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Elementary Principal Leadership Practices to Enhance Academic Achievement of English Language Learners

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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MA, College of Notre Dame of Maryland, 2000

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

English Language Learners (ELLs) struggle in many schools in the United States. Instructional leaders and their communities need greater understanding of the leadership practices of principals that can enhance the achievement of ELLs. The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to examine the leadership practices that elementary principals used to increase the achievement of ELLs in their schools. The conceptual framework that grounded this study was culturally responsive school leadership. The two research questions were designed to explore the leadership practices employed by principals to increase the achievement of the ELL population at their schools. Eight elementary principals from one urban school district in the Eastern United States, each of whom had a minimum of 3 years' experience at the same school and led an elementary school with an ELL population of 50% or higher, participated in this study. Data were collected through semistructured interviews and from archival documents from school meetings. A combination of a priori coding and open was used to elicit categories and themes. Findings indicated that building the capacity of the organization and its teachers and of the community and its families helped principals address challenges. Focusing on students through monitoring instruction and learning was another useful leadership practice identified in the findings. It is recommended that principals provide instructional support for teachers and collaborate in monitoring student learning and progress to improve the instructional program and enhance the achievement of ELLs. By enhancing professional development and fostering more community interaction and support, school leaders may be able to help ELLs be more successful, both in the classroom and in their later life.

Elementary Principals' Leadership Practices to Increase Academic Achievement of English Language Learners

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

English Language Learners (ELLs) are the fastest growing student population in the United States, and their enrollment is expected to continue to increase by 1% by 2030 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). ELLs are those students whose primary language is not English. As English is not their primary language, they are faced with the challenge of learning academic content in English while acquiring a new language at the same time (Munguia, 2017). Having to concurrently learn academic content and English may adversely affect ELLs' learning outcomes.

ELLs consistently underperform academically when compared to their native speaking peers, students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged students, and students from major racial and ethnic groups (Garcia, 2015). The National Assessment of Educational Progress—the largest assessment of what U.S. students know in the content areas of mathematics, reading, science, writing, the arts, civics, economics, geography, U.S. history, technology, and engineering—reported a significant gap in Grade 4 reading scores between ELLs and their non-ELL peers between 2007 and 2017 (Office of English Language Acquisition [OELA], 2018). The National Assessment of Educational Progress also reported a mathematics performance gap between Grade 4 ELLs and non-ELLs between 2007 and 2017 (OELA, 2018). U.S. students who do not learn English perform poorly in school and beyond; early achievement gaps between ELLs and their native English-speaking peers can lead to lower educational attainment, research shows (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016). Because they are achieving at a lower rate than their non-

ELL peers, there is a critical need for elementary school leaders to focus on this student population (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Garcia, 2015).

The principal's role is central to improving student achievement and overall school effectiveness (Corcoran, 2017). However, addressing the academic needs of ELLs has been a challenge for elementary school principals because of a lack of appropriate knowledge and training (Padron & Waxman, 2016). Effectively supporting the learning of ELLs is important because when ELLs achieve academically at the elementary level, it can secure their prospects in postsecondary education (Elfers & Stritikus, 2014) and later in the workforce, which has a potential positive influence on their health and well-being (Mitchell, 2017). Hence, it is important to understand how elementary school principals can overcome challenges to increase the achievement of ELLs (DeMatthews, 2015).

In this exploratory case study, I examined how participating principals overcame challenges to increase the achievement of ELLs. Understanding the leadership practices that these principals used might reveal strategies that other educational leaders can use to increase the achievement of ELLs. Doing so may bolster these students' academic, social, and emotional outcomes and also further the well-being of their families and community. In addition, the study may contribute new knowledge to the field of educational research.

In this chapter, I present the problem and purpose of the study, which was to explore the leadership practices of principals working in an urban district with an ELL population of 50% or higher. Participants had a minimum of 3 years of experience at the same school. The study was structured around answering two research questions (RQs). To answer the RQs, I conducted semistructured interviews with the participants. In

addition, I performed an archival data review of the participants' staff meeting and leadership team minutes to identify their school's targeted focus, directives, and/or dialogue regarding ELLs. The minutes were reviewed to identify which strategies participating principals elevated and discussed during their meetings with staff who focus on ELLs. Data were transcribed, coded, and analyzed for themes. The chapter also includes information on the conceptual framework; definitions of key terms particular to this study, and discussion of the assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance of this study.

Background

Title III is a part of the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965, which obligates U.S. state and local educational agencies to provide all children, regardless of immigration status, with equal access to public education at the elementary and secondary levels. Title III's goal is to ensure that ELLs attain English language proficiency and meet state academic standards (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, n.d.). Title III legislation requires educators to identify best practices to improve the achievement of ELLs in schools. The Supreme Court decision of *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) mandated that school systems grant all students, including ELLs, the same opportunities to obtain an education. This decision explained that ELLs were to be given access to the necessary educational tools, inclusive of provisions for the attainment of English proficiency, to be successful in the acquisition of their education.

Today, the United States has the largest migrant population in the world, which includes more than 40 million foreign-born people in the country (Moreno-Recio et al.,

2018). As such, schools have seen an influx of students who require language assistance to attain English proficiency and master requisite academic content and achievement standards (Moreno-Recio et al., 2018). States require school systems to improve English language proficiency under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 as a metric under the state's school accountability system (Moreno-Recio et al., 2018). Researchers contend that the elementary school principal should create equitable conditions for ELLs, such as fostering an inclusive school environment, which could lead to an increase in their academic achievement.

Johnson (2014) stated that principals who promote an inclusive school environment for ELLs emphasize high expectations for student achievement. These expectations include the history, values, and cultural knowledge of students' home community in the school curriculum. Principals challenge the inequities for ELLs in the larger society, and they create organizational structures at their schools to empower ELL students and their families to close the educational gap between ELLs and their native speaking peers. The expectation that they will create equitable conditions for ELLs has left principals to their own devices to determine the leadership practices that they can use to increase the achievement of ELLs (Bagwell, 2019). In addition to knowledge of effective leadership practices, principals of elementary schools with an ELL population need to understand ELLs and how they learn (Moreno-Recio et al., 2018).

The challenge for elementary school principals is the gap in the literature on the leadership practices that can be used to increase the achievement of ELLs. Although research exists regarding the instructional strategies employed by teachers to support

ELLs (Elfers & Stritikus, 2014), there is a minimal understanding of the leadership practices employed by principals to increase the achievement of the ELL population at their schools. This study is relevant because principals continue to encounter challenges when seeking to improve the academic achievement of ELLs in their schools (Elfers & Stritikus, 2014).

Problem Statement

The research problem is a minimal understanding of the leadership practices employed by principals to overcome challenges and increase the achievement of the ELL population at their schools. To be successful in school, ELLs must simultaneously acquire English language proficiency and achieve academically across content areas to fully participate in school with their native-English speaking peers (Fenner & Segota, 2016). However, the expectation of learning English and achieving academically has been difficult for ELLs as they are struggling to meet the requirements for academic success in schools (Mitchell, 2017).

Although an important role of the elementary principal is to foster an instructional environment that supports increased achievement of all students, increased achievement for ELLs has been challenging. Some principals do not understand the leadership practices necessary to respond to or identify the academic needs of their ELL population (DeMatthews & Izquierdo, 2017). Because of this minimum understanding of theory and research on how ELLs acquire a second language, these principals experience challenges with identifying the academic needs of ELLs. This fundamental understanding would allow principals to analyze and reframe how their school addresses the educational needs

of ELLs (Theoharis, 2007). The challenge for elementary school principals is the gap in the literature on how principals can provide leadership in their schools to increase the achievement of ELLs.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to understand how principals use leadership practices to overcome challenges and increase the achievement of the ELL population at their schools. In an Eastern U.S. state, all students, including ELLs, are assessed annually in the core subjects of English language arts and mathematics with the expectation that ELLs demonstrate progress in achieving English language proficiency. In the study state, educational leaders use a proficiency level growth-to-target model to measure ELLs' progress toward English language proficiency. The growth-to-target model is based on the overall proficiency level earned on the state assessment for English language proficiency, the state department of education noted in its online guide to interpreting the 2019 state report card.

The Progress in Achieving English Language Proficiency indicator measures ELL students' meaningful growth toward or attainment of English language proficiency. Each school can earn points on their ESSA Report Card for Progress in Achieving English Language Proficiency. The points are determined by the percentage of English learners achieving or making progress toward attaining proficiency, according to report card metrics on the state department of education website.

Elementary ELLs in the research district met the state's annual target as they earned 6.4 points out of 10 points for the Progress in Achieving English Language

Proficiency indicator for the 2018-2019 school year, as indicated by the state's 2019 Report Card, but they did not demonstrate improvement. ELLs in the two school districts surrounding the research district met the state's annual target, but they also did not demonstrate improvement as they earned 7.1 points out of 10 points and 6.9 points out of 10 points, respectively, for the Progress in Achieving English Language Proficiency indicator on the state's report card. The research state expects ELLs to attain English language proficiency within 6 years, which means there is a sense of urgency for elementary school principals to understand and employ leadership strategies to meet the needs of ELLs in their schools (McGee et al., 2015). The data in the research district show that ELLs are making progress; however, they are not demonstrating improvement to allow them to access the standard grade-level curriculum to move through elementary school. The study goals were exploratory, seeking to understand how elementary principals overcame challenges to increase the achievement of ELLs and what leadership practices principals used to increase the achievement of ELLs.

Research Questions

Research shows that principals have an indirect influence on student achievement through the assignment of teachers and the instructional cultures that teachers create (Printy, 2010). There is an abundance of research identifying the importance of effective leadership for teaching and learning, but there is a paucity of research regarding the leadership needed to increase the achievement of ELLs (McGee et al., 2015). The guiding questions for this exploratory study focused on the leadership practices of elementary principals with a minimum of 3 years of experience at the same school in an Eastern

state. These principals led schools with an ELL population of 50% or higher and employed leadership strategies associated with increasing the achievement of ELLs. I sought to answer the following RQs in the study:

RQ1. How do elementary school principals overcome the challenges at their schools to improve the academic achievement of ELLs?

RQ2. What leadership practices do elementary principals use to increase the academic achievement of ELLs?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL), which was born from the frameworks of culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and culturally responsive (Gay, 1994) pedagogies. CRSL encompasses the leadership theories of anti-oppressive (Gooden & Dantley, 2012; Kumashiro, 2000), transformative leadership (Dantley & Tillman, 2006; Shields, 2010), and social justice leadership (Bogotch, 2002; Theoharis, 2007). Although anti-oppressive, transformative, and social justice leadership focus on liberating and resisting the oppression of minoritized and culturally unique students, CRSL is liberatory, anti-oppressive, and affirmative (Khalifa et al., 2016). CRSL attempts to identify and institutionalize practices that affirm Indigenous and authentic cultural practices of students (Khalifa et al., 2016). CRSL does not solely focus on teaching, but the purpose is to ensure that the entire school environment is responsive to the educational needs of minoritized or culturally unique students (Khalifa et al., 2016). CRSL asserts that there are actual behaviors of principals that have a direct impact on school climate, curriculum, policy, pedagogy, and

student achievement (Khalifa et al., 2016). The process has spurred education reform in the United States (Khalifa et al., 2016).

Principals across the United States are confronted with the changing demographics in the nation's classrooms as the ELL population continues to grow (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010), thus requiring principals to use leadership practices that will help them address the academic needs of ELLs (de Lourdes Viloria, 2019). Khalifa et al. (2016) acknowledged that the school principal is the most identifiable leadership position in the school and the position most authorized by the school district, state, and policy makers to make decisions on behalf of students. As such, state accountability mandates influence school principals and their practices (de Lourdes Viloria, 2019), and those same mandates hold the principal as the most accountable for the lack of student progress (Khalifa et al., 2016).

I grounded this study in the tenets of CRSL. The tenets of the CRSL framework includes (a) critical self-awareness, (b) culturally responsive curricula and teacher preparation, (c) culturally responsive and inclusive school environments, and (d) engaging students and families in community contexts (Khalifa et al., 2016). As I further discuss in Chapter 2, CSRL provides a tool that principals may be able to use as they strive to meet and exceed the state accountability mandates to increase the achievement for their ELL population.

Nature of the Study

I conducted a qualitative case study to explore the leadership practices employed by elementary principals to increase the achievement of the ELL population at their

schools. The exploratory case study research design was chosen to understand how elementary principals overcame challenges to increase the achievement of ELLs. Specifically, I wanted to identify what leadership practices they used to do so. In qualitative research, the researcher must create an environment that allows for a closeness to the participants' lived experiences without the creation of a power differential (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The researcher must ensure that the methodology of the study, specifically how the researcher interacts with the participants, assists with valid data collection (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

For this study, the participants included eight elementary principals who had served a minimum of 3 years in the same elementary school with an ELL population of 50% or higher. I collected and analyzed two forms of data. These included semistructured recorded interviews with open-ended questions that I conducted with participants and archival data from the staff meeting and leadership team meeting minutes from the participants' schools. I designed the interview questions to identify (a) the challenges that elementary school principals encounter in seeking to improve the achievement of ELLs and (b) the leadership practices that principals provide that could increase the academic achievement of ELLs. The coding process began with inductive coding of interview data reflective of the four tenets of CRSL framework (see Creswell, 2012). Thematic analysis was used to develop themes to answer the RQs (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Definitions

In this study, I use the following terms:

Critical self-awareness: A school leader's awareness of their self and their values, beliefs, and/or dispositions when serving poor children of color (Khalifa et al., 2016).

Culturally responsive and inclusive school environments: A school context in which there is an emphasis on inclusivity of culturally diverse, linguistically diverse, and marginalized students (Dantley & Tillman, 2006; Riehl, 2009; Ryan, 2006).

Culturally responsive curricula and teacher preparation: School leaders' articulation of a vision that supports the development and sustenance of culturally responsive teaching (Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Khalifa et al., 2016).

Culturally responsive school leadership (*CRSL*): Those leadership philosophies, practices, and policies that create inclusive schooling environments for students and families from ethnically and culturally diverse backgrounds (Johnson & Fuller, 2017).

Engaging students and families in community contexts: The school leader's ability to understand, address, and advocate for community-based issues as well as the ability to create structures that accommodate the lives of families and creating school spaces for marginalized student identities (Khalifa, 2012; Khalifa et al., 2016; Walker, 2009).

English Learner (*EL*): "A student who communicates in a language other than English; or comes from an environment where a language other than English is dominant; or whose family uses a primary language other than English in the home; and whose English language proficiency falls within the range established by the state for an English language development program" (p. 1), as noted in the administrative procedures for ELL students on the county public school's website.

English Language Learner (*ELL*): A person who has enough difficulty speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language to be denied the opportunity to learn successfully in classrooms where the primary language of instruction is English or to participate fully in the larger U.S. society (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d., English Language Learner [ELL] definition).

English for Speakers of Other Languages (*ESOL*): The name of the language acquisition program in the local school district.

Assumptions

An assumption of this study was that the elementary principals who agreed to participate in this study truthfully and candidly answered the interview questions about their experiences providing leadership to increase the achievement of ELLs in their schools. In qualitative research, the researcher must assume that participants are truthful in their responses (Wargo, 2015). I made this assumption because the open-ended interview questions were structured to provide participants the opportunity to reflect on their leadership practices.

Scope and Delimitations

This study involved eight elementary principals in an urban school district in an Eastern U.S. state with a minimum of 3 years of experience at the same school who are leading efforts to increase the achievement of the ELL population at their schools. This study was delimited in two ways. First, elementary principals with fewer than 3 years of experience at the same school were excluded, as these principals were new to the principalship at the elementary school. Their influence and familiarity with the ELL

program may not be observable. Second, this study was not designed to assess the leadership practices of principals who lead schools without an ELL population.

Ravitch and Carl (2016) defined transferability as the degree to which qualitative results are applicable to other settings or samples. In this study, I sought to achieve transferability by ensuring that the research protocols and qualitative procedures were clear throughout the study. Doing so may enable other researchers to study this phenomenon under different circumstances. Transferability was established by the purposeful random selection of the elementary principal population in the research district to provide a rich participant group. The last procedure to ensure transferability is describing the setting, population, and situation in the findings. I used the inductive approach to analyze data. This approach allows for the transfer of aspects of the study into different contextual factors (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Limitations

Dusick (2015) identified limitations as those aspects of the study over which the researcher has no control. This qualitative case study had some limitations due to the nature of the study, the design of the study, the small sample size, and the local nature of the sample. One limitation was that individual principals have the agency to determine the actions needed to increase the achievement of ELLs at their schools, as there is no specific district initiative or policy. Thus, individual principals may have made programmatic decisions regarding the achievement of ELLs based on information specific to their individual schools, and those programmatic decisions may not transfer to all school settings.

Another limitation of the study may be the participating principals' social desirability bias as they may have inaccurately reported their beliefs related to educating ELLs to be seen in a positive light by me as the researcher (Bergen & Labonté, 2020). To mitigate these issues, I accepted all responses. I also phrased the interview questions in a manner to signify the acceptability of answering in a socially undesirable way (see Bergen & Labonté, 2020). Purposeful sampling was used to select elementary principals for the study. Measures were taken to mitigate bias in this study by providing participants with the appropriate releases and acknowledgments before interviews and completing each interview in a uniform matter to ensure consistency. Additionally, I sought to analyze all collected data with a clear and unbiased mind; in conducting the study, I was aware of the influence that the researcher may have on the study and, simultaneously, of how the research process affects the researcher (Mackieson et al., 2019). To ensure accuracy, I recorded, transcribed, and reviewed the participant interviews prior to data analysis.

Significance

The problem of minimal achievement of ELLs is significant as ELLs continue to underperform academically in schools across the United States. As schools continue to enroll large numbers of ELLs, principals need to understand what leadership strategies they can use to address the needs of these language learners. The nature of the principal's work to increase the achievement of ELLs is important to the long-term success of students because ELLs are less likely to perform well on standardized tests, graduate

from high school, attend and complete college, or have access to high-paying jobs (DeMatthews & Izquierdo, 2020).

