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Perceptions of Leadership Influence on Teacher Professional Development

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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Walden University
2023

Abstract

Perceptions of Leadership Influence on Teacher Professional Development

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MA, Walden University, 2011

BA, American Intercontinental University, 2004

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

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November 2023

Abstract

School directors with both instructional leadership skills and knowledge of adult learning theory (andragogy) can effectively facilitate teachers' professional development (PD) needs and improve their teaching performance. The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' and school leaders' perceptions about the challenges faced in providing support for teachers' instructional needs for improved teaching performance. Through the exploration of different perceptions from both teachers and school leaders, an understanding was created of the factors that need to be taken into consideration for school leaders to effectively use differentiated support strategies for the ongoing support of teachers' perceived PD needs and to improve their teaching performance. A qualitative case study was used, and relevant data were collected from teachers and school leaders using semistructured interviews. Purposive sampling was used to recruit five school leaders and seven teachers in early childhood with 2 years' experience from schools in the city studied. Through thematic analysis, similar codes grouped formed final themes. The study's findings indicated that teachers associate many important roles with their school leaders. However, teachers would like school leaders to provide access and support for PD through learning courses and relevant teaching resources. School leaders thought they were inadequately supported for their PD in adult learning theory (andragogy) and instructional leadership. This had a detrimental effect on school leaders' confidence in facilitating PD. Future possibilities of this research could lead to social change through a structured program for developing early childhood school leaders and their role in supporting teachers' PD needs and improving their teaching performance.

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Dedication

My motivation and self-efficacy were possible because of the positive influence I received on my journey through all aspects of life and the people I met along the way.

Thank you to my four angels (my children), who have given me my life purpose and legacy through my 14 grandchildren.

Thank you to my deceased grandfather, John Price, for believing in me. Your last words just before your death were for me to finish my education. That is what I have done for you.

Thank you to my deceased father, Rapfeld Mullings, for believing in me and being proud of my every accomplishment. Despite your death, I will continue to make you proud.

Thank you to my deceased mother, Shirley Mullings, for teaching me to maintain my dignity, professionalism, and positive outlook on life to manifest a positive future.

It is all for you. I love you all.

Acknowledgments

I acknowledge God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

“Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord, your God is with you wherever you go.” Joshua 1:9

“Jesus looked at them and said, ‘With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.’” Mark 10:27

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

School leaders are challenged in providing professional development (PD) support for teachers' instructional needs at the early childhood level for improved teaching performance in a segment of the northeast United States (Roles, 2018; Smith et al., 2019). In this study, school leaders included administrators, principals, deputy principals, heads of departments, and teachers. Findings from the literature showed that teachers are motivated to grow and change when they are supported to do so and if it applies to classroom circumstances; otherwise, teachers feel no need to change practices (Appova & Arbaugh, 2018). Although teachers expect to be supported by school leaders, school leaders are often unsupported in the evolution of their profession and, therefore, lack support in influencing the improvement of teaching performance (Fluckiger et al., 2014). Most school leaders lack the skills to support and evaluate teachers' growth (Roles, 2018). More specifically, only an average of 2.8 school leaders out of 4 use evaluation for improved teaching performance (Roles, 2018).

Background

In the northeast United States segment that was the focus of this study, early childhood teachers typically advance from classroom teachers to teacher leaders or mentors, and, finally, to a school leader, often referred to as an educational director. The school leaders' knowledge, abilities, and dispositions stem from their experience as early childhood educators, which leads to promotion based on their experience in pedagogy (Bowers & Wright, 2014; Farisia, 2019). More than 60% of school leaders feel unprepared for their position (Franco, 2019; Roles, 2018). Most school leaders do not

participate in a formal education program to become leaders (Bowers & White, 2014). School leaders may use the Early Childhood Framework for Quality (2019) as a guide for best practices in early childhood classrooms. Per Section 3.2 of the Early Childhood Framework for Quality, school leadership is required to provide teachers with appropriate training, resources, and ongoing support to implement age-appropriate research-based curricula. Moreover, written within the literature of The Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015), Standard 6c describes a specific qualification that a school leader should possess to fulfill the requirements of Section 3.2 of the Early Childhood Framework for Quality. It is written in The Professional Standards for Educational Leaders that effective school leaders develop teachers' and staff members' professional knowledge, skills, and practice through differentiated opportunities for learning and growth, guided by an understanding of professional and adult learning and development, also known as andragogy (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). However, the identified prerequisite qualification of knowledge of adult learning (andragogy) and development is not identified in the Early Childhood Framework for Quality. Thus, school leaders are typically challenged to support teachers' instructional needs at the early childhood level (Smith et al., 2019). Examples of ongoing support that the school leaders should provide may include, but are not limited to, classroom guidance visits, coaching, facilitation of peer-to-peer learning, and off-site and on-site PD (Smith et al., 2019). This lack of use may be partly due to a lack of school leader preparation considering their learning needs. School leaders are not adequately prepared for their role in supporting teachers' PD needs

