations. One limitation of this project is that creating a new policy is contingent upon receiving buy-in from key decision makers. Creating and adopting the new policy that would require new teachers entering the profession to participate in a district-provided induction program for the first 2 years of employment would also necessitate District A to develop a program that has never been offered.

Another limitation of the project is that providing a new teacher induction program would require hiring additional personnel at the executive, managerial, and operational levels, and challenges may arise identifying and hiring qualified individuals

for those positions. These additional personnel will be critical to the systematic process of analyzing, planning, designing, developing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating a comprehensive new teacher induction program. Employing and compensating new personnel and providing the tools and resources they need to perform their duties efficiently will require District A to allocate capital to fund the new teacher induction program.

District A would need to provide a substantial amount of financial resources to guarantee the viability and sustainability of the induction program. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) asserted that policy makers can support educator effectiveness by funding evidence-based PD opportunities that have been successful in increasing student achievement. District A receives Title II, Part A funds that can be used to finance a new teacher induction program; however, further limitations will arise if these funds are not allocated to finance the program. Without capital, there will be no means to pay for hiring and training additional personnel or purchasing the tools and resources needed for the successful establishment, implementation, and maintenance of the induction program.

An additional limitation is the time commitment required to bring the new teacher induction program to fruition. The induction program would be novel to District A, and there may not be an established program framework utilized in another school district that District A could modify to meet the needs of new teachers in the district. The lack of an established induction framework would require District A to design a completely new program. Furthermore, new teachers, instructional coaches, and mentors would have to commit to participating in the program for a full 2 years. The time commitment from

various stakeholders will be essential to building and maintaining a comprehensive and successful new teacher induction program.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

I used qualitative methodology to explore intermediate schoolteachers' perceptions about the impact district-provided PD had on their classroom instruction and self-efficacy. Data were collected via semistructured, face-to-face interviews with 10 intermediate schoolteachers and a face-to-face focus group interview with an additional seven intermediate school teachers. Data collected indicate that the current PD provided by District A had no impact on participants' classroom instruction or self-efficacy, nor did it align to the characteristics of effective PD. Findings suggest that participants wanted PD that was content specific and offered at convenient days and times, with topics that are not repetitive and differentiated based upon years of classroom experience. Participants agreed that the PD provided by District A did not help them improve their practice, increase student achievement, or meet their professional needs. Additionally, results indicate that teachers who were new to the profession need different formats, topics, and quantities of PD in comparison to their more experienced colleagues. Participants suggested that District A should provide a structured and systematic process for providing PD that met the needs of teachers at various stages of their career.

Different Ways to Address the Problem

One alternative way to address the problem would be to collect quantitative data via a survey. Using a survey allows researchers to obtain information about the topic of study through a standardized set of questions that reflect the beliefs, perceptions, and

behaviors of a group of individuals (Queirós et al., 2017). Using a survey would also garner a larger sample of participants; thus the results could be generalized and provide a comprehensive view of the entire population (Creswell, 2013; Martin & Bridgmon, 2012; Queirós et al., 2017). Employing quantitative methodology via a survey would allow the researcher to gain the perspectives of teachers from all levels of teaching (elementary, middle, and high school), not just the intermediate level.

Another alternative way to address the problem would be to use a mixed-methods research design. This approach would require the researcher to intentionally and meaningfully integrate qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis to best understand the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). When carefully designed and implemented, a mixed-methods study will yield quantitative data that will support the qualitative data, producing more robust findings and richer discussion (Headley & Plano Clark, 2020). The mixed-methods design could have been incorporated as an alternate design in this study by using a survey and interviews to collect data.

Conducting a focus group interview with only new teachers after their first year in the profession could be another alternative way to address the problem. Focus groups can be used for data collection in qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods research methodologies (Pearson & Vossler, 2016). Focus groups can also be used to conduct a needs assessment for participants (Luke & Goodrich, 2019). Conducting a focus group with new teachers would be helpful in understanding the types of PD they need to be successful in the profession.

Alternative Definitions of the Problem

The problem at the study site, District A, was a steady decline in student achievement. Administrators commissioned an external agency to investigate the possible root causes of the decrease in student success; one discrepancy identified was correlation between effective instruction and District A's current PD program. Results from the inquiry indicated that "professional development, though abundant throughout the district, was found to be loosely aligned to district priorities and inadequately monitored for implementation or evaluated for effectiveness." The gap in practice prompting my decision to explore the impact of district-provided PD on intermediate teachers' classroom instruction and self-efficacy.

Alternative definitions of the problem could be that students' performance on the state assessments were not connected to the impact of district-provided PD on teachers' classroom instruction or self-efficacy. Other factors that may have contributed to this problem could have been changes to the state content standards or changes to the state assessment passing standards. Changes to the district's curriculum resources or high teacher turnover could have also contributed to the local problem.

PD is designed to enhance teacher knowledge and skills, not measure student achievement on a state assessment. The state assessment is intended to measure students' mastery of the content, rather than the impact of PD on teachers' classroom instruction or self-efficacy. Because there was no evidence-based data to determine if state assessment results or ineffective PD was the cause of the decline in student achievement, alternative definitions of the problem are possible.