School administrators play an important role in creating safe environments and guiding educators to address the needs of all students in an equitable manner (Minkos et al., 2017). Fraise and Brooks (2015) stated student success is fundamental to the principal's ability to establish a school culture that allows students to feel comfortable sharing their ideas, beliefs, values, and opinions. When teachers and staff members feel valued and free to share their ideas, school climate can improve, potentially leading to improved outcomes for students (Minkos et al., 2017). Principals who incorporate tenets of the CRSL framework in their leadership practices show a commitment to continuous improvement of practices, through building relationships that value cultural diversity, which can promote the overall success of all students (Minkos et al., 2017). As such, in this exploratory qualitative case study I sought to understand how elementary principals overcome challenges to increase the achievement of ELLs. I was particularly interested in identifying the principals' leadership practices to increase the achievement of ELLs.

Positive social change may result from an increase in awareness of the specific leadership practices principals use to increase ELL academic achievement. Elementary principals who desire to increase the achievement of ELLs in their schools could replicate study participants' actions at their schools. The findings from this study could provide the local school district with pertinent information that could lead to positive social change. The change could involve transforming how the overall district supports and develops elementary principals' understanding of ELLs. With increased knowledge of ELLs and

effective leadership practices, principals may be better positioned to increase the achievement of ELLs. If they better understand the needs of the ELLs in their school, principals may be able to make decisions and employ leadership practices focused on increasing these students' achievement. The results may be useful to the leaders of other public-school districts who are seeking to increase the achievement of the ELL population in their schools.

Summary

Principals have a critical role in leading the charge to ensure quality teaching and learning occurs for students. This is extremely important for culturally and linguistically diverse students (MacDonald, 2020). Schools with large populations of ELLs need school leaders who are cognizant of the challenges and needs of the students in these communities (MacDonald, 2020). The achievement of ELLs is contingent upon the leadership practices of the school principal. I used the conceptual framework of CRSL and the qualitative case study research method to explore the leadership practices used by elementary principals to increase the achievement of ELLs. Many complimentary and competing factors affect the work of a principal when working to increase student achievement (Brown, 2015). While schools may be provided with many resources, it is the principal's responsibility to coordinate all available resources in a comprehensive manner with a focus on student achievement (Brown, 2015). Competing factors that may affect the work of a principal may be budgetary constraints as elementary schools receive less funding than high schools, which may limit the funding available for professional development. Some principals have difficulty establishing a schedule that establishes

curriculum goals and aligns with the contractual obligations of teachers (Brown, 2015). Although researchers have identified the direct actions that teachers should employ to increase the achievement of ELLs, they have not ascertained the specific behaviors or practices that principals can use to bolster these students' achievement.

School leaders should possess leadership skills and knowledge that allow them to confront the challenges they experience when closing the educational gap and creating schools that are responsive to the demographic shifts in student population (Bagwell, 2019). As such, the complexity of increasing the achievement of ELLs will require the principal to employ specific strategies to support the learning of students and staff. Raising achievement could lead to improved educational outcomes for these students, with benefits extending into their postsecondary career and beyond. In Chapter 2, I review the related research on leadership practices that increase the achievement of ELLs.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this exploratory qualitative case study was to understand how principals used leadership practices to overcome challenges and increase the achievement of ELLs at their schools. The problem is a minimal understanding of elementary principals' leadership practices to increase the achievement of ELLs. There is a gap in the literature related to how elementary school principals are overcoming challenges and providing leadership in their schools to improve the achievement of ELLs (McGee et al., 2015). Principals have many roles within a school, but the most significant role is to shape and monitor classroom instructional practices to influence student learning (Demerath & Louis, 2017).

Research supports the principal's work of shaping student learning as there is observable evidence that principals have a direct or indirect effect on the instructional practices of teachers in the classroom (Demerath & Louis, 2017). Principals are expected to create equitable conditions in schools to increase the achievement of students in their schools. They should employ leadership practices that create effective actions that lead to an increase in the achievement of ELLs such as "galvanizing and empowering other individuals to organize for effort, action, and improvement" (Bagwell, 2019, p. 98).

In this chapter, I highlight the leadership practices employed by principals that can increase the achievement of ELLs. The chapter's literature review encompasses key concepts in the study. These key concepts are the characteristics of ELLs, the influence of the principal on achievement, the actions principals employ to increase the achievement

of ELLs grounded in the four tenets of CRSL, and the challenges for principals to increase the achievement of ELLs. The four tenets of CRSL include critical self-awareness, culturally responsive curricular and teacher preparation, culturally responsive and inclusive environments, and engaging students and families in community contexts (Khalifa et al., 2016). I begin the chapter by discussing the literature search strategy.

Literature Search Strategy

I found most of the articles for the literature review using Walden University Library resources. ERIC, SAGE, and Google Scholar were the main databases and search engines used for the literature review. The search terms were *elementary principals, principals, school leaders, leadership practices, academic achievement, English Language Learners,* and *culturally responsive school leadership*. Publications were limited to those that are peer-reviewed and published within the last 5 years with an exception for theoretical and methodology texts and the seminal work of academics in the field of culturally responsive teaching. I performed chain searches using recent dissertations and articles to find related publications.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was CRSL, which is derived from the frameworks of culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and culturally responsive (Gay, 1994) pedagogies. CRSL has been instrumental in educational reform (Khalifa et al., 2016). Culturally responsive practices have focused on the instructional practices of teachers, but recently these practices have been applied by educational researchers to create a culturally responsive framework for principals (Khalifa et al., 2016; Ladson-

Billings, 1995). Culturally responsive leadership expands the understanding of culturally responsive teaching in the context of the total school environment and the decision-making process of principals (Khalifa et al., 2016). CRSL is defined by four tenets: critical self-awareness, culturally responsive curricular and teacher preparation, culturally responsive and inclusive environments, and community engagement and advocacy for students and families (Khalifa et al., 2016; Marshall & Khalifa, 2018). Schools are effective when principals create structures and policies at their schools that are responsive to the culture of the students and the community in which the school is located (Davy, 2016; Hallinger & Leithwood, 1998; Johnson, 2006). The establishment of a school environment that is welcoming to students, families, and the community can create authentic relationships with stakeholders. This might allow administrators to put CRSL strategies in place to engage all students in their schools to positively influence student achievement (Davy, 2016; Khalifa et al., 2016).

Central to this study was the specific leadership practices elementary principals use to increase the achievement of the ELL population in their schools. I used the CRSL as the study's conceptual framework to explore the practices elementary principals use to increase the achievement of ELLs. I was particularly interested in learning about participating principals' leadership behaviors and whether these behaviors were grounded in the tenets of Khalifa et al.'s (2016) CRSL framework.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and Concepts

Research shows that effective principals can create an environment that supports the success of ELLs. In these cases, the principal establishes a mission and vision for the

school that focuses on quality teaching and learning, has strong values and high expectations for students and teachers, creates an inclusive school environment for ELLs where their needs are understood, and establishes clear, identifiable actions. Demie and Lewis (2018) identified several factors that schools that are successful with ELLs have in common, and one such factor is the principal's leadership. These types of leaders are seen as culturally responsive school leaders because they positively impact the instruction and school culture while creating an inclusive school environment for students and the larger community (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Green, 2015; Karadağ et al., 2015).

In its online guide for understanding the 2019 state report card, the state department of education noted that ELLs require support to obtain English language proficiency to meet the same academic standards that all children are expected to meet. Elfers and Stritikus (2014) posited that educators' difficulty with providing long-term and meaningful support for ELLs and non-ELLs is one of the reasons schools fail to close the educational gap. Collier and Thomas (2002) and Zimmerman (2014) indicated the important role of principals in creating and sustaining successful ELL programs to close the educational gap. Thus, schools need principals who are instructional leaders who create a culture of academic achievement for ELLs (Munguia, 2017). With the adoption of ESSA (2015), there are new education requirements for ELLs, which include standardized measures for the identification of ELLs and the inclusion of English proficiency in the measurement of school quality (Contreras & Fujimoto, 2019). It is the principal's responsibility to establish school conditions that ensure that ELLs are meeting the education requirements.

Principals' Influence on Achievement

The principal is the instructional leader of the school. As such, the principal is the one person in the school who influences the long-term success of the educational program for students and is held accountable for student performance (Khalifa et al., 2016; Sheng et al., 2017). As instructional leaders, principals can be effective in their role when they have mastery in curriculum, teaching, and student learning to contribute to student achievement (Kalman & Arslan, 2016; Sheng et al., 2017).

Direct Influence on Achievement

The knowledge of curriculum and teaching and learning can bolster the principal's credibility with stakeholders as the principal is seen as understanding what ELLs need to be successful in school (McGee et al., 2015). Thus, principals are expected to lead the development and implementation of curriculum, which has a direct influence on student achievement (McGee et al., 2015). In addition to ensuring that high-quality instruction is taking place in their schools, principals are expected to create a safe, accepting school environment that guides the education of all students including diverse student populations (Minkos, et al., 2017).

Principals can demonstrate that their school has a safe, accepting school culture by constructing a mission and vision that promotes culturally responsive practices for ELLs. Rogers and O'Bryon (2017) suggested that principals can promote a safe and accepting school environment both through words and actions and by creating a climate that is respectful, tolerant, and sensitive to all individuals. It is through this safe and

accepting school environment that ELLs may have the instructional support to take risks with their learning.

As the instructional leader of the school, the principal needs to ensure that teachers' professional development is grounded in an understanding of the students' culture and learning styles and the most effective ways to implement instructional strategies to meet their specific learning needs. This provides instructional credibility for teachers and allows the principal to act as a role model for the acquisition of essential knowledge needed to increase the achievement of ELLs (McGee et al., 2015). Principals can empower ELL teaching and learning by creating an instructional team, which brings together diverse groups of educators who can share their knowledge about ELLs. This collaborative environment not only allows educators the opportunity to share their knowledge of ELLs and instructional practices but allows them to reflect on the practices they employ to impact the quality of instruction for ELLs (Bellibaş et al., 2020; Printy, 2010; Scanlan et al., 2016). Bellibaş et al. (2020) argued that collaboration to discuss instructional practice reflects educators' efforts to improve teaching skills through a set of school-embedded actions. The principal leads the effort to create the school-embedded actions such as sharing instructional methods, techniques, craft knowledge, expertise, and student work, and working collaboratively to leverage the quality of education.

Indirect Influence on Achievement

Some researchers assert that the principal's effect on learning is indirect. They contend that the principal exerts influence on student achievement through their effect on school culture and through teacher behavior and classroom practices (Baecher et al.,

2016; Day et al., 2016). Hollingworth et al. (2018) described a positive school culture as a place where there is a commitment to student learning by the staff; a collegial and supportive environment, with a shared common vision and goals; and celebration of student achievement, family commitment, and teacher innovation. According to experts, teachers are more likely to accept changes and take risks on behalf of students when part of a positive culture of learning and support (Hollingworth et al., 2018).

Principals can create a positive school culture by building and creating trusting relationships and taking the time to know and understand staff as these relationships can affect staff commitment, satisfaction, and morale. Effective communication is another means for building a positive school culture as the principal provides reasons and evidence behind decisions, which could lead to an environment where staff can adapt to changes needed to meet the needs of students (Hollingworth et al., 2018). Demerath and Louis (2017) identified the principal's influence on achievement as indirect because the principal's work to implement county and district policies is not visible but is felt in the functioning of the school environment in achieving many critical outcomes for students.

Consistent monitoring of the instructional program for ELLs is an example of how principals can indirectly influence academic achievement. Principals are visible in the classrooms, provide feedback, and uphold an expectation of continuous improvement for teaching and learning (Hollowell, 2019). The monitoring of the instructional program informs the principal of students' learning and the instructional practices being used in the classroom. This allows principals to identify what professional development

opportunities are needed for teachers to learn and develop the skills that are needed to increase the achievement of ELLs (Brown, 2015; de Lourdes Viloria, 2019).

Tenets of Culturally Responsive School Leadership

Khalifa et al. (2020) suggested that principals could promote schooling that addresses the unique learning and cultural needs of students who are Indigenous, Black, Latinx, low income, refugee, ELL, or otherwise marginalized when they use CRSL behaviors. For the purposes of this research, I used the CRSL framework to examine the behaviors that principals use to increase the achievement of ELLs. CRSL is rooted in the premise that cultural responsiveness is a necessary component of effective school leadership and that the principal should consistently promote cultural responsiveness (Khalifa et al., 2020). CRSL is characterized by a set of unique core tenets. Those core tenets include critical self-awareness, culturally responsive curricular and teacher preparation , culturally responsive and inclusive environments, and community engagement and advocacy for students and families (Khalifa et al., 2016, 2020; Marshall & Khalifa, 2018).

Critical Self-Awareness

According to Khalifa et al. (2016), those principals who are willing to examine their beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions about ELLs have a critical self-awareness. Critical self-awareness is the first tenet in the CRSL framework and identifies critically self-aware principals as those who reflect and evaluate their values and dispositions when it comes to serving and educating ELLs (Khalifa et al., 2016). Critical self- awareness is foundational and precedes any actions in leadership (Khalifa et al., 2016). It is important

for principals to recognize their bias and be willing to continuously learn and reflect about oneself, the student population, and how their actions and limitations impact others before they can address the learning of students (Brown, 2004; Dantley, 2005; DeMatthews & Izquierdo, 2020; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Gooden, 2005; Khalifa et al., 2016; McKenzie et al., 2008).

When leading a school to increase the achievement of ELLs, the principals' critical self-awareness and understanding of their student population may require them to be decisive decision makers who acknowledge, understand, and respond to practices at their school that negatively affect ELLs (Lopez, 2016). Critically self-aware principals might exhibit a sense of urgency and passion as they lead to increase the achievement of ELLs because they are aware of the historical and consistent underperformance of ELLs in schools and are willing to use deliberate leadership practices to support student achievement (DeMatthews & Izquierdo, 2020; Garcia-Borrego et al., 2020; Slattery, 2006). They may employ leadership practices such as establishing a clear set of values and beliefs for their school community regarding ELLs, their culture, their language, and their learning (DeMatthews & Izquierdo, 2020). To that end, critically self-aware principals may work to motivate the community and challenge their assumptions about ELLs by providing opportunities that educate the community about problems faced by ELLs so they can act as advocates for ELLs and the community (Angelle et al., 2021; Hamm, 2019; Khalifa et al., 2016). Critically self-aware principals are willing to take such actions because they understand marginalization in all its forms and openly acknowledge and address it when it occurs. These principals challenge power relations

and structural inequalities, confront issues that negatively affect students, and promote equal opportunities for ELLs (MacDonald, 2020; Miller & Martin, 2015).

As principals reflect on their beliefs about ELLs, they may see the students' language as an asset because they value language for its external benefits and also for its inherent value and connection to the students' culture (De La Cruz Albizu, 2020). Using their awareness, they may prioritize inclusion of ELLs in the school's instructional program with high-quality instruction and academic, social, and emotional supports (DeMatthews, 2016). Their belief system may lead them to see it as their responsibility to ensure that ELLs are included in the school community and have equal access to educational opportunities (De La Cruz Albizu, 2020; Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011).

In summary, before a principal can shape the school environment with a focus on ELLs, they must know themselves and know what they believe about ELLs and their ability to achieve (Khalifa et al., 2016). The principal's acknowledgement and understanding of their beliefs, views, and values regarding ELLs is their foundation before envisioning and creating a new school environment that focuses on increasing the achievement of the ELLs in their school. The core belief about the achievement of their ELL population can lead to the establishment of goals, based on perceived needs within the school community (Mombourquette, 2017).

Culturally Responsive Curricula and Teacher Preparation

The second tenet of the CRSL framework is culturally responsive curricular and teacher preparation, which relies on the principal's ability to articulate a vision supportive of expanding and sustaining culturally responsive teaching strategies for ELLs. When

communicating the vision to all stakeholders, the principal should focus the work of the school community on the achievement of the vision for ELLs. As the vision is actualized, the successes of ELLs should be celebrated with the school community to inspire continuous improvement (Mombourquette, 2017; Smith, 2005; Yakavets, 2016).

After the vision for the school has been created, the principal as the instructional leader should begin to create processes and structures in their school that support developing the culturally responsive instructional practices of teachers. Doing so can lead to an increase in the achievement of the ELL student population. Principals should implement strategies that transform and push the staff toward innovative instructional methods for ELLs that are culturally responsive and sustainable for the achievement of the ELL population (DeMatthews & Izquierdo, 2018; Gay, 2010; Hayes & Juarez, 2012; Sleeter, 2001; Wiemelt & Welton, 2015). Principals should encourage teachers to use culturally responsive instructional and classroom management strategies and hold them accountable (The National Association of Elementary Principals [NAESP], 2018). Culturally responsive school leaders hold teachers accountable because they can recognize instructional practices that may lead to minimal achievement of the ELL population. It is the principal's responsibility to ensure that effective teaching and learning occurs for ELLs each day (de Lourdes Viloria, 2019).

Munguia (2017) noted the instructional practices of the classroom teacher significantly influences student learning; therefore, it is important that principals who are culturally responsive leaders can identify teachers who need additional support with their instructional practices to meet the academic needs of ELLs. Principals can provide

meaningful and purposeful professional development that empowers and moves the teacher's instructional practices from a focus on the perceived weaknesses of ELLs to highlighting the value of ELLs primary language, language acquisition, and cultural awareness (Cruze & López, 2020; Khalifa et al., 2016). When leading teachers toward the improvement of ELLs, principals should consider specialized training for teachers in the area of ELLs to equip teachers with skills to amplify their teaching repertoire to meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students (NAESP, 2018). While providing meaningful and relevant professional development for teachers is key, principals should also foster a collaborative environment for teachers. Highly trained teachers knowledgeable of the best instructional practices for ELLs are needed in the collaborative environment to interpret and adapt the curriculum to address the different ELL instructional practices, provide feedback, and assess the progress of ELLs (Moreno-Recio et al., 2018).

Principals who are engaged in increasing the achievement of ELLs should be visible in classrooms as they monitor the instructional program, provide teachers with timely and constructive feedback to improve their instruction, which maintains the school's vision of continuous improvement for ELLs (Young et al., 2017). In addition to ensuring teachers are equipped to meet the unique academic needs of ELLs, the principal should emphasize an instructional learning community that is grounded in academic excellence to increase the achievement of ELLs (DeMatthews, 2016; Scanlan & Lopez, 2015).