as adult learners (Zepeda et al., 2014). However, school leaders with more experience, knowledge, and training produce better teacher outcomes (Smith et al., 2019). In fact, less than 40% of teachers in the segment of the northeast United States said they received support for practices (Smith et al., 2019). This low percentage is partially due to the pressures of the school leader position in early childhood settings (Zepeda et al., 2014). School leaders often have multiple responsibilities, which cause inconsistent support for teachers' professional learning. Therefore, this study is significant to the local setting because the school leader facilitates learning for teachers who are the driving support for student achievement (see Mongillo, 2017). Because the education field is constantly changing, school leaders need structured support in best practices to support teachers' efforts to improve student learning outcomes (Mongillo, 2017). Structured support can ultimately bridge the gap between school leaders, teachers, and students.

Problem Statement

The problem that was the focus of this study is that while the literature has explored the issue of PD among teachers, little is known regarding whether school leaders are adequately prepared to support teachers' instructional needs in early childhood education (ECE) settings in a segment of the northeast United States. School leaders must be adequately prepared to support teachers' PD needs as adult learners (Mongillo, 2017; Smith et al., 2019; Zepeda et al., 2014). However, most support programs are not designed to support the school leaders' work in context and are viewed by school leaders as being inadequate (Farisia, 2019; Orphanos & Orr, 2014; Roles, 2018). School leaders should be able to use differentiated support strategies to support teachers' instructional

needs as adult learners and to improve teaching performance (Brezicha et al., 2015). Lack of adequate support often leaves school leaders unable to offer required support to meet teachers' instructional needs in the classroom and during curriculum development (Brezicha et al., 2015; Fatih Karacabey, 2021; Pitpit, 2020). School leaders sometimes use strategies that do not involve interaction with the teacher but only observation of what is taking place in the classroom (Daniëls et al., 2019; King, 2016; Montgomery, 2020; Smith et al., 2019). Insights from past studies have shown that most schools often lack PD opportunities for school leaders concerning how to support the career needs of early childhood teachers, which further hinders their skill development (Çalik et al., 2018; Ferrara, 2020). In light of these observations, a knowledge gap necessitated further research to help bridge the gap in practice between school leaders and teachers' instructional needs.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' and school leaders' perceptions about the challenges faced in providing support for teachers' instructional needs for improved teaching performance at the early childhood level in a segment of the northeast United States. An in-depth examination of the different types of school leader support used for a teacher's PD instructional needs was examined, in addition to its effectiveness at improving teachers' teaching performance. Teachers were asked what their perception of the support was that they currently received from school leaders to create an understanding of what they would like to receive. This provided a basis for whether school leaders believed they were prepared to provide the support expected. Through the

exploration of different perspectives from teachers and school leaders, areas of knowledge and specific abilities were found that need to be developed in school leaders to support their efforts in providing ongoing support to teachers' instructional needs for improved teaching performance. Insights from the interview responses were used to understand the factors that need to be considered for school leaders to use differentiated support strategies effectively to support teachers' perceived PD needs and improve their teaching performance. Future possibilities of this research for social change could lead to a structured program for developing early childhood school leaders and their role in supporting teachers' PD needs and improving their teaching performance.

Data analysis involved reviewing the data collected, identifying patterns and themes, and putting together the results. Reality is subject to interpretation, and no single reality or truth exists (Lee, 2012). Hence, a case study was most suitable for understanding such research problems using qualitative methods.

Research Questions

The research questions (RQs) that guided this study were as follows:

RQ1: What are teachers' perceptions about school leader support for their instructional needs and for improving their teaching performance at the early childhood level in a segment of the northeast United States?

RQ2: What are school leaders' perceptions of the challenges in providing support for teachers' instructional needs for improved teaching performance at the early childhood level in a segment of the northeast United States?

Conceptual Framework

The theory of adult learning, also known as andragogy, was the conceptual framework for the study. Andragogy was originally introduced in American culture by Savicevic in 1967 and, most notably, by Knowles beginning in 1968 (Knowles et al., 2005). Knowles's theory specifies the different perspectives on how adults learn. The theory of how adults learn emphasizes that adults learn differently from children. Adults are more self-directed and expect to take responsibility for decisions (Martin et al., 2019; Subitha, 2018). Puteh and Kaliannan (2016) stated that the theory of andragogy directly recognizes the differences between adults and children in terms of their learning experiences. Unlike children, adults come to the table with their life experiences and motivations, which essentially direct their learning. As Cox (2015) stated, adults rely on what is related to real life when learning. They gather meaning from the content of the learning so that they can relate it to a useful purpose. Hence, if a teacher does not view what they are learning in PD as relevant or applicable to their specific classroom needs, they will not apply skills learned; this is the concept behind this theory as it applies to the study. As cited by Zepeda et al. (2014), Knowles reported that adult learners have nine basic attributes. These attributes include being in charge of their learning, using it right away, relatable content, validating their learning, identifying the use of learning, improving skills, increasing tools for learning, communication, diverse environment, and reliable and developmentally appropriate information. According to Tuli and Tynjälä (2015), PD programs are effective when grounded in adult learning theory.