Alternative Solutions to the Local Problem

Alternative solutions to the local problem could have been a district-prompted research study, as opposed to an audit, to identify the possible root causes of the decline in student achievement. The data collected from an in-house study would have provided prompt feedback, which could have initiated changes in practice expediently. An internal study could have also garnered a larger participant population, as opposed to the limited participation from one school in this study.

Additionally, the SQ of my study relating to teacher self-efficacy could have been removed as a focus of exploration. The external audit referenced a discrepancy between student achievement and the monitoring and evaluation of district-provided PD, not teachers' beliefs and confidence about implementing district-provided PD. Limiting data collection to only the RQ could have provided sufficient information to prompt the development of a policy recommendation.

Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change

My doctoral journey has furthered my understanding of scholarship, project development and evaluation, and leadership and change. I learned about various research methodologies, which helped me identify the best research approach to use to explore the local problem I identified. The research and project development processes enhanced my critical thinking, analysis, and communication skills.

Research Process

I learned that the research process requires a meticulous sequence of steps that must be followed to increase the validity and credibility of a study. Initially, identifying

one problem to focus on was difficult; however, after reading course textbooks, exploring scholarly literature, and receiving advice and feedback from my doctoral committee I was able to narrow my focus to an area that I am passionate about: professional development for teachers. I used qualitative methodology to explore the impact of district-provided PD on intermediate schoolteachers' classroom instruction and self-efficacy.

Using semistructured, face-to-face individual interviews and a focus group interview as the methods of data collection entailed having several interpersonal skills, such as emotional intelligence, active listening aptitude, empathy, positivity, and the ability to communicate clearly and effectively and to build trust. Allowing participants to share their experiences without interrupting or adding my thoughts and opinions to the conversation was difficult at times. Additionally, as I interviewed participants, I had to continually practice reflexivity, knowing that the process was critical to objectively collecting data and remaining aware of my personal biases.

Project Development

The process of developing the project deliverable required me to base my selection on the results of the study and supporting literature, not my personal preference. The findings indicated that the most appropriate project genre was a policy recommendation with detail. The 3-day PD genre was not suitable for this study because data indicated a systematic problem with district-provided PD that could not be effectively addressed via a short-term training. I did not consider a curriculum plan for this project study as that genre lends itself towards students learning academic content, and this study focused on developing and refining knowledge and skills for teachers. An

Evaluation Report was not applicable because an evaluation study was not the methodology used for data collection.

Growth as a Scholar

As a scholar, I have gained a deeper understanding of the effort, knowledge, and skills involved in the research process. This doctoral experience has taught me to view research studies and policy recommendations through a different lens. I have grown to be more analytical and investigative of scholarly articles I read, and now desire to understand the *why* and *how* behind other scholars' work.

Growth as a Practitioner

As a practitioner, I was able to implement the skills I learned about the research process. I am now proficient in the areas of locating credible, recent, and peer-reviewed literature; collecting, organizing, and analyzing data; and clearly and concisely reporting findings to various stakeholders. These skills will be invaluable as I conduct research in the future.

Growth as a Project Developer

Before this study, I had no background knowledge on the process of developing a policy recommendation with detail. Based upon the problem I explored, I initially thought the topic of PD would organically lend itself to the Professional Development project genre. However, after collecting and analyzing the data, and reviewing related literature, findings indicated that District A would benefit from a policy recommendation to address a systemic gap in practice. Creating a policy recommendation allowed me to

provide researched-based information to key decision makers about the need and value of creating a new district policy.

Leadership and Change

The research and project development process has helped me become a better leader in District A, PD provider, and scholarly researcher. Before entering the doctoral program, I knew about the importance of teachers constantly learning and growing professionally; however, I did not have any evidence to support my position at the time. Learning about constructivism, andragogy, and characteristics of effective PD, has allowed me grow professionally, and has provided a platform for me to share information and evidence-based professional strategies that are substantiated by other research studies.

Reflection on Importance of the Work

Recent reforms in education have illuminated the importance of continued PD for teachers, drawing parallels between teacher preparedness and student learning outcomes. Effective PD provides teachers with the knowledge and skills necessary to provide high-quality classroom instruction, which in turn can have a positive impact on student achievement. Due to a steady decline of student academic success at the local study site, a study exploring the impact of district-provided PD on intermediate teachers' classroom instruction and self-efficacy was warranted.

This study was important because it illustrated a need for teachers to receive effective PD that could elicit changes in practice. Findings indicated that teachers wanted PD that was content specific, offered at convenient days and times, topics that were not

repetitive, and was differentiated based upon years of experience. Additionally, teachers who were new to the profession needed different formats, topics, and quantities of PD in comparison to their more experienced colleagues, and District A should provide a structured and systematic process for providing PD that met the needs of teachers at various stages of their career.

Developing a policy recommendation was important because it offers suggestions that address the concerns identified in the results of the study. The policy recommendation proposes that District A create and adopt a new district policy that would require new teachers entering the profession to participate in a district-provided induction program for the first 2 years of their employment. This policy recommendation can offer guidance to major stakeholders for developing a policy that focuses on the needs of new teachers, and subsequently create an induction program that provides them (new teachers) with differentiated and sustained support as they transition from the classroom into the profession.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

This research study and corresponding policy recommendation have the potential to affect positive social change at the individual, organizational, policy, and societal levels. Results from the study indicate a need for District A to revise the current PD program to ensure it aligns to the characteristics of effective PD, and consider the needs of teachers when making district wide decisions regarding PD. Creating and adopting a district policy that would require new teachers to participate in a district-provided

induction program for the first 2 years of employment could be the first step in the revision process.