Culturally Responsive and Inclusive School Environments

Schools are essential to improving the life experiences of students but also improve the "social fabric of neighborhoods and communities" (Riehl, 2009, p. 189). This means that principals who seek to respond to diversity in their schools promote inclusive school cultures and instructional practices, and work to position schools within community (Riehl, 2009). Thus, the third tenet of the CRSL framework addresses how principals can create an inclusive school environment for ELLs. Principals who strive to create an inclusive school environment for ELLs should be aware of the needs of their school community and create the conditions and structures that support ELL students and their families (MacDonald, 2020; McGee et al., 2015). If the principal believes ELL students would benefit from resources such as supplemental materials, a change in curriculum, or teachers who specialize in ELL instruction and intervention, then the school leader should leverage those resources to include ELLs appropriately and effectively into the larger school context to meet their instructional needs. CRSLs may use their networking abilities to connect with organizations across disciplines and the larger community to acquire the needed resources to take care of the needs of ELLs and their families (Johnson, 2014; Riehl, 2009). Centering and including the needs of ELLs in the school environment can increase their academic achievement (Ascenzi-Moreno et al., 2015).

Principals who are leading their schools toward increased achievement for ELLs find ways to optimize the contributions of families, families, and community partners to increase student achievement (Hitt & Tucker, 2016). CRSLs go beyond advocacy to

identify ways to reach out to families of ELLs or community organizations to address the plethora of issues and problems that exist outside of the school to make change for their ELLs (Alsliman, 2020; DeMatthews, 2018). Some principals understand the importance of students' families and community and the positive influence they can have on ELL academic achievement; therefore, they put structures and systems in place to include the community in the school environment (Hitt & Tucker, 2016). In summary, principals use their knowledge of their ELL population, their families, and the community to foster a culture of inclusivity within the school environment.

Engaging Students and Families in Community Contexts

The school is responsible for engaging and involving families and students in the school environment across potential barriers such as ethnicity, language differences, and socioeconomic backgrounds (Epstein & Sanders, 2006). The final tenet of the CRSL framework identifies the importance of the principal's leadership to engage the students' families and community organizations in culturally appropriate ways to improve the achievement of all students (NAESP, 2018; Smith, 2005). Robust partnerships and collaboration between schools and communities can improve family engagement, which is crucial to bridging home and school cultures. The strong cultural partnerships can increase the trust between students, families, and schools, which improves the students' connection to the school and their feelings of inclusivity (NAESP, 2018; Okilwa, 2018; Smith, 2005).

In a culturally appropriate school culture, principals advocate for the school, the community, and the marginalized student population in their schools by providing regular

events centered on the cultural diversity of the students in a welcoming environment that is validating and authentic (Scanlan & Lopez, 2015). Accordingly, principals are to behave ethically and justly when collaborating with families and communities by establishing clear methods and practices for the collective work of the school and community (NAESP, 2018). The principal should advocate for the integration of ELLs into the classroom, school, and curriculum with overt actions that actively integrate ELLs into the school (Cruze & Lopez, 2020; Scanlan & Lopez, 2015). The principals' actions include organizational skills that engage teachers, students and families in activities that align with the school's mission and values ELLs. Inclusive strategies to engage students, staff, communities, and stakeholders in diversity and social transformation process is integral to the success of ELLs. This integration is important because the collective effort of students, staff, and communities keeps stakeholders better informed, and it involves them in the creating and sustaining a culturally appropriate school culture and climate (NAESP, 2018). Some strategies to involve ELL families in the school environment could be to enlist families to volunteer both in and outside of the classroom, supply frequent communication in their native language, provide school workshops for families, and ensure consistent contact from the teacher about student behavior and academics (DeMatthews, 2016). Culturally responsive school leaders should look for ways to incorporate the students' home language in the morning routine and throughout the school day when possible. Additionally, the school should offer literacy and workshops so families can help their children with homework. Providing relevant workshops for families is only one aspect of engaging families. Schools need to ensure the locations for

workshops and events are easily accessible to families (Okilwa, 2018). This nuance demonstrates an understanding of the needs of families in the community.

Challenges for Principals

Culturally responsive school leaders may experience challenges when working to increase the achievement of ELLs. They may have difficulty examining their personal beliefs, their professional acumen, deficiencies with monetary and human resources, and they may have difficulty building relationships with teachers and the families of their school population. CRSLs may have difficulty examining their beliefs and assumptions about ELLs because they may not be able to draw upon personal or professional experiences in the backgrounds of ELLs and best instructional practices for ELLs (Miller & Martin, 2015). This lack of awareness and understanding among principals about the cultural backgrounds of students in their school community and instructional practices may prove difficult for principals to create procedures and processes focused on the needs of the ELL population in their schools (Davis, 2002). Whitenack (2015) identified the principal's readiness to lead a school with ELLs as a challenge because some principals may lack the professional skills, knowledge, and understanding of ELLs and the instructional strategies needed to increase their achievement.

Culturally responsive school leaders may face challenges with acquiring the necessary resources for ELLs because states, districts, and schools often neglect to equitably distribute funding, resources and learning opportunities to ELLs, as they are often less likely to perform well on high-stakes tests, graduate from high school, attend and complete college, and access high-paying jobs (Gándara & Contreras, 2009).

Additionally, principals are charged with hiring teachers and it is difficult to find teachers to support the ever-growing diverse student populations (Lachance, 2017) because instructing ELLs requires specialized skills and training that is not exhibited by all teachers. Finally, building strong relationships with ELL families are key to student success. When there is no relationship with families, administrators may misunderstand ELL student needs and perspectives or they may make decisions that do not take into consideration the needs of ELLs and their families, which results in a gap between home and school, with neither group understanding the other (Brooks et al., 2010) and the possibility of student achievement wanes.

Summary and Conclusions

Principals who aspire to be culturally proficient leaders should bring with them knowledge and understanding of how ELLs learn or they must have a critical awareness of self and be willing to acquire the necessary knowledge to support the academic success of ELLs. When leading to increase the achievement of ELLs, principals benefit from having a business acumen that allows them to leverage school, district, and community resources to foster a school environment that promotes the inclusion of ELL culture, language, and their families. Principals who lead schools with ELL students should commit to a continuous improvement of practices that build relationships that value cultural diversity in an effort to promote the overall success of all students (Minkos et al., 2017). In the end, due to the varied challenges of being a culturally responsive school leader, principals have to make decisions with what challenges to prioritize and which to

address later on (DeMatthews, 2016) because increasing the achievement of ELLs is multifaceted and takes time.

While there have been many studies conducted examining the perspectives and actions of teachers to improve the achievement of ELLs, little research exists on what practices principals use to increase the achievement of ELLs. Thus, the individual principal must build their own capacity and understanding of how to support ELLs (Christison & Murray, 2008) as the focus on leadership for ELLs is still evolving. This research aims to explore the challenges of principals when increasing the achievement of ELLs and the leadership practices principals used that may increase the achievement of ELLs.

In Chapter 3, the design and methodology guiding this qualitative study are discussed. The research approach to explore the leadership practices of principals is identified in detail. The subsequent chapter describes the preparation for the research and the process for carrying out the research in a scientific, ethical manner to obtain data regarding the leadership practices of elementary principals regarding the phenomena. The resulting data can have positive implications for practical use and an increase in the achievement of ELLs in elementary school. The following chapter consists of a detailed explanation of the research plan to provide data that gives rise to an existing gap in the literature regarding the leadership practices of elementary principals to increase the achievement of ELLs in an urban school district.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how principals in an urban school district overcome the challenges of increasing the achievement of ELLs to increase the achievement of ELLs. I was particularly interested in learning about the leadership practices of principals. Understanding the specific practices of elementary principals who are leading their schools to increase the achievement of their ELL populations could offer insight to district leaders as to how to support the work of elementary principals with this student population. It is also important to understand the challenges that principals face to identify practices that could address, mitigate, and eliminate these barriers.

In this chapter, I discuss the research design for this exploratory study. The qualitative case study research methodology is explained in detail and connected to the relevance of historical and current research to this study. This discussion includes participant selection; instrumentation; procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection; and the data analysis plan. I also discuss my role as the researcher as well as address ethical considerations, trustworthiness, and the validity of results. The conceptual framework of CRSL supported this study.

Research Design and Rationale

The RQs for this qualitative exploratory case study were focused on how principals overcome challenges to increase the achievement of ELLs and the leadership practices principals use to increase the achievement of ELLs. Researchers using an exploratory design investigate an undefined problem to gain a better understanding (Bhat,

n.d.). Although these designs do not provide conclusive results, they can be used to answer what, why, and how questions to identify issues that can be the focus of future research (Bhat, n.d.). It is important that researchers who use an exploratory design be willing to change the direction of the study based on the revelations from the data (Bhat, n.d.). The RQs that I sought to answer in this study were as follows:

RQ1. How do elementary school principals overcome the challenges of improving the achievement of ELLs?

RQ2. What leadership practices do elementary principals use to increase the academic achievement of ELLs?

The central phenomenon investigated in this study was how principals in an urban school district overcame challenges to increase the achievement of ELLs and the leadership practices principals used to increase the achievement of ELLs. There is substantial research demonstrating the role of educational leadership in supporting student outcomes and educational equity (Young et al., 2017). The principal's effect on the school is significant; therefore, principals are either credited or blamed for student outcomes (Daly, 2009). Although teachers are responsible for actual instruction, the principal sets the vision, tone, and expectations for the instructional program. Research shows that leadership programs and professional development for school leaders lag have not addressed the demographic shift that has resulted in more ELLs enrolled in U.S. schools, thus resulting in a generation of school leaders unprepared to serve these students (Scanlan & López, 2012). In this study, I explored how elementary principals in

one urban school district overcame the challenges of increasing the achievement of ELLs, focusing on the leadership practices they used to increase these students' achievement.

I used a qualitative approach for my investigation. Qualitative research requires the researcher to select the appropriate qualitative field research paradigm for the study. An ethnographic researcher studies a society, culture, or group and is dependent on observation; as such, the researcher may need to undertake a participant observer role (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In doing so, an ethnographic researcher reports on social life focusing on detailed and accurate description rather than explanation (Babbie, 2017). This research study was not suited for an ethnographic study approach because I sought an explanation from the participants regarding their actions to overcome challenges to increase the achievement of ELL. That is, I needed their direct responses to the interview questions, along with analysis of other data, to answer the RQs.

Phenomenological researchers are interested in the lived experiences of the phenomenon (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The RQs for this study did not lend themselves to a phenomenological study. The research was not about the principals' experiences related to increasing the achievement of ELLs; rather, it was about understanding the principals' actions that may lead to an increase the achievement of ELLs. For this reason, I opted against using a phenomenological design. I also considered but opted against using grounded theory. Researchers who use this design develop theory from analyzing patterns, themes, and common categories found in observational data (Babbie, 2017). The goal of my research was not to develop a theory from the interview and archival data but to study the principals' actions to increase the achievement of ELLs in a bounded time.

The definition of a case study is an empirical inquiry that is used to investigate "how" or "why" questions concerning the phenomenon of interest (Yazan, 2015). Yin (2002) defined "case" as a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context (p. 13), and Stake (1995) identified case studies as a process. These attributes made this qualitative approach ideal because it promotes determining how the culture works. According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), qualitative researchers study people in their natural settings to make sense of what individual people do in their everyday lives and what their actions mean to them. I explored the leadership practices of elementary principals in one urban district. The participating principals operated under the same governmental and educational systems, which was appropriate for a case study approach.

Once the researcher determines that the RQ is best answered using a qualitative case study approach and determines the boundaries of the case, the researcher should consider the type of case study that should be conducted (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Researchers elect to use a descriptive case study to describe an intervention or phenomenon in the real-life context in which it occurred (Yin, 2003). Explanatory case studies explain the link between program implementation with program effects (Yin, 2003). Some researchers elect to use an exploratory case study design to explore situations in which the intervention being evaluated is not clearly defined and has no single set of outcomes (Yin, 2003). The researcher should understand that exploratory research will not yield conclusive results, but the research design helps the researcher to better understand an existing problem (Bhat, n.d.). An exploratory qualitative case study design was the appropriate design for my study because the study focus was on

understanding how principals overcome the challenges of increasing the achievement of ELLs and understanding the leadership practices principals use to increase the achievement of ELL. The evaluation of the leadership practices principals use to overcome challenges and the leadership practices they use to increase the achievement of ELLs is not clearly defined and has no single set of outcomes, thus making an exploratory case study design an appropriate choice. The boundaries of this exploratory case study included elementary principals in an urban school district.

Qualitative researchers focus on depth rather than scale because they are interested in understanding particular situations, individual groups, or moments in time that are significant or revealing (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). As such, there are three types of data collected in qualitative research: interviews, observations, and documents. Qualitative interviews help the interviewer to recreate events, which allows the researcher to create a picture of complicated processes by putting together the descriptions from the separate interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). There are four categories of qualitative interviewing: focus groups, internet interviews, casual conversations, and in-passing clarifications, and semistructured and unstructured (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

The interview categories differ from each other based on the role of the interviewer, the number of people interviewed at the same time, whether the interviews are conducted face-to-face or from a distance, the extent at which the interviewer planned the interview, and how well the interviewer and interviewer know one another (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). In a focus group, the researcher acts as a facilitator who asks questions of a group of participants who represent the population of interest. Focus groups are

scheduled for a limited time frame and can occur over multiple sessions with different participants responding to the same question or questions. Internet interviews can be used to interview people who are difficult to reach or unwilling to talk publicly (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The strengths of using internet interviews are that they are private and provide the participants with an opportunity to think about their answers and allows participants to hide their emotions. Internet interviews can be slow if email is used because only one or two questions can be asked at a time, and the researcher must wait for a reply, which can take several days. Once a reply is received, the researcher then sends a follow-up reply and waits for a response, which can also take days (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Casual conversations and in-passing clarifications are another type of interview that occurs during the participant observation phase of a project when the researcher and interviewee cross paths (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). These conversations tend to be brief, unstructured, open-ended, spur of the moment chats, in which the conversation moves into a relevant topic regarding the research (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Casual conversations and in-passing clarifications work best when the interviewer and interviewee have a familiarity with each other and have conversed previously. Researchers use this type of qualitative interviewing to fill in the missing pieces or to discuss information that is too sensitive to be recorded and the researcher want to collect second thoughts (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Semistructured interviews take place as scheduled and generally extend the conversation between the researcher and interviewee. When conducting semistructured

interviews, the researcher has a specific topic to learn about, prepares a limited number of questions in advance, and plans to ask follow-up questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The researcher can elect to reword or reorder the questions to be asked to all participants to maintain a conversational tone that allows for follow-up questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The most important element of the semistructured interview is that the researcher focuses more on the planned questions to fully address the RQs (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Unstructured interviews also take place as scheduled and generally extend the conversation between the researcher and interviewee. The difference between semistructured and unstructured interviews is the researcher has a general topic in mind but generates the specific questions as the interview proceeds based on the interviewee's responses (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Unstructured interviews allow the interviewer to ask probing question and prepare follow-up questions. The main difference between semistructured and unstructured interviews is the degree to which the researcher controls the interview (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Interviews are one tool used by researchers to gather secondhand information about the phenomenon of interest, but researchers can use observations as a primary source to obtain information about the phenomenon of interest.

Qualitative researchers use observations when a firsthand encounter of an activity or event is needed, a new perspective is needed, or there is an unwillingness of the participants to discuss the phenomenon of interest (Merriam, 2002). Researchers may elect to use direct or indirect observations to gain information about the phenomenon of interest. Direct observation is used when the observer is looking at the events happening before their eyes in the moment of them occurring. Direct observation may be active or

passive depending on the role of the observer who can be participant or nonparticipant (Ciesielska et al., 2018). Direct participant observation requires the observer to be an active participant of a group or organization and be temporarily fully immersed in the culture while maintaining an analytical mindset. Direct participant observation is best used when acquiring an insider's point of view access to implicit knowledge is important (Ciesielska et al., 2018). Conversely, direct nonparticipant observation is an observation in which the participant takes an "outsider perspective without interacting with subjects of an observation. The researcher may take the position of an "alien" from a different planet or reality in order to achieve a distance from the well-known" (Ciesielska et al., 2018, p. 43). Direct nonparticipant observations are useful when observing a well-known reality such as a public place and when the observer needs to acquire a completely new perspective (Ciesielska et al., 2018).

Indirect observations differ from direct observations because they rely on the observations of others or recordings of past events in the form of documentation, videos, and so forth (Ciesielska et al., 2018). Indirect observation is a set of methods that allows researchers to obtain information about past or present situations that they did not have direct access to in the form of videos or written descriptions of events (Ciesielska et al., 2018). Indirect observations are useful when direct observations are not possible when the events naturally occurred. I used the indirect observation method of document analysis to review archived staff meeting and leadership team minutes provided by the participants in the study. The review of the archival documents consisted of the text analysis approach of content analysis. Content analysis was used to identify themes,

keywords, and codes in the texts of the staff meeting and leadership team meeting minutes events (Ciesielska et al., 2018).

Role of the Researcher

I am currently a school administrator in the urban school district in which this study took place, but I had no personal or professional gain or incentive from the results of the study. I had no power relationships with the study's participants, as each participant was a colleague and elementary principal outside of my supervision. The population of elementary principals in the district was approximately 125 at the time of the study. From this population, I drew a sample of eight participants through purposeful sampling to avoid selection bias (see Pannucci & Wilkins, 2010). The participants for this study led elementary schools, but the only relationship I had with any of them was of a professional nature.

The role of principal is the only role I have held in this school district, and I am charged with ensuring that all students at my school are achieving academically. The bias that I brought to the study is my current experience as an elementary school principal with approximately one third of the student population identified as ELLs. Based on my knowledge, experiences, and beliefs as an elementary principal in the district, I believe that there can be an increase in the achievement of ELLs if principals are aware of the leadership strategies that could lead to an increase in their achievement and the principals use definite strategies that could lead to an increase in the achievement of ELLs. I also believe that principals desire to have the ELL population in their schools to increase their academic achievement.