Nature of the Study

The topic of interest, teachers' and school leaders' perceived challenges in providing support for teachers' instructional needs for improved teaching performance, was investigated using a qualitative research design. Qualitative inquiry focuses on understanding human experiences in their contextual settings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The primary goal was to undertake an in-depth assessment of the topic and gain insights into how school leaders support teachers' PD. Experiential knowledge and sensory understandings generated from the perceptions of teachers and school leaders were empirically explored. According to Lambert (2012), qualitative research aims to discover things not known before by answering RQs that, when applied to practice, will influence what is done. Therefore, the choice of research design is determined to a greater extent by the predefined RQs and research objectives to be met (Lambert, 2012; Maxwell, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The RQs in this study addressed school leaders' perceived challenges and teachers' perceptions about school leader support for instructional needs and for improving teaching performance at the early childhood level in a segment of the northeast United States.

In addition to a qualitative research design's suitability to the research case study and data used, a qualitative research design enabled me to provide in-depth and detailed investigations of the case study. As Maxwell (2009) explained, a qualitative design allows the participants to make sense of their reality and how it affects their behavior. It also creates openness by encouraging people to expand their responses, thereby allowing for a deeper and richer understanding of the case study explored. Collected data were from

semistructured, in-depth, one-on-one interviews of teachers and leaders in related but different early childhood settings. The data were analyzed using content analysis techniques.

Definitions

Andragogy: A teaching strategy developed for adult learners and often interpreted as the process of engaging adult learners with the structure of the learning experience (Youde, 2018).

Individualized professional development: All kinds of activities aimed at developing an individual teacher's skills, knowledge, expertise, and characteristics that focus on building their strengths and weaknesses (Appova & Arbaugh, 2018).

Professional development: A special form of education designed to enhance or better the ability and capability of groups of teachers for their classroom environment or teaching practice (Fatih Karacabey, 2021).

Sustainability: The ongoing use of skills taught in PD over a substantial period relevant to the adult learners' needs (Dyment et al., 2014).

Assumptions

As explained by Wargo (2015), assumptions are aspects of the study that are assumed to be true. For this study, the first underlying assumption was that teachers' PD would continue to be important in the education system. If this assumption was not included and the situation changes, then there would be no need to conduct the current study.

Given that primary data were collected through interviews, the second assumption was that the sampled respondents would answer truthfully to the interview questions. I assumed that the respondents did not give biased responses or conceal important information. If this assumption was not included, then various facets of biases such as selective memory, telescoping, attribution, and exaggeration could be admissible in the results of the research study.

Scope and Delimitations

As explained by Wargo (2015), delimitations essentially define the boundaries of the study as determined or chosen by the researcher. The first delimitations acknowledged were the RQs and objectives. The scope of the study was limited to fulfilling only the prespecified research objectives and answering the RQs. Even though other aspects of the research problem could be investigated, the scope of the current study was limited to answering only the questions specified. Another delimitation identified related to the research design and methodology used. The study was based only on using a qualitative research design while conducting case study research.

The target population was 300 early childhood education (ECE) directors, leaders, principals, and/or assistant principals in a segment of the northeast United States. The inclusion criteria focused on school leadership and ECE teachers with work experience of at least 2 years in the same ECE facility who participated or intended to participate in career advancement, and who currently resided and worked in a segment of the northeast United States. The final sample size included 12 school leaders (seven ECE teachers, three principals, a school director, and a head of department). Interviews were used to

collect relevant data from the participants. Thematic analysis using the 6-step process by Braun and Clarke (2006) was undertaken to identify key themes emerging from interviews concerning school leaders' support for teacher learning and PD (see Campbell et al., 2021).

I recognized that several aspects of the research problem could be investigated. However, I only focused on the perceptions of school leaders and teachers regarding the school leaders' influence on teaching performance and related challenges as defined by the RQs. In addition, the scope of the investigation was limited to investigating only early childhood school settings. Thus, the research population was limited to only a segment of the northeast United States. However, I noted that there are other potential geographical locations, including secondary and higher education, where teachers face similar problems in PD that could be researched as well.

In addition, based on the predefined RQs, only teachers and school leaders were included in the study. Only the opinions and perceptions of teachers and school leaders were investigated. Thus, data were only collected from a sample of teachers and school leaders from the target population; they were interviewed to provide the data to be analyzed. To be included in the research study, the teachers and school leaders must have experienced the research issue being explored. The school leader must have provided PD and leadership support in the previous year. The teacher must have received PD and leadership support within the previous year. As a result, those who had never experienced the research issue being explored were excluded from the study.

