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Administrator Perceptions of Truancy Support for Rural Elementary Students

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Walden University
2022

Abstract

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by

Jennifer Lynn Douthit

MA, Cambridge College, 2012

BS, Jacksonville State University, 2005

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

March 2022

Abstract

This study focused on the support administrators give to truant elementary rural students in a southeastern state using a qualitative approach. Students must be accustomed to attending school daily. Chronic absence in kindergarten foretells low classroom success levels at the end of 5th grade. The problem addressed in this study was that administrators are challenged to support students with a high rate of truancy in rural elementary schools in the southeastern United States. The purpose and research question of this study was to investigate how administrators support truant elementary rural students in a southeastern state. The situational leadership theory was used in this study, which administrators may use when working with elementary truancy. The data were collected through individual semistructured video interviews with eight administrators, of which six are from brick-and-mortar rural elementary schools and two are district administrators, who have been in education for over five years. All interviews were submitted for transcription into a digital file through an application called Otter and were analyzed thematically to come up with a meaning for the study. Administrators who took part in the study gave their perceptions on truancy support in rural elementary schools. When dealing with elementary truancy, administrators confronted many obstacles which led to specific recommendations that focus on relationship building, parental and family involvement, policies and procedures, as well as a trained and caring staff. Describing problems at home, school, and community may suggest positive social change in rural school districts procedures and interventions that could improve attendance, as well as academics to help support administrators when working with truant elementary students.

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Dedication

To my parents, Franklin and Vivian Douthit, in loving memory. Matthew 25:21.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank God for allowing me this opportunity to achieve this goal. Your many blessings have made me who I am today.

I would like to acknowledge and give thanks to Dr. Robert Flanders and Dr. Lynn Varner for your guidance and encouragement during this adventure.

I would also like to acknowledge my brother and sisters, nephews, nieces, close friends and colleagues that gave a plentiful amount of encouragement, support, and prayers during this time. Thank you all for not allowing me to give up. Your support allowed me to keep moving forward.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

School attendance is a needed criterion for academic success, leading to other positive life outcomes. More than 6.5 million students in the United States, roughly 13% of all absent students, miss more than 15 days of school each year (Stempel et al., 2017). The United States adopted truancy laws in the early 1930s, but the reasons some students become truant have been a focus on many different studies (Heck, 1933). Truancy laws are created to support the importance of consistent school attendance. Balfanz and Brynes (2012) stated attendance correlates with key academic outcomes that include reading proficiency and graduation rates. Reasons students may not graduate include personal, social, and academic challenges; this can, of course, affect student accomplishments, academic engagement, school completion, and fulfilling personal responsibilities (Balfanz & Brynes, 2012). Also, truant students are more likely to engage in criminal activities, drug usage, or even experience incarceration (Garry et al., 1996). Individuals who graduate from school are more likely to be employed, earn higher incomes, experience better mental and physical health, and possibly live longer (Stempel et al., 2017). Considering the strong relationship between truancy and the various social, health, and economic outcomes described, it is in the schools' best interest to determine truancy causes and create prevention strategies. The purpose of this dissertation is to examine truancy, with a focus on administrator perceptions of truancy support in rural elementary schools.

Background

One main goal in education is to create an environment that is safe and induces learning and a sense of community (Boyd, 2016). Educators support the students' needs by enhancing the academic, social, and emotional aspects, but having these needs fall secondary to truancy or excessive absences for some students. The main factor for supporting success in school is helping students in elementary grade levels maintain a routine of attending school every day (Brunner et al., 2011).

Abdullah et al. (2018) stated that socioeconomic status and the family background is a factor that causes truancy among the students. The Black Belt region is located in two of the southeastern states in the United States. This area was categorized by having many African Americans with high poverty rates and a strong dependence on welfare programs (Patel et al., 2017; Perry, 2018; Zekeri et al., 2016). Given the concentrated amount of poverty, there is a dominant number of rundown neighborhoods, a small amount of taxes to finance public schools, and a reduction in local businesses (Zekeri et al., 2016). Low-income households are possibly isolated throughout the open country.

Policymakers and school personnel have relied heavily on the law and its definitions to guide their response to decreasing truancy (Gentle-Genitty et al., 2015). Disciplinary procedures that follow school policies such as out of school suspension can also lead to an increased effect of becoming behind on schoolwork, leading to missing more school (Attendance Works, 2013; Roulette et al., 2017). The State Department of Education (2016) created an attendance manual to guide school systems to create expectations for reporting student attendance and implementing interventions that can

positively influence attendance that will not lead to truancy. The Department of Education, code §16-28-1 stated:

> Children between the ages of six and 17 years are required to attend a public school, private school, church school, or be instructed by a competent private tutor for the entire length of the school term in every scholastic year except that every child attending a church school as defined by state law is exempt from this requirement, provided such child has met the requirements as specified for enrollment and reporting. (p. 4)

Students must be accustomed to attending school daily. Brunner et al. (2011) stated that attending school regularly in the early years is critical, especially for the students in low-income status, who are less likely to have the resources to make up for the missed days in the classroom. Chronic absence in kindergarten foretells low classroom success levels at the end of fifth grade (Brunner et al., 2011). Truancy, at any age, can have significant adverse effects on the student, schools, and society (Baker et al., n.d.).

Problem Statement

School administrators are mandated to monitor truancy and provide prevention programs that best serve the student population (State Department of Education, 2016). The problem in this study is that administrators are challenged to support students with a high rate of truancy in rural elementary schools in the southeastern United States. During the 2018-2019 school year, there were 6.5 million total student absences, of which 40% of the absences were unexcused, which led students to become truant across a

southeastern state (State Department of Education, 2019a). It is becoming overwhelming for the depositions that must be filed against parents since the elementary students are receiving unexcused absences (Means, 2020). In a rural school district of 13 schools in the study state, they send a letter to the parents requesting them, after their third unexcused absence, to attend a meeting at the courthouse (Agee, 2018). During these weekly meetings, Prosecutors, Juvenile Probation Officers, and Attendance Officers from the school system explain to parents and students their legal responsibilities and truancy risks (Agee, 2018).

The 2018 overall dropout rate in a southeastern state was 10% (State Department of Education, 2019a). Most students who drop out attend school less than 70% of the time (Sparks, 2018). Truancy can begin in elementary school, continuing to middle and high school grade levels (State Department of Education, 2016). In 2015-2016, a southeastern state had 18% of fourth graders chronically absent (Sparks, 2018). In a southeastern state, 2017-2018 State Report Card showed that 18 rural school districts range from 11.8% to 38.17% in elementary truancy, which is the highest across the state (State Department of Education, 2019a). Elementary school is when all students receive their foundational learning, but if the child is not attending school, it creates a problem that can have lasting effects (Popovich, 2014). According to Thomas (2017), truancy often affects older students; however, issues arise with students within elementary schools at an alarming rate.

As students' progress within schools, truancy can lead to grade retention and possibly dropping out of school (Thomas, 2017). The United States Department of

Education's Guiding Resource Principles (2014) stated that there are specific things that schools should demonstrate to produce and promote learning. It is seen that administrators should make every effort to encourage students' regular attendance and ask for assistance from parents and guardians in accomplishing regular attendance (Boyd, 2016). While studies are documenting the outcomes of truancy (Ahmad & Miller, 2015; Ehrlich et al., 2016; Gentle-Genitty et al., 2015; London et al., 2016; Stempel et al., 2017; Thomas, 2017), few have addressed the role of administrators in the implementation of truancy policy, especially in rural school districts.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate how administrators support truant elementary rural students in a southeastern state in a qualitative approach. The rural south-central region of a southeastern state consists of 18 counties. Several of these counties suffer from extreme poverty due to economic hardships (Patel et al., 2017). The region communities have shown higher poverty rates, low literacy levels, and a health deficient compared to the rest of the state (Patel et al., 2017).

The State Department of Education (2016) of a southeastern state reports that the rural area is a continued focus on reducing truancy, where 20% or more students miss 15 days or more of school. In the 2017-2018 school year, a southeastern state had 17.68 percent to truancy, while 9.3% represents elementary students (State Department of Education, 2019b). While truancy has been deemed illegal across the states, new policies, such as the need to implement truancy prevention measures, are often created with larger school districts in mind; nevertheless, they equally apply to rural school districts, creating

a challenge due to fewer resources. Williams and Nierengarten (2011) noted, "Administrators in America's rural school districts are uniquely challenged to meet increased achievement expectations despite decreasing resources" (p.15). This often leaves rural administrators and teachers to shoulder these burdens themselves, in addition to tackling numerous pressing tasks" (Williams and Nierengarten,2011). Administrators' responses to truancy vary geographically and demographically (Fishman, 2015), and the extent to which truancy affects elementary student attendance in rural districts is unknown. This study provides insight from administrators' perceptions on the increasing number of truant rural elementary students.

Research Question

For this study, the main research question was:

Research Question 1: How do administrators support truant elementary students in a rural southeastern state?

Conceptual Framework

This study was based on the situational leadership theory which administrators can utilize while addressing elementary student truancy. The theory of situational leadership "suggests to leaders how they should behave based on the demands of a particular situation" (Northouse, 2016, p. 112). Hersey and Blanchard (1977) developed the situational approach to leadership that consists of a directive and supportive dimension applied to any situation (Northouse, 2016). Using situational leadership theory, the administrators are given a choice on how they can respond to the situation (Northouse, 2016).

Situational leadership theory is a model based on the idea to meet the needs of the subordinates, so the leader can modify their behaviors (Hersey et al., 1979). The model is grounded on contingency theory, which suggests that subordinates have different needs based on the level of capacity and willingness to perform or complete the task (Hersey et al., 1979). Based on each condition and mission, the leader is responsible for responding to those needs by showing the required combination of task behaviors and relationship behaviors (Hersey et al., 1979). The overall idea is to build collaboration to achieve the best results between the leader and the subordinate (Hersey et al., 1979). Situational Leadership is focused on previous studies that show leadership does not have one best form. Instead, the willingness of the leader to use different styles to tailor towards the employee's needs is more important than what type of style the leader is more comfortable using (Hersey et al., 1979).

Leaders who use the model of situational leadership should begin with the job at hand and then consider the person who has the assigned task (Shriver, 2017). The following question should consider how much task-specific expertise, skill, or talent the person has. Even, this individual is optimistic, dedicated, and inspired to fulfill the assignment (Shriver, 2017). The answers of the leader to these questions show various degrees of competence and willingness, known as preparedness (Shriver, 2017).

The situational leadership model is a useful tool that could help administrators to achieve their goals. It addresses the task behavior, relationship behavior of the administrator, and the readiness level of the students (Hersey & Blanchard, 1984). The situational leadership model dictates that there is no single way to lead a school. The

administrator is left to select the way that best suits a particular situation depending upon the readiness levels of students. The model describes the students' readiness as their ability, willingness, and the level they assume responsibility to perform organizational tasks. Hersey and Blanchard (1988) explained that with the increase in the level of readiness, the administrator is left to adapt the relationship behavior to improve the confidence and performance of followers.

As was seen in the Ohio State studies (Stogdill & Coons, 1957) and the 3-D model of leadership (Reddin, 1967), the situational leadership model also evaluates leaders on two dimensions of behavior, the first being task orientation, and the second, people-orientation. The situational leadership model's task concept is called task behavior, while the people dimension is called relationship behavior. The authors explained these behaviors as follows:

> Task behavior is the extent to which leaders are likely to organize and define the roles of the member of their group (followers) and to explain what activities each is to do and when, where, and how tasks are to be accomplished…. Relationship behavior is the extent to which leaders are likely to maintain a personal relationship between themselves and members of their group (followers) by opening up channels of communication, providing socio-emotional support, active listening," psychological strokes," and facilitating behaviors. (Hersey et al., 2001)

The basic concept of situational leadership is that no one style will fit in all situations, and there is no one best way to influence followers; it all depends on many

variables of the situation, the leaders, and the followers. Situational leadership is categorized into four separate leadership styles: delegating, participating, selling, or telling.