Social Change at the Individual Level

At the individual level, this project can impact positive social change by providing recommendations for a new district policy that will afford new teachers access to a program that will give them the sustained support and guidance needed to become successful practitioners. New teachers can benefit from attending an induction program because it would provide ongoing, content focused PD that is job-embedded and differentiated to meet each teacher's specific needs. The induction program can also encourage new teachers to be reflective practitioners and take ownership of their learning by identifying the areas they need additional training, support, and guidance. The intentionality of an induction program will provide the professional knowledge and skills new teachers need to be successful in the classroom and have a positive impact on student learning outcomes.

Social Change at the Organizational Level

At the organizational level, this project can impact positive social change by providing District A with evidence-based recommendations to make a systematic change to the current PD program. This systematic change can benefit all district stakeholders by targeting new teachers, as there will be a constant pipeline of novice educators due to veteran teacher retirement, promotion, or attrition. District-provided induction programs can have a positive impact on overall student achievement by offering focused and

effective PD for new teachers that can promote greater confidence in their capabilities, improve job satisfaction, increase productivity, and decrease attrition.

Social Change at the Policy Level

At the policy level, this project can impact positive social change by illustrating the importance and benefits of creating and adopting a district policy that would require new teachers to the profession to participate in an induction program for the first 2 years of employment. Currently, District A has no policy directly related to new teacher PD or induction programs. Creating this new policy would subsequently require District A to develop a new teacher induction program that provides the differentiated and sustained support new teachers need as they transition from the classroom into the profession.

Social Change at the Societal Level

At the societal level, this project can impact positive social change because, if developed and implemented effectively, the policy and subsequent new teacher induction program could serve as a model for other school districts to implement. New teachers entering the profession are not limited to District A, therefore participating in an induction program would be beneficial to new teachers beyond the local study site. Having a framework for a comprehensive induction program could assist other school districts in developing a program that would provide the differentiated and sustained support, and guidance new teachers need to be successful in the classroom.

Methodological Implications

Qualitative methodology was used for this study in which data was collected via semistructured face-to-face interviews with seven intermediate schoolteachers, and a

face-to-face focus group interview with an additional 10 intermediate schoolteachers. Qualitative study results are presented in a scholarly narrative form that provided a rich, thick description of the research process and findings (Merriam, 2009). The process of interviewing participants, transcribing the audio recordings of the interviews, analyzing, coding, and reporting the data was a difficult and lengthy process; however, the knowledge I gained through those experiences is invaluable.

Recommendations for Future Research

In this study, I focused on intermediate schoolteachers' perceptions about the impact of district-provided PD on their classroom instruction and self-efficacy. One recommendation for future research is to expand the population to include teachers at all grade levels (elementary, intermediate, middle, and high school). Another recommendation is to conduct a study on the impact of district-provided PD on teachers in specific areas (i.e., social studies, mathematics, art, etc.) classroom instruction. Future studies on those topics can add to the growing body of research concerning the relationships between PD practices and improved student learning outcomes.

Conclusion

Student achievement can be viewed as evidence of high-quality classroom instruction and recent reforms in public education has proposed that PD plays a significant role in determining the effectiveness of instruction. Providing teachers with effective PD opportunities can lead to improvements in instructional practices and increased student learning. The results from this study indicated that professional learning opportunities that were content-focused, job-embedded, provided new information, and

was differentiated based upon teachers' years of classroom experience could have a positive impact on classroom instruction and student learning outcomes. School districts should be intentional when developing, modifying, and/or revising PD policies and programs to ensure that teachers at various levels of their career receive the comprehensive and sustained support and guidance they need to be successful practitioners and agents of social change.

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Appendix A: The Project

Building Bridges Not Barriers: Creating a New Teacher Induction Program

A Policy Recommendation

by

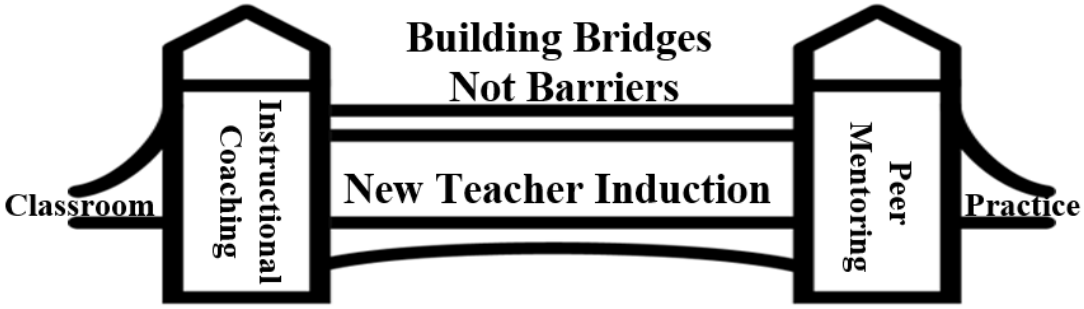
Gwendolyn Adams Lockett

Walden University

Executive Summary

The goal of this policy recommendation is to address the problems identified in the results of the study regarding professional development (PD) provided by District A. The purpose of the study was to explore intermediate schoolteachers' perceptions of the impact PD provided by District A had on their classroom instruction, as well as the impact these trainings had on their self-efficacy. Qualitative data was collected via semi structured face-to-face individual interviews with 10 intermediate schoolteachers, and a semi structured face-to-face focus group interview with an additional seven intermediate schoolteachers.