To mitigate bias throughout the study, I developed open-ended interview questions and had them vetted by an expert in the field who is the director of the equity unit in a nearby school system (see Norris, 1997). The director vetted the interview questions to ensure they were written to elicit answers to my RQs. Doing so will help to make the processes of the research more public (Norris, 1997). Member checking was an additional measure to provide a safeguard against bias and to ensure alignment to the RQs. Member checking establishes credibility because it gives the participants an opportunity to react to their responses to ensure they are adequate representations of their own realities (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I ensured the trustworthiness of the study using the validity strategies of member checking and triangulation. Both strategies will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

Methodology

Qualitative exploratory case study is the research methodology and design for this study. Merriam (2009) defined case studies as having unique distinctive attributes in that it focuses on a particular situation, provides a rich, thick description of the phenomenon under study, and illuminates the reader's understanding of the phenomenon under study. Hence, qualitative researchers try to understand individuals in their normal settings and the context for their behaviors that reveal the sense that people make of their own experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In this study, the phenomena explored was the leadership practices of principals in an urban school district intended to improve the achievement of ELLs.

Participant Selection

The state report card was used to identify which schools had a 50% or higher population of ELL learners. Each school has an annual state report card published on the state department of education's website, which can be filtered to identify demographic information such as the percentage of students in a school who are identified as ELLs. As noted in the administrative procedures posted on the county public school's websites, the research district defines an English Learner as a student who communicates in a language other than English, or comes from an environment where a language other than English is dominant, or whose family uses a primary language other than English in the home, and whose English language proficiency falls within the range established by the state for an English language development program. Principals who led schools with an ELL population of 50% or higher received an email invitation from me asking them to participate in the study. All email recipients were asked in the body of the email to respond to the email with "I consent." Once recipients provided consent, a purposive sample of eight principals who met the criteria were selected for the study. Then, we collaborated to select a mutually agreed upon date and time for their individual interviews. Participants were asked at the beginning of the interview the length of time they served as principal at their particular school. If they served as principal at the same school for a minimum of 3 years and they consented to participate in the study, the interview was conducted.

Purposive sampling was used as the sampling strategy to select principals who can provide specific information that can reveal and illuminate important group patterns

(Patton, 2015) about how principals overcome challenges when increasing the achievement of ELLs and the leadership practices they use to increase the achievement of ELLs. Guest et al. (2006) noted guidelines for determining non-probabilistic sample sizes such as purposive sampling is virtually nonexistent. Guest et al. (2006) argued the sample size typically relies on the point at which no new information or themes are observed in the data. In that vein, I used a sample size of eight principals because the important factor relating to sample size is that it should be large enough to assure that most or all the perceptions that might be important to the study are uncovered (Mason, 2010). Thus, the eight participants answered the RQs to achieve complex and multiperspective understandings that are in context. Furthermore, the responses of the eight participants can help to make important decisions (Ravitch & Carl, 2021) about leadership practices to increase the achievement of ELLs and suggest applications to a broader population. The purposive sample of eight principals can also provide in-depth detailed information (Ravitch & Carl, 2016) regarding their challenges increasing the achievement of ELLs and the practices they use that can increase the achievement of ELLs.

Instrumentation

I used an exploratory qualitative case study to understand how principals overcome challenges when increasing the achievement of ELLs and the leadership practices principals used to increase the achievement of ELLs. To answer these questions, qualitative data were collected from two sources: (a) one-on-one semistructured open-ended interviews, and (b) a content analysis review of meeting notes using an archival data protocol. The CRSL framework, which frames this study, and related literature were

used to develop the interview questions for the study. Researchers use qualitative interviews because they allow the researcher to expand the inquiry practically without limit, which provides for greater depth in the information gained form the participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). I created the interview protocol as described (see Appendix A).

The second instrument was an archival document protocol to review staff meeting and leadership team meeting minutes (see Appendix B). I created the protocol based on the CRSL framework, the related literature, and based on approval by Walden's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the school district's research officer. The document analysis protocol helped me address both RQs because the meeting notes provided primary source data related to how the principals addressed challenges and indicated some specific actions the principals used related to increasing the achievement of ELLs.

Interviews

Semistructured interviews fall somewhere in between highly structured and unstructured interviews with a mixture of more and less structured questions (Merriam, 2002). More specifically, semistructured interviews consist of a specific topic of interest, preparation of a limited number of questions in advance, and follow-up questions if needed (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). When using semistructured interviews, the focus is on the planned questions that speak to the RQs (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Semistructured interviews were the appropriate approach for this study to explore how elementary principals overcome challenges and use leadership practices related to the phenomena of increasing the achievement of ELLs. Another reason semistructured

interviews were the best choice is because formalized structured interviews may prevent a true understanding of the principals' experiences due to the rigidity of questions while using informal unstructured interviews may not lead to an emergence of common themes or findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Thus, the open-ended questions in semistructured interviews are designed to provide participants the opportunity to reflect on how they overcame challenges and to identify leadership practices implemented to increase the achievement of ELLs. The preplanned questions are flexible, which allows an opportunity for follow-up or probing questions as needed based on the participants' responses to the interview questions. It is important to note that regardless as to whether the interview is structured, unstructured, or semistructured; the interview questions must align with the RQs, problem, and purpose of the study.

I interviewed each participant in a one-on-one setting via Zoom. The participants responded to eight open-ended interview questions with probing and follow-up questions. The questions were asked in order to each participant to ensure consistency. The semistructured open-ended interview questions were chosen to obtain broad responses from the participants regarding how they overcame challenges increasing the achievement of ELLs and the leadership practices they used to increase the achievement of ELLs. Baškarada (2014) noted that open-ended interview questions could guide the conversation, ensure bias is absent, and become a significant source of evidence. These interviews were completed in one session and were approximately 45-60 minutes in duration. All interviews were recorded, reviewed for accuracy, transcribed, and analyzed for themes related to the RQs.

Archival Data

Merriam (2002) identified archival data as another source for data collection because the data are preexisting in the research setting and the collection of the data does not interrupt the school's daily routines in ways that the researcher might. The benefits of using archival data are that the data collection does not rely on human beings to provide the researcher with the information and the documents augment the evidence from another source (Merriam, 2002; Yin, 2017). The archival data were requested from the participants. The participants provided electronic copies of their staff meeting and leadership team minutes. Staff meeting and leadership team minutes from August 2019 through August 2020 were reviewed. These data were relevant to this research because they can provide answers to both RQs and the notes may offer firsthand detail as to how principals addressed challenges and the leadership practices principals used.

These archival data provided information to indicate how principals worked with their instructional staff to address student achievement and if there were challenges to effectiveness. It was not clear whether these data supported the understanding of how principals used leadership practices to overcome challenges and increase the achievement of ELLs at their schools. The meeting minutes did not identify behaviors and outward expressions of the principal's beliefs about the learning of ELLs.

I used the protocol (see Appendix B) to analyze data such as the same words, concepts, and actions used or not used by the principal relating to ELLs and their achievement. From the meeting minutes I categorized the principal's words and actions related to increasing the achievement of ELLs as identified by the four CRSL tenets. The

data did not reveal any specific words or phrases used by principals related to challenges increasing the achievement of ELLs. The data did highlight leadership practices used by principals to address the achievement of their ELL population. Specifically, I included data from staff meeting and leadership team meeting minutes from the participants' schools from August 2019 to August 2020. Staff meeting and leadership team meeting minutes prior to August 2019 were excluded from the study.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

I used the state department of education's website to identify elementary schools in the district with an ELL population of 50% or higher. The state department of education's website identified the demographics of each school in the state, which allowed me to select schools in the district that met the criteria. Once schools were identified, I used the local school district's public website to obtain the names and email addresses of principals. I sent an email introducing myself and included my contact information, described the study, my affiliation with the district and the study, and requested volunteers to participate in the study.

I garnered participation from elementary principals who led schools in the district, thus I did not seek participation from elementary principals in a neighboring district who led a school with an ELL enrollment of 50% or higher and have been principal at the same school for a minimum of 3 years. I did not need to use the state's reporting site to identify schools with an enrollment of 50% or higher and the neighboring district's public website to identify the principals' names and email addresses to send email communication requesting their participation just as I did for the principals in the local

district. I did not have more than 10 principals express interest in participating in the study. Interviewing those principals with the largest ELL population would have provided more information regarding how they overcame challenges and the leadership practices they used to increase the achievement of ELLs. All principals who were contacted provided consent within 24-48 hours via email and participated in the study.

Participation

Those principals who responded to the invitation email stating they consented to participate in the study and had been a principal at their school for a minimum of 3 years were contacted electronically to schedule a date and time to for their semistructured interview. Each participant sent their availability to me electronically and I scheduled the interview. Before the interview began, I reviewed the background of the study, procedures, nature of the study, risks and benefits of the study, privacy, contact information, and answered any questions the participant had. I then asked the participant for permission to record the interview via Zoom. Once I received consent to record the interview, I interviewed the participant.

Data Collection

Semistructured Interviews. For the purposes of this study, data were collected using semistructured interviews and archival data in the form of staff meeting and leadership team meeting minutes. The semistructured interviews took place via video conferencing at a mutually agreed upon time in private settings to provide participants with adequate time to respond to the interview questions. Follow-up and/or probing questions were asked to provide depth and insight into the participants' responses.

Interviews were recorded via video platform to ensure accuracy of the responses. The audio recordings were compared with the video platform transcription of the interview to ensure accuracy of the interview before analysis began. Qualitative data software was used to organize the collected data.

Interview data collection took place across a span of 1 month, and each participant was interviewed once for approximately 45-60 minutes in duration. The data collection took place via Zoom video software as the video platform was approved and supplied by the local school district. Each interview proceeded as follows:

1. Participants were greeted and thanked for their participation.
2. The purpose of the study was reviewed with participants. They were informed that the video was recorded and the approximate length of time for the interview. They were reminded their staff meeting and leadership team minutes from August 2019-2020 would be used as a dataset and given an opportunity to provide consent or eliminate themselves from the study.
3. Participants could eliminate themselves from the interview or study at any time. Participants were allowed to remove themselves from the interview at any time during the interview verbally or by sending the researcher an email requesting removal from the study. All participants remained in the study.
4. The interview was conducted using questions in the Interview Guide (see Appendix A). Each question was presented to each participant in the same order as written on the Interview Guide and follow-up or probing questions were used when more information from the participant was needed.

5. At the conclusion of the interviews, the participants were thanked for their participation, provided an opportunity to ask questions, informed they could request the transcript of the interview by sending me an email within 7-10 business days of the interview.
6. The participants were asked to email their staff meeting and leadership team meeting notes to me within 24-48 hours after the interview.
7. Participants could decline sending their staff meeting and leadership team meeting minutes at any point during the study either orally or in writing. None of the participants declined the use of the school's staff meeting and leadership team meeting minutes.
8. The participants were thanked again, the video recording was stopped, and the video call ended.

Archival Data. Staff meeting and leadership team meeting minutes from each principal were collected electronically. The principals of each school sent me the electronic meeting minutes for one academic school year, August 2019 to August 2020. Each participant sent the meeting minutes once because the local school system used Rolling Agendas for all meetings. "A rolling agenda is a Google document (located in Google Drive) that contains agenda/meeting notes from multiple meetings on one, continuous Google document" (Evans, 2016, p. 2). The purpose of a rolling agenda is to ensure clear record keeping, organization of images, websites, and notes in one place, reflection of attendees, identification of clear structures and focus for each meeting, storage of meeting materials electronically to support easy and open access to notes by

participants (Boudett et al., 2013; Boudett & City, 2014). The meeting minutes provided data in the form of words and actions related to how the principal managed challenges with increasing the achievement of ELLs and the elementary principals' leadership practices used to increase the achievement of ELLs.

Data Analysis Plan

Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) was used to organize and sort data. The CAQDAS software stored, organized, and helped me with "human analytic reflection" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 30). An inductive approach was used to analyze the data to expose patterns of themes and interactions within data (Patton, 2015). An inductive approach was used for this study because it was important that the research findings emerged from the frequent, dominant, or significant themes inherent in raw interview and document review data, without the restraints imposed by structured methodologies (Thomas, 2006).

The interviews and archival data were reviewed and transcribed within a month after all interviews concluded and all data were used to answer both RQs. The transcripts and documents were read multiple times to interpret the raw data and to become familiar with the data (Thomas, 2006). Open coding is a search for repetition of words, phrases, and concepts, and then a label is used to give meaning to the open code. I used open coding of specific words, phrases, and sentences relative to challenges increasing ELL achievement, leadership practices, and ELL achievement in the initial phase of data analysis.

Second cycle coding entailed organizing and grouping the data into categories, which were determined by searching for similarities among the open codes (Saldaña, 2016). The coding process was used to generate themes to develop further analysis. The themes displayed multiple perspectives from individuals and were supported by specific evidence (Creswell, 2014). The analysis focused on "sets of constructs or concepts in relation to each other to make arguments and develop findings" (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 250). The findings were developed by reviewing the data based on the framework and the RQs (Yin, 2018).

Discrepant Cases

Discrepant cases are cases that do not support or actually contradict emerging patterns, explanations, or themes. I attempted to avoid pitfalls of qualitative data analysis such as (a) failing to analyze the data by stringing data extracts together; (b) paraphrasing, making the questions from the interview guide analytic themes, including themes that do not make sense, overlap too much, or including data that do not support the research claims; or (c) supporting other claims (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I found no discrepant cases.

Trustworthiness

The key characteristic in qualitative research, trustworthiness (Shenton, 2004), ensures the study measures what is intended. Validity in qualitative research references the ways the researcher asserts the fidelity of the findings to the experiences of the participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). This research used two ways to achieve internal validity of this qualitative study through triangulation of the data and member checking.

Qualitative researchers use member checking because participants in the study are asked to assess and/or challenge the researcher's interpretation and the accuracy of the analysis of the participant interviews and archived data for internal validity and to ensure the participants' responses were interpreted correctly (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Creswell and Miller (2000) defined triangulation as the process used by researchers that joins multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study. Triangulation for this study included corroborating the findings of the data collected from the semistructured interviews and the staff meeting and leadership team minutes, which were analyzed to form the themes and categories in the study (Golafshani, 2003).

Credibility

Credibility was established by following the proper methods for interviewing participants and collecting and analyzing data. Positivist researchers postulate that credibility is one of the key criteria, in which they seek to ensure their study measures or tests what is actually intended as credibility deals with the congruence of the findings with reality (Shenton, 2004). The research involved semistructured interviews and archival data and the strategies used to achieve credibility were reflexivity and triangulation of the data sources. The themes and categories emerged from the participant interviews and from the meeting minutes to identify how the principals addressed challenges and what leadership practices were used at their schools to increase the achievement of ELLs. I had an ongoing internal dialogue and critical self-reflection of my positionality as an observer and active acknowledgement and recognition that my

position may affect the research process and outcome (Berger, 2015; Hsiung, 2010). My self-reflection required me to examine my assumptions and preconceived notions (Hsiung, 2010). The acknowledgement of my reflexivity enhanced the research because I took into consideration my positionality throughout all phases of the research process and how the positionality affects the study (Berger, 2015; Hsiung, 2010). Consequently, the participant interviews were reviewed shortly after the original analysis to identify and note where my own experience interfered with accurately understanding the participant's report of their experiences to increase the achievement of ELLs (Berger, 2015) as a means to maintain balance between my own experience and that of the participants.

Triangulation is defined as the process researchers use to verify evidence from two or more sources (Creswell, 2012). I triangulated data from two sources: semistructured interviews and documents. The purpose of triangulating the data was to compare and contrast the themes drawn from data sets (Merriam, 2009). The data were analyzed separately, which assisted with creating a report that was accurate and measured what was intended.

Transferability

Transferability was established by purposeful selection of the participants to create a robust group of participants in the study. Shenton (2004) stated the results of a qualitative study are transferrable when they are understood within the context of the particular characteristics of the organization or organizations and, possibly, geographical area in which the fieldwork occurs. I used thick description to present a thorough

description of the context of the phenomenon and excerpts from transcripts to ensure a range of circumstances.

Dependability

Dependability was established by an audit trail of the research process (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The research incorporated a range of data from various sources related to the phenomena being explored. Shenton (2004) stated that researchers could address issues of dependability directly. An audit trail is useful if a future researcher repeats the work with the intent of gaining similar results. I documented the data collection process and the decisions made to aid another researcher in following and repeating the study. The audit trail included the data collection process, the sampling details, how the data were managed, and the findings of the study.

Confirmability

Confirmability was established by the implementation of researcher reflexivity, a continuous reflection of the research process (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I took steps to ensure as far as possible that the study's findings were the result of the experiences and ideas of the participants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher (Shenton, 2004). I reflected on my personal biases and captured data as literally as I could to limit interpretation while collecting data.

Ethical Procedures

. Walden University's IRB granted approval (no. 04-06-21-1012601) for research, participants received an email inviting them to participate in the study, which requested their consent in the body of the email. Participants voluntarily responded with, "I

consent" before the data collection process ensued. Treatment of human participants was executed in accordance with the 1974 *Belmont Report*, which required the researcher to advise participants of their rights formally and thoroughly before, during, and after the study (Miracle, 2016). The partnership agreement between Walden University and my employer stipulated the case study would involve adults only in the research. Participants voluntarily participated in the study and were informed of their rights several times during the process of the study. The email invitation notified the participants of their rights in writing. Once participants elected to participate in the study by formally replying, "I consent" via email, they received an email inviting them to schedule a video conference to review the expectations of the study, ask questions, and participate in the semistructured interview.

After the interview, the details of the interview, audio recordings, and transcripts were kept confidential. Another protective measure to maintain the confidentiality of the participants in the study was to redact the participants' names and their school's name on the interview transcripts; I gave the collected data pseudonyms. The pseudonyms for participants aided in distinguishing one participant's data from another for easy retrieval, data analysis, and data reporting. The computer files were stored on my personal computer with a password-protected code, accessible only by myself. The transcripts and other collected data are locked in a filing cabinet at my home for a period of 5 years beyond completion of the study. At the end of the 5-year mark, all data will be destroyed.