Delegating is styled by using below-average amounts of both relationship and task behaviors (Chen & Silverthorne, 2005). This does not intend the leader is withdrawn from the equation, just that the follower is the dominant character in this style. This style is the delegating style whereby the leader allows the follower to set goals and directions and make the necessary decisions. The leader is still involved but from an observing and monitoring position. Delegating style is shown with these indicators: General description of the task, monitor the activities of subordinates, encourage the achievement of goals (Wuryani et al., 2021). With the delegating style, there is high competence and high commitment. When the follower is able and willing, the model calls for delegating style according to the task behavior. The follower possesses the capability and is willing or confident about the tasks. In this case, there is less emphasis on task and relations (Walls, 2019).

Participation can be seen as a leadership style, which is characterized by above-average amounts of relationship behavior and below-average amounts of task behavior (Chen & Silverthorne, 2005). This style of leadership is participative whereby the leader and follower share decision making and the leader supports and encourages the follower in his/her development.   The following indicators are seen as indicators for participation styles: Active listener, support subordinates in taking risks, give praise to subordinates' task reports, and build self-confidence (Wuryani et al., 2021). Participating style has high

competence and variable commitment. When the follower is able but unwilling, the model calls for participating style to the task behavior. Here the follower possesses capability but is unwilling or insecure about the tasks. In this case, there is a high relationship and low task consideration to facilitate performance (Walls, 2019).

Selling is seen as a consulting leadership style, which is described by above average amounts of both task behavior and relationship behavior (Chen & Silverthorne, 2005). This style seeks buy-in from the follower and provides the opportunity for two-way communication between the leader and the follower. The leader still provides guidance and sets the goals, but the follower has the opportunity to ask questions to get clarification to ensure a full understanding of what is expected. The selling style has some competence with low commitment. Selling style has these indicators as followed: decisions and opportunities for clarification, follower level of followers, encouragement to improve the performance of subordinates (Wuryani et al., 2021). When the follower is unable but willing, the model calls for selling style to the task behavior. Here the follower lacks capability but is willing or confident to perform the task. In this case, there is a high relationship and high task consideration to facilitate performance (Walls, 2019).

Telling is seen as an instructional style, is characterized by above-average amounts of task behavior and below-average amounts of relationship behavior (Chen & Silverthorne, 2005). This style is directive in that the follower is told what to do, when to do it, how to do it, with little concern, in the directions given, of the relationship between the leader and the follower. This style might be seen in a crisis, such as a fire situation, or simply where a follower does not know how to do a specific task. The telling style has

low competence, high commitment. Telling style has these indicators shown: describe the roles of each, effective two-way communication, make a decision, additional instructions to clarify (Wuryani et al., 2021). When the follower is unable and unwilling, the model calls for a telling style according to the task behavior. The follower lacks capability and is unwilling or insecure about the tasks. In this case, more emphasis is on tasks and less on the relationship (Walls, 2019).

The administrators are allowed to be flexible and adjust their styles according to the willingness and capacity of the students. The model also implies that if the correct style is used in low readiness situations, followers will become mature and grow in their abilities and confidence. The administrator understands students' development and flexible response and becomes less directive as followers improve their willingness and capability (Hersey, 1997).

Using the telling style, the administrator explains the need to be met and how to go about it by utilizing one-way communication. Two-way communication and collaboration are supportive behaviors between the administrators by leading the student (Northouse, 2016). For a successful response to truancy, administrators in elementary schools must be able to identify the truant student's development level and the reason for the truancy. Once the reasons are identified, the administrators can use the matching leadership style. According to this principle, the leader allows the followers to advance by delegating increasing degrees of obligation by modifying one's leadership style to meet the needs of the followers, while they show the willingness to administer, ensuring that the followers learn at their pace while providing obvious contributions.

In education, the most effective leadership style is one that complements the individuality of each student, characterized by behaviors, personal characteristics, tasks, goals, and the environment (Walls, 2019). Situational leadership emerged from these concepts (Hersey & Blanchard, 1977). Situational leadership approaches hold a philosophy of flexibility, recognizing that situations change, and new needs emerge (Walls, 2019). Therefore, it has a range of approaches and styles relevant to different situations as they arise over the course of the day (Northouse, 2016). This leadership style integrates the proportions of directedness and supportiveness and promotes a leading and teaching method in which the student can respond.

Deciding which situational approach to use can help administrators respond to truancy and utilize the suitable truancy prevention measures within elementary schools. Administrators must monitor and implement prevention measures to maintain student success (Boyd, 2016). Utilizing situational leadership allows administrators to apply the interventions that meet truant students' needs to attend school regularly.

Nature of the Study

A basic qualitative approach was used in this study. This design was chosen due to its appropriateness of the topic and to answer the research question. This approach was used to describe administrators' perceptions and expand their responses, which is not allowed in surveys of quantitative studies. Obtaining and communicating answers to research questions regarding participants' perceptions about experiences and ideas makes descriptive qualitative studies appropriate (Perry, 2000).

The sample selected for the study was comprised of eight district and building administrators from a rural school district in a southeastern state. The administrators are described as in brick-and-mortar schools or the district office personnel that worked with truancy. The sample elementary administrator has five years or more experience in education. Semistructured interviews were used to explore their perceptions of elementary truancy. Data collected from these interviews provided relevant information regarding administrators' perceptions of challenges to support truancy in rural elementary schools.

A narrative description of the administrators' perceptions was written to explain their experiences. Creswell (2013) encourages us to analyze the meaning of the data and find comparisons in the research. A summarization will also be given of the significant findings and how the research question will be answered and used to interpret the data.

Definitions

These terms are defined for clarity within this study:

Attendance: Students arrive at school and class every day and on time to benefit from instructional programs offered (State Department of Education, 2016).

*Chronic absenteeism***:** Missing a percentage or number of days, including excused absences, unexcused absences, or suspensions (State Department of Education, 2016).

Excused absence: An absence for which a reasonable cause may be present, such as illness, death in the family, inclement weather, legal quarantine, and principal permission. (State Department of Education, 2016).

Rural: Not identified as urbanized or urban clusters with fewer populations than urban (Ratcliffe et al., 2016).

Truancy: Unexcused absence or skipping school or class for a day (State Department of Education, 2016).

Truancy prevention: Promotes regular school attendance through one or more approaches, including parental involvement, law enforcement participation, court alternatives, or other related strategies (State Department of Education, 2016).

Unexcused absences: An absence where no reasonable cause can be established (State Department of Education, 2016).

Assumptions

Assumptions are the accepted premises of the research study that have not yet been validated (Creswell, 2013). The following assumptions were used regarding this research study. The participants know the truancy laws. The participants are administrators in a rural school district. Administrators participated in the study voluntarily and accepted the data collection process. Participants understood what was asked and responded to the interview questions candidly.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of the study involved the perceptions of administrators. This study is limited to only current elementary brick and mortar administrators of school districts in a rural southeastern state. The focus was on administrators who have five years or more in education. The selected educators have a variety of experiences that enhance a variety of perceptions.

Limitations

The factors of limitations may affect the study outcomes and are outside the control of the researcher (Walkley & Cox, 2013). Participants' experiences in truancy were limited to one rural southeastern state school district, which may not be comprehensive to other rural school districts. Participants may be hesitant to provide honest answers regarding their truancy perceptions and how the school district handles truancy.

Significance

Almost 85% of elementary students from low-income families with truancy issues miss 10% or more of school (Ahmad & Miller, 2015). Students who are truant miss instructional time that is critical to long-term success (Sanchez, 2012). Hendron and Kearney (2016) found that 83% of kindergarten and first-grade students will not read proficiently in the third grade; this will make the student four times more likely to be retained or drop out of high school. In a rural southeastern state, it holds the fourth largest school district, which has 31 elementary schools with a combined truancy rating of 16.5% (State Department of Education, 2019a). An administrator's role is to create an environment that promotes academic achievement and the well-being of students (Tobin, 2014). Administrators and teachers who positively influence students can create positive social change at the school level. The completion of this study provided reasoning for the basis of rural truancy and an effort to decrease this action before students' matriculate to middle and high school.

Summary

This section introduced the problem of elementary truancy in rural southeastern United States and the administrators' perceptions in a school district in this area. Truancy is recognized as a highly critical issue facing not just middle and high schools, but elementary schools (Ahmad & Miller, 2015). This matter is significant because there is a deficiency of research examining rural elementary truancy. There are likely differences between the educator and the parent regarding the knowledge of what truancy is and can create. Chapter 2 will provide an in-depth analysis of the causes of truancy and the prevention that some school districts have taken.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The research problem stated in Chapter 1 focused on how administrators support truant elementary students in a rural southeastern state. In elementary schools, average daily attendance rates are calculated as an overall school attendance average. Excused and unexcused absences are included in the daily attendance calculations but without any specific distinction (Gottfried & Hutt, 2019; Miller & Johnson, 2016). Although previous studies have focused on middle and high school dropout rates, researchers have found that truancy affects primary grades. Nationwide, almost 10% of kindergarteners and first graders are truant. Truancy can affect a quarter of all students in kindergarten through 3rd grade (Brunner et al., 2011). London et al. (2016) found that kindergarten students who attended high-poverty elementary schools outnumbered high school students' truancy rates. It is vital to have the perceptions of rural administrators on elementary truancy, help produce a productive student to promote to the following grade levels and graduate from high school.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature used for this study originated from books, dissertations, peer-reviewed, scholarly journal articles, and southeastern states department of education. Several databases were used to obtain the information, such as the Walden University library portal, South University library portal, Google Scholar, and ProQuest Central. Searches were limited to five-year publication date in peer-reviewed journals. Several phrases and key search words were used, including *truancy, elementary truancy, rural elementary truancy, rural education, rural truancy, Black Belt, and rural administration.*

Some current dissertations were used when appropriate to enhance peer-reviewed, published studies.

Conceptual Framework

Situational leadership is seen as multiple relationships between the needed behavior, listening, support, and value, which combines strategies that apply consideration to individual and environmental needs (Walls, 2019). Ken Blanchard and Ralph Hersey introduced this model in the 1970s in their book *Management of Organizational Behavior*. In the model, according to the maturity level and work ethic, the leader can apply different leadership styles to mediate different situations (Meier, 2016). This can maximize students' and parents' learning experiences and satisfaction within practice contexts. Situational leadership allows individuals to be flexible towards the situation by recognizing change and the differences (Walls, 2019). McCleskey (2014) believes that, according to situational leadership theorists, an effective leader should not only understand the situation but also be able to rationalize the situation at hand to create an adequate response.

The conceptualization of situational leadership is well known, as written by various scholars (Avery, 2001; Bedford & Gehlert, 2013; Yeakey, 2002). Using different situational leadership styles, depending on context or circumstance, can assist leaders to create a solid framework for the success of actions. Numerous scholars have also found that a solid basis for success determines the consistency of the communication skills of the leader towards followers in terms of task performance, including when, where, and how to execute those tasks (Avery, 2001).

McCleskey (2014) believed that situational leadership theory sets a new perspective towards the situation to leadership. This shows a difference between the principles of transactional and transformational leadership theories where the focus is on the philosophy of management, attitudes, and values (Liu et al., 2011), where leaders inspire followers to adopt innovative ways of bringing about change, offer followers a sense of purpose and belonging, and provide followers with a motivating mission and vision (Walls, 2019).

Situational leadership theory is focused on the situational nature of leadership and recognizes that effective leadership behavior must be flexible (Walls, 2019). The recognition of subordinates as the most critical situational determinant of effective leader behavior is a perspective that is justified and highly congruent with a conceptual definition of leadership as an interpersonal phenomenon (Walls, 2019). Arguments supporting situational theory's significance indicate that situational factors have a decisive impact on leadership (Walls, 2019). Situational theorists argue that influential leaders emerged due to place, circumstance, and time (Bass, 1990). The conceptualization of situational leadership theory suggests that behaviors that are specific to tasks and relations are intertwined and not mutually exclusive (McCleskey, 2014). Consequently, to be an effective leader, one must engage in a combination of task and relation behaviors (Yukl, 2008; Yukl & Mahsud, 2010).

Recognizing the situational approach to be taken with each student will help school administrators respond better and introduce appropriate steps to avoid truancy. By taking into account the needs of targeted students, administrators may further engage

students in school attendance and even academic success. Factors that contribute to rural

student truancy can vary from those of urban students (Cooley & Floyd, 2013). Many

steps to avoid truancy continue to be taken to keep families out of the truancy court, and

it is up to administrators to decide which truancy measures are more suitable for their

districts and students. The use of situational leadership helps school officials to create a

degree of guidance and encouragement that ideally suits the needs of students to facilitate

school attendance.