Limitations

As explained by Wargo (2015), the limitations of a case study related to any of its potential weaknesses are those that the researcher is not able to control or overcome. A few limitations were identified for this study, which are recognized in this section. The current study's first and most important limitation related to the sample size. Even though there were several potential school leaders and teachers in the target population, I recruited 12 participants who volunteered from the same district because it was difficult to investigate all school leaders and ECE teachers from across a segment of the northeast United States. In addition, being a qualitative study using interviews as the main instrument for data collection, I selected a small sample group, which does not provide a statistically plausible representation of the entire research population. This greatly hinders the ability of the study's results to be generalized to the entire research population.

Another limitation of the current study is that I relied on self-reported data, whose authenticity and accuracy could not be guaranteed. Self-reported qualitative data were collected through interviews; the authenticity of such data could not be independently verified. In other words, I took what the respondents said without verifying the information. Wargo (2015) explained that using self-reported data could lead to potential biases. Biases may include selective memory, telescoping, attribution, and exaggeration. The interviewee may intentionally give biased or incorrect information, which could create a large drawback to the reliability of the data collected.

I addressed the above limitations by ensuring that only appropriate individuals with the required information were included in the sample. When selecting the sample

respondents to participate in the interview, I insisted on choosing teachers and school leaders who had experienced the research issue being explored. In addition, during the interviews, I probed deeper to ensure that the respondents gave accurate information to limit potential biases.

Significance

Tuli and Tynjälä (2015) stated that improving conditions within schools depends on teachers' training. They further noted that differentiated forms of PD are used best in communities of practice in formal and informal ways. The perceptions of school leaders and ECE teachers were explored to develop an understanding of the contributing factors to the challenges school leaders are perceived to face when providing support to teachers. The study provides insight into what needs to be considered if positive social change is to occur for school leaders. Tuli and Tynjälä also believed that teacher PD opportunities fail because the teachers' prior knowledge is not considered during the experience, and teachers are not asked what they need in terms of their development. The low rate of success suggests dissatisfaction with being told what to do and why to do it during PD instead of showing how to make improvements necessary for effective teaching (Tuli & Tynjälä, 2015). This may indicate that coaching and mentoring are missing as a form of ongoing PD. These opportunities typically come from school leadership, who often lack the knowledge and ability to support the implementation of these practices (Smith et al., 2019).

One issue that school leaders face regarding gaining the teachers' input on their PD is the issue of reflection in action within the job-embedded setting. Bøe et al. (2017)

stated that as a result of the demands placed on leaders in busy settings, being consistent when making decisions is challenging. Data from Tuli and Tynjälä 's (2015) research revealed that several schools have unqualified and unsupportive leadership. Furthermore, Ouyang et al. (2018) argued that teachers must receive leadership support to become the center of their professional learning, promoting improved teaching performance. Teachers' perceptions of their support experiences must be explored to gather further understanding of the case study.

Summary

This study could be the first step in designing a structured early childhood leadership program based on the perceived knowledge and ability necessary of the school leader to address challenges and the perceptions of teachers' needs. Information gathered may contribute to developing a structured early childhood leadership program in a segment of the northeast United States. Positive social change could occur by revealing important data that could contribute to closing the gap concerning school leader challenges involving support for teachers' needs. This ultimately can improve student achievement.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The research problem that informed the need for this study regarded growing challenges among school leaders to support teachers' instructional needs in ECE settings in a segment of the northeast United States. Insights from past studies on the topic revealed that most school leaders are inadequately prepared for their role of supporting teachers' PD as adult learners (Brandmo et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2020). According to Figland et al. (2019), existing support programs are not developed to support school principals in supporting preschool teachers in advancing their skills and knowledge. In elaboration, this problem is compounded by the fact that there is no mandatory requirement in ECE settings for school directors to participate in a formal education program to become a school leader (Fatih Karacabey, 2021; Heikka et al., 2019). Instead, ECE-level programs use the Early Childhood Framework for Quality (2019) to guide practice. As such, there was a need to explore this research problem and formulate strategies on how school directors might be adequately educated to provide their teachers with relevant support in terms of PD.

Underwriting the above problem, in this qualitative study, I aimed to explore school leaders' perceptions about the challenges faced in providing support for teachers' instructional needs for improved teaching performance at the early childhood level in a segment of the northeast United States. In addition, I explored teachers' perceptions of school leader support for their instructional needs and for improving their teaching performance at the early childhood level. Specific research focuses on studying the perceptions of teachers and their school leaders concerning whether school directors in

ECE settings are trained properly to support a teacher's PD. An in-depth exploration of the different types of school leader support used for a teacher's PD instructional needs was undertaken, in addition to assessing their effectiveness at improving their teaching performance according to teachers' perceptions. Through the exploration of different perspectives from both teachers and school leaders, a clear understanding can be achieved regarding knowledge and specific abilities that need to be developed in school leaders to support their efforts in providing ongoing support to teachers' instructional needs for improved teaching performance.