Participants could withdraw from the study at any point in the research process. If a participant elected to withdraw from the study, the audio recording would have been

deleted. If participants withdrew from the study after they provided access to their staff meeting and leadership team meeting minutes, the electronic documents would have been deleted and if there were any hardcopies of the documents, they would have been shredded. If the withdrawal of participants caused the number of participants to fall below eight participants, follow-up emails would have been sent to principals who did not respond to the initial email invitation and those participants would receive a phone call asking them to participate in the study. There were no participants who withdrew from the study.

Summary

In this chapter, I offered evidence as to how this study was related to the tradition of a qualitative study. This qualitative case study used a combination of semistructured interviews and staff meeting and leadership team meeting minutes to explore how principals overcame challenges increasing the achievement of ELLs and the leadership practices of principals in an urban school district that can increase the achievement of ELLs. In accordance with university and district policy, appropriate permissions were obtained from the IRB, school district personnel, and the participants to meet ethical obligations of the study. Confidentiality and trustworthiness of the study was addressed through consent, credibility, and transferability of the study results. Chapter 4 includes results of the study.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to explore the leadership practices of elementary principals in an urban school district located in an Eastern state to increase the achievement of ELLs in their schools. By acquiring a better understanding of the individual practices of principals to overcome challenges and increase the achievement of ELLs may provide insight to other public-school districts that are seeking to increase the achievement of the ELL population in their schools. In the study, I sought to answer the following two RQs:

RQ1. How do elementary school principals overcome the challenges of improving the achievement of ELLs?

RQ2. What leadership practices do elementary principals use to increase the academic achievement of ELLs?

This chapter begins with a description of the study setting. I also discuss the data collection and analysis procedures before presenting the results. Information on the methodology I used to ensure the trustworthiness of the study is also provided. The chapter concludes with a summary of the results.

Setting

The setting for this study was an urban school district located in the Eastern United States. Participation was open to those elementary principals who were principals at the same school for a minimum of 3 years and led a school with an identified ELL population of 50% or higher. Eight principals agreed to participate in this study. Those elementary principals who consented to participate corresponded with me directly via

email to ensure confidentiality. Each participant was interviewed using Zoom video conferencing. All participants conducted their voluntary interview from their individual school office at a mutually agreeable time.

Demographics

Seven of the participants were female, and one was male. Four of the participants led elementary schools that were prekindergarten to 6th grade, and four participants led elementary schools that were prekindergarten to 5th grade. Principals in the study had 4–10 years of leadership experience at their current schools. Five of the principals had a master's degree in education, and three had a doctoral degree in education. Six of the participating principals had been in the same school district for the duration of their principalship, and one participant had been an assistant principal in another school district prior to becoming a principal in the current school district. The years of experience and the duration at their current schools helped to provide insightful perspectives. The demographics are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant	Tenure (years)	ELL (%)	Gender	Education (degree)
Participant 1	5	62	Female	Doctoral
Participant 2	4	68	Female	Master's
Participant 3	10	67	Female	Master's
Participant 4	5	54	Male	Doctoral
Participant 5	8	51	Female	Master's
Participant 6	4	56	Female	Master's
Participant 7	7	58	Female	Master's
Participant 8	4	50	Female	Doctoral

Note. ELL = English Language Learner. ELL population data derived from the 2020 School Report Card.

Data Collection

Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings and attempt to make sense of the meaning people bring to the situation (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In this study, I used a semistructured interview guide and an archival data review instrument that I created (see Appendices A and B). These data collection tools aided me in gathering data to answer the study's two RQs.

The data collection process included individual semistructured interviews with eight school principals, which lasted approximately 45-60 minutes over a 35-day span of time. I held one-to-one interviews using the Zoom video conferencing platform. Interviews were recorded on a password-protected laptop with the live transcription feature enabled. The interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the participants. All interviews with participants were conducted in a span of 4 weeks. The variability of interview conditions was minimal to nonexistent; the primary challenge was coordinating the principals' schedules with mine to ensure there was adequate time to complete the interview in one seating. There was no variation to the previously shared data collection plan.

Interview Process

I used the state department of education's website to identify each school's state report card. The state report card identified each school's ELL population. Once I found schools that had an identified ELL population of 50% or higher, I used the district's

website to identify the name and email of the principal of the schools with an ELL population of 50% or higher. The data collection process described in Chapter 3 was followed.

I sent an individual email to each potential participant requesting their voluntary participation in the study. Per IRB guidelines, I embedded the following information in the body of the email: the purpose of the study, interview procedures, voluntary nature of the study, risks and benefits of being in the study, privacy, and contact information if the participant had questions. Those principals who were willing to participate in the study responded to the email with the statement, "I consent."

Each interview began with a greeting from me in which I thanked the participant for their participation. I reiterated the purpose of the interview, informed them they could end the interview at any time, and informed them that I would need them to send their electronic staff meeting and leadership team meeting minutes from August 2019 to August 2020 to me. I then asked them how long they had been principal at their school and their level of education. After the principals shared their tenure at the school and their level of education, I asked them if they had any questions and I asked for verbal consent to record the interview. Once consent was granted to record the interview, I began the interview.

I recorded participant responses via Zoom video conferencing. I enabled the live transcription feature. Zoom video conferencing emailed the transcribed interview to me with the accompanying audio and video. I listened to the audio and corrected the errors in the transcript that impacted meaning. Each participant's transcript was used for the

coding process and analyzed for meaning. I stored the audio recordings and transcripts on a secure password-protected laptop. The transcripts and audio files will be deleted from the secure password-protected laptop after a period of 5 years as expected. Additionally, the paper transcripts will be locked in a filing cabinet at my home for a period of 5 years beyond completion of the study. At the end of the 5-year mark, all data will be removed from my laptop hard drive and destroyed.

Archival Data

After their interviews, participants sent their electronic staff meeting and leadership team meeting minutes for one academic school year, which spanned from August 2019 to August 2020. I read all of the meeting minute notes and collected notes using the Archival Data Review instrument (see Appendix B) that I created. My notes and the minutes documents were used as data for coding and categorizing purposes.

The number of meetings included in the documents varied. Participant 8 held 24 staff meetings in 1 year while Participant 3 held seven staff meetings in 1 year. The same was true for the leadership team meeting minutes as Participant 7 held 31 leadership team meetings in 1 year while Participant 3 held four leadership team meetings in 1 year (see Table 2). The data also revealed the variance in meeting frequencies. Participant 7 held leadership team meetings weekly while the other principals met with their teams weekly, biweekly, bimonthly, and, in some instances, monthly. The frequency of staff meetings varied as well. The archived meeting minutes were reviewed several times and used for the coding process and analyzed for meaning. The meeting minutes were stored on a secure password-protected laptop. The meeting minutes will be deleted from the secure

password protected laptop after a period of 5 years as required. Additionally, the paper minutes will be locked in a filing cabinet at my home for a period of 5 years beyond completion of the study. All data will be destroyed at the end of the 5-year mark by deleting the minutes from the hard drive of my laptop and shredding the paper copies of the archived meeting minutes. There were no unusual occurrences during the data collection process of completing semistructured interviews or receiving the archival data.

Table 2

Leadership Team and Staff Meetings That Participants Held From August 2019 to August 2020

	No. of leadership team meetings	No. of staff meetings
Participant 1	25	14
Participant 2	09	20
Participant 3	04	05
Participant 4	12	04
Participant 5	12	08
Participant 6	13	16
Participant 7	31	07
Participant 8	06	24

Data Analysis

I analyzed the data using an inductive approach. The purpose in using an inductive approach to analyze the data was to allow the research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant, or significant themes inherent in raw interview and archival data, without the restraints imposed by a structured methodology (see Thomas, 2006). It is a simple, systematic approach to analyze qualitative data and answer the RQs.

Once all eight interviews were completed, I listened to the audio recordings and edited the transcriptions to ensure accuracy of participants' words. All participants sent

their staff meeting and leadership team meeting minutes electronically via Google Drive or email within a week of the conclusion of the interview. The interview transcriptions from each interview were uploaded separately from a password-protected laptop to CAQDAS for storage and preliminary organization to assist me with analytic reflections (Saldaña, 2016). In addition to storing and organizing the data, it is important to note that qualitative data analysis software does the mechanical work but not the thinking. CAQDAS does not conduct the analysis (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Saldaña, 2016). When using CAQDAS, I provided a set of input data taken in the form of text. As the researcher, I developed the entire underlying substantive procedure, such as sorting, coding, combining, and recombining portions of the text. I gave step-by-step instructions to the computer to carry out the procedures (see Yin, 2015).

Interviews

I familiarized myself with the data by reviewing and reading the data in detail multiple times. The repetition allowed me to gain an understanding of the themes and events covered in the text (Thomas, 2006). I then began to assign meaning to the data by assigning codes to words or phrases that described what was going on in the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I ensured trustworthiness by using the following steps to analyze these data:

1. read and reread all interview transcripts and meeting minutes and notes line-by-line to ensure that the text was captured and to have the overall concepts clearer in my mind,

2. used open coding and in vivo coding (using the participants' words) to identify potential categories,
3. combined categories to create short phrases to identify themes that emerged from the categories, and
4. continued to synthesize themes as needed (see Saldaña, 2016).

Coding

Open coding was the first level of coding used with the interview data as I searched for the repetition of words, phrases, and concepts (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I read through the participants' responses and organized similar words and phrases to identify distinct themes and concepts for categorization (Williams & Moser, 2019). The aim of open coding was to express the data in the form of concepts during the first cycle of coding.

First Cycle. After I read and re-read all interview transcripts line by line, I used an inductive approach to apply open codes to the participants' words to identify possible categories. The first cycle coding revealed codes such as *influx of newcomers*, *caseload of ESOL teacher*, *teacher mindset, family attendance, provide resources to families, family attendance*, and *observe teacher practice*. The data in Table 3 illustrate the open coding process used. The codes were borne from the repeated words, phrases, and concepts of the participants' during the semistructured interviews, which set me on the path of beginning to understand how principals addressed, and perhaps overcame, challenges increasing the achievement of ELLs and the leadership practices they used to increase the achievement of ELLs.

Once the open coding process was complete, I reviewed the codes to look for similarities to develop broader categories. Some of the categories that emerged were *ELL population increase, scheduling for ESOL students, scheduling for ESOL teachers, low family attendance, resources, improving student achievement,* and *classroom observations of teacher practice*. The far left column showed the participant, the next column showed the open code, the middle column showed the excerpt from the interview transcript, and the final column identified the category. The data in Table 3 showed how the coding process progressed from open codes to categories. There was a relationship between the open codes generated during the first cycle coding and category. I read the transcripts carefully to ensure the chosen participant excerpts aligned with the open code and the category.

I used the CAQDAS to store the interview transcripts. I then read each individual transcript line by line, reviewed the open codes and then begin to combine the open codes to create an overarching category. For example, the open code, influx of newcomers developed into ELL population increase because participants discussed strategies to manage the increase of the newcomer ELL population. The open code caseload of ESOL teacher developed into the category scheduling for ESOL teachers because participants discussed creating teacher schedules that increased the instructional time ESOL teachers had with their students or another way to schedule staff to meet the needs of students.

As I reflected on the open codes generated from the data, I used a color-coding system to identify the open codes, which identified strategies participants used to overcome challenges increasing the achievement of ELLs and the open codes, which

identified the strategies participants used to increase the achievement of ELLs. Then I used the process of merging the larger amounts of data which formed the open code into smaller amounts of data to form categories.

Table 3

Open Coding and Categorization Process for Participant Interview Data

Participant	Open code	Excerpt	Category
Participant 3	Influx of newcomers	…The challenge when we have newcomers, meeting their needs, because we have an influx of newcomers.	ELL population increase
Participant 4	Increase number of newcomers	One of the challenges we're seeing in recent time is that we have we're having an increase in the in the number of newcomers.	
Participant 2	Entering school as newcomer/lower performance	...So now our plan is to look at every grade level and say what's the biggest bang for the buck in each grade level to help them build their way up? …We have so many fifth graders that are first grade reading level because they came in as newcomers.	Lower ELL student performance
Participant 1	Newcomers need more time with interventions	What we have found that sometimes newcomers need more time on the intervention versus less time with the classroom teacher, because they have such needs for basics that it benefits the student more to have that time then to just sit in the curriculum and not know what's going on, so we adjust the amount of time on an intervention, we also may adjust how the lesson is taught in in the ESOL setting.	Scheduling for ESOL students

(*table continues*)

Participant	Open code	Excerpt	Category
Participant 3	Caseload of ESOL teacher	…Load of the ESL teacher, because then their load became a real challenge trying to fit them [newcomers] in because their time … theirs was like 15 minutes, as opposed to 30 minutes.	Scheduling for ESOL teachers
Participant 6	Caseload of ESOL teacher	…Seven ESOL teachers two of those ESOL teachers were out on leave, so I kind of had to spread the love with other ESOL teachers and it was a little overwhelming.	
Participant 4	ESOL schedule	One of my concerns is having enough time you know, do they have enough time within their schedule to effectively meet the needs of all the students on their caseload	Scheduling for ESOL teachers
Participant 8	ESOL schedule	...Only have five. I wish I had one per grade level… To have one person per grade level, so they teach across grades.	Scheduling for ESOL teachers
Participant 6	Teacher capacity	…Understanding those strategies and how to use those strategies another challenge, I have. Especially the speaking task this school year because it really wasn't explained what it was like you know how are we going to use this…and the teachers really didn't understand that, I didn't really understand that…	Minimal understanding how to teach ELLs

(*table continues*)

Participant	Open code	Excerpt	Category
Participant 7	Teachers do not understand what it means to be an ELL	One of the challenges is understanding what it means to be an ELL.	
Participant 8	Teacher capacity	…The lack of knowledge and a lack of wanting to know how to increase their perceptions of what to do, for their students in the classroom.	
Participant 7	Teacher mindset	…The challenge wasn't children The challenge was our mindset around how we address children and how we look at them. As learners and not as a deficit because you don't speak the language doesn't mean I can't learn I just don't know what you're saying so, how do we as educators grow our own craft.	Teacher low expectations
Participant 5	Teacher buy in	…One of the challenges is getting teachers to embrace English language learners as a group that need and require something different. Additional to how they're teaching. So to see themselves as Teachers of English Language Learners.	Teacher low expectations
Participant 2	Teacher mindset	Just with them having the mindset of because they don't speak English, then the kids can't do. So it was first getting my teachers to get a mindset of every child can learn.	Teacher low expectations

(*table continues*)

Participant	Open code	Excerpt	Category
Participant 5	Attendance at parent meetings	…We have ESOL parent nights. The problem with that is the quality of those nights are awesome. But the attendance is poor.	Low parent attendance
Participant 2	Parent attendance	…When parents wouldn't come to the meetings. But then Miss G. and Miss M. were really good at like, so we're gonna give you dinner for the first few ones. And then that kind of started bringing them and then they started moving the meetings earlier.	
Participant 1	Parent attendance at workshop	We had low numbers, they got better, so I think word of mouth wasn't as prominent as it could have been if we weren't here, and we think a lot of things get around that way if they were able to come to the building and get the prize for attending versus yeah you get it later, you know that kind of thing… I think the challenge to that was just attendance and then again being a community that needs to be in the building and we were unable to do that…	

(*table continues*)

Participant	Open code	Excerpt	Category
Participant 8	Attendance at parent meetings	…We do things for our parents in teaching them and helping them, we always run a parenting class to help them with learning the English language that's usually twice a week. We didn't do that this year due to Covid. We found that kind of difficult and we didn't have the participation. I know that S. tried, my Community Schools person, she tried to start it this year, but a lot of our parents didn't participate, so we nixed it.	
Participant 4	School provides resources	We would provide opportunity for parents to come by to pick up the resources so that they could actively you know, be an active participant in that whatever the activity or engagement is. Whatever materials or manipulative they would need we let them know ahead of time so that um so that they can provision and be prepared to engage right then.	Resources
Participant 1	Provide resources for families	Welcoming the parents to the school and then that makes them comfortable that makes the students comfortable in coming to us regarding. If it's an immigration issue, a housing issue, a job issue, and how we can help them with that piece, the parent piece, but utilizing the resources in the building and making it a really a wraparound.	

Participant	Open code	Excerpt	Category
Participant 8	Provide resources to families	…Each month and we'll invite one of our teachers to come in and do a short talk or an activity, will do make …and take night …for word cards, because the parents don't make them at home and if we send the materials home they don't do it so.	
Participant 3	Checking for student understanding	...Many like checkpoints, not waiting for the big district assessment, just little things when they do at the end, when after they teach something, assess the children and see how they're performing.	Assess achievement
Participant 7	Review and discuss data of strategy usage	…Meet once a week on that particular data capture sheet to say I still have 3 kids out of my 20 that aren't responded at all. So what are we going to do to try to encourage them to speak…	
Participant 7	Review student data to help with decision-making	…I really had to sit down and really look at what our data was saying and really thinking through so as the leader in the building, how do I help really truly lead that work and what the work will be for me, so I had to understand that strategy, I had to take the time to know the purpose of that strategy, how it works and a means to actually monitor it	Data driven decision-making
Participant 5	Room for improvement	…We had quality data, it always looked good compared to the system, you know, and the state. But it's not where we want it to be…	Improve student achievement

(*table continues*)

Participant	Open code	Excerpt	Category
Participant 2	Review data	So when we started looking at the data, say, for instance, we looked at like math data, and our kids were not doing well with decimals and fractions. But they also weren't doing well with addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division.	
Participant 1	Analyze data from an ESOL lens	We work with the teacher and leading the data analysis and I believe part of that was including them in more of a role in presenting the data and it wasn't just this is the data, but it's what is the data, and how does it from an ESOL lens tell us what you see.	Data discussions
Participant 8	Review data	…We've looked at our numbers and our scores and they don't look all that great so as a building that's where we're trying to move towards…	Improve student achievement
Participant 7	Monitoring instruction	…The monitoring doesn't always come from you know me so the monitoring can be me doing informal or formal it could be monitoring as a whole school … Create a weeklong schedule, where people are being observed, not just once, not twice, but three times…	Observing teacher practice

(*table continues*)

Participant	Open code	Excerpt	Category
Participant 4	Observe teacher practice	As we observe teacher practice we're also looking at how are teachers implementing those strategies within their day to day instruction so it's not just you providing the professional development… So expectations around the instruction and …how do we effectively monitor.	
Participant 5	Observe instruction	… When you visit classrooms and you see that teachers are using some of the strategies …the kids are drawing concepts or you know and showing them or sometimes they'll engage in the peer sharing or when you're in the classrooms and you see teachers implementing some of the strategies that were talked about in the in a staff development.	
Participant 6	Monitoring instruction	…My AP and I and my whole leadership team we're going to make a plan to go in to make sure that we are monitoring and holding the teachers accountable.	
Participant 2	Monitoring instruction	…So for the administration team, we had to come in and put accountability on us and how we were going to monitor it. …For the A team like so when you walk in what are you looking at? What supports are you able to identify and put into place? Where can you help?	Observation and feedback

(*table continues*)

Participant	Open code	Excerpt	Category
Participant 8	Observe teacher practice	…From me going into their classrooms and watching them and talking to my ESOL team and finding out from them what their expectations are too. Meet with them to and talk to them and ask them okay so what are you all working in…	

Note. ESOL = English for speakers of other languages; ELL = English Language Learner.