<div align="center">**Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variable**</div>

Rural Education

Over the last few decades, urban schools have focused on most educational

research and policies (Farrigan, 2020). Rural education is now receiving attention for

both positive and negative issues that students, teachers, and school administrators face

(Siegel-Hawley, 2016). Rural schools are traditionally identified using the National

Center for Education Statistics (2007) urban-centric classification system, based on a

school's physical address and its proximity to clusters of densely populated areas.

Burdick-Will and Logan (2017) found that of the 67,977 public schools located in

Metropolitan Statistical Areas, 6% of schools are located in rural areas. With fewer

schools in these areas, it may be easier for some to diminish the unique challenges they

face. Currently, rural schools face poverty, lower student diversity, and higher numbers

of students with special needs (Showalter et al., 2017). A 2018 study found that 22.4% of

children under 18 years old living in nonmetro areas live in poverty compared to 17.3%

in metro areas (Farrigan, 2020). Another study determined that the poverty level where a

student lives has more impact on a student's achievement than the student's poverty level (Siegel-Hawley, 2016). The most frequently cited reason for student underperformance in school is the effect of living in poverty (McShane & Smarick, 2018). Siegel-Hawley (2016) estimated that only 17% of allotted educational funding goes to rural schools in most states, while 18.7% of students attend rural public schools.

Many schools in rural locations may differ significantly from each other. While poverty usually is seen as an issue in all rural schools, in the Northeast, only 10% of students live below the poverty rate, but in the South, nearly 21% of students live in these conditions (McShane & Smarick, 2018). However, students in rural kindergarten programs tend to perform higher than those in towns and cities. Rural districts are located away from city centers and tended to rely on jobs that involve the land. However, trying to group all rural schools into one category may be oversimplifying this issue (McShane & Smarick, 2018). Rural poverty is another challenge that rural school districts face. One of the best ways to overcome the effects of poverty is to make sure that students are receiving a quality education. However, in rural areas, on average less than 20% of the population has a bachelor's degree or higher education level (Siegel-Hawley, 2016). Since rural communities are close-knit, those who need support may not seek help due to shame (McShane & Smarick, 2018). When trying to improve education in rural communities, it is essential to understand each rural community and its individuals before presenting solutions that may not work in that community.

The state in this study shares the ranking of second highest in the nation for its overall rural education needs, with more urgent needs than most states (State Department

of Education, 2019b). Nearly half of the schools are in rural areas, and one in three

students attends school in a rural district. More than one in five of the state's school-aged

rural children lives in poverty, and its communities around rural schools are among the

poorest in the country. Rural schools and districts are among the nation's largest, but

instructional spending is lower for rural students. National Assessment Educational

Performance is also low in rural areas (State Department of Education, 2019b). Even

more alarming is the relative lack of students' improvement between Grades 4 and 8 in

math and reading.

Truancy

Truancy differs from chronic absenteeism. Truancy is when a student has an

excessive number of unexcused absences from school (London et al., 2016), while

chronic absenteeism is when students are missing at least 10% of school days within a

school year that uses an excuse (London et al., 2016). Truancy and chronic absenteeism

contribute to low academic achievement and predictors of dropping out of school

(London et al., 2016). In the early part of the 20th century, Williams (1927) contributed

that truancy is the first sign of delinquency in secondary school levels and that it should

be addressed before it transitions into becoming truant throughout the years of

matriculation. Several studies have been completed with finding that truancy at a young

age can lead to future problems within the school and socially. Garry et al. (1996) argued

that inadequate school attendance is the first step to future antisocial behaviors.

Antisocial behaviors can lead to drug abuse, alcoholism, and even violence (Garry et al.,

1996). Truant elementary students are vulnerable to see failing grade levels, not

graduating within the targeted time of their peers, or even dropping out of school altogether (Gershenson et al., 2017).

School failure and higher dropout rates, higher poverty and crime rates, higher risk of imprisonment, and possible drug involvement characterized by insufficient education (Comer, 2017). Researchers on truancy have proposed that students with regular attendance score higher on achievement tests than their more frequently absent peers (Lamdin, 1996). To maintain a high attendance rate, everyone must understand the value of coming to school from students, parents, and even stakeholders (Abdullah et al., 2020).

Early learners are among those who suffer from truancy (Ehrlich et al., 2016). Elementary truancy is an early predictor of grade retention or even dropping out of high school (Attendance Works, 2016). Truancy in kindergarten is an early warning indicator that can lead to severe consequences for elementary school students and over the course in later grade levels. Current studies have shown that truancy occurs in the primary grades, as early as kindergarten, and in some studies, even preschool (Gentle-Genitty et al., 2015). Researchers revealed a negative relationship between truant kindergarten students, their academic performance, and social-emotional development (Gottfried, 2014). Students who are truant in kindergarten will lack the improvement of school attendance during their second-grade school year if there is no intervention (Dubay & Holla, 2016). Truancy in younger students can involve those missing fundamental instructions on reading and math skills needed for development throughout their educational career (Attendance Works, 2014; Gottfried & Hutt, 2019). There are

retention policies that connect student promotion to student attendance in elementary schools. These policies tend to start a negative pattern and behavioral issues leading the students to undervalue education (London et al., 2016). In addition, truant students have other concerns besides a lack of academic success.

Causes of Truancy

Researchers have identified several possible truancy causes among elementary, middle, and high school students (Eremie, 2015; Kalil et al., 2019). Truancy was a concern with similar variables to those that contribute to truancy today as early as the year 1839 (James & Davies, 2017). Back during the early 1800s, positive reinforcement was used to try to entice young children to attend school. Truant students were mainly distinguished by factors such as poverty, child labor, societal structure, ethnic groups, undereducated families, and unemployed households. (Abdullah et al., 2020; James & Davies, 2017; Lee et al., 2020). Truancy can be caused by many factors today, including mental health, physical health, poverty, suspensions, homelessness, unreliable transportation, dysfunctional family, unhealthy housing, trauma, substance abuse, and embarrassment at being behind in academics (Chang et al., 2016; Dahl, 2016). These factors have received increased attention in recent years but continue to be an area where more research is needed (Jordan & Miller, 2017; State Department of Education, 2016). The social, psychological, and educational causes of truancy are described in the upcoming sections.

Social

      The family background has a lot to do with truancy (Cortes et al., 2019; Ehrlich et al., 2016). Parents who are actively involved in their child's education have a better chance of attending school regularly (Kalil et al., 2019; Rogers & Feller, 2016). How parents perceive school can contribute to the truancy of their child (Ehrlich & Johnson, 2019; Gottfried & Hutt, 2019; Reid, 1999; Rogers & Feller, 2018). Studies have revealed that 50% of parents did not think that missing three days of school a month was an issue (Rogers & Feller, 2016, 2017). Students who have family members who had low attendance while they were in school tend to follow the same pattern (Cholewa, et al., 2018). The parents who have had bad experiences while in school may not value school attendance and make up for the work missed in school and completing schoolwork (Popovich, 2014). At times, when a child wants to stay home from school, the parent may allow them without showing concern for makeup work (Cortes et al., 2019). Parents may not be involved with their child's education with this parenting style (Ahmad & Miller, 2015). Some parents may have a total disregard that can include the lack of school supplies for their child and allow unnecessary absences to occur or even not attending conferences based on attendance concerns (Ahmad & Miller, 2015). Some students around this type of parental neglect may also not attend school regularly because their parent is not around, and they must take the place of their parents and take care of themselves or even their siblings (Popovich, 2014). Students also may miss school due to physical abuse injuries, which makes this a high need for educators to recognize the signs of abuse and neglect (Ahmad & Miller, 2015). When dealing with a home lifestyle that is

not conducive to the betterment of the child's academic success, they can become discouraged and disengaged in school (Simon & Johnson, 2013).

Low socioeconomic status is another problem that students may encounter socially (Gase et al., 2016). Children reared in low socioeconomic status conditions often experience hardships (Banerjee, 2016). Low socioeconomic status affects overall human functioning, including physical and mental health (Dahl, 2016). Low socioeconomic status correlates with attributes such as lower educational achievement, poverty, and poor health, which can ultimately affect a person in the community (Lee et al., 2020). As a result, these children experienced burnout, which led to underachievement, truancy, and school dropout (Luo et al., 2016). When combining low socioeconomic status with other risk factors, truancy risk can increase drastically (Patel et al., 2017). In addition, at times, students will try to maintain their group identity not to become successful and ignore positive behaviors such as studying, cooperating with teachers, or even coming to school to become productive students (Van Kessel et al., 2021). This can align a student to maintain the high-risk factors that lead to truancy.

Psychological

It is not uncommon for students to have behavior-related problems during their development (Dembo et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2020). Other factors mentioned as possible contributors to truancy are students identified with special needs or behavior issues (Gottfried & Hutt, 2019; Hong et al., 2020). Different factors that lead to psychological issues are not biological; genetic, environmental, psychological, and social factors play a role (Lee et al., 2020). Ingul and Nordahl (2013) stated that childhood behavioral disorders have

been shown as a significant risk factor for dropping out of school, unemployment, economic deprivation, suicide attempts, psychiatric disorders, and substance abuse as children grow. Researchers have shown the most common diagnoses of children ages 5 to 17 years with truancy issues have been: separation anxiety disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, social phobia, oppositional defiant disorder (ODD), and depression (Barthelemy et al., 2021; Stempel et al., 2017). Students with mental health issues sometimes experience difficulty at school for various reasons (Dembo et al., 2016; Hong et al., 2020). Fifteen percent of school-aged children experience mental health disorders, with 7 to 10% prevalence rates for severe disorders, most of whom had never received treatment from health care or educational providers (Foster et al., 2021).

Trauma is also related to the psychological factor linked to truancy, in which these events can impact the educational setting (Mireles-Rios et al., 2020). The brain can be affected by constant exposure to traumatic events (Dembo et al., 2016). Trauma can be a psychologically difficult event outside the range of an adult, especially an elementary student's experiences, frequently involving a sense of fear, helplessness, and even terror (Dembo et al., 2016; Perry, 2000). Several brain regions are found in neurological imaging that can show shrinkage due to childhood trauma (Perry, 2000; Walkley & Cox, 2013). Paying attention and processing new information in traumatized students find it harder, causing lower academic achievement and having difficulty in the sensory process (Dembo et al., 2016; Walkley & Cox, 2013) These students may also find it challenging to respond to social indications, overreact or remove themselves from social situations, and bully other students (Miller & Johnson, 2016). The adverse effects of trauma in the

educational setting are prominent in the minority and low socioeconomic students (Ko et al., n.d.). Students who experience traumatic events move their attention to survival, making learning in the classroom setting impossible (Dembo et al., 2016). There is a link to lower engagement in school and increased truancy due to trauma (Ko et al., n.d.).

A significant finding from the research done in the elementary schools also revealed that not only were students not equipped with critical tools needed for learning, but also, they did not receive proper screenings for health and abuse risks (Gottfried, 2019; Hong et al., 2020). There is a stereotype in rural communities about people receiving mental health counseling. It can be exasperating, as an educator, to know that a student needs help, but their families are against it because they do not want to be viewed a certain way. Mental illness affects many students from ages 6-17 years at least one-half, and many estimates as many as 80% of them do not receive the mental health care they need (Barthelemy et al., 2021). African Americans hold beliefs related to stigma, psychological openness, and help-seeking, which affect their coping behaviors (Dembo et al., 2016; Ward et al., 2013). Most mental health illness starts early in life; about 90% of people who develop a mental disorder show warning signs during their preteen or teen years (Parekh, 2018).

In several studies, the mental health issues that most truant students face often go undiagnosed because of the levels of poverty (Mireles-Rios et al., 2020; Stempel et al., 2017). Barriers preventing rural students' treatment include social stigma and cultural misperceptions (e.g., people with mental health problems are 'crazy'; people who seek mental health treatment are weak). There is also a deficiency in accessing mental health

providers due to lack of insurance or financial resources, prohibitive distance, limited transportation, lack of professionals in an isolated area (Dembo et al., 2016; Hong et al., 2020; Mireles-Rios et al., 2020).