In this literature review chapter, I synthesize past studies on school leaders' PD, teacher perceptions about school director training, and knowledge gaps related to instructional leadership practices for adult learning in ECE settings to explore the formulated research problem and purpose. The rest of this literature review chapter covers the following aspects: literature search strategy, theoretical foundation, and literature review related to key concepts about instructional leadership practices. The chapter concludes with a summary of the key findings, the knowledge gap, and the need for further research to fill the identified knowledge gap in ECE school directors' training to support teachers' PD needs.

Literature Search Strategy

An online search was conducted to identify relevant secondary sources for the study. All resources used in this review were retrieved from online academic journal articles. Key academic databases used to identify the studies included Google Scholar, Science Direct, EBSCOhost, ERIC, Semantic Scholar, and International Journals of

Educational Research. Elaborate inclusion and exclusion criteria were adopted to retrieve peer-reviewed journals published within the last 5 years between 2018 and 2023. However, high-impact journals that have been cited by several educational researchers and published before 2018 were also included in the study. In addition, original studies on theoretical backgrounds published before 2018 were included to provide a historical perspective on theory development.

An inclusion criterion for most studies in the research focused on ensuring that they were published in an international journal in the last 5 years. Additionally, the included studies were peer-reviewed and published in English. However, opinion articles and editorials were excluded from the analysis. Seminal works were included in the study to give theoretical underpinnings and justification. Additionally, an elaborate search criterion was adopted using relevant keywords, including the use of Boolean operators: t*eacher professional development* AND *school leader input,* s*chool leaders* AND *teacher professional development, school culture* AND *teacher professional development,* and *challenges to teacher professional development.* Extracted studies were subsequently used to critically synthesize the current research topic on issues related to school directors' support for ECE teachers' PD needs.

Conceptual Framework

Knowles's (1975; 1984a, 1984b) theory of andragogy formed the theoretical basis upon which this study was anchored. The theory of andragogy primarily attempts to postulate key insights behind the adult learning process. According to Knowles (1975), adults are self-directed learners and expect to take responsibility for decisions related to

their learning. As a result, any adult learning program must consider or accommodate this fundamental aspect (Knowles, 1975). In his research on andragogy in action, Knowles (1984b) made the following assumptions regarding the design of adult learning: (a) Adult learners must be informed why they need to learn something, (b) the adult learning process should occur experientially, (c) adults approach learning as problem-solving, and (d) adults learn best when the topic is of immediate value.

In practice, andragogy postulates that the learning process of an adult should focus more on the process and less on the content that is taught (Heikka et al., 2019; Vijayadevar et al., 2019). Some of the most helpful strategies during the adult learning process include self-evaluation, simulations, role-playing, and case studies (Farisia, 2019; Pitpit, 2020). According to Myran and Masterson (2020), an instructor is a resource or facilitator during the adult learning process rather than a grader or lecturer. Over the years, andragogy has been applied to various forms of adult learning to improve organizational learning, skills development, and knowledge enhancement (Douglass, 2018; Myran & Masterson, 2020).

As applied to the education sector, andragogy has been used to understand different contexts, including teachers' PD, principal leadership training, and skills and knowledge development in curriculum development. Youde (2018) used andragogy to examine how to develop effective tutoring among teachers and principals in vocationally relevant degrees. Results showed that adults convinced about the need to advance their professional skills to become more competitive were more likely to embrace vocational

training. These insights align with Knowles's (1984a, 1984b) postulation on explaining why specific things are being taught to motivate adult learners in the learning process.

Ajani (2019) used andragogy theory to explore the needs of teachers as adult learners in different education PDs. Findings from semistructured interviews with 13 teachers showed that schools largely fail to provide PD activities such as collaborative support and training of teachers to enhance their teaching competency. Existing teacher training programs largely fail to sustain the modern dynamic education system with learners from multiethnic and multicultural settings. These insights emphasize the need to develop principal-led programs to enhance teachers 'attitudes and skills for better classroom practices (Ajani, 2019). In line with Knowles's (1984a) andragogy theory, developed programs need to be task oriented as opposed to being based on memorization.