Archival Data

Upon completion of the interview analysis, I used the Archival Data Review Meeting Minutes instrument (see Appendix B) to capture notes as I individually read and reread the staff meeting and leadership team meeting minutes. The archived meeting minutes were reviewed for words, concepts, and actions related to how the principal overcame challenges with increasing the achievement of ELLs and the elementary principals' leadership practices used to increase the achievement of ELLs.

First Cycle

During the first cycle of coding the archived data, *teaching assignments, family communication, presentation of strategies*, and *review of student data* were some of the codes and are included in Table 4. I used a color-coding system for each participant to identify the particular words and phrases that appeared across the dataset for staff meeting minutes and then the leadership team minutes. Once I noticed particular words or phrases were used repeatedly across the dataset, I then assigned codes.

I reviewed the open codes and noticed relationships between the codes, which enabled me to develop categories. For example, the open code teaching assignments was assigned the category staffing, because participants discussed the number of teacher vacancies in the school and the need to hire for these positions. The far left column identified the participant, the next column identified the meeting type, the middle column identified the open code, the next column identified the excerpt from the participant's archived meeting minutes that aligned with the open code, and the final column identified the category.

The data in Table 4 illustrate how I progressed from open codes to categories for the archived data. There was a relationship between the open codes generated during the first cycle coding and the categories. The meeting minutes were read individually and carefully to ensure the chosen participant excerpts aligned with the open code and the category.

Table 4

Open Coding and Categorization Process for Archived Meeting Minutes

Participant	Archived data meeting Type	Open codes	Excerpt	Category
Participant 4	Staff meeting	Teaching assignments	The grade level teaching assignments are outlined accordingly. SPED assignments remain the same for 2019-2020 year.	Staffing the school
Participant 6	Leadership meeting		Grade 1 would like a para to support newcomers.	
Participant 7			Discuss vacancies and upcoming virtual interviews	
Participant 2	Staff meeting	Staff reduction	…Changes in the schedule. Staff reduction…Will be staff reduction based on numbers	
Participant 1	Leadership meeting	Newcomer enrollment increase	…Our school is not the only school exploding with newcomers we are not alone we have an 11% increase in ESOL enrollment….	
Participant 8	Staff meeting	Parent communication	Communication must be ongoing. Be available for parents through email and Class Dojo.	Engaging parents
Participant 6	Staff meeting		… Students are asking to get one… Talking to parents at dismissal…Parents are very thankful and grateful for positive feedback good feedback about community schools grant…. Keep it going!!!!	

Participant	Archived data meeting Type	Open codes	Excerpt	Category
Participant 5	Staff meeting		...We are attempting to create a database for communicating with parents more efficiently…	
Participant 5	Leadership meeting		Parent survey goes out today. Inquiries regarding English classes for parents.	
Participant 2	Leadership	Parent information sessions	...This virtual parent night, there will be sessions that are covered to the whole group that are universal to assist parents with county guidelines/initiatives as well as breakout sessions that they can choose from based on their individual needs...	Informing parents
Participant 7	Staff meeting	Presentation of strategies	…Demonstration of Visual Thinking Strategy…	Improvement of teaching skills
Participant 2	Leadership meeting		…Implement strategies learned in the ESOL PD…	
Participant 5	Staff meeting	Culturally proficient educators	Increase understanding of the cultural diversity and context of our students and families Reflect on our individual journey and collective experiences. Enhance ability to be culturally proficient educators	

(*table continues*)

Participant	Archived data meeting Type	Open codes	Excerpt	Category
Participant 3	Staff meeting	Collaboration with colleagues	...ESOL teachers will provide instructional support the classroom teachers can use with ESOL students. ESOL teachers will help create a plan to incorporate more content-based discussions among ESOL students to support general education teachers.	
Participant 5	Leadership meeting		The New Teacher Academy is providing support for the new teacher. The long-term substitute is working collaboratively with team to understand the curriculum and testing but needs support with bulletin boards, etc. Admin support will provide needed support.	
Participant 1	Leadership meeting	Developing teachers' skills	...ESOL Newcomers PD needed...	
Participant 4	Staff meeting	Review of student data	…Identify the lowest performing standards (domains) students…	Assess achievement
Participant 3	Staff meeting		...Discussing the purpose of Speaking Tasks and how teachers can analyze data for instructional goals for students...	Improve student achievement
Participant 7	Staff meeting		Review state ESSA rating... Improvement in student quality...Progress towards English Language Proficiency decreased from 5.9 to 5.0...	

(*table continues*)

Participant	Archived data meeting Type	Open codes	Excerpt	Category
Participant 5	Leadership meeting		…Review student work samples on the instructional tasks and analyzing the descriptive feedback…	Assess achievement
Participant 8	Leadership meeting	Analyze student data	...analyzing running records for MSV data to inform small group guided reading instruction...	
Participant 4	Leadership meeting		**...**Data Reflection...Identify the lowest performing standards (domains) and students. What were the teacher and students barriers? Identify the highest performing standards (domains) and students. What teacher and/or student behaviors led to this success?	
Participant 8	Staff meeting	Informal observations expectations	…Informal observations-Data &Look fors…	Observation and feedback
Participant 4	Staff meeting		Informal Observation Look Fors; Objective, Critical Academic Vocabulary, Student Discourse, Use of Manipulatives/Resources Common Formative (inclusive of a writing component)	
Participant 1	Staff meeting	Informal walkthrough	...The administrative team designed an informal walkthrough form. It is only to be used for our organization not for evaluation...	

(*table continues*)

Participant	Archived data meeting Type	Open codes	Excerpt	Category
Participant 7	Leadership meeting	Informal observations	…Discuss the findings of this week's informal observations…	
Participant 5	Leadership meeting	Observation and feedback	My goal is to visit all grade 4 and K classes and give teachers written feedback. I also plan to review the first quarter benchmark data, speak to grade level teams about their data, and plan next steps for moving forward.	
Participant 2	Leadership meeting	Learning walk	...Learning Walk Problem of Practice Look Fors	

Note. SPED = special education; ESOL = English for Speakers of Other Languages; PD = professional development; ESSA = Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015.

Elementary principals used similar leadership practices to address challenges increasing the achievement of ELLs and to increase the achievement of ELLs. The principals varied in the specific strategies and practices used and the frequency at which they used those practices. A relationship was seen in the data between the open codes and the categories. As I moved through the coding process, I understood the challenges principals had increasing the achievement of ELLs and the leadership practices they used to increase the achievement of ELLs, which could answer both RQs.

The interview data revealed principals were challenged by the minimal amount of instructional time available for ELLs because of teachers' caseloads and their large ELL populations. They were also challenged by the teachers' knowledge of strategies to support the learning of ELLs and creating strategies to include families in the school

community in meaningful ways. The interview data and archived meeting minutes data highlighted the leadership practices principals used to overcome their challenges and leadership practices they used to increase the achievement of ELLs.

There was no one participant whose interview data or archived meeting minutes data provided any discrepant data which countered the emerging themes. While the principals had varying experiences, they monitored classroom instruction and provided teachers with feedback as a practice to improve teaching and learning. Some principals observed their teachers more than others and provided more targeted support regarding specific ELL strategies they expected teachers to use, but they all set the expectation to observe the instructional program. All principals held staff meetings and leadership team meetings from August 2019 to August 2020. The principals used their leadership teams to assist them with informal observations of instruction and reviewing student data to identify student achievement, and teacher performance. They also used those meetings to create and formalize the activities and experiences that could increase the engagement of families in the school community. The staff meetings were used to disseminate information, identify expectations, procedures, and protocols at their respective schools.

The last step in the cyclical process was to analyze these data again to develop temporary themes. Themes emerged as I continued the cyclical process of analyzing the codes and categories that were developed. I noticed several themes emerged, but I used the cyclical process to identify a recurrence in themes that seemed important to my understanding of the challenges principals encountered increasing the achievement of ELLs and the leadership practices they used to increase the achievement of ELLs. The

categories revealed data points linked to the tenets of CRSL framework. For example, the categories, improvement of teaching skills and minimal understanding of how to teach ELLs are linked to CRSL tenet 2, in which principals used their school structures to develop or improve teachers' classroom instruction (Khalifa et al., 2016). During the interviews and archived data review principals discussed learning walks, classroom observation, and providing teachers with feedback as the practices used to improve teaching and learning, which could increase the achievement of ELLs.

Emergent Themes

I used a cyclical process to interpret, analyze, and synthesize these data. As these data were synthesized, I referred to the CRSL conceptual framework and the RQs that underpinned the study. The participant interviews and archived data were examined closely and compared for similarities and differences before being assigned codes (Saldaña, 2016). Data were grouped based on similarities, which led to categories and then to themes that answered the RQs. The interview data, archived staff meeting minutes, and leadership team meeting minutes were analyzed separately. The cyclical process of coding and the CRSL framework was used to examine the emerging themes. Five themes emerged: (a) school organization, (b) family engagement, (c) professional development, (d) assess student achievement, and (e) instructional monitoring (see Table 5).

Table 5

Categories and Themes

Category	Theme
ELL population increase	School organization
Scheduling for ESOL students	
Scheduling for ESOL teachers	
Staffing of the school	
Low parent attendance	Family engagement
Resources	
Engaging parents	
Informing parents	
Minimal understanding how to teach ELLs	Professional development
Teacher low expectations	
Improvement of teaching skills	
Lower ELL student performance	Assess student achievement
Assess achievement	
Data driven decision-making	
Improve student achievement	
Data discussions	
Observing teacher practice	Instructional monitoring
Observation and feedback	

Note. ELL = English Language Learner. ESOL = English for Speakers of Other Languages.

The creation of these themes enabled me to address both RQs. The themes *school organization* and *family engagement* were used to answer RQ1, which explained how principals overcame the challenges increasing the achievement of ELLs. School Organization aligned with CRSL tenet 1 as it was the principals' critical self-awareness that led them to structure or organize the school in a manner that ensured ELLs received an optimal instructional program. Principals used CRSL tenet 4: Engaging Students and

Parents in Community Contexts to engage families in the instructional program for students at the school. Principals conducted family workshops on a variety of school related topics to support families' understanding of what was occurring in the school.

The themes *professional development, assess student achievement,* and *instructional monitoring* answered RQ2, which identified the leadership practices principals used to increase the achievement of ELLs. The themes aligned with CRSL tenet 2; culturally responsive curricular and teacher preparation as it is the principal's responsibility to support the development of teaching effectiveness by maintaining the instructional program (Khalifa et al., 2016). Principals provided professional development opportunities for teachers based on the needs of ELLs and staff to ensure teachers learned the appropriate strategies that could lead to an increase in the achievement of ELLs. Principals monitored student achievement by reviewing student data to determine student progress. They also monitored the instructional program to determine whether the provided professional development was being used effectively with students. Last, principals provided teachers with feedback regarding their instruction to support their improvement with classroom instruction which can influence student achievement.

Discrepant Cases

It is important that qualitative researchers scrutinize their developed themes by constantly checking and rechecking the interpretations against the data and to also consider alternative explanations and possible misinterpretations (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Qualitative researchers should also not force the data to fit into any preconceived notions,

which can be achieved by looking for discrepant cases (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Discrepant cases were considered during the analysis phase of this study. Throughout the interviews with participants, I reflected on the participants' responses and questioned what I read as I analyzed the archival data. There were no alternative explanations uncovered related to the interview protocol or the archived meeting minutes protocol in relation to the study's RQs. Thus, there were no discrepant cases found that refute the themes which emerged from the data.

Results

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to understand how principals in a school district in an Eastern state use leadership practices to overcome challenges and increase the achievement of the ELL population at their schools. Data collected from the eight semistructured interviews and archived staff meeting and leadership team meeting minutes from August 2019 to August 2020 were used to answer both RQs, which were as follows:

RQ1: How do elementary school principals overcome the challenges at their schools to improve the academic achievement of ELLs?

RQ2: What leadership practices do elementary principals use to increase the academic achievement of ELLs?

Theme 1: School Organization

Interviews

This theme answered RQ1 in which participants identified the challenges they had organizing the school when increasing the achievement of ELLs. Some of the challenges

principals had increasing the achievement of ELLs were ELL teachers' caseloads and providing ELL students with adequate instructional time.

Participant 4 discussed the challenge of teachers having large caseloads which prevented them from having enough time during the student day to instruct all of their ELLs. Participant 4 noted the growing ELL population required him to consider measures to reduce the teachers' caseload. Participant 4 overcame this challenge of the teachers having large caseloads by using school funds to purchase an additional ESOL teacher position to decrease the number of students on each teacher's caseload. The decrease in students on each teacher's caseload provided teachers with more time in their schedules to instruct their ELLs.

Participant 3 discussed the challenge with staffing because of the influx of ELL newcomers enrolled in the school. Participant 3 noted that ELLs at the school had such varying needs that teachers did not have enough time in their schedules to meet with all of their student groups to provide the minimum of 30 minutes of ELL instruction as required by the district. Participant 3 overcame this challenge by creating what was believed to be an equitable schedule for ELL newcomers. Participant 3 organized the school in a manner to allocate one teacher who focused only on the ELL newcomers in the primary grades (K-2) and one teacher who focused only on the ELL newcomers in the intermediate grades (3-5). The remaining ELL teachers focused on the ELL students who were not identified as newcomers. The newly organized staffing structure reduced the ESOL teachers' caseloads and provided teachers with time in their schedules to provide students with the minimum 30 minutes of instruction as required by the district.

Participant 6 had staffing issues because of a teacher shortage. Therefore, she made scheduling changes. There were two ESOL teachers on leave which increased the caseload of the remaining ESOL teachers. Participant 6 divided the students between the remaining teachers. While she recognized "the load was really a lot on the other teachers that had to take those teachers' kids and it was a little overwhelming," she believed it was important the ESOL students received ESOL instruction.

Staff Meeting Minutes

Participants 2 and 6 discussed the school's budget with their staff at the staff meeting. Participant 2 asked staff to review the current school's budget and identify what items should remain in the budget for the upcoming school year and to identify what items made no impact. Staff were asked to make decisions as to how to organize the school for the upcoming school year. Participant 6 shared the overall school budget with staff and alerted staff that two positions would be cut based on the funding the district was providing for the upcoming school year. Participants 4 and 6 identified teacher assignments and identified the teacher vacancies within the school.

Leadership Team Minutes

Participants 1, 2, 6, and 7 discussed how to staff or organize the school. Participants 1, 2, and 7 identified the teacher vacancies within the school and the plan to interview for those positions. Participant 6 discussed how the school would be staffed across grade levels identifying the number of teachers at each grade level and what subjects they would teach. Hiring more teachers and organizing the school in a manner to provide students with more instructional time is how participants overcame the

challenges of teacher caseloads and inadequate instructional time. The leadership practices employed by participants to organize their school structures in a manner that supported the needs of ELLs exemplified the principals' critical self-awareness and understanding of their student population, which allowed them to make decisions to positively influence ELLs (Lopez, 2016).

Theme 2: Family Engagement

Interviews

The second theme to emerge was familial engagement and it answered RQ1. Increasing the engagement of families was identified as a challenge for principals during their interviews as they believed there were barriers which prevented families from being involved in their student's education. Participant 5 mentioned one of her challenges was helping families to understand their involvement was critical to student success. She noted families were involved in the social aspects of student life but getting them involved in academic life had been a challenge. She overcame the challenge by restructuring the family night to include information sharing at the beginning of the meeting, and the second half of the meeting focused on academic topics such as helping families understand data or how to help their student in reading or math.

Participant 3 stated during the pandemic, when the state and district increased the use of technology in school, families had low expectations for themselves. The participant indicated:

> Parents were afraid of the technology, so we've had several parent workshops to overcome that challenge. So, we had to start with educating the parents because

> the kids were pretty quick with learning, but the parents, we had to do a lot of workshops with them.

Participant 1 said when parents came to parent workshops, they would listen to the presentation, but parents did not ask questions, so it was unclear whether they understood the information presented. Participant 1 stated,

> We did a lot of parent engagement around working with students at home. Practicing strategies with the parents in the hopes that what they do with the teacher mirrors what they're doing at home and that would improve instruction for them.

Participant 1 overcame this challenge by working with parents on how to help their student at home. Parents were given the necessary materials during workshops and given time to practice working with the materials with school staff to further support family involvement and student achievement.

Participants 3, 4, and 7 were challenged by the minimal resources families had at home to support students' educational needs. Each participant overcame the challenge by providing the resources for families and they provided family workshops modeling how to use the resources. Participant 4 provided families the opportunity to come to the school to pick up the resources prior to the workshop so they could actively participate in the activity. Participant 3 also ensured families were given the resources to participate in the family workshops. Participant 7 held monthly family workshops in which families were provided with hands-on experiences, which included giving them resources to take home.

Resources included book baggies, pictures, or whatever they were focusing on at school. These resources helped families understand the school's vision and goals.

Participant 6 shared that at every Parent Night, whether the focus would be on math or reading, parents were given strategies and materials to use at home to support student success. Participant 8's challenge was when materials were sent home for parents to make things like vocabulary cards, there was no follow-through and the parents did not use the materials. To overcome this challenge, Participant 8 held Parent Nights in which childcare was provided and teachers taught parents how to make vocabulary cards for their children. She believed it was important for parents to have an understanding of what their student was doing in school and it was the school's responsibility to do so.