Educational

Truancy is seen as a heavy burden on an administrator as well as the teacher. This problem becomes a root for low test scores, academic failure, and lack of motivation in higher-grade levels (Edobor & Kate, 2017). Some administrators may view truancy as an issue related to home life rather than the school (Teuscher & Makarova, 2018), but truancy is related to several school-based factors (Van Eck et al., 2017). Truancy cannot become a regular portion of a school's culture (Reid, 1999), with the attitude that students will not attend school no matter what interventions are given (Artango & Galleto, 2020). Some students feel that no one misses them when they are not at school (Ehrlich et al., 2016). Many students who do not have a personal connection with the school or do not feel supported will lose motivation to attend (Hendron & Kearney, 2016; London et al., 2016). Two significant student predictors of truancy issues are academic performance and negative peer group association. (Teuscher & Makarova, 2018). Schools that have high attendance rates and lower truancy numbers create a classroom environment that engages students in meaningful learning, builds positive student-teacher relationships, and offers students extra-curricular activities to be involved in (Hendron & Kearney, 2016; London et al., 2016).

According to Banerjee (2016), students did not attend school due to teacher's perceptions and low expectations academically. One study conducted proposed that

teachers had mental mindsets, which led to biases when they knew if a student's absence was excused or unexcused (Teuscher & Makarova, 2018; Van Eck et al., 2017). It also suggested that teachers' biases were heightened when the student was truant. These biases surfaced through interviews, surveys, and group discussions about chronically absent students with staff, students, and parents (Van Eck et al., 2017). Another study reinforced this previous study as one of the findings showed that teachers were more willing to help students who were excused rather than unexcused (Gershenson, 2016). While these biases are not intended, they can create an equity barrier for truant students, especially when teachers' positive connection has not been developed (Gershenson, 2016). The importance of a positive relationship comes from the student's perspective because they feel safe to explain what is going on and the reasons for the truancy (Baskerville, 2021; Edobor & Kate, 2017). Gershenson also reviewed the teacher effectiveness in schools and the relationship it must chronically absent students (2016). In schools with a higher rate of chronic absenteeism, there was also a higher rate of teacher turnover year to year, which may lower the overall effectiveness of teaching (Gershenson, 2016; Van Eck et al., 2017). Research has not been able to find a direct correlation to test scores, teacher effectiveness, and truant students. School leaders can plan teacher professional development, focus observations on looking at the time on task, and student engagement to increase rigor and relevance (Teuscher & Makarova, 2018; Virtanen et al., 2021). This may increase teacher retention and effectiveness, but school leaders will also need to develop and work with teachers and families to open communication and foster positive, trusting relationships (Gershenson, 2016).

Possibly the educational environment has been hindering the student (Artango & Galleto, 2020). Some of the educational level issues may include implementing attendance policies, the relationships with teachers, peer relations, bullying at school, curriculum, or any other issues (Teuscher & Makarova, 2018; Virtanen et al., 2021). Administrators should be able to evaluate each child's situation. Educators and policymakers cannot understand achievement gaps or efforts to close them without understanding absenteeism (Baskerville, 2021; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Many educators have found that being truant from school can damage student achievement (Gottfried, 2010; Teuscher & Makarova, 2018). A study looking at elementary students found that truancy in kindergarten was associated with adverse first-grade outcomes such as greater truancy in the following years and lower achievement in academics all around (Henry & Huizinga, 2007).

Being in school can lead a student to succeed in an academic environment (Gottfried & Hutt, 2019). Especially in math and reading, achievement is a crucial matter to attendance, and the absence of even two weeks during one school year matters (Balfanz, 2012; WV Department of Education, 2018). Administrators should make every effort to encourage regular attendance by students and solicit parents' and guardians' assistance to accomplish regular attendance, so it will not lead to truancy (Boyd, 2016). If elementary schools improve academic success, they will need to address truancy (Brunner et al., 2011). To address truancy, it should include the schools and families working together, an approach that will also support academic success (Baskerville, 2021; Boyd, 2016).

Truancy Prevention Programs

Understanding whether a study is valid in a geographical area can inform researchers in creating intervention programs for specific students (Cook et al., 2017; Cordes et al., 2019; Guryan et al., 2017; Robinson et al., 2018; Rogers & Feller, 2018; Thomas, 2017). Over the years, some southeastern states in America have remained in the nation's lowest and worst-ranked states on annual K-12 assessment reports. Truancy continues to be one of the most significant barriers to a student's success in school (State Department of Education, 2019b). Often, chronic attendance problems start in elementary school, and a pattern of non-compliant behavior begins (State Department of Education, 2019b).

Truancy is an issue that is seen throughout all types of schools, in which the prevention methods are well researched (Gottfried & Hutt, 2019). Failing to look at truancy data can lead to many lost opportunities for schools or districts to intervene early (MDRC, 2016). A critical finding in the research is that there is not an answer to truancy for all schools. However, one way to deescalate truancy is seen as a case-by-case basis (Conroy et al., 2018; Teuscher & Makarova, 2018). The research demonstrates the need for administrators to evaluate what systems are essential to get students to attend school (Keppens et al., 2019).

Some schools use implementation tiered systems for interventions and support, to support elementary truancy issues instead of depending on an informative disciplinary measure (Gottfried & Hutt, 2019). These programs can create positive results and foster relationships between schools and even families (Attridge, 2016). Response to

Intervention (RTI) is a tiered model used to identify and address academic difficulties

from students receiving effective individual progress monitoring (Steenbergen-Hu et al.,

2016). This tiered approach has been applied to all students within schools to promote

positive attendance and reduce truancy. This approach included three different levels of

interventions based on the level of need: Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 (Pinkelman & Horner,

2019).

Tier 1 provides assessments to all students to identify those with the most need for

more intensive interventions. Those identified as at-risk students are transitioned to Tier 2

(Pinkelman & Horner, 2019). Tier 2 provides intensive interventions to targeted students

identified as having problematic school attendance. The administrators and teachers

identify these students as having absences within the legal limit or having less than ten

school absences within a semester (Pinkelman & Horner, 2019). Tier 3 is specifically

designated for students who are considered chronically absent or with ten or more school

absences within a semester. This tier was an expansion of Tier 2 with the option of

alternative education and legal action. Legal action was a possibility if the student had

surpassed the legal number of school absences (Gottfried & Hutt, 2019). This intensive

intervention level included expanding the RTI team members (school-based, mentor,

school counselor, school nurse, parents, teachers, and administrators with knowledge of

the student's attendance).

The ideal solution for the school to collaborate with other stakeholders in dealing

with the issue of truancy is still in its infancy (Ingul et al., 2019; Rocque et al., 2017).

These approaches should include a connection of outside resources as a needed portion of

offering a type of support and intervention, such as and not limited to; the school, a judge, parents, parent classes, tutoring, anger management, and community agencies (Gottfried & Hutt, 2019; London et al., 2016). Also, to make an effective partnership, interventions have been found to include partnerships with community agencies, parent involvement, incentives and consequences, and evaluations of intervention effectiveness (Conroy et al., 2018; Gottfried & Hutt, 2019; London et al., 2016). Using this approach to family, school, and community partnerships has been shown to improve attendance and reduce truancy rates (Gottfried & Hutt, 2019). Community partnerships play a vital role in collectively addressing barriers that allow elementary students to become truant (Attendance Works, 2016; Gottfried & Hutt, 2019).

Summary and Conclusions

Truancy is increasing, especially in elementary schools in rural, not just urban America. The profound effects of elementary truancy can start as early as kindergarten and first grade, with the establishment of reading fundamentals. This can cause a decline in student academic performances, especially with students who have a socioeconomic background. Truant students need individualized attention at school and opportunities to build strong relationships based on trust and respect. Students need healthy, positive relationships with administrators and teachers, in conjunction with a trained, committed, and supported staff to provide high-quality, responsive services to keep truant elementary students on task to matriculate.

Having a clear truancy policy rewarding students for attendance, assigning a truancy specialist to severe but chronic cases, and working with parents in multiple ways

are proven strategies. The development of truancy programs should consider student's

grade level and the diversity of families. The next chapter will explain the research

design, rationale, and methodology used for this study and present the recruitment,

participation, and data collection for this study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this study was to investigate how administrators support truant elementary rural students in a southeastern state. This chapter describes and provides a rationale for qualitative research and study design. This chapter describes the methodology, including the participants and the selection, and explain how the data will be collected and analyzed. This section concludes with a discussion of the ethical issues involved with this study.

Research Design and Rationale

This study uses a basic qualitative design. The qualitative method is appropriate for obtaining data on perceptions, beliefs, ideas, and opinions because it is difficult to measure these characteristics quantitatively (Creswell, 2013). Perceptions, beliefs, ideas, and opinions are subjective and are defined by the person providing the data interpreted by the researcher. Merriam and Tisdell stated, "Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (2016). A basic qualitative study is ideal for exploring these ideas. A basic qualitative study was chosen because it is the most appropriate to determine participants' experiences in a real-life context (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The qualitative interview is a dialogue where the researcher collects information about the participant's world (Alvesson & Svensson, 2008). Holding interviews with the participants allow an in-depth view of truancy within these elementary schools. The administrator's interviews gave insight into academic success, classroom behaviors, and

the student's motivation for learning. Any of the participants' answers provide

information about a topic, especially when dealing with their role in their profession

(Smith & Eatough, 2007).

For this study, the main research question was:

Research Question 1: How do administrators support truant elementary students

in a rural southeastern state?

Role of the Researcher

A qualitative narrative inquiry study was conducted to explore administrator

perceptions on rural elementary school truancy support and their approaches to this

behavior based on the basic qualitative study protocol. The explanations for elementary

students' truancy are leading school officials to vary their approach to truancy in a way

that is acceptable to the situation. For this cause, school administrators use situational

leadership to respond to truancy by matching leadership style to specific circumstances

(Northouse, 2016). I worked solely on the data collections and attempted to remain

unbiased throughout the collection process. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000),

narrative inquirers must be aware of their histories, and possible tensions that arise during

the inquiry. To ensure unbiased research, reflexivity and bracketing were used to set

aside personal perceptions of truancy and focus on eliciting participants' responses when

conducting interviews. This process is necessary because I have experience dealing with

truancy as both an elementary school counselor and a classroom teacher. I refrained from

conversations about the research topic with participants during the data collection process

to ensure participants' perceptions were accurately captured and not influenced by the researcher. There wasn't any personal connection with the participants.

Methodology

In this portion, the basic qualitative design will be discussed to explore administrator perceptions and findings determined. This study utilized individual semi-structured interviews with rural elementary school administrators. This section will also cover participant selection, data collection, and analysis methods.

Participant Selection

This study is centered around a rural school district in a southeastern state. The eight administrators were selected using a particular criterion of having 5 or more years' experience in an elementary school. The eight administrators were located in a brick-and-mortar elementary school or the district central office that works with truancy. The sample was small to guarantee greater depth and knowledge.

DePaulo (2000) stated that it is the researcher's responsibility to confirm that the information was usable by providing a sample size that was large enough to achieve saturation. Each of the eight administrators provided detailed information about his or her daily interactions concerning elementary truancy that supports the study's purpose. DePaulo also suggested that researchers choose a sufficient sample size to hear important perceptions. The sample size has to ensure that the researcher did not miss any important information; when data becomes repetitious, the topic would be considered saturated (DePaulo, 2000).

To ensure that enough data were collected to address the research problem and answer the research questions, recruiting the most appropriate candidates was necessary. The ethical manner was present during recruitment. I completed the school district's process to conduct research with their elementary schools and obtained a letter of approval from the district's superintendent so the data collection could occur using a zoom video or audio system, and audio recording due to Covid-19.

The school district truancy representative(s) were contacted to obtain the elementary school with truancy as an issue within the recent school years. A list was obtained from the central office of the eight administrators who have at least five years in education, with three years as a teacher, and two years as an administrator.

Individual appointments were scheduled with each participant and allowed 60 minutes to provide enough time to discuss informed consent, explain the process, conduct the interview, and answer any questions the interviewee had once completing the interview. An explanation was given to each of the eight participants of my role as a researcher. I listened and served as the primary instrument for gathering data during each interview. I established a good rapport and assured the participants that the information provided would be kept confidential. During the beginning of each interview, the interviewees were informed of the study limitations, the types of questions that were asked, how confidentiality will be maintained, and their ability to withdraw from the study. The participants signed the letter of consent, which is found in Appendix C.