Besides identifying knowledge gaps in teachers' PD, andragogy has also been applied to examine scholar-leader competency in supporting teachers (Franco, 2019). Results showed that most school principals lack relevant training to facilitate teachers' career advancement and skills development. Further, teachers showed low self-efficacy in designing relevant curriculum content and delivering instruction (Franco, 2019). The key to this approach is to ensure adult teachers take into account a diverse range of backgrounds of students to meet their tailored learning needs (Knowles, 1984a, 1984b). Because adult learners are self-directed (Knowles, 1984b), school directors should allow teachers to discover things themselves while providing help and guidance when mistakes are made. Thus, a review of past studies on the topic showed the growing application of

andragogy theory in education to understand how adult learners (i.e., teachers) learn. As such, applying the theory of andragogy was considered appropriate in this study.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variable

The current section presents findings from extracted studies on how directors in ECE settings support teachers' PD. A comprehensive search of literature highlighted 10 key themes related to the topic. These themes included (a) instructional leadership, (b) teachers' unpreparedness and lack of self-efficacy, (c) PD through professional learning communities (PLCs), (d) lack of ECE preparation programs on instructional leadership, (e) cultivating a culture of continuous PD, (f) lack of feedback and communication, (g) limited materials and facilities, (h) organizational support and culture, (i) leadership coaching initiatives, and (j) special education incompetency. These themes are chronologically discussed in the subsequent sections.

Instructional Leadership

In the last decade, there has been growing research interest in instructional leadership and its potential contribution to learner performance (Franco, 2019; Liu et al., 2020; Pitpit, 2020). The existing literature has identified different variables related to school improvement and effectiveness, leadership practices, and challenges school principals encounter in motivating school leaders and teachers (Farisia, 2019; Fatih Karacabey, 2021; Pitpit, 2020). According to Hallinger et al. (2020), research on instructional leadership in the United States has received growing interest among practitioners and researchers since the 1980s. However, limited research has focused on how instructional leadership is applied within early childhood and preschool settings. Yet,

there is a growing expectation for school leaders to be instructional leaders worldwide (Hallinger et al., 2020).

In their systematic research of 1,206 past studies on instructional leadership between 1940 and 2018, Hallinger et al. (2020) reported that the knowledge base of instructional leadership seems to have increased in size and geographical scope. However, a major concern attributed to instructional leadership is a lack of consensus on its definition and constructs or how school principals should implement instructional leadership practices (Farisia, 2019; Fatih Karacabey, 2021; Hallinger et al., 2020; Pitpit, 2020). Brolund (2016) defined instructional leadership as a model of school leadership where principals work alongside teachers to provide guidance and support to establish best teaching practices. To elaborate further, instructional principals communicate with teachers and set clear goals for instruction delivery and student achievement (Brolund, 2016). Therefore, instructional leadership may be considered a process where principals mentor and coach their teachers and provide PD opportunities that empower teachers to explore best teaching practices.

Mikser et al. (2020) reported and also agreed with the views expressed by Brolund (2016) in that instructional leadership has been conceptualized in multiple ways in educational literature. Mikser et al. defined instructional practice as a form of curriculum leadership while conceptualizing it as being within the jurisdiction of the school principal to manage and facilitate its implementation. By contrast, Montgomery (2020) reported a distinction between administrative and instructional leadership in school effectiveness, although Fatih Karacabey (2021) argued that the two leadership

styles cannot be separated. In a review of past literature on leadership and leadership development in educational settings, Daniëls et al. (2019) reported that instructional leadership may be understood in terms of its constructs, instruction, and leadership. These findings revealed a lack of consensus across the extant literature regarding conceptualizing instructional leadership.

Despite the contention about instructional leadership, researchers have largely agreed that instruction relates to the selection and arrangement of learning content, setting objectives and goals, unfolding knowledge, transferring attitudes and skills, and providing feedback to teachers in terms of their teaching achievements (Daniëls et al., 2019; Fatih Karacabey, 2021; Mikser et al., 2020; Montgomery, 2020). From the extant literature, the concept of instruction has been linked to knowledge transfer, skills acquisition, technique development, and attaining career proficiency (Fatih Karacabey, 2021; Ismail et al., 2018; Mikser et al., 2020; Thien et al., 2021). Thus, scholars and practitioners have agreed that instruction refers to formal education that occurs in a structured setting or school environment, and it comprises elements of instructional activity that represent information delivery in curriculum content (Fatih Karacabey, 2021; Mikser et al., 2020; Thien et al., 2021).

Researchers also have varied definitions of leadership. However, there has been consensus among educational scholars that leadership in educational settings is the ability of school directors, principals, or administrators to conduct, guide, influence, or direct teachers to improve curriculum delivery and set academic outcomes (Daniëls et al., 2019; Mikser et al., 2020; Thien et al., 2021). These insights have shown that an educational

leader must be able to influence subordinates to achieve set goals and objectives. As such, instructional leadership may be defined as specific practices, policies, and behaviors initiated by a school principal (Mikser et al., 2020). In this light, instructional leadership may be understood as development strategies using various management instruments to achieve a school's most important tasks: teachers' effectiveness in instruction delivery and students' academic performance (Farisia, 2019; Fatih Karacabey, 2021; Hallinger et al., 2020; Montgomery, 2020; Pitpit, 2020).