Findings indicated that district-provided PD was not effective in eliciting changes to the participants' teaching practices, thus the PD had no impact on their classroom instruction or self-efficacy. Participants conceded that the lack of impact was due to District A providing limited PD opportunities that directly related to the participants' content areas; PD was offered at times and days that were not convenient for participants to attend; the same topics of PD were repeated several times throughout the year; and the district did not provide PD that was differentiated based upon teachers' years of service. Participants collectively expressed a need for District A to provide a structured and systematic process for providing PD that met the needs of teachers at various stages of their career. Based upon the results of the study, and supporting literature, I recommend that District A create and adopt a district policy that would require all new teachers entering the profession to participate in an induction program during their first two years of employment in District A.



Background

High quality teaching and student learning requires educators to be well prepared and constantly supported throughout their career. Lack of training, resources, and support can have a negative impact on student achievement. The problem at the local study site, hereafter referred to as District A, was a steady decline in student achievement. For several years, students in District A have performed below the state averages in all content areas assessed by the state's high stakes testing program (Internal Document from TASA, 2018). Meissel et al., 2016 argued that when student achievement declines, schools have the responsibility to investigate the root cause of this issue.

In response to the deficiency in overall student achievement, the Board of Trustees in District A commissioned an external agency to conduct a Curriculum Audit™ to "reveal the extent to which officials and professional staff of a school district have developed and implemented a sound, valid, and operational system of curriculum management" (Internal Document from TASA, 2018, p. 1). One of the discrepancies identified in the Curriculum Audit™ pertained to the correlation between effective instruction and District A's current professional development (PD) program, stating "professional development, though abundant throughout the district, was found to be

loosely aligned to district priorities and inadequately monitored for implementation or evaluated for effectiveness" (Internal Document from TASA, 2018, p. 14). The gap in practice is the lack of evaluation regarding the impact PD provided by District A has on classroom instruction and student achievement.

Although District A provides a robust and diverse quantity of PD opportunities for teachers, several schools are still failing to meet minimum state standards, according to the district's Director of Accountability and 2017 academic performance data from the Texas Education Authority. An intermediate school in District A, hereafter referred to as Campus H, was identified as one of the schools with a significant percentage of students failing to meet grade level academic standards, according to the Texas Education Authority data. Administrators at Campus H expressed concerns that one of the factors contributing to the lack of student achievement was that District A does not provide effective PD that successfully elicits change in intermediate schoolteachers' instructional practices. according to the school's principal.

Effective Professional Development

Recent reformation in public education has been primarily focused on growing and developing teachers, as effective classroom instruction is a key factor in student academic growth (ESSA, 2015). The goal of PD is to grow the knowledge and skills necessary for teachers to provide high-quality instruction, and subsequently improve student achievement (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Through effective PD, teachers get the tools necessary to enhance their knowledge and develop or refine their instructional practices. Effective PD focuses on providing teachers with learning opportunities that

cultivates new knowledge, skills, values, and beliefs while reinforcing and enhancing pedagogical practices (Avidov-Ungar, 2016; Bates & Morgan, 2018; Desimone, 2009, 2018; Overstreet, 2017; Valiandes & Neophytou, 2018). Several research studies identified five core features of effective PD: (a) content focused, (b) incorporates active learning, (c) is coherent with school, district, and state reforms (d) has sustained duration, and (e) has collective participation (Desimone, 2009, 2018; Garet et al., 2016; Gore et al., 2017; Overstreet, 2017; Pak et al., 2020; Roth et al., 2019; Wahlgren et al., 2016; Valiandes & Neophytou, 2018). Researchers reported that professional learning opportunities that incorporated these core features had a positive impact on teachers' classroom instruction, pedagogy, and student achievement (Bates & Morgan, 2018; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Overstreet, 2017).

Research Design and Findings

The purpose of the study was to explore intermediate schoolteachers' perceptions of the impact PD provided by District A has on their classroom instruction, as well as the impact these trainings has on their self-efficacy. A qualitative research approach was used, and data was collected through semi structured face-to-face individual interviews with 10 intermediate schoolteachers, and a semi structured face-to-face focus group interview with an additional seven intermediate schoolteachers. The following questions guided the study:

- What are intermediate schoolteachers' perceptions about the impact of district-provided PD on their classroom instruction?

- What are intermediate schoolteachers' perceptions about the impact of district-provided PD on their self-efficacy?

Through data analysis of the individual interviews, four major categories were identified that answered the research question:

a) District A provided limited PD opportunities that directly related to the participants' content areas.

b) There were time/date conflicts for participants to attend district-provided PD.

c) The topics of PD provided by District A were repetitive.

d) District A did not provide differentiated PD for novice and veteran teachers.