Participants discussed their challenges with the attendance of parents at parent workshops. Participant 2 was challenged by the low parent attendance at parent workshops. One strategy to overcome this challenge was to serve dinner at the first few meetings as an incentive to attend the event. She noted family attendance increased. The second strategy used was to change the time of the family workshops from early evening to immediately after dismissal. She noted the entire student population walked to school which meant many families picked their children up from school in the afternoons. Having the meetings immediately after students were dismissed increased attendance. She also allowed families to bring their children to the meeting which eliminated another barrier for families in terms of needing childcare to attend an evening meeting.

Participant 1 also had low family attendance at family meetings. but she said as the school year progressed the attendance improved. She believed the attendance was low

because students were engaged in virtual learning. There was no face-to-face contact with families to remind them of activities being held at school as there had been in past years. Therefore, to mitigate the communication issue, the school leaders sent text messages to parents one week before the meeting. School leaders sent a second message three days prior to the meeting. Parental attendance increased.

Staff Meeting Minutes

Participants 1, 2, 5, and 8 discussed with their staff the expectation they engage with parents using the program Class Dojo. Class Dojo was used by individual teachers, the principal, and other staff members to communicate with parents individually or to communicate with the entire school to share school wide updates. Participant 8 "...Communication must be ongoing. Be available for parents through email and Class Dojo. Communicate early and often with parents, try to answer all questions- be flexible and roll with the punches." Participant 1 identified the methods used to engage parents,

> We have bilingual video tutorials for parents ready on how to use Dojo, Google Classroom and other online resources if we need to continue online instruction to aid in helping parents understand how to use everything...The staff will break into small groups to brainstorm ideas for the Parent University. She also encouraged staff to "look at student's needs and/or academic concerns" to determine what resources should be provided to parents.

Participant 5 charged staff with acquiring parent emails because the school was creating a database of email addresses to communicate efficiently with parents.

Leadership Team Meetings Minutes

Family Engagement emerged as a theme because Participants 1, 2, 3, and 5 each discussed and planned an event for families with their teams. Participants 2 and 5 held an event celebrating the many cultures in their schools. Participants 1, 2, and 5 held Parent Meetings to discuss aspects of the curriculum or a special program. They held Family Literacy Night, Math Night, Special Education Parent Night, and general Parent Meetings to keep families informed. Thus, the participants' leadership practices were rooted in the CRSL tenet of engaging students and families in community contexts as they provided relevant family workshops because they understood the needs of families in their communities.

The results below provide detailed information as to how the participants' interview responses and archived staff meeting and leadership team meeting minutes answered RQ2. These data are organized using the themes professional development, assessing student achievement, and instructional monitoring.

Theme 3: Professional Development

Interviews

The third theme that emerged answered RQ2. The interview data showed that participants leveraged the CRSL tenet of culturally responsive curricular and teacher preparation to provide professional development opportunities to build the capacity of teachers to instruct ELLs effectively and appropriately. Participant 7 realized that while she had some teachers who obtained certification in teaching English as a second language, they did not know what it meant to be an ELL because their certification in

some cases meant the passing of a test with no coursework in teaching English as a second language. Therefore, one strategy she used was to conduct a professional development (PD) session for teachers in a language other than English to help teachers understand the classroom experience of ELLs. The session then progressed to the identification of strategies such as visuals, slower speech, vocabulary instruction, word walls, and labeling the classroom that could have increased engagement in the lesson even though the lesson was in a different language. She also conducted a book study with her staff.

> ...so we landed on unlocking the potential of English language. It gave different strategies like in the classroom and really understanding that there are tiers when it comes to vocabulary and how children easily adapt to that social language but it's those tier two and tier three vocabulary words that they can struggle with the meanings...

As a result of the book study, she discussed changing the instructional model for ELL instruction with her staff. The school moved to a co-teaching model where the ESOL teacher and general educator had equal responsibility for planning, instructing, and assessing students. The professional development centered on “What co-teaching looks like and the different levels and forms of co teaching and how you're scaffolding your information, to help kids connect to the actual standard and the language of the content. We noticed more movement and student achievement.” Participant 7 provided staff with ongoing PD on the co-teaching model.

Participant 6 noted the ELLs at her school were meeting the state target but as a school they were not exiting enough students from the district's ESOL program. As such, through her outreach to the district's ESOL Office, she will receive an ESOL coach during the 2021-2022 school year who will observe her seven ESOL teachers, provide them with feedback, model lessons, and facilitate professional development sessions for ESOL teachers. Participant 6 is also going to provide professional development on the six key ESOL strategies (vocabulary instruction, sentence starters, conversation starters, graphic organizers, audio and visual support, and modeling) during the fall preservice sessions for teachers. She said staff received this training a few years ago but she believed a refresher is needed.

Staff Meeting Minutes

Participants 1, 3, 7, and 8 provided professional development for their staff on various ESOL strategies. Participant 1 provided professional development to staff focused on ELLs at several staff meetings. The staff learned how to use visuals to support ELLs, they learned about ELL newcomers at another meeting, and they learned how to use the guided reading strategy with their ELLs. Participant 7 provided a presentation on how to teach the Visual Thinking Strategy. Participant 3 provided professional development for teachers on the district ESOL Speaking tasks. The staff received information on the purpose of the speaking tasks, how to analyze the student data, and they discussed how teachers could use the data to support ESOL students in the classroom. Participants 2 and 5 worked with their staff to understand implicit bias and the need to become culturally proficient to support the ELLs in their schools.

Leadership Team Meetings Minutes

Participants used leadership team meetings to discuss and address school wide issues and to determine the professional development needs of teachers. There were three participants who worked with their leadership teams to develop the topics for the mandatory district wide professional development days for teachers. Participants 4, 6, and 7 enlisted their leadership teams to identify pertinent topics for the district wide professional development days, which included obtaining feedback from their colleagues. Some of the topics were socio-emotional learning for adults, systemic testing, academic vocabulary, writing, and providing teachers with extended periods to plan their lessons. Participant 5 and her team discussed the need to "plan how to move students to level (language proficiency) 3 or 4." Participants 7 and 8 facilitated a book study with their leadership team members to enhance their leadership skills. The participants' assigned team members to read a chapter a week and they discussed the chapter, their reflections, and how to use the information learned in their leadership with colleagues.

Theme 4: Assessment of Student Achievement

The fourth theme to emerge from the data answered RQ2. More than half of the participants during their interviews identified the different strategies used at their school to determine student achievement and teacher effectiveness. Reviewing student data aligned with CRSL tenet 2 culturally responsive curricula and teacher preparation. Participant 3 believed the assessment of student progress should be done prior to the administration of required systemic assessments. Therefore, teachers used checkpoints at

the end of daily assignments to assess how students were doing on class assignments to determine understanding. Participant 3 also believed,

> ...celebrating the children after those little small successes. We could tell when we used to have writing publishing parties, that's another way you can see your students are really hitting the mark. So the publishing party provided evidence because you could see the beginning and the end, because we were having quarterly publishing parties.

Participant 7 reviewed the student data to determine the leadership actions that she needed to employ to support ELLs,

> I really had to sit down and really look at what our data was saying and really thinking through so as the leader in the building, how do I help lead that work and what the work will be for me. So, I had to understand that strategy (Visual Thinking), I had to take the time to know the purpose of that strategy, how it works and a means to actually monitor it.

Participant 7 also required teachers to capture qualitative data, which tracked ELLs' speaking such as vocabulary usage, responses to questions, and the use of sentence starters were documented on a capture sheet. The data were used to identify the frequency of student speaking and to identify strategies to encourage students to speak.

Participant 2 adjusted the curriculum for students in grade 3 after she reviewed student mathematics data and noticed students were missing foundational skills because lessons were exposing students to concepts, but the concept was not being taught in depth. She also reviewed the results of students' writing assessment data with her staff.

The principal and the staff scored the student work using the district's language assessment rubric to identify students' strengths and areas of improvement.

> ...So, we looked at the reading benchmark. They used the state's writing rubric for ESOL students, and went back and looked at it like, so our kids understood this, they were able to do this, and they didn't do that. It was more informative than looking at the state test which only ESOL students take…

Participant 1 supported her staff in analyzing student reading and mathematics data with a focus on ESOL student performance and teacher instructional practices. She encouraged her teachers to lead the data discussions to help them understand and take ownership of student learning.

> We are learning how to use the speaking tasks and listening tasks that were developed by the ESOL Department and we're working with that to monitor students' progress. We work with the teacher to lead the data analysis and I believe including them in more of a role in presenting the data and it wasn't just this is the data but it's what is the data, and how does it look from an ESOL lens. Just changing the conversation into something that was more than this is what's going on in reading to this is what we're doing in reading and this is how they scored in reading.

Teachers then adjusted instruction based on those conversations borne from the data.

Staff Meeting Minutes

Seven of the eight participants analyzed student data with their staff to assess student achievement. Participants 3 and 7 reviewed student report card data noting

students who received failing letter grades of D or E. Participants 2, 6, and 8 reviewed their school's State Report Card with staff identifying areas of growth from the previous school year and areas in which improvement was needed. Participants 1 and 7 analyzed student work samples with staff to determine student achievement and identify student needs. Participant 7 also provided staff with a protocol for reviewing student data. In the feedback to staff she noted,

> ...from our observations, numerous students were not aware of how they would be evaluated per task (classwork, centers, assessments, projects etc.) on a daily basis. In addition, many teachers did not provide students with critical feedback in order to assist students with building their understanding of a particular skill. Also, based on our observations, there was limited evidence that students have been trained or have been given guides/resources to use in order to self-assess and monitor their progress.

She also identified the next steps to ensure student assessment will occur, "As a staff we will begin discussing and outlining how we will monitor student learning in a continuous manner, not only for a summative purpose via a test, but also before and during instruction."

Participant 4 created a data discussion protocol to structure their work as they reviewed student reading and mathematics data. The staff were given the reflection questions such as, "...Identify the lowest performing standards (domains) and students. What were the teacher and students' barriers? Identify the highest performing standards

(domains) and students. What teacher and/or student behaviors led to this success...” to ponder as they reviewed student data.

Leadership Team Meeting Minutes

All participants discussed, reviewed, or analyzed student assessment data with their leadership teams in some capacity. However, Participants 1, 4, 5, 7, and 8 provided the most frequent data regarding the assessment of student achievement. Participant 4 developed a Data Protocol to support staff as they analyzed student data. Participant 4 also asked the leadership team to identify what they noticed as they reviewed the statewide data. The team noted,” ...We are 3 out of 5; 53%. We went up two percentage points...” Participants 1, 4, 5, and 7 held Data Meetings with their teams to review the state and district assessments. Participant 8 posed reflection questions to the team as they reviewed student assessment results.

> How did we do overall? What was our total earned percent? What are some of the things you noticed? Do you have any wonderings? Looking at last years versus this year’s, what do you see? Increased by 1% point from last year (59%; 3 stars). How will we move the building? ESOL decreased .5%...

Participant 5 specifically reviewed student work samples of ESOL students with the team in addition to reviewing the district and state assessment data. Participants 1, 4, and 5 analyzed student Reading and Mathematics district data to identify whether students were making progress and to determine their next steps.

Theme 5: Instructional Monitoring

The importance of monitoring the instructional program was highlighted by all participants in their interviews as a key leadership practice and is critical to increasing student achievement. Monitoring teacher practice is fundamental to CRSL tenet 2, culturally responsive curricula and teacher preparation. Thus, the final theme to emerge from the data answered RQ2. Participant 4 created a Look For document that he and his leadership team used when they observed teachers. The Look For document highlighted instructional strategies that teachers should use when teaching content areas such as reading and mathematics and they also infused the best practices for instructing ELLs. The data yielded from the Look For documents were examined and conferences were held with the teachers to discuss their instructional practices. Participant 4 shared results and provided coaching or additional professional development based on teachers' specific needs. Participant 6 created a document that she used to monitor the ESOL instructional practices used when she visited classrooms. After the classroom visit, she met with the observed teacher to share her observations, note positive practices observed, and provided recommendations with clear action steps for the next classroom visit. Her goal was to observe every teacher once a month at minimum and in some instances, she was able to monitor teachers twice a month.

Participant 2 collected weekly lesson plans from classroom teachers and examined them to ensure the teacher provided evidence of collaboration with the ESOL teacher. Then she completed a classroom observation to ensure the classroom instruction aligned with what was written in the lesson plan. Then later in the week she would

request student work samples from the observed lesson as another form of checks and balances to ensure alignment with planning and instruction.

All participants discussed observing the instructional practices of teachers and providing feedback; however, Participants 5 and 8 provided details. Participant 5 stated she did not have quantitative data to support the decisions she made to increase the achievement of ELLs this school year due to the pandemic and the absence of statewide testing. The participant acknowledged that when she observed classrooms, she saw teachers using ESOL instructional strategies that were presented during professional development sessions. Participant 8 also observed classroom instruction and met with her ESOL team to ensure what she observed in the classroom was aligned with ELL practices. While observing instructional practices, she took notes and discussed her observations with teachers after the lesson. She used a range of leadership practices when meeting with teachers after an observation such as reviewing the curriculum with teachers, allowing the teacher to identify what action steps were needed to better support students, and in some instances, she outlined what instructional practices she expected to see during the next classroom observation.

Participant 6 invited a representative from the district's ESOL office to observe ESOL teachers' lesson plans to provide her with feedback on the instruction that was being provided for ELLs. Participant 6 also observed the instructional program with a team of teachers.

> We're going to make a plan...My Assistant Principal and I and my whole leadership team we're going to make a plan to go in to make sure that we are

> monitoring and holding the teachers accountable. …, we do give them the training, but then, we do ask for evidence. … if I'm going to give you this training, I need you to give me evidence the next time we meet.

Participant 7 monitored the instructional program individually and at times with a team of teachers. They conducted learning walks to identify whether observed teachers were teaching and using the school wide focus strategy of Visual Thinking. It was important that Learning Walk participants observed the instructional landscape regardless of the grade level taught.

> ... a lot of monitoring [is used by leadership]. It doesn't always come from me so the monitoring can be me doing informal or formal observations. It could be monitoring as a whole school, which I absolutely love to do. It's not always coming from the leadership team saying this is what we saw. It takes a lot of planning to sit down to say how do we ensure that everybody in the building is a part of this learning walk where we're looking at this one particular strategy, but I really try my very best to ensure that everyone is in that process. Where I am able to see primary teachers implementing that strategy, as well as intermediate teachers, whether I am you know, a second-grade teacher or not.

Staff Meeting Minutes

The staff meeting minutes reviewed showed that four of the eight participants discussed instructional monitoring with their staff. Participants monitored the instructional program in various ways. Participants 1, 2, 4, and 5 provided staff with expectations for lesson planning. Participant 5 expected classroom teachers to plan with

the ESOL teacher to ensure lessons incorporated ESOL strategies. Participant 4 provided time for teachers to work collaboratively to create lesson plans for an entire unit as well as to create weekly lesson plans. Participant 4 also shared with his staff the areas of focus for his informal classroom observations. He was looking for the "objective, critical academic vocabulary, student discourse, use of manipulatives/resources, and common formative assessments (inclusive of a writing component)." Participant 2 expected lesson plans to be available on the teachers' desks for review when she conducted an informal classroom observation. Participants 1 and 7 informed their staff of the school wide Learning Walk and identified the Look Fors for the Learning Walk. Participants 1 and 8 conducted informal observations of teachers and provided feedback regarding what was observed.

Leadership Team Meeting Minutes

Instructional monitoring was evident in all leadership team meeting minutes. Five of the eight participants conducted learning walks with their leadership team members to observe classroom instruction. Each team set a focus for the learning walk, observed the instruction, shared the results of the observation with the team, and provided feedback to the teachers individually. Participant 5 and her team focused on, "whole group writing instruction and reasoning and sensemaking in mathematics." She also shared the expectations for what the team should observe when in the classroom. Teams were to look for evidence of student work on the curriculum instructional tasks and descriptive feedback on student work was to be visible in the classroom.

Three of the eight participants used their leadership team members to complete informal observations. The leadership team members shared what went well during the observation and the areas of need for the teacher. Participant 2 met with her leadership team to plan the classroom observation schedule, identify the focus, and leadership team members provided updates of what they observed when in classrooms. When team members shared the observations they were expected to identify who they observed and provide, "1 Glow and 1 Grow." Four of the eight participants reviewed teachers' lesson plans to ensure teachers were planning appropriately for students. Three of the eight participants discussed their expectations for grade level collaborative planning in terms of the structure of the planning session, the persons who were expected to attend, and the topics to be addressed during the grade level collaborative planning sessions.

Discrepant Data

Identifying and analyzing discrepant data is an essential part of assessing a proposed conclusion (Maxwell, 2004). There were no data in this study deemed as an outlier. There were differences in principals' responses to the interview questions, which could be possibly explained by the differences in ELL populations at the school and/or the principals' experience. The differences in the number of staff meetings and leadership team meetings could be because of the latitude given to principals to determine their meeting structures. The interview data and archived meeting minutes were examined repeatedly to identify and understand how principals overcame challenges to increase the achievement of ELLs and the leadership practices principals used to increase the

achievement of ELLs as well as to expose any differences between the interview responses and archived data of the principals.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to the ways researchers can affirm their study's findings are faithful to participants' experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Having a trustworthy study cannot be achieved by the use of specific, technical strategies; however, there are methods researchers use to increase the trustworthiness of their study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Qualitative researchers commonly accept the concepts of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability because these concepts aid researchers with visualizing, engaging with, and planning for the many aspects of trustworthiness (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Credibility

The proper methods for interviewing participants and collecting and analyzing data were followed. Participants were selected based on their affiliation with the district, whether the school had an ELL percentage of 50% or higher, and the principal served as principal at the same school for 3 years or more. Each participant who met the criteria received an email requesting consent. Those principals who were willing to participate responded to the email with the words "I consent." CAQDAS, data analysis software was used only to store and organize the data resulting from the interviews and the archived meeting minutes. Credibility was ensured through triangulation and member checking.