Instructional leadership focuses on helping teachers improve instruction by observing their engagement with the curriculum, providing feedback, and enhancing their self-efficacy. More recently, the definition of instructional leadership has been expanded to include deeper involvement in the core business of schooling: learning and teaching (Heikka et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2020). However, as leadership emphasis shifts from teaching to learning, proponents of instructional strategies have proposed the term "learning leader" over "instructional leader." As evident from the existing literature, there are varied approaches to the definition of instructional leadership, necessitating additional research to achieve consensus on the roles and scope of an instructional leader (Farisia, 2019; Fatih Karacabey, 2021; Montgomery, 2020).

Even so, a plethora of studies are in consensus that instructional leadership enhances teacher competency, professionalism, motivation, and career growth, which are central to student performance (Brandmo et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2020). As discussed in the subsequent sections, not many literature insights are available on how school principals apply instructional leadership in their daily practice. Part of the concern is that

principals lack training and background knowledge on instructional leadership, especially when leading teachers or when facilitating adult learning (Douglass, 2018; Farisia, 2019; Hallinger et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2020; Montgomery, 2020), as further discussed in the next subsection. As a result, most teachers' learning and PD needs continue to be unmet, especially in early childhood development settings (Douglass, 2018; Vijayadevar et al., 2019).

Teachers' Unpreparedness and Lack of Self-Efficacy

A review of past studies on instructional leadership within ECE settings has shown that school principals report inadequate preparation in their leadership duties (Douglass, 2018; Farisia, 2019; Hallinger et al., 2020; Montgomery, 2020; Pitpit, 2020; Vijayadevar et al., 2019). For example, a recent qualitative case study examined challenges school principals in California encounter in PreK-3 community settings (Garrity et al., 2021). Researchers used interview questions to collect responses from school principals over a duration of 2 years. Specifically, the PreK−3 Learning Communities Competencies for Effective Principals was used to identify the preschool school leaders' actions, behaviors, and thoughts (Garrity et al., 2021). The PreK−3 Learning Communities Competencies for Effective Principals was developed by the National Association of Elementary School Principals to assess school leaders' leadership effectiveness and career development. Results showed that ECE is rarely addressed in terms of principal preparation programs (Garrity et al., 2021). These findings echo observations by other researchers who have reported that most ECE leaders are largely unfamiliar with the science of child development and have inadequate instructional

leadership skills for facilitating the PD of teachers (Farisia, 2019; Hallinger et al., 2020; Vijayadevar et al., 2019).

Insights from recent studies raise concerns that most ECE programs lack mandatory education requirements on leadership development (Montgomery, 2020; Pitpit, 2020; Vijayadevar et al., 2019). The lack of mandatory frameworks for ECE leadership development presents a potential loophole that might explain why most school leaders lack competency in instructional leadership and express a lack of self-efficacy in supporting leaders in acquiring relevant skills and knowledge in instruction delivery (Douglass, 2018; Farisia, 2019; Hallinger et al., 2020; Montgomery, 2020; Pitpit, 2020; Vijayadevar et al., 2019). As such, a key theme from the literature related to growing concerns among preschool and kindergarten teachers is inadequate preparedness in their professional skills (Atiles et al., 2021; Barahal & Humberto, 2020).

A further review of past literature showed that due to limited skills, school leaders feel they lack essential knowledge to support the delivery of curriculum instruction to their ECE teachers (Daniëls et al., 2019; King, 2016; Montgomery, 2020). Moreover, other researchers have reported that school principals are more likely to feel less equipped and trained to provide needed support to teachers in enhancing their professional growth and skills development (Brezicha et al., 2015; Fatih Karacabey, 2021; Pitpit, 2020). For example, recent quantitative research reported that 43% of school leaders in preschool settings feel inadequately prepared for the position of leadership (Farisia, 2019). Low levels of preparedness are exacerbated by a lack of formal education programs to facilitate career growth among preschool leaders (Garrity et al., 2020;

Orphanos & Orr, 2014; Roles, 2018). As previously noted, existing programs are limited to the Early Childhood Framework for Quality as a guide for ECE leadership practice (Early Childhood Framework for Quality, 2019). As a result, it may be noted that ECE leaders are not adequately prepared to support teachers' PD needs as adult learners.

Recent qualitative research by Atiles et al. (2021) highlights the growing problem of inadequate training among ECE teachers and administrators. A key focus of the research by Atiles et al. (2021) was to examine how ECE educators and leaders in the United States and across Latin American countries support teacher learning amid the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) related challenges. Semistructured interviews were used to collect data from 27 ECE teachers and leaders. Findings from the thematic analysis of the interviewed teachers identified five themes defining challenges teachers experience in facilitating learning within ECE settings during the COVID-19 pandemic (Atiles et al., 2021). These challenges included a lack of preparation on curriculum delivery via online platforms, deficiency in preschool and in-service training, inadequate support from school leaders, lack of career growth opportunities, and lack of timely communication and feedback from school principals (Fatih Karacabey, 2021; Mongillo, 2017; Smith et al., 2019).