A letter pseudonym was assigned to each participant for confidentiality during and after data collection. For example, I used the letter A followed by a dash and a

number to refer to each administrator participant. A-1 will refer to the first administrator;

A-2 will refer to the second administrator, and so forth. Confidentiality was kept of the

participants' identity and will not be used in the findings or revealed at any time to the

school district. The interviews were recorded digitally with an audio recorder, as notes

are taken during the interview. All interviews were transcribed from the Zoom audio

recorder. Finally, to ensure that the transcripts accurately reflect the information in the

interview, member checking was utilized. All of the transcribed interviews were emailed

to each participant. Errors that can be identified by participants during transcription were

revised to ensure that the data analyses reflected the exact participant reflections (Tracy,

2019). Participants were reminded that they still had the right to withdraw from the study.

I informed participants that I may contact them through email if I have any questions

after going through the transcriptions of the interview to clarify their responses.

Instrumentation

During this study, the use of semistructured interviews with all the participants for

the collection of data were used. Questions were prepared firsthand to align with the

research questions but allowed room for follow-up questions during the interview

session. A conversational style interview allows the social aspect for an authentic two-

way interaction with the participant (Yin, 2016). Open-ended questions were to engage

the participants in the truancy discussion to gain meaningful experiences and perceptions.

By the study focusing on administrators' perceptions, the interviews were appropriate for

the data collection to understand their ideas and experiences.

Rubin and Rubin (2012) explained when creating interview questions that included using conversational language or language free of vagueness, allowing participants to answer in their own words, and paying attention to personal experiences to become a natural part of the responses. Questions should be created in a manner that the wording of the questions does not restrict participants' responses, and participants' responses can be formed from their knowledge and experiences (Saldaña, 2016).

The interview questions that are presented in Appendix D were created as the instruments for data collection. To help in answering RQ1, about how do administrators support truant elementary students. I relied on Interview Questions 1-2 to determine the eligibility of the participant. Interview Question 3 explored the background of the school and the community, while Question 4 asked for the affirmative of Question 3. Question 5 addressed background on the schools' response to truancy. Interview Questions 6 addressed the administrators' perceptions on task and relationship behavior, the second dimension of situational approach.

Interview Questions 7-10 focused on the model of situational leadership. Interview Question 7 probed for the school's response towards truancy and the alignment with this specific. Interview Question 8 probed to understand administrators' perception of student support towards attendance. Exploring the alignment of decreasing truancy with this specific approach was used for Interview Questions 9 and 10. Interview Question 11 was a probing question for insight into the administrators' situational approach when dealing with truancy. To understand the administrator's purpose for leadership choices Interview Question 12 was asked, while Interview Question 13

explored the administrators' perceptions of how leadership style aligns with actions specific to truancy. Finally, I asked Interview Question 14 to explore perceptions of the effectiveness of leadership choices

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

I included details concerning techniques and methods increase the likelihood of the study's outcomes that would be deemed trustworthy and valid; and that a reader can reproduce the study in the same way and with the same kind of participants and produce similar outcomes (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2016). The following explained how participants were obtained for this study, data collection, and data analysis.

To guarantee enough data was collected to address the research problem and answer the research question, recruiting the most appropriate candidates was essential. Because the study aimed to investigate administrators' perceptions concerning rural elementary truancy support, specific conditions were established to select participants. The eight administrators were selected using a specific criterion of having five or more years of education experience in an elementary school. The administrators were located in a brick- and-mortar elementary school or the district central office that works with truancy. The participants met this criterion to ensure that the data collection was relevant in addressing the research question.

Once IRB approval was obtained from Walden University, personal contact was made with the school district and school administrators to meet the established criteria via their district email. Within the email, an overview was provided of the research's

purpose using a preapproved leader interview consent form provided by Walden University.

A response was asked from interested individuals within 5 days. The interview consent form informed potential participants of information concerning interview procedures, the study's voluntary nature, the study's potential benefits, the potential risk factors, and participant privacy assurances. Informed consent was accepted if the individual responded via email.

When data collected through interviews, location, privacy, and timing are essential parts of the plan. Due to Covid-19, for this study, the data collected via individual semi-structured interviews via Zoom audio or video call with the administrators. Participants were asked to recommend a time conducive to interviewing with privacy and environmental needs. The interviews were anticipated to be completed within 60 minutes.

Due to Covid-19, each interview was conducted via audio or video zoom and audio recorded to document each spoken word correctly and capture the tone and inflections of the responses. Audio recordings allow the researcher to observe participants and script notes while the recorder captures each word expressed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). During each interview, the interview protocol was available to briefly document the researcher's notes and observations and engage in reflexive bracketing by notating a particular emotion or reaction. Predetermined probes and follow-up questions were used to elicit more profound responses.

Once the interviews concluded, each recording was transcribed within one to two days. All recordings were listened to, and the participant's responses were typed verbatim using a software application called Otter. When researchers elect to self-transcribe recordings of interviews, the researcher must commit to a time-consuming process; however, hearing the voices of participants can increase understanding of the individuals' characteristics and internalize individuals' responses (Banerjee, 2016).

Data Analysis Plan

The data were evaluated to come up with a meaning for the study. I submitted an interview for transcription into a digital file through an application called Otter after each interview. Otter is an application for dictation that transcribes when an individual speaks (Otter Voice Meeting Notes, 2020). The transcription was verified for precision by the application. To store the transcription with an encrypted connection, both digital and physical security measures were used (Otter Voice Meeting Notes, 2020). I used Microsoft Word and three columns to codify and retrieve. In a Word document, I inserted the transcripts into the center column of a three-column table, then inserted the field notes taken during each interview into the left column at the appropriate point in each interview. I used the right-hand column for coding.

A priori coding, open coding, and axial coding completed a topical review in three cycles. I concentrated on phrases or words that pertained to these predetermined codes in the first coding period through priori codes. A priori codes, based on the value, attitudes, and beliefs of the participants (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), included *environment, goals, teachers, community, trust, challenges, support, parents, relationships,*

transparent, collaboration, resources, teams, and any links to situational leadership. In

the text, I highlighted them and make a code notation in the column to the right. I

finished priori coding all transcripts to move on to open coding.

Open coding helps one discover the data's overall meaning through multi-

participant connected principles (Saldaña, 2016), which may not be disclosed during a

priori coding. I read each transcript, highlighting words and phrases that have recurred

but have not been part of the previously defined preset codes. Following the priori coding

cycle, my experience with all the transcripts helped to identify ideas that recurred

throughout the transcript and through transcripts, to flag them. Again, before continuing

with axial coding, I completed the open coding of all transcripts.

Axial coding explains how codes are connected and helped construct categories

for grouping codes (Saldaña, 2016). I decided how codes and the ideas represented were

associated by re-reading the interviews and asking myself open-ended questions

(Saldaña, 2016). To identify similarities and differences, knowledge was analyzed. I

grouped various codes extracted from interview answers into categories by following the

procedure. Finally, I grouped similar categories that generate patterns that ran through the

information and generate answers to the research questions.

Trustworthiness

To establish trustworthiness in this study, the aspects of dependability, credibility,

transferability, and confirmability have to be established. Ethical issues can arise from the

research questions, purpose, data collection, data analysis, data interpretation, writing,

and dissemination (Creswell, 2009). Trustworthiness is established throughout the study, with the development through methodical research (Yin, 2016).

I used Zoom video recording to conduct the interviews. Concepts of the procedures are used based on the complexity of the participants' experiences and methodically scrutinizing the participant's responses based on perspectives and experiences to assist in presenting valid interpretations (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I emailed a copy of the transcript to the participant, and they were asked to respond with the terms of no changes necessary or make the required changes so I could modify the transcript. I used member checking during follow-up meetings within two weeks timeframe for each participant administrator to review their answers for accuracy. I focused on trustworthiness and commitment to ethical procedures when analyzing the interview transcripts.

Credibility was established by using administrator perspectives of truancy support for rural elementary students. I ensured credibility by recruiting participants who work with elementary truancy. I confirmed that each administrator who participated fulfilled the criterion of working in education for five or more years as an administrator and an active employee in a rural school district.

Transferability is concerned with applying a study's results in a bolder context or population (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I ensured transferability by providing detailed descriptions of various aspects of the study, including the participants' perspectives, reactions, and body language during the interview, the rural school district and the

climate. Through these descriptions, readers determine the level of relevance of this study to their particular research needs.

Dependability was created by providing enough information about the study to allow another researcher to repeat the study using similar methods; and establishing processes that will deliver the same results. An audit trail establishes dependability by detailing how a study was conducted and offering an external analysis of all data collected (Anney, 2014). I described what I did in conducting this study in a reflective journal, any deviations from the time of research, and the data I gathered. I described how the data was analyzed. The data will be kept for five years following this study.

Confirmability was established through detailed methods and procedures for conducting interview sessions. The data collection methods and procedures are detailed for processing, analysis, and display. My values and biases were identified and separated from the analysis to ensure objectivity. Anney (2014) states that the use of a reflective journal supports confirmability. I kept a journal on a password-protected computer, recorded events, and annotate my thoughts for each research step. I also used the reflective journal to track my biases not to intrude on my study's conduct.

Ethical Procedures

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Walden University approves studies when the benefit exceeds the participants' risks. The IRB application was submitted and received by Walden University's permission to conduct this study to gain access to the participants and the data they provided based upon the university's ethical 38 standards and U.S. Federal Agreements. The approval number was 06-25-21-0667182. By

communicating through email, the participants were informed of the study's purpose and how the results will be used. All the participants volunteered for the study and were instructed of their rights to withdraw from the study and inform via email that there were no negative consequences if they chose to do so. The participants were informed that all data will be kept confidential, and pseudonyms will be used for the schools and participants. Additional information in the email was stored in a password-protected computer hard drive, that only the researcher will have exclusive access to the data, and destroyed after five years.

Summary

In this chapter, the purpose was stated for the basic qualitative study to provide insight into the administrator perceptions of truancy in rural elementary students. The research question was restated, the qualitative researcher's role was described, and presented a rationale for why a basic qualitative study was the preferred method in this research. The site selection, participant selection, and instrumentation were justified for this study. The data analysis plan included descriptions of the data, coding procedures, and the themes selection process. Issues of trustworthiness, including validity, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, are also discussed in this chapter. Walden University's IRB requirements were described relating to ethics involving human participants' treatment before, during, and after collecting data. Finally, the procedures for storing and destroying the data were discussed.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to investigate how administrators support truant

elementary rural students in a southeastern state in a qualitative approach. For this study,

the main research question was:

Research Question 1: How do administrators support truant elementary students

in a rural southeastern state?

This chapter discusses the setting in which the study takes place, data collection,

data analysis, the results, the evidence of trustworthiness, and a summary.

Setting

The study was conducted in the Southeastern region of the United States of

America. This region is significant because it includes diverse geographic areas,

including suburban and rural locations. This geographic diversity also mirrors the diverse

educational options available in this region, including individual homeschools, public

community schools, and several private schools. The school district selected for this

study is a public school district in a rural county that serves close to 1300 children in

grades PreK-12. The school district has three elementary schools that serve students in

grades PreK through 5; two middle schools that serve students in grades 6 through 8; and

two high schools that serve students in Grades 9 through 12.

Initially, it was planned to gather data with in-person face-to-face interviews.

However, at the time of this study, the COVID-19 global pandemic forced changes to the

original data collection method. The participants were impacted by the COVID-19 global

pandemic, but also the school districts across this state of research went through a drastic

change with their student information database. Increased levels of anxiety and

uncertainty related to personal and professional matters likely impacted participants'

participation in this study.

Eight certified administrators agreed to participate in the study. The

administrators included 3 elementary principals, 3 elementary assistant principals, and 2

central office administrators. Each participant was assigned a unique identifier to protect

his or her identities. These unique identifiers ranged from A-1through A-8 for

administrator participants, and they are referenced in this study and saved records. During

the data transcription and analysis process, any identifying information was removed to

ensure confidentiality and protect participants' privacy. Table 1 shows the role, years in

education, and years in administration for each participant.

Table 1

Participant Profile

Participant	Administrator Role	Years in Education	Years in Administration
A-1	Principal	20	16
A-2	Principal	10	15
A-3	Principal	20	9
A-4	Assistant Principal	21	8
A-5	Attendance Coordinator	8	3
A-6	Assistant Principal	12	5
A-7	Assistant Principal	18	6
A-8	Director Student Services	25	19

All participant interviews were conducted via Zoom, a web-based video and audio-conferencing platform. Zoom provides security features that help to ensure confidentiality and participants' privacy. Participants were sent a unique link to access the Zoom meeting, along with a unique password to gain entry to the meeting. Although audio may be recorded with or without video, all participants chose to keep their video off to proceed with a virtual audio interview.