Member Checking

Member checking is used by researchers to validate the results of the study, which ensures credibility (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Researchers use member checks as a way to check in with participants in a study to assess and challenge the researcher's interpretations and accuracy of the analysis (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Participants were given the opportunity to corroborate the interview and archived data collected with the analysis of the findings. I would have included any changes suggested by the participants related to the findings, as appropriate; however, no changes were requested.

Triangulation

Researchers use triangulation to verify evidence from two or more sources to confirm the themes drawn, which contributes to the study's credibility (Creswell, 2012). Therefore, I collected and triangulated data from two different kinds of sources – interviews and documents summarizing meetings. I used one data set (archival data) to corroborate the findings of another data set (interview data) to triangulate the data to increase the credibility and accuracy of my findings (see Merriam, 2009).

Transferability

The purpose of transferability in qualitative protocols is to ensure other researchers can replicate the research in varied circumstances to continue to study the phenomenon. Ravitch and Carl (2016) stated transferability should be the goal in qualitative research in which qualitative studies can apply to larger contexts. Transferability was established by purposeful selection across the population of elementary principals to provide a robust participant group. The selection process yielded

eight participants from elementary schools who led schools with an ELL population of 50% or higher and had a minimum of 3 years of experience at the same school.

Another strategy that was used for external validity was thick description. Thick rich description established transferability and was important to transferring the findings of the study. Rich, thick description is describing the context (background information), sample and population, and circumstance. The description of the setting provided clear context of the research, which allowed anyone unfamiliar with the research to comprehend the context of the study and the research. Sufficient information about the participants' years of experience, degree of education, and leadership experience at their school were provided; thus, enabling readers to draw their own interpretations or conclusions of these data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Dependability

Dependability was established using an audit trail by documenting the research process throughout the study to make decisions (Shenton, 2004). An audit trail in a qualitative study describes in detail how the data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the study (Merriam, 2009). The steps were clearly documented and I detailed the decisions I made which would allow another researcher to replicate my study, thus signifying the consistency of my study (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). My reflections, details of the sampling technique, how data were managed, and the findings of my study were included in the audit trail.

Confirmability

The aim of confirmability is to recognize and identify the ways in which our biases and prejudices may influence our interpretations of the data. Thus, confirmability was established by the continuous reflection of the research process known as reflexivity (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I reflected on my personal bias throughout the data collection process and represented the information as accurately as possible and devoid of interpretation. Integrity of the interview process was maintained by recording the participant interviews. Validity in qualitative research is the ways the researcher can confirm that the findings are authentic to the participants' experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I used various methods that met the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability criteria of a trustworthy study to ensure validity.

Summary

In this study, I explored the leadership practices of elementary principals to overcome the challenges increasing the achievement of ELLs and the leadership practices used to increase the achievement of ELLs. I learned that participants identified two challenges when increasing the achievement of ELLs. Participants organized the school in a manner to ensure teachers had time in their schedules to meet with students, they had adequate staffing to support students, and in some cases there was a need to restructure the ELL program schedule to meet the needs of students. Participants identified the needs of families and provided resources and opportunities for families to engage with the school. Participants increased the capacity of teachers through professional development based on the needs of students and teachers at their individual schools. Participants

assessed student achievement by reviewing statewide, district, and schoolwide data to identify student progress and determine next steps. Participants monitored their instructional programs by observing classroom instruction and provided feedback to teachers which included action steps. Not all participants' meeting minutes clearly identified ELL instructional strategies as a frequent agenda topic; however, the percentage of ELLs in the schools would indicate that agenda topics were developed with ELLs in mind. It is also noted that some of the meeting minutes were not detailed, which made it difficult to determine what the actual conversations were during the meeting. Last, participants were unable to identify whether the leadership practices employed increased the achievement of ELLs as there was no current quantitative statewide data available due to the pandemic. As such, principals used classroom observations to determine whether teachers were using ELL strategies and whether students' performance on formative classroom assessments increased. In Chapter 5, I provide a discussion of the findings of this study, the limitations of the study, and researcher recommendations are discussed.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to explore the leadership practices of elementary principals in an urban school district located in an Eastern state who worked with their staff to increase the achievement of ELLs in their schools. I conducted this research to identify how principals overcame the challenges of increasing the achievement of ELLs and what practices principals used to increase the achievement of ELLs. By gaining a better understanding of what district principals are doing in their schools to increase the achievement of ELLs, district leaders may be able to provide support to current and future elementary principals, as well as identify precise practices to increase the achievement of ELLs.

I found that participating principals used two main approaches when leading to increase the achievement of ELLs. Building the capacity of the organization, teachers, and families and monitoring and accountability of the students and teachers were the two main approaches used by principals to increase the achievement of ELLs. In terms of building the capacity of the organization, students, and teachers, I found that principals used a variety of strategies to improve the abilities, skills, and expertise of teachers and families. Some teachers did not have the knowledge, skills, or expertise to instruct ELLs, which led participating principals to provide professional development opportunities for teachers. Some principals experienced challenges with engaging families in the learning of their students. Therefore, principals provided families with materials and resources, workshops, and trainings to engage them into the school community and their students' learning. Participants monitored student achievement by analyzing and discussing data to

determine students' strengths and areas of improvement. They also monitored the instructional program to ensure teachers were utilizing strategies that met the needs of ELLs and to determine the teachers' professional development needs. In this chapter, I discuss in detail the conclusions of the study, which are based on the collected and analyzed data.

Interpretation of the Findings

To categorize the data and identify themes, I used the CRSL framework of Khalifa et al. (2016).

Key Finding 1: Building Capacity

Principals set the direction of the school, develop people, and design the organization to meet the needs of all students (Munguia, 2017). In this study, there were two identified leadership practices that supported overcoming challenges to increase the achievement of ELLs and increasing the achievement of ELLs. The first leadership practice used was to build the capacity of teachers by providing professional development opportunities based on students' and teachers' needs. Principals in the study also provided families with resources and workshops to engage them in their students' learning which could increase student achievement. The principals' understanding of the need to develop the teachers' and families' knowledge and skills aligns with Munguia's (2017) assertion that the principal's role is to foster conditions to promote ongoing learning. Secondly, principals in this study believed in the academic achievement of ELLs and as a result, restructured the systems and structures in their schools to support ELLs (Munguia, 2017). Principals reviewed the caseloads of ESOL teachers to make

changes to ensure students received optimal instructional time. Some principals allocated funding to purchase additional staff to decrease the caseload of their ESOL teachers, which provided time for more targeted instructional support and some principals changed the ESOL instructional delivery model to support students. These practices support Khalifa et al.'s (2016) notion that culturally responsive school leaders must have enough knowledge to recognize and challenge common patterns in their organization that could lead to the disenfranchisement of their ELLs. Based on interviews with these principals, they believed these leadership practices shifted the instructional environment towards increasing the achievement of their ELLs.

Research indicates that effective principals ensure that each student has access to effective teachers, learning opportunities, academic and social support, and any other resources necessary for academic success (Minkos et al., 2017). Thus, principals in this study chose programs or structures that addressed the specific needs of ELLs and provided instructional resources that were relevant to the students' needs (Minkos et al., 2017). Principals created a learning environment centered on developing the capacities of teachers by supporting professional development opportunities that were intentional and consistently embedded in the practices of the school (Minkos et al., 2017). Ensuring that students had the resources for success also included finding ways to engage parents in the school environment. Principals understood that fostering a relationship with students and their families was essential to effective collaboration and increasing student achievement (Miranda, 2014).

Key Finding 2: Monitoring and Accountability

Principals can increase achievement of ELLs by frequent monitoring of student data and holding teachers accountable for using instructional practices and strategies that can increase the achievement of ELLs. Research affirms that high-achieving schools with high percentages of ELLs allocate time for collaboration on data, instructional strategies, and supports (Aleman et al., 2009). Thus, those principals who are effective monitored and shared data in ways that celebrated improvement, reinforced small accomplishments, and built a sense of teacher belief that student achievement can be obtained (see Aleman et al., 2009). Participants reviewed student data noting areas of strength and growth to determine the needs of students and teachers. Principals monitored the instructional program using the practice of observation. Teachers were observed by principals individually, and some principals conducted learning walks with a team of teachers. Regardless of the structure of the observation, teachers were given a focus or Look Fors for the observation.

At the conclusion of the observation, teachers were given oral or written feedback. Teachers were then expected to implement the recommendations. Principals then observed teachers again to ensure the recommendations were implemented. These observations provided information as to what students are learning and how they are being instructed. This information was valuable because principals created professional development opportunities for teachers based on these observations and student achievement data. This finding confirms the need for principals to provide instructional support, monitor student learning and school improvement progress to improve the

instructional program (Leithwood et al., 2020) for ELLs. Although principals have implemented these practices and believe that their ELLs are progressing, they have not had access to quantitative data to confirm and/or affirm that their leadership practices were improving ELL achievement. The COVID-19 pandemic was a barrier accessing current quantitative district and state data.

Limitations of the Study

This study had several limitations. I based the study findings, in part, on the input from eight elementary principals who had been principal at their school for 3 or more years and led a school with an ELL population of 50% or higher. The number of participants used in the study was within the targeted range of participants; however, the sample size was small. Researchers have noted that there are no guidelines for determining the sample size when using purposive sampling (Guest et al., 2006). Thus, purposive sampling allowed mitigation of this limitation because the sample size was large enough to uncover participants' perceptions that were important to the study (see Mason, 2010).

Another limitation may be that the study results may be relevant only to schools with a similar ELL population and school structure as principals have autonomy to make programmatic decisions based on the needs of their ELLs and staff in the absence of a formal district initiative or policy. Each participant's unique experiences as an elementary principal, degree of preparation for the principalship, and expertise on the topic of ELLs may be a limitation of the study. Additionally, the participants' educational background, ethnicity, and perceptions of ELLs may have influenced the answers to the interview

questions as they discussed their beliefs related to educating ELLs in an effort to be seen in a positive light by the researcher (Bergen & Labonté, 2020). The archival data review was a limitation of the study as principals have agency over the number of meetings held, who participates in the meetings, and the content of the meetings. Thus, triangulation of the data could have been more in depth had there been less variance in the data captured in the meeting minutes. Last, the school principals in the study were volunteers. As such, it is possible that only those principals who felt comfortable, confident, and competent in leading their schools to increase the achievement of ELLs participated in the study.

Recommendations

One recommendation for future studies is to expand the study to include statewide ELL academic data. The purpose of CRSL is to use leadership strategies that could lead to an increase in student achievement. Therefore, it is recommended that researchers use statewide assessment data to confirm whether ELLs' achievement is increasing at participants' schools. Future researchers could also focus on the leadership practices that particular principals used to support an increase in achievement for ELLs. The principals in this study were using several leadership practices that they believed would increase student achievement, but it is not clear what practices have been successful. Knowing the particular leadership practices that were related to increased achievement of ELLs could be beneficial to district and state leaders.

Another recommendation is for principals to track the data of those students whose family members attend the offered workshops. This information will allow educational leaders to identify whether the resources provided to families and the content

of the workshops coupled with the professional development for staff relate to increases in student performance on district and statewide assessments. The inclusion of these data can provide a deeper understanding as to what strategies or activities schools need to implement to better support the families of ELLs. Last, the study showed that principals relied heavily on CRSL tenets 1, 2, and 4 as they lead their schools to increase the achievement of ELLs. While there was evidence that tenet 3, culturally responsive and inclusive school environments was embedded in their leadership practice, the interview questions did not yield responses as to how principals reached out to outside community organizations to help address the issues in the community. Therefore, it is recommended that interview questions are crafted in a manner to illicit responses as to how principals engage organizations within their community to support ELLs.

Implications

The findings of this study reinforced the understanding that the leadership practices employed by principals are important to increasing the achievement of ELLs. The principals in this study used practices such as building the capacity of the teachers, parents, and the organization and monitoring and accountability. I found that while principals used many leadership strategies to increase the knowledge, expertise, and practices of teachers and parents, they did not identify which leadership practices were the most beneficial specifically to ELL student achievement. For school systems with large ELL populations, this means that more training and research may be needed to help principals identify the best leadership practices to support ELLs.

Social Change at the Organizational Level

Every principal in the study used one or more of the leadership practices of providing professional development to staff, providing workshops for families, and monitoring student data and teacher performance with the understanding those practices could lead to an increase in ELL student achievement. However, principals were left to their own devices to determine what leadership practices to use, when to use them, and how to use them without clear evidence as to what leadership practices worked. To support principals, central office staff knowledgeable of ELL instructional practices could partner with principals to conduct peer visits observing teachers' instructional practices. District personnel could help principals determine the professional development needed at the school. This collaboration between principals and central office personnel holds the principal and district accountable for using leadership practices known to increase the achievement of ELLs. Through these collaborative conversations, principals can create long range professional development plans strategically focused on increasing the achievement of ELLs.

The results of the study indicate that principals employed leadership practices that support students, teachers, and parents but the evidence was not clear as to what specific practices increased ELL achievement. Principals with mid to large ELL populations used several leadership practices to increase ELL student achievement based on what they believed the students and staff at their schools needed. As a result, specific leadership practices that were the most beneficial for ELLs were not identified. Potential changes in the organization focused on collaboration between central office and principals which

concentrated on specific strategies for ELLs could lead to greater academic outcomes for ELLs. This collaboration may provide principals with an understanding of the best leadership practices that increase the academic achievement of ELLs without principals having to use a trial-and-error approach.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to understand how principals in an Eastern state in an urban district use leadership practices to overcome challenges and increase the achievement of the ELL population at their schools. Through interviews with elementary principals and a review of archived staff meeting and leadership team meeting minutes, I gained insight into leadership practices that elementary principals used to increase the achievement of ELLs. The principal of a school has a significant effect on the school organization, which positively influences the quality of teaching and learning. Although the actual size of the influence of the leadership on the school improvement effort is small, this leadership effect is vital to the success of students (Leithwood et al., 2020). Thus, structuring the organization to meet the needs of ELLs, engaging families in the school setting, providing professional development, and monitoring student data and teacher performance were common themes amongst participating principals. What emerged from these data was the need to identify specific leadership practices that increased the achievement of ELLs. The principals believed they made decisions that were in the best interest of ELLs at their schools and identified qualitative measures that signified improvement. Using these

strategies, other principals may be able to boost ELL student achievement at their schools.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

Date:
Time:
Interviewee Code Name:
Location of Interview:

Parts of the Interview	Interview Questions and Notes	RQ
Introduction	Hi, my name is Toi Davis. Thank you very much for participating in this interview today. The purpose of this interview is to explore the leadership practices of principals that could increase the achievement of ELLs. I would also like to discuss the challenges regarding increasing the achievement of ELLs and how you overcame them. This interview should last about 45-60 minutes. You can choose to stop this interview at any time. I would also like to review your school's Staff Meeting and Leadership Team Meeting minutes for SY 2019-2020. In addition, I need to let you know that this interview **will be recorded** for transcription purposes. Do I have your consent to record the interview? • Do you have any questions? • Are you ready to begin?	
(Tenet 1: Critical Self-Awareness)	What challenges have you experienced to increase ELLs' achievement? *Follow-up:* • How did you overcome these challenges?	RQ 1
(Tenet 2: Culturally Responsive Curricular and Teacher Preparation)	What steps did you take to ensure you had made the right decisions to increase their academic performance? *Follow-up:* Based on those steps, please describe your decision-making thought processes to achieve the desired academic goals?	RQ1
(Tenet 2: Culturally Responsive	What actions did you take to reverse ELLs' poor academic performance? *Follow-up:*	RQ2

Curricular and Teacher Preparation)	Tell me more about that…	
(Tenet 2: Culturally Responsive Curricular and Teacher Preparation)	How do you inspire and motivate staff to achieve common goals to improve ELL student achievement? *Follow-up:* Be more specific…	RQ 2
(Tenet 2: Culturally Responsive Curricular and Teacher Preparation)	How do you ensure your teachers implement instructional practices that are aligned with the best interests of ELLs? *Follow-up:* Tell me more… What do you do when instructional practices do not align with the best interests of ELLs?	RQ2
(Tenet 2: Culturally Responsive Curricular and Teacher Preparation)	What strategies do you employ to monitor the achievement of ELLs? *Follow-up:* What actions have you taken once you have monitored their achievement?	RQ2
(Tenet 3: Culturally Responsive and Inclusive School Environment)	How have teachers and administration worked together to increase Ells' academic achievement?	RQ2
(Tenet 4: Engaging Students and Parents in Community Contexts)	What have you done to create relationships between the school and ELL families to support the instructional goals? *Follow-up:* How have these relationships helped support the instructional goals? How have these relationships helped to improve ELLs' academic performance?	RQ1 RQ2
(Tenet 4: Engaging Students and Parents	What programs or initiatives have you put in place to support parents of your ELL students?	RQ1 RQ2

in Community Contexts)	*Follow-up:* Were any changes made after implementation? If so, how have these programs or initiatives helped to improve ELLs' academic performance? What challenges were encountered? How were the challenges overcome?	
Close	Thank you for your answers. Is there anything else you would like to add? Please electronically share your Staff Meeting and Leadership Team Meeting notes for SY 2019-2020 with me by the end of the day. Thank you for your time, goodbye.	

Appendix B: Archival Data Review Meeting Minutes

Leadership Team Meeting Minutes

RQ 1- How do elementary school principals overcome the challenges at their schools to improve the academic achievement of English Language Learners?

RQ 2-What leadership practices do elementary principals use to increase the academic achievement of English Language Learners?

Participant name (Pseudonym): School name (Pseudonym):
Date: Focus of Meeting:
Review of Document:

Challenges	Leadership Practices	Comments
		Agenda item's location: Beginning Middle End
		Agenda item's location: Beginning Middle End
		Agenda item's location: Beginning Middle End
		Agenda item's location: Beginning Middle End

Staff Meeting Minutes

RQ 1- How do elementary school principals overcome the challenges at their schools to improve the academic achievement of English Language Learners?

RQ 2-What leadership practices do elementary principals use to increase the academic achievement of English Language Learners?

Participant name (Pseudonym): School name (Pseudonym):
Date: Focus of Meeting:
Review of Document:

Challenges	Leadership Practices	Comments
		Agenda item's location: Beginning Middle End
		Agenda item's location: Beginning Middle End
		Agenda item's location: Beginning Middle End
		Agenda item's location: Beginning Middle End