These four categories were later validated by the focus group interview. Findings indicated that district-provided PD was not effective in eliciting changes to the participants' teaching practices, thus the PD had no impact on their classroom instruction or self-efficacy. Participants agreed that district-provided PD did not align to the characteristics of effective PD, and it did not help them improve their practice, increase student achievement, or meet their professional needs. Participants collectively expressed a need for District A to address these four areas and provide a structured and systematic process for providing PD that met the needs of teachers at various stages of their career.

New Teachers

In the context of this policy recommendation, new teachers are those entering the profession for the first time through a traditional teacher preparation program or an alternative teacher preparation or certification program. This policy recommendation targets new teachers because,

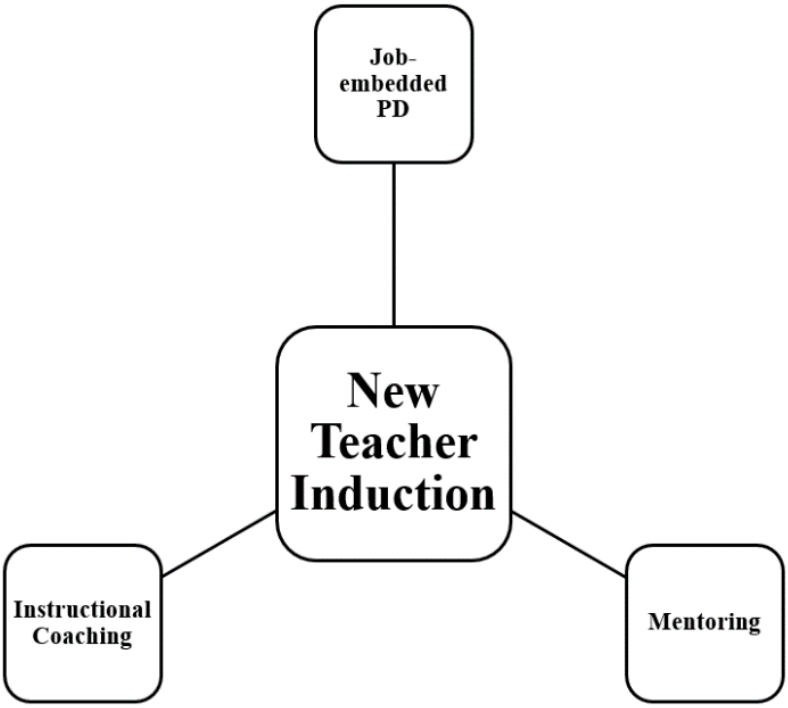
according to the U.S. Department of Education (2016), the demand for new teachers in the United States is less than the supply. Over the next 10 years, this gap in teacher availability is projected to widen due to the steady increase of the population of students entering U.S. schools; however, the supply of teachers will continue to decrease due to retirement, promotion, or attrition (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018; Hussar & Bailey, 2017).

To address the teacher shortage, school districts must hire new teachers from traditional teacher preparation programs or alternative teacher preparation/certification programs (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Regardless of the path new teachers take to the classroom, districts must ensure they (new teachers) are effectively prepared and supported when they enter the profession (Van Overschelde & Wiggins, 2020). One method that District A can use to successfully offer the differentiated PD and extensive support new teachers need is through the creation of a new teacher induction program.

As a novice, the first few years of a teacher's career are considered the most formative and school districts should provide the PD, resources, and support new teachers need as they make the transition from preparation to practice (Kutsyuruba, 2020). Failure to provide the needed support and PD for new teachers could lead to errors in practice, obstacles to student achievement, or high teacher attrition (Ardley et al., 2020). Podolsky et al. (2019) argued that the quantity and quality of training and support school districts offer to new teachers can determine if they (new teachers) will grow into highly competent practitioners - or develop ineffective instructional practices or leave the

profession. Scholars have suggested that new teacher induction is one approach school districts can take to provide the extensive and on-going support new teachers need during their first few years in the profession (Bastian & Marks, 2017; Kini & Podolsky, 2016).

Induction Programs



Induction "is the name given to a comprehensive, coherent, and sustained professional development process that is organized by a school district to train, support, and retain new teachers, which then seamlessly progresses them into a lifelong learning program" (Wong, 2005, p. 43). Induction programs should offer a variety of PD activities for new teachers including job-embedded PD, instructional coaching, and mentoring and feedback from veteran teachers (Carver-Thomas, 2018; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). A

quality teacher induction program provides clearly communicated goals and has a structured and nurturing system of PD and support for new teachers can result in higher retention rates, accelerated professional growth, and improved student learning (Bastian & Marks, 2017; Wong, 2005).

Providing a high quality induction program would address the four concerns about district-provided PD that emerged from the data. To begin with, there would be no time and date conflict for new teachers to attend PD, as it would be job-embedded. Also, instructional coaches would provide content focused and differentiated PD that would be specific to the needs of the new teachers they were working with. Furthermore, the PD topics provided would be based upon the areas of need new teachers identify as they work with their instructional coaches and mentors; therefore, PD would be personalized, and repetitive topics would be solely based on new teachers' request, not lack of availability.