Data Collection

I began the data collection process with an email to the site school superintendent initiating help with the email addresses of 8 potential participants for the study. In consideration of Centers of Disease Control and Prevention nationwide health mandates and guidelines for social distancing and possible conflicts with scheduling interviews, I interviewed participants with Zoom software. I used a computer and the audio feature of Zoom and Otter to collect data one time from each participant for approximately 60 minutes. Before starting each interview, I stated the purpose of the interview and informed each participant they would be asked questions about their times dealing with truancy as an administrator in an elementary setting. I asked all eight participants the same 14 questions during each interview session and allowed each participant to respond to each question to collect data to address the phenomenon and research question of my study. I concluded each interview session by thanking each participant for volunteering to participate in the study, and each was informed that within 24 hours, they would receive an email draft copy of their interview transcript, from Otter, for validation of accuracy, clarification, and any misinterpretations of their responses to interview questions. Finally,

participants were informed they would be excited from my study upon validation of their

transcripts.

The primary source of data was open-ended virtual Zoom interviews. Individual

interviews were conducted with eight administrators who worked with or around

elementary truancy. Each one-time interview lasted about 30 minutes. Some interviews

lasted longer, while others were slightly shorter, depending on the length of time a

participant spoke when answering a question. Interviews were scheduled on days and at

times convenient for the participant.

Interviews were the primary source of data for learning more about participants'

perceptions on truancy and the leadership style used. An interview protocol for

administrators was developed and used to guide the interviews, ensuring consistency in

the questions asked and the information gathered. The protocol included an introduction

to the study, interview norms, and interview questions. Participants were also reminded

of their right to opt-out at any time.

Data Analysis

After each interview on Zoom, a digital file was created with the Otter application

for transcription. I compared each transcription to the audio recording to ensure accuracy

and to clean up any errors. I used Otter while listening carefully to each participant while

taking notes thoroughly. I inserted the transcriptions into the center column of a three-

column table in a Word document, then inserted any field notes gathered during each

interview into the left-hand column at the appropriate point in each interview. I reserved

the right-hand column for coding. Completing a priori, open, and axial coding on an

Excel spreadsheet proved more straightforward and reliable than a word document. The document only provided a small glimpse of the data in multiple segments, while the spreadsheet provided a complete panoramic view of all the data at once, making it easier to access and report the findings. I created 14 sheets in an Excel spreadsheet, one for each interview question separated by the participants. Within each sheet, I created five columns containing the research questions, participant alias used to be able to the transcription for accuracy.

I completed thematic analysis in three cycles: a priori coding, open coding, and axial coding. A priori codes, based on the value, attitudes, and beliefs of the participants (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), included , *Absence, approach, attendance, consistency, contact, delegating, effective, excuses, importance, meetings, monitored, parental involvement, responsibility, school district, truancy, unexcused, unstructured and, links to the conceptual framework.* In the first coding, I focused on phrases or words that pertain to these predetermined codes, highlighting them in the text and making a code notation in the right column. I completed a priori coding of all transcripts before moving on to open and axial coding.

The techniques of open and axial coding were utilized. Axial coding is used to classify codes that reflect similar thoughts (Williams & Moser, 2019). The thematic analysis procedure consisted of six stages which are: familiarizing myself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and labeling themes, and preparing the report (Nowell et al., 2017).

During the first stage, the field notes from the interviews were examined. Interview audio and texts were also double-checked for correctness and to begin reflecting on the facts and patterns that emerged (Nowell et al., 2017). Despite the fact that no scripts were generated during this phase, I arranged the data in preparation for the coding procedure. To prepare for category-based analysis and to begin looking for trends among participants' responses, charts were developed, one for each interview topic (Kuckartz, 2019). I reviewed and analyzed the sorted data, taking notes and making comments.

Open coding, which describes raw data, was used to generate the initial codes. During this step, the replies of the participants were carefully and properly reviewed inside the charts that were prepared. Data were highlighted, and the data were coded, or by extracting open codes from the data (Saldaña, 2016). Throughout the process, reflective notes were taken to record ideas on the data, developing themes, and patterns. The programs created at this step aided in making sense of the raw data. To identify blocks of data that had repeated phrases or important concepts, open coding approaches were combined. Following the completion of the open coding procedure, the original codes were combined into categories using axial coding. Additionally, color-coding assisted in categorizing the codes because comparable codes and supporting data were highlighted in the same color.

Finding themes was the next step. An inductive theme analysis procedure with open and axial coding was used. Data were coded using the raw data of individual respondents. Axial codes were identified as groups or categories of the first codes

(Williams & Moser, 2019). Clear patterns and ideas related to the topics of the study were then gathered from the axial codes, and themes were drafted as they appeared. The most common categories provided temporary themes. These temporary themes reflected the concepts voiced by participants at this phase (Nowell et al., 2017).

Following the theme search, the themes were reviewed. The use of themes enables a researcher to present "categories of ordered data...as story-filled statements" (Williams & Moser, 2019). During this period, I went over the themes and data. During this stage, a matrix was created to display each emerging topic, supporting data, and a brief interpretive description (Saldaña, 2016). I went through the topics to make sure there was enough data to validate. Further study was conducted on those themes that didn't have adequate data (Creswell, 2014).

After examining the topics, the defining and naming themes were shown. The purpose of this step was to explain how each topic related to the research questions and to convey an aspect of the study (Nowell et al., 2017). It was also required to establish whether and how each offered theme was properly tied to the facts during this step. This was accomplished by developing idea maps for each topic to demonstrate the links between the themes and the axial and open codes. William and Moser (2019) stated that the themes, categories, and codes should be checked for consistency and to confirm that no changes needed to be made.

Following the completion of the themes, the full study and final report was prepared in a clear and accessible manner. The themes and supporting data, including direct quotations or passages, were stated to demonstrate the study's conclusions. To

build credibility, all significant findings were mentioned in the final report, and member

verification was performed to guarantee consistency between participants (Nowell et al.,

2017). The following portion is an overview of the data-derived topics, categories, and

codes presented in Tables 2 through 6.

Table 2

Attendance Incentives Theme

Reported Factors			
"We'll have a little basketball tournament. Normally something they like.	"Having popsicle parties for attendance motivates and encourages them"	"We try that type of fun stuff to sway the students to be here.	"In a classroom, there's competitions; the students, encourage each other for a weekly prize."

Table 3

Parental Support Theme

Reported Factors			
"The issue of the parental involvement is something that we have to be creative, and make it better."	"We talk to the parents about the importance of them being in school and education, if the children aren't in school, this will hurt academically.	"You actually have sit down and talk to them (parents) about attendance for their child, and let them know we need them."	"We have a lack of communication with the parent".

Table 4

Student-Staff Relationship Theme

Reported Factors			
"It's about consistency. It takes every educator to encourage every student to come to school. As long as you are building that culture."	"As long as you're consistent it builds the relationships with students. That's the impact we will have."	"It starts from the top and works down. The faculties have to build a working relationship with all."	"We have to build functioning relationships with our students."

Table 5

Rural Community Relations Theme

Reported Factors			
"I focused on community building and building relationships with the students and their families, and that has definitely improved truancy, because of those building those relationships and being more involved in local activities.	"Stakeholders and their role matters within the schools who were involved so we definitely would involve community partners because they are the ones who can provide help with knowing the community."	"The small communities have to know that you care for them. If you are not, they will build a wall against all outsiders."	"I had to earn the communities trust and respect."

Table 6

Intervention Theme

Reported Factors			
"Putting those actions in place allows us to help our students."	"As a school district, each school has to find what works for them to fight truancy."	"We have used several strategies, but we have found that we have to be consistent and follow it through".	"We have found a few methods that have allowed us to become closer to minimizing truancy."

During the coding process, no anomalous cases were discovered. Throughout the interviews, participants were consistent in their replies. Participants were generally confident in their leadership style when it came to dealing with truancy. They did, however, propose several impediments that may have influenced truancy.

Results

The results of this study are based on the analysis of the data collected from interviews of school administrators. Participants were asked questions related to their leadership style to learn more about administrators' perceptions of elementary truancy.

Research Question 1: How do administrators support truant elementary students in a rural southeastern state?

Interview questions one and two focused on the administrators' eligibility as a participant. As seen in *Table 1, Participant Profile* gives a breakdown of their positions and years as an administrator. I did ask a follow-up question on how long they have been in education.

Question 4 focused on the main reason(s) for students' truancy in school. These were the five main responses pulled for this question.

Figure 1

Reasons for Truancy
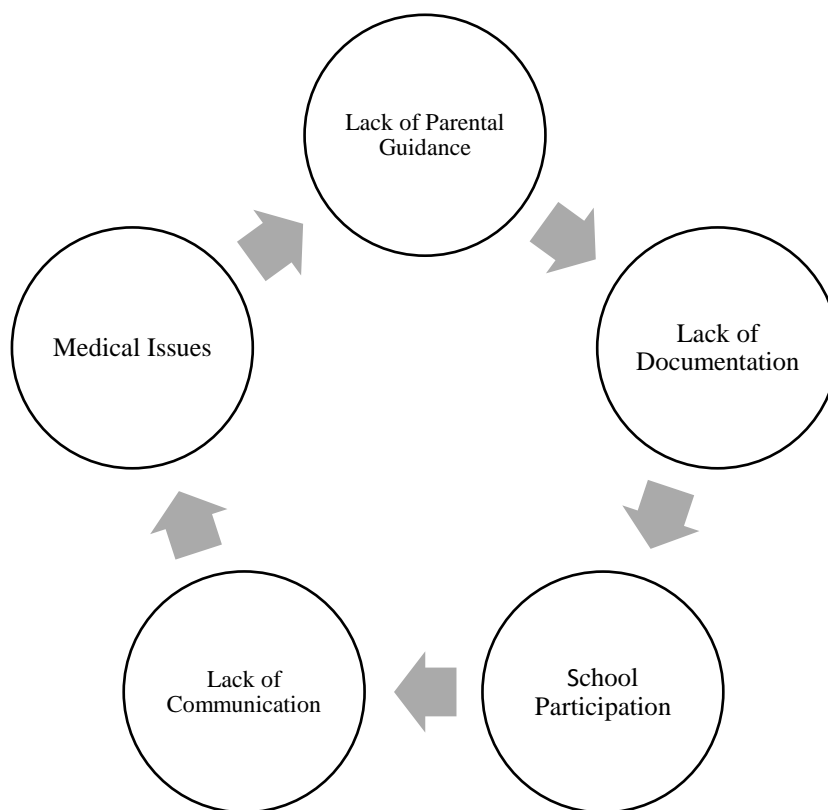
Participants A-5 and A-8 focused on the medical issues, lack of documentation, and parental guidance. Both participants are district administrators and have had experience as principals and assistant principals. Participant A-5 stated that:

> The main reasons for truancy are either one they are forgetting their parent notes their doctor's excuses, and the paperwork that is needed by parents to show the responsibility of parents as being an elementary level. It all falls back to them

(students) in learning responsibility but either doctor's excuses or just not wanting

to come to school, in general, will be the reasons for truancy in schools.

Participant A-1 expressed, "We don't have any activities to get them interested in school.

Other schools, bigger school districts, have a lot more electives. They have a lot more

extracurricular activities. We pretty much have PE."

Participant A-7 combined a few reasons for truancy happening in the school by

stating, "Accountability, and effectively communicating consequences to actions to

parents, and parents communicating that to the child. Lack of motivation, lack of seeing

the relevance to education and those things are important too."

Question 5, how is attendance monitored on your campus, addressed the

background on the schools' response to truancy. Participant A-3 summed up the basic

school district procedure for elementary schools, which was, "Attendance is monitored

daily with teachers submitting posts in attendance, and my secretary does a really good

job of calling those parents when their kids are out." Participant A-3 explained what

happens after an absence takes place. A call stating that 'your child has an unexcused

absence.' The third unexcused absence is when they get a letter. Then with the fifth

absence, they go to the District Attendance Coordinator.

Interview Questions 6, do you use task, relationship, or a combination of both

when working with truancy, and why addressed the administrators' perceptions on the

second dimension of the situational approach. Participant A-1 feels that "We have good

relationships with the parent. Normally we can call them and tell them, hey, your child

missing school".