According to Ronfeldt and McQueen (2017), state, district, and school policymakers have increasingly begun creating and requiring induction programs for new teachers. Although induction programs are becoming more common, Martin et al. (2016) found that less than 1% of new teachers participate in them. New teachers that participate in an induction program during their first few years are shown how to systematically transition into the profession and are more likely to become and remain effective teachers over time (Bastian & Marks, 2017; Bowden & Portis-Woodson, 2017; Redding & Nguyen, 2020). Providing a focused and effective induction program for new teachers

can have a positive impact on their classroom instruction, self-efficacy, retention rates, and ultimately increase student achievement (Horn, 2018; Khanam et al. (2020).

Job-embedded PD

Job-embedded PD is one component of an effective teacher induction program (Carver-Thomas, 2018; Flores, 2019; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Campbell et al. (2016) described job-embedded PD as "professional learning that is practical for teachers, is personalized to their learning needs, relevant to their instructional and classroom practices and contributes to valued student outcomes" (p. 221). Job-embedded PD involves teachers collaborating, identifying areas in which they need additional training and support, and making decisions throughout the process about the best methods to address those specific professional learning needs (Cavazos et al., 2018). Additionally, job-embedded PD is school-based or classroom-based, is provided during teachers' contract hours, and embedded into existing procedures and practices (Dennis & Hemmings, 2019). New teachers to the profession can benefit from an induction program that includes job-embedded PD, as this allows them (new teachers) to remain actively involved in the process of recognizing and addressing the areas in which they need additional training and support (Semon et al., 2020).

The goal of job-embedded PD is to provide teachers with the knowledge, training and learning styles best suited for their individual needs (Owens et al., 2016). Additionally, through job-embedded PD, new teachers can immediately incorporate the new content learned into their work (Wiedow, 2018). Pacchiano et al. (2016) argue that

consistent and collaborative job-embedded PD, which is supported, facilitated, and sustained by school leaders, is effective in changing and improving teacher practice and sustaining student achievement.

Instructional Coaching

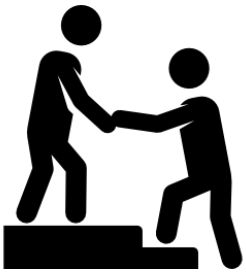
Instructional coaching is another strategy that school districts are utilizing during new teacher induction and ongoing job-embedded professional learning (Desimone & Pak, 2018). Policymakers are increasing mandating instructional coaching programs for new teachers to build their competence and promote individual and systematic instructional change (Woulfin & Rigby, 2017). Instructional coaching is a sustainable form of professional learning that will likely lead to improved classroom instruction and increased student achievement (Connor, 2017).

Instructional coaches are experienced educators that have proven to be well versed in their subject matter, collecting and analyzing teacher and student-level data to identify strengths and weaknesses, targeting areas in need of improvement, and measuring student achievement (Crawford et al., 2017). Instructional coaches provide focused assistance and on-the-job training to teachers in need of additional support (Vikaraman et al., 2017). Instructional coaches strive to increase teacher effectiveness and improve student-learning outcomes (Kraft et al., 2018; Kurz et al., 2017).

Instructional coaching is deemed a valuable tool for ongoing, coherent, and collaborative PD because coaches provide the onsite training and support new teachers need to be successful in the classroom (Hammond & Moore, 2018). Effective

instructional coaching for new teachers includes guidance in areas of pedagogy, instructional techniques, and content knowledge (Vikaraman et al., 2017). Instructional coaching focuses on new teachers' professional growth and development, whereas mentoring focuses on their personal growth and development, such as their self-efficacy, social-emotional well-being, and self-confidence (Vikaraman et al., 2017). There are some facets of instructional coaching and mentoring that overlap; however, instructional coaching tends to focus on building new teachers' content knowledge and developing effective classroom practices, whereas mentoring leans toward cultivating interpersonal relationships and meeting the social and emotional needs of new teachers.

Mentoring



Mentoring is another essential part of the induction process; however, mentoring and induction are not the same and these terms cannot be used interchangeably or synonymously (Wong, 2005). Induction is an ongoing and collective process for new teachers, and mentoring is one facet of that process (Wong, 2005). Mentoring involves pairing a veteran teacher, who have consistently demonstrated effective classroom instruction as evidenced by performance appraisals and student achievement data, with a new teacher to provide the encouragement, professional and personal guidance, feedback and support they (new teachers) need during the first few years in the classroom (Vikaraman et al., 2017; Weisling & Gardiner, 2018; Zembytska, 2016).

Effective mentoring programs help pave the way for new teachers to make a successful transition into the profession (Curtis & Taylor, 2018). Hong and Matsko (2019) asserted,

> Mentoring needs to comprehensively address an array of areas essential to the development of new teachers, from strengthening classroom management skills to deepening instructional repertoires, and also to include information about school and district policies and contexts, rather than focus on a single area (pp. 2376-2377).

When school districts incorporate mentoring into their induction program, new teachers are more likely to have greater confidence in their capabilities, improved job satisfaction, increased productivity, and decreased attrition (Daresh, 2002; Howe, 2006; Sparks et al., 2017).

Policy Recommendations

Based upon the results of the study, and supporting literature, I recommend District A take the following actions:

1. **Create and Adopt a New District Policy**

   This policy would require all new teachers entering the profession to participate in an induction program during their first two years of employment in District A. Currently, District A has one policy that relates to PD, which only specifies the number of PD hours all teachers must acquire to meet annual appraisal requirements. Adopting this new board policy could demonstrate District A's commitment to continually develop the professional

knowledge and skills new teachers need to be successful in the classroom, increase new teachers' self-efficacy, and reduce new teacher attrition.