Participant A-4 felt that task and relationships are both essential, "Everyone is familiar with their task and what they're supposed to be doing. Having those partner meetings with them; kind of letting everyone know what your role is and what your responsibilities in your role consist of." Participant A-2 expanded on the usage of the second dimension of the situational approach by stating:

Interview Questions 7-10 focused on the model of situational leadership. Interview Question 7, how is delegating style approach effective towards your whole student population, probed for the school's response towards truancy and the alignment with this specific approach. Participant A-6 stated, "So it's just based on delegating tasks, you know, holding people accountable, making sure all stakeholders are playing their part, collaborating." Participant A-2 expressed, "In terms of truancy, it alleviates a lot of the initial paperwork off my desk for having to be tied down to the office when I can be actually out and about in the school." Participant A-4 explained, "With delegating, I'm putting those interventions in individuals that are over that particular role that I have seen or I have observed that they're actually effective in those roles." Participant A-5 expressed,

When working in the schools if you are delegating, who in the committee is doing what, whether they are running reports, whether they are talking to parents, whether they are just talking to students, having the counselors have a session with them. It makes it easier when it tackles everybody as a whole because everybody knows their certain parts, then they are able to facilitate that throughout the whole school, which makes working attendance easier to monitor.

Interview Question 8, what does participating style look like when dealing with truancy, probed to understand administrators' perception on student support towards attendance. Participant A-1 expressed, "You have to talk with the students and parents so they know the importance of attendance. And they have to give them a little willpower to come to school. They do better work, because of something they want." Participant A-4 expressed, "That's (Participating) the issue, parental involvement. That is something that we are having to be creative, and you know make it better. This has rather been our biggest issue when dealing with truancy."

Participant A-2 stated,

> Just having a conversation with them about what's going on in the home because sometimes it's a little deeper than just a child not showing up at school, there are some underlying issues going on, that they don't feel comfortable with talking about until you really get them in and just have a conversation with when they feel comfortable to talk to you.

> Exploring the alignment of decreasing truancy with this specific approach was used for Interview Questions 9 and 10. Question 9 was when using selling style who else do you involve while using this approach? A-2 stated, "We do that initially at the open house. I do that with the superintendent being present. All the teachers are present. And the parents, we talked about the importance of them being in school and tie that to academics." Participant A-4 added,

> Everyone has to be involved. Everyone has to function as professional learning communities as it relates to anything, on your campus. Everyone has to speak the

same language. Anytime you have to be able to articulate what you are wanting with everyone in order for them to be involved and partake in what they have them to do when dealing with attendance or truancy, as their role and responsibility.

Question 10 was to describe how using the telling approach affects the relationship with students. Participant A-2 shared, "Sometimes you have to just say what you mean and be firm and stand by it." Participant A-3 stated, "This normally works usually as documented evidence… writing in a meeting and they know your document is basically an agreement."   Participant A-4 expressed, "Making it plain and clear speaking their language to where they can understand what the consequences are." Participant A-5 enhanced the question by saying, "telling approach is effective when you're trying to promote that stern use going across the board for the parents and the students." Participant A-6 expanded on the telling approach in this manner, "Notifications are sent out through email, phone calls, and parent meetings, any means ways to reaches them. Also, use social media to put the information out there as well as a group. Hold home visits to be direct."

Interview Question 11, how often do you change your approach when dealing with, was a probing question for insight on the administrators' situational approach when dealing with truancy. Participant A-2 responded quickly by saying, "Depending on the situation." Participant A-4 expanded by saying, "That has to change all the time because again, you know one thing does not work for every child so you have to look at the particular situation and be able to put things in place for that particular student"

Participant A-5 expeditiously stated, "Basically, every family, every child has a different

approach."

To understand the administrator's purpose for leadership choices, Interview

Question 12 asked, from the different types of styles that were mentioned prior, which is

most effective? Interview Question 14 asked which leadership behavior has become

effective towards your truant students.

Table 7

Participant Response to Questions 12 and 14

Participant	Administrator Role	Question 12	Question 14
A-1	Principal	Participating	Telling
A-2	Principal	Participating	Participating
A-3	Principal	Delegating	Telling
A-4	Assistant Principal	Telling	Delegating
A-5	Attendance Coordinator	Telling	Telling
A-6	Assistant Principal	Participating	Participating
A- 7	Assistant Principal	Participating	Participating
A- 8	Director of Student Services	Participating	Participating

While Interview Question 13, how has your leadership style impacted your

schools' response to truancy, explored the administrators' perceptions of how leadership

style aligns with actions specific to truancy. Participant A-5 elaborated, "Being consistent

with rules and procedures are part of my leadership style. Once you do that then the

school falls in line, teachers, students, or even parents, as long as you're consistent and

giving the right information when needed. Participant A-4 expressed, "I'm all about consistency, putting protocols and procedures in place. And they just know the importance of, how I feel about instruction in being the teaching and learning process in general." Participant A-6 expanded, "It has impacted our response to truancy because I'm focused on community building, and building relationships with the students and their families. That has definitely improved how we work with truancy, because of those building relationships and being more involved."

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility is the most important part of establishing trustworthiness (Lewis, 2015). Credibility is the connection between the research conducted and reality to ensure the findings are accurate (Lewis, 2015). I confirmed that each administrator fulfilled the criterion of having their administrator certification by searching the state educator database to see all the current certifications the administrators hold. I also emailed a copy of the transcript to the participant, and they were asked to respond with the terms of no changes necessary or make the required changes so I could modify the transcript.

Using rich descriptions, transferability was achieved by allowing the administrator's viewpoints to be understood in various contexts, demographics, and age ranges (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I utilized a lot of detail to describe my method and events, and I supplied interview data word for word, which allowed the readers to analyze the data and decide whether the findings were transferable. According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), each reader determines transferability after assessing the application of the information provided by the researcher.

Dependability is established by providing enough information about the study to allow another researcher to duplicate it using identical approaches and by developing mechanisms that would provide the same findings if I repeated it over time (Anney, 2014). An audit trail was created by describing how the study was carried out and providing an external examination of the data obtained (Anney, 2014). In a reflective diary, I detailed what I did in performing my study, any deviations from my plan that occurred throughout the study, and the data I obtained as part of my audit trail. I described how the data was examined in my paper. Following this study, the data will be preserved for 5 years so that they may be studied as required to validate the results and conclusions I present.

By performing the study in the manner outlined, I was able to ensure confirmability. The data collection methods and procedures were detailed for processing, analysis, and display. My values and biases were identified and separated from the analysis to ensure objectivity. Anney (2014) states that the use of a reflective journal supports confirmability. I kept a reflective diary in which I recorded and annotated my thoughts throughout each interview in the research process. I made a great effort to keep my prejudices and opinions out of this study.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore rural elementary administrators' perceptions of truancy and their approaches to leadership dealing with truancy. Participating administrators of a rural school district described their experiences dealing with elementary student truancy. All administrators indicated that they understood the

truancy policy; however, they also all described an inability to refer students to truancy court since the policy was implemented. Participants discussed the truancy prevention measures they found effective in their school district.

Participants shared their perceptions of leadership style. All eight administrators indicated understanding the truancy policy and the protocol to follow when dealing with truant elementary students. Participants discussed dealing with truant elementary students in their district as certified administrators. The administrators discussed contacting parents within a recommended timeline, holding conferences to inform parents, and implementing preventative measures to keep students from being truant.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to investigate how administrators support truant elementary rural students in a southeastern state in a qualitative approach. For this study, the single research question was:

Research Question 1: How do administrators support truant elementary students in a rural southeastern state?

A basic qualitative approach was used in this study. This design was chosen due to its appropriateness of the topic and to answer the research question. This study was based on the situational leadership theory which administrators can utilize while addressing elementary student truancy. Using situational leadership theory, the administrators are given a choice on how they can respond to the situation (Northouse, 2016). This approach was used to describe administrators' perceptions and expand their responses, which is not allowed in surveys of quantitative studies. The sample selected for the study was comprised of eight district and building administrators from a rural school district in a southeastern state. The administrators are described as in brick-and-mortar schools or the district office personnel that works with truancy. The sample elementary administrator had five years or more experience in education. The use of semistructured interviews was used to explore their perceptions of elementary truancy. Data collected from these interviews provided relevant information regarding administrators' perceptions of challenges to support truancy in rural elementary schools.

Interpretation of the Findings

Administrators who took part in the study gave their perceptions on truancy support in rural elementary schools. When dealing with elementary truancy, administrators confront many obstacles. Despite the difficulties connected with implementing truancy policies, some truancy prevention techniques were shown to be successful. The study topic, "How do administrators support truant elementary students in a rural southeastern state?" revealed five main themes.

Parent Support

Student attendance might be influenced by a lack of parental participation. Gottfried and Hutt (2019) discovered that residing in single-parent households was a frequent trait among students with truancy issues. All administrators highlighted how parental concerns intensified the difficulties in implementing the truancy policy. Two subthemes arose addressing parenting difficulties.

The first subtheme was that parents do not value education, and the second was that poor parenting was observed. Six administrators stated that parents who do not value education make implementing truancy policies difficult, which was discovered in question 10 about the telling leadership style. Administrator A-6 said that parents who did not value education did not teach that value to their children. Administrator A-6 expanded about a specific time when a student was habitually absent, and the parent was unresponsive to truancy intervention and preventive efforts. This concept is similar to the findings of Popovich (2014), who discovered that attendance habits established in

elementary schools might be indications of children becoming at risk of dropping out in secondary school.

Furthermore, parents who were not successful in school may not be active in their children's education. Cholewa et al. (2018) found that students who perceived their parents' lack of participation were more likely to miss school and assignments. Administrator A-5 addressed how educators continue to provide education to students even though their parents do not appreciate it. All administrators in the study saw ineffective parenting as an obstacle to implementing truancy policies. Administrator A-8 stated that the major issue the school district had in dealing with truant students was poor parenting. Administrator A-8 also stated adolescents who perceived their parents' lack of participation were more likely to miss school and assignments. Administrator A-5 addressed how educators continue to provide education to children even though their parents do not appreciate it. All administrators saw ineffective parenting as a barrier to implementing truancy policies. Administrator A-2 stated that the major issue the school had in dealing with non-attending pupils was inadequate parenting.

Attendance incentives. All administrators mentioned attendance incentives as a way to motivate students to attend school in question 9 about the selling leadership style, but administrator A-1 mentioned them the most. Administrator's A-1 and A-3 stated that they monitored daily attendance with the assistance of office personnel who ran attendance reports. Individual, classroom, and/or school-wide awards motivate students to attend, including extended recess, celebrations, prize draws, and dance parties. Administrator A-1 explained how the school uses attendance incentives for students who

have perfect attendance to push students to improve their attendance. Administrator A-1

offered something for students to work for even if they missed one or more days,

especially if they are Covid positive or exposed. This technique is consistent with

Gottfried and Hutt (2019), who discovered that addressing truant students early on might

enhance student attendance.

Student-staff relationships. Student attendance can be influenced by student-

school faculty interactions (Baskerville, 2021), which was brought out in question 8

about the participating style. A compassionate staff member who connects with students

is a component that can keep students in school (Hendron & Kearney, 2016).

Establishing strong relationships with students is regarded as an effective truancy

prevention technique by all participants. Teachers are frequently on the front lines of

forming relationships with students (Baskerville, 2021). Administrator A-5 talked about

how strong interactions between students and adults went beyond the classroom

instruction to encompass the whole school community, including administrators, aides,

cafeteria workers, and custodians.

Interventions. Students who get early assistance in elementary schools are less

likely to drop out of high school (Barthelemy et al., 2021; Robinson et al., 2018). As

effective truancy measures, all administrators discussed intervention options, especially

in question 7 about the delegating leadership style. Truancy intervention includes giving

families information on truancy policy, conducting home visits, establishing open

communications, and offering incentives. Increased contact between the school and

parents can motivate parents to be more involved in their children's education

(Attendance Works, 2016; Barthelemy et al., 2021). Administrators and teachers communicate state and district truancy policies through informational letters and individual meetings. Administrator A-5 shared that some teachers in the district communicate to students directly on the importance of being at school in the hopes that they would share the message with their parents. Administrator A-5 also expressed that their teachers use social media as well as educational apps such as Class Dojo and Remind to communicate with parents.