2. **Develop a New Teacher Induction Program**

   Adopting a new policy that would require new teachers to attend an induction program would also entail developing a new teacher program in District A. New teacher induction programs provide the resources, guidance, and differentiated support new teachers need during their first few years in the classroom, which would be beneficial to their (new teachers') and students' success. District A's new teacher induction program would incorporate job-embedded PD, instructional coaching, and peer mentoring.

3. **Fund the New Teacher Induction Program**

   Developing the new teacher induction program would require additional human and financial resources. District A receives Title II, Part A funds from the federal government, which can be used to establish and support high quality educator induction and mentorship programs. Allocating the funds needed to hire, train, and provide the tools and resources needed for additional personnel will be vital to the successful establishment, implementation, and maintenance of the program.

4. **Staff the New Teacher Induction Program**

   Developing and sustaining a comprehensive induction program would require District A to hire additional personnel at the executive, management, and operational levels. At the executive level, District A would need to add the

Executive Director of Teacher Induction position. At the managerial level, a Director of New Teacher Instructional Coaching, and a Director of New Teacher Mentoring District A would be needed. The operational level would require Instructional Coaches and new teacher mentors. These personnel will be critical to the systematic process of analyzing, designing, developing, implementing, and evaluating a comprehensive new teacher induction program.

5. Implement the New Teacher Induction Program

The design and development of the induction program would be completed by June 2022 and implemented beginning August 2022 for the 2022-2023 academic year. A suggested timetable for implementation of the new teacher induction program is illustrated below.

Timetable for Implementation

Action	Anticipated Completion Date
Create and adopt board policy for new teacher induction program	September 2021
Hire Executive Director of New Teacher Induction	October 2021
Hire Director of Instructional Coaches and Director of New Teacher Mentoring	December 2021
Design a comprehensive new teacher induction program	February 2022
Develop a new teacher induction handbook	March 2022
Select an instructional coaching framework	March 2022
Hire and train new teacher Instructional Coaches	April 2022
Select a new teacher mentoring framework	May 2022
Complete development of new teacher induction program	June 2022
Recruit and train veteran teachers to serve as mentors	Beginning July 2022 - Ongoing
Implement the new teacher induction program	August 2022

6. **Monitor the New Teacher Induction Program**

   Upon implementing the new teacher induction program, District A must create a continuous, systematic process for monitoring the program to ensure that it is implemented correctly and with fidelity. Program monitoring will be essential in determining how well the new teacher induction program is performing. Ongoing monitoring will also assist in identifying any areas of the program that are not achieving desired outcomes and determine whether any adjustments to the program are needed.

7. **Evaluate the New Teacher Induction Program**

   I recommend that District A use both an implementation evaluation and the summative evaluation for the new teacher induction program.

   a. The implementation evaluation will assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the implementation and delivery of the program. The purpose of the implementation evaluation is to identify what is working well and opportunities for improvement.

   b. The summative evaluation will assess the overall success of the program. The purpose of the summative evaluation is to determine the impact of the new teacher induction program, including whether it has met its intended outcomes.

Policy Recommendation Goals

The goals of this policy recommendation are to:

- Share the existing problem that prompted the study, and a summary of the results of the study.

- Explain the reasoning for selecting the targeted group (new teachers) that will be impacted the most by the policy recommendation.

- Communicate the benefits of creating and adopting a new district policy that would require all new teachers entering the professional to participate in a new teacher induction program for the first two years of employment.

- Provide major evidence from the research that supports the development of a new teacher induction program.

- Describe the components of a comprehensive new teacher induction program, along with the resources and support needed to develop and sustain the program.

- Share a plan for development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the new teacher induction program.

The suggestions presented in this policy recommendation detail the rationale and benefits of developing and adopting a district policy that would require new teachers entering the profession to participate in an induction program for the first two years of employment. This new policy would then necessitate the creation of an induction program for new teachers to participate in. A comprehensive induction program will provide the sustained and differentiated support, resources, and guidance new teachers need as they transition into the profession. The new teacher induction program would benefit all stakeholders in District A by building new teachers' capacity, enhancing their classroom instruction, reducing new teacher attrition, and most importantly increasing student achievement.

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Appendix B: Individual Interview Protocol

Intermediate Schoolteachers' Perceptions of the Impact of Professional Development on Their Classroom Instruction

Time:

Date:

Facilitator: Gwendolyn Adams Lockett

Interview Length: 1-hour

Facilitator's Statement:

Before we start, I would like to explain what we will be doing during the interview, which will take no longer than 1-hour, as well as answer any questions you might have. This interview is a part of the data I am collecting for a research study.

The purpose of this research study is to learn about intermediate classroom teachers' experiences with professional development provided by the school district, and how those trainings have impacted their classroom instruction. [redacted] has not requested nor funded this research study.

With your permission, I would like to audio-record our interview, as it will help me better focus on our conversation [pause for response; if the subjects say no, then the interview will not be recorded].

Please note that you do not have to answer every question. This interview will be kept strictly confidential and your identity will remain anonymous when I write-up the results of the study.