The findings of London et al. (2016) supported individualizing intervention techniques. All administrators in this rural school district believed they could give greater assistance to families due to their lower class sizes and communities. Building relationships with students and families can also assist teachers and administrators in identifying home situations that educators may be able to accommodate.

Rural school and community relations. School and community collaborations, according to Siegel-Hawley (2016), are critical to decreasing truancy. Developing strong ties between the school district and the rural community, according to all administrators, is an effective truancy prevention technique. Rural schools are frequently described as having tiny and strong ties to the community (McShane & Smarick, 2018). Because of the small size of rural districts, administrators build personal ties with students' families, particularly when they are engaged in the community.

Administrator A-5 graduated from the district and knew the majority of the families and where most of the students resided. This came in handy while conducting home visits and emphasizing the significance of school attendance to parents. This

conclusion is confirmed by Cortes et al. (2019), who stated that direct interaction between school personnel and families could improve attendance patterns.

Limitations of the Study

The factors of limitations may affect the study outcomes and are outside the control of the researcher (Walkley & Cox, 2013). The administrators' experiences in truancy were limited to one rural southeastern state school district, which may not be comprehensive to other rural school districts in another region, therefore; results may not be generalizable to other rural school districts.

Another limitation of this study was that the interviews were scheduled via Zoom due to the Covid -19 pandemic, which prevented in-person interviews. One year into the COVID-19 pandemic, educators are still affected by partial or complete school closures, and the health catastrophe will cause students to fall behind. The administrators have been prioritizing education recovery. All administrators had to conduct their interviews via Zoom, which prevented observation of body language, limiting the range of data.

Additional limitations were the integrating of the student information database system. The database manages everything from instruction through grading, attendance, assessment, analytics, state reporting, student registration, and human resources for school districts. Five administrators had to change their interview times due to training for the student information system.

Recommendations

Schools alone cannot battle truancy; it does take a village to help implement attendance as an important factor in education. There is nothing stagnant about the field

of education; it is constantly evolving with research that helps people understand the interactions within the field better. In all points with education, students must be present. Truancy is both a cause and an effect of legal and economic problems (Stempel et al., 2017). Research shows that truants: often come from low-income families; have parents who lack high school degrees; are victims of abuse or neglect; have mental health problems, or have parents with histories of criminality or substance abuse (Abdullah et al., 2018; Barthelemy et al., 2021). Some are highly intelligent and bored with school. Regardless of a child's circumstances, unstructured time provides opportunities for students to have behavior issues. Society has a responsibility to ensure students gain the tools necessary for successful adult life; otherwise, we continue the cycle of low education and low opportunity (Barthelemy et al., 2021). Problems not solved among this generation will likely surface again in the next (Patel et al., 2017; Perry, 2018). Truancy intervention promotes educational success, reduces juvenile and adult criminal activity, saves taxpayer money, and generates indirect benefits (Robinson et al., 2018). A broad range of agencies and groups must take responsibility for making structural, systemic changes to improve life's opportunities for our students. This study concludes with specific recommendations for state laws, school and school district policies, courts, truancy reduction programs, and researchers. Examples include the following:

Relationship Building: Students need individualized attention at school and opportunities to build strong relationships based on mutual trust and respect (Kalil et al., 2019). Students need healthy, positive relationships with teachers and other adults at school (Artango & Galleto, 2020). Research has also found that older youth need strong

and healthy relationships with peers, which can be a motivator for attending school (Teuscher & Makarova, 2018).

Parental and Family Involvement: Contacting parents regarding absenteeism, creating meaningful incentives for parental responsibility (Barthelemy et al., 2021), and including parents in all truancy prevention activities have proven to be effective strategies. In addition, family counseling recognizes and builds on the family's strengths and resources, with the overall goal of increasing attendance (Mireles-Rios et al., 2020).

Policies and Procedures: Consistent and clear attendance policies are necessary and should be systematically communicated to all stakeholders. Policies and procedures should be evaluated for uniformity. Establishing ongoing truancy prevention programs for schools, rather than one-time effort or an effort that only targets high-risk students (Gottfried & Hutt, 2019).

Trained and Caring Staff: Staff trained, committed, and supported to provide high-quality, responsive services to keep at-risk youth in the educational mainstream. Professional development targeted at educators on how to detect the symptoms of relocation might help in the early delivery of assistance (Hendron & Kearney, 2016).

Implications

The findings of this study show how administrators at a rural elementary school view truancy. Truancy regulations are intended to keep students in school and apply to all school districts in the state; yet, they have different effects on urban and rural areas (Farrigan, 2020). Even though rural areas account for a major portion of the US

population, education reform academics have focused on urban institutions (Fishman, 2015). Rural educators are worried that policies are frequently developed without taking into account the needs of rural schools (Farrigan, 2020). Because the causes that contribute to truancy among rural students may differ from those that contribute to truancy among urban students, it is critical to understand the experiences and opinions of administrators in rural areas (Farrigan, 2020).

Administrators in rural elementary schools are already dealing with a variety of issues (Showalter et al., 2017). Inadequate finance and the ability to provide specialized services are two issues that rural schools face (Farrigan, 2020). Due to a lack of staff and resources, as well as the demands of new policies, rural school administrators are put under increased strain (Fishman, 2015). When parents do not value education, it is difficult for school administrators to urge students to participate in school. Student attendance has an impact on future student engagement, retention, and even dropout rates (Showalter et al., 2017). As a result, identifying and addressing disengaged students early on can help to boost student attendance (Barthelemy et al., 2021).

Identifying students who have excessive absences and intervening early can help them avoid becoming chronic truants (London et al., 2016). Monitoring attendance can also assist administrators in identifying students who are in danger of being at risk (Attendance Works, 2016). Administrators must keep track of attendance at all grade levels, from elementary to secondary, because attendance patterns established in the early grades can serve as warning indications for students who may drop out in the future (London et al., 2016).

The theory of situational leadership was used to guide this research. Situational leadership theory "suggests to leaders how they should respond based on the demands of a certain scenario," according to the authors (Northouse, 2016, p. 112). When dealing with student truancy, the administrators used situational leadership, according to the study. This leadership style enables administrators to provide guidance and support needed to fulfill the needs of their pupils, promote school attendance, and implement truancy prevention strategies. Administrators use situational leadership theory to intervene in truancy prevention initiatives as the initial step. Situational leadership theory "suggests to leaders how they should respond based on the demands of a certain scenario," according to the authors (Northouse, 2016, p. 112). Directive and supportive behaviors are included in situational leadership styles. Directive behaviors, such as delegating and telling, are used to achieve goals through one-way communication, in which the leader outlines what has to be done and how it should be done. Two-way communication and collaboration between the leader and those being led are key components of supportive behaviors. The goal of supportive actions is to make group members feel supported and at ease (Northouse, 2016). Situational leadership is divided into four styles, each with different levels of direction and support. The most direct technique is the high directive-low supportive, telling leadership style, in which the administrator uses one-way communication to guide the truant student and parents on goals and expectations, such as clarifying the attendance procedures. A selling leadership style in which the administrator focuses on both the student's needs and the achievement of the intended goals is known as high directive-high supportive. By listening to the

students and parents enabling attendance objectives in a low directive-high support way, the administrator can take a supportive approach, in a participating leadership style. Finally, a delegating leadership style is low directive-low supportive, requiring minimal interaction. Administrators must assess the issue and each student's developmental requirements before responding with the appropriate leadership style. Situational leadership enables administrators to provide the most appropriate level of direction and assistance for each student.

When it comes to avoiding truancy and intervening with students, administrators can use both task and relationship. The administrator specifies attendance standards, rewards, and consequences; therefore, directive behaviors are based on one-way communication. Informing parents and students about attendance regulations and developing incentive structures are two directive components. Offering attendance incentives at all grade levels, creating ties between students and staff, as well as the school and rural community. Incentives are most efficient when used with younger kids, according to Attendance Works (2016). To keep kids engaged and motivated to attend school, attendance incentives should be presented to students with good and improved attendance.

Because rural schools have strong ties to the communities they serve and play a vital role in student development (McShane & Smarick, 2018), positive relationships between the school system and the communities it serves are critical. Partnerships between schools and the community are critical in decreasing truancy (Conroy et al., 2018; Gottfried & Hutt, 2019; Haight et al., 2014; London et al., 2016). Schools,

children, parents, and youth services must work together to ensure that students feel safe

in school and to assist reverse harmful patterns of nonattendance (Gottfried & Hutt,

2019). Direct communication between school employees and family can help to establish

relationships and improve attendance habits (Attendance Works, 2016).

When it comes to creating relationships with students, parents, and the

community, administrators use supportive behaviors. Collaboration and two-way

communication are two supportive components. The connection that develops between

school employees and students might help to create relationships. Situational leadership

enables school administrators to execute the amount of supporting behaviors that best suit

the requirements of children to increase school attendance and completion.

The research is based on the perceptions of truancy of rural elementary school

administrators. Administrators at rural schools are assigned with monitoring,

documenting, and intervening with children who engage in truant behavior. The findings

of this study add to the body of knowledge on student truancy and provide information to

rural school administrators. Understanding the perceptions of rural elementary school

administrators on truancy may provide more insight into the difficulties of enforcing

policies. Such knowledge could raise awareness and influence the district's rural primary

school administrators and policymakers.

The results of this study have implications for positive social change by providing

insight into administrators regarding truant elementary students and may lead to

improved support strategies and positive outcomes for students. In addition, describing

problems at home, school and community may suggest a positive social change in school

districts procedures and interventions that could improve attendance, as well as academics. If the students and parents exhibit fewer unexcused absences, the teachers, and administrators will benefit from this study.

Conclusion

The study focused on how administrators felt about truancy in rural elementary schools. With fewer resources, staff, and financing, rural schools are forced to fulfill the needs of changing education policy (Fishman, 2015). Although rural areas account for a substantial portion of the U.S. population, academics have concentrated their efforts on urban schools (McShane & Smarick, 2018).

The study was performed using a qualitative methodology. The researcher focused on the administrators' personal experiences through their lived and reported tales using this technique (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Individual semi-structured interviews were used to collect data, allowing administrators to give lengthy narratives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I manually coded the interview transcripts using open coding and then classified the coded data to find growing themes.

Parenting difficulties and poor parenting were mentioned as challenges in implementing the truancy policy by participants. Administrators described a variety of truancy prevention strategies that worked well in rural schools. Attendance incentives were mentioned by administrators at all grade levels, as well as early intervention with specific kids. Effective techniques, according to administrators, include establishing relationships with kids, parents, and the rural school community.

Also, the student's grade level and the diversity of families need to be considered in developing truancy programs. Having a clear attendance policy, rewarding students for attendance, assigning an attendance specialist to severe but not only chronic cases, and working with parents in multiple ways are proven strategies.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. What is your current position in the district? (Determining eligibility of the participant)
2. How long have you been an administrator? (Determining eligibility of the participant)
3. Is truancy a problem for your school? (Exploring the background on the school and community)
4. What are the main reason(s) for students' truancy in your school? (If question #3 is answered in the affirmative)
5. How is attendance monitored on your campus? (Developing background on the schools' response to truancy, found in Chapter 2.)
6. Do you use task, relationship, or a combination of both when working with truancy? Why? (To understand the administrators' perceptions on the second dimension of the situational approach)
7. How is delegating style approach effective towards your whole student population? (Probing question for school response towards truancy and the alignment with this specific approach)
8. What does participating style look like when dealing with truancy? (Probing question to see administrators' perception on student support towards attendance)
9. When using selling style, who else do you involve while using this approach? (Explore the alignment of decreasing truancy with this specific approach)
10. Describe how using the telling approach affects the relationship with students (Explore the alignment of decreasing truancy with this specific approach).
11. How often do you change your approach when dealing with truant students? (Probing question for insight on the administrators' situational approach when dealing with truancy.)
12. From the different types of styles that were mentioned prior, which is most effective? (To understand the administrator's purpose for leadership choices)
13. How has your leadership style (discussed in question 8) impacted your schools' response to truancy? (Explore the administrators' perceptions of how leadership style aligns with actions specific to truancy)
14. Which leadership behavior has become effective towards your truant students? (Explore perceptions of effectiveness of leadership choices)

Conclusion

Ask and answer any questions and thank the participant for his or her time.