Upon completion of the study all records that contain personal identifiers will be permanently destroyed after 5 years per Walden University policy. Any questions before we begin?

Demographic Questions (2 minutes):

1. How many years have you been teaching?
2. How many years have you been an intermediate schoolteacher?
3. What is your highest level of education?

Warm-Up Questions (5 - 10 minutes)

1. What do you believe is the purpose of professional development (PD)?

2. What type(s) of professional development do you usually attend (online, face-to-face, hybrid)?

3. What is your primary reason for attending PD (i.e. professional growth, licensure mandates, or annual appraisal)?

Main Questions: (40-50 minutes)

1. What types of PD provided by [redacted] did you attend during the 2018-2019 academic year?

2. What is the reason(s) you chose to attend those specific PD sessions?

3. What did you learn from those PD sessions?

4. How did you implement your new learning into your classroom instruction?

5. What impact did those PD sessions have on your classroom instruction?

6. What impact did those PD sessions have on your self-efficacy? Self-efficacy refers to the belief that you could implement your new learning into your classroom instruction, not whether or not you were able to do so.

7. What impact did those PD sessions have on your students' achievement?

8. Is there additional information you would like to share regarding district provided PD?

Closing:

Thank you very much for participating in this study. I appreciate your taking the time to talk with me.

I will return the transcripts of this interview to you for review before I analyze and report the results.

The results from this study will reported in my final doctoral study and published via ProQuest.

Appendix C: Focus Group Interview Protocol

Intermediate Schoolteachers' Perceptions of the Impact of Professional Development on Their Classroom Instruction

Time:

Date:

Facilitator: Gwendolyn Adams Lockett

Interview Length: 1-hour

Facilitator's Statement:

Before we begin, I would like to explain what we will be doing during the interview, which will take no longer than 1-hour, as well as answer any questions you might have. This interview is a part of the data I am collecting for a research study.

The purpose of this research study is to learn about intermediate classroom teachers' experiences with professional development provided by the school district, and how those trainings have impacted their classroom instruction. [redacted] has not requested nor funded this research study.

With your permission, I would like to audio-record our interview, as it will help me better focus on our conversation [pause for response; if the subjects say no, then the interview will not be recorded].

The focus group interview will consist of a collective interview, thus all participants will know the identity and responses of one another. Though participating in a focus group interview is not anonymous, I will make every effort to keep your identities hidden as far as I can. I will assign pseudonyms to all participants, and of anyone they mention, when utilizing any direct quotes in the analysis of information.

This interview will take approximately one hour to complete.

The interview questions will inquire about the types of professional development you attended, along with the impact those trainings had on your classroom instruction, self-efficacy, and student achievement.

Please note that you do not have to answer every question. This interview will be kept strictly confidential and your identities will remain anonymous when I write-up the results of the study.

Upon completion of the study all records that contain personal identifiers will be permanently destroyed after 5 years per Walden University policy.

Ground Rules

I would like to establish some ground rules before we the start the interview:

- My role is a facilitator and I will be guiding the discussion. I will also be taking notes throughout the interview.
- I ask that you please turn off, or silence, your cellphone during this interview. If you cannot, or must respond to a call, please do so as quietly as possible and rejoin us as quickly as you can.
- Please do not repeat any information discussed, nor share the names of any other group members, once the interview is completed.
- Please remain on a first name basis.
- Please talk to one another and do not interrupt other participants when they are speaking.
- Please be cognizant of your talk time as to allow all of the group members the opportunity to contribute to the discussion.
- There are no right or wrong answers, only differing points of view. You do not need to agree with others, but you must listen respectfully as others share their views.

Any there questions before we begin?

Demographic Questions: Purpose - to identify any trends amongst participants (2 minutes):
****Each participant will be asked to provide this information****

1. How many years have you been teaching?
2. How many years have you been an intermediate schoolteacher?
3. What is your highest level of education?

Warm-Up Questions (5 - 10 minutes)
****Each participant will be asked to provide this information****

1. How would you define the purpose of professional development (PD)?
2. What modes of professional development do you usually attend (online, face-to-face, hybrid)?
3. What is your primary reason to attend PD (i.e. professional growth, licensure mandates, or annual appraisal)?

Main Questions: (40-50 minutes)

1. What modes of PD provided by [redacted] did you attend during the 2018-2019 academic year?
2. Which PD sessions were most helpful? Elaborate.
3. Which PD sessions were least helpful? Elaborate.
4. How were you able to implement content from PD sessions into your classroom?
5. What impact, if any, did PD sessions attended have on your classroom instruction?
6. What impact, if any, did PD sessions attended have on your self-efficacy? Self-efficacy refers to the belief that you could implement your new learning into your classroom instruction, not whether or not you were able to do so.
7. What impact, if any, did PD sessions attended have on your students' achievement?
8. What are your perceptions about differentiating PD based upon teachers' years of service?
9. What do you believe is the relationship between district provided PD and teachers' annual performance appraisal?
10. What are some challenges preventing you from attending district provided PD?
11. What types of PD could the district provide that would be of interest to you?

Closing:

Thank you very much for participating in this study. I appreciate your taking the time to talk with me.

I will return the transcripts of this interview to each of you to review for accuracy before I analyze and report the results. This process will take approximately 15 minutes.

The results from this study will reported in my final doctoral study and published via ProQuest.