Moreover, the literature identifies a raft of challenges ECE teachers continue to encounter in delivering relevant curricula, with major concerns about unpreparedness partly due to a lack of leadership support (King, 2016; Montgomery, 2020). Teachers are more likely to express low self-efficacy in facilitating online learning. Therefore, it may be concluded that both ECE leaders and school administrators need additional PD

opportunities to adequately prepare them to provide relevant PD support to teachers, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic (Carter-Sims, 2021; Garrity et al., 2020; Thien et al., 2021).

Study findings by Barahal and Humberto (2020) have confirmed the problem of inadequate preparedness among school principals. Specifically, researchers found that a lack of proper training among ECE leaders on leadership strategies contributes to their inability to provide support to their subordinates has also been reported (Barahal & Humberto, 2020). The study by Barahal & Humberto (2020) was informed by a Leader Learning Lab pilot program conducted by a segment of the northeast United States's Department of Education's Division of ECE that focused on building instructional leadership capacity among the city's early education leaders. Results from the pilot program show that ECE leaders are resilient, dedicated, and caring in their profession. Most show proficiency at multitasking, seamless transition from managing children to comforting them, writing facilities reports, and communicating with parents to help understand their child's development (Barahal & Humberto, 2020). However, ECE leaders are not able to commit enough time to the crucial role of being instructional leaders and supporting teachers' PD. Like findings by Garrity et al. (2020), insights by Barahal and Humberto (2020) showed that a lack of instructional leadership competency might be attributed to a lack of instructional leadership requirements by school districts for professional learning and ECE leadership. In addition, school principals from ECE settings shared they were inadequately prepared to execute instructional leadership (Smith et al., 2019; Zepeda et al., 2014). A key recommendation from this finding is that

principal preparation programs, state education departments, and school districts must develop programs tailored for ECE settings to enable leaders to acquire essential skills to support teachers (Barahal & Humberto, 2020).

Teachers' ongoing challenges largely hinder career prospects among ECE teachers and their leaders. Taha-Resnick (2019) set to explore potential gaps in knowledge within ECE settings that contribute to ineffective leaders in this setting. A mixed research method was used to examine administrators enrolled in early childhood programs using California's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). Early child education leaders were invited to participate in PLC to assess their self-efficacy in leading curriculum development and delivery. A PLC refers to a group of teachers who meet regularly, share their expertise, and work collaboratively to improve their teaching skills and the academic outcome of students (Taha-Resnick, 2019). Post-survey results showed that ECE leaders had better leadership skills than before participating in the five-month training program (Taha-Resnick, 2019). Like previous studies, this study also revealed that ECE administrators lack programs to advance their PD and that of their subordinates, such as instructors and tutors (Brezicha et al., 2015; Fatih Karacabey, 2021; Pitpit, 2020). As such, the use of PLCs may be considered to address this knowledge gap and help advance the leadership skills of ECE leaders who are often neglected within the public education sector.

Researchers have also explored how principals' instructional leadership influences teachers' perception of self-efficacy (Farisia, 2019; Garrity et al., 2020; Orphanos & Orr, 2014; Roles, 2018). For example, Özdemir et al. (2020) conducted mixed-method

research and used surveys and interviews to collect data from teachers. 435 teachers participated in surveys, and 24 teachers participated in interview sessions. Results showed a significant relationship between principals' instructional behaviors and teachers' self-efficacy (Özdemir et al., 2020). Similar findings on the topic show that the positive nature of instructional leadership influenced individual self-efficacy among teachers in instruction delivery, task focus, motivation, self-evaluation of personal competency, and creation of programs that facilitate students' ability to learn (Garrity et al., 2020; Orphanos & Orr, 2014; Özdemir et al., 2020; Roles, 2018).

The perceived practices of principals in their instructional practices and their impact on teachers' self-efficacy have also been reported in past literature (Bellibas & Liu, 2017; Daniëls et al., 2019; King, 2016; Montgomery, 2020). For example, a recent quantitative study investigated the extent to which instructional practice among school principals predicts teacher self-efficacy (Bellibas & Liu, 2017). The study conducted a correlational analysis while controlling for school, teacher, and principal characteristics. Data was collected using the Teaching and Learning International Survey. Results showed a positive and significant relationship between principals' perceived instructional leadership practices and teachers' self-efficacy (Bellibas & Liu, 2017). Key factors influencing teachers' self-efficacy included formal service training, tenure status, experience, and gender (Bellibas & Liu, 2017). These findings further echo observations by educational researchers such as Garrity et al. (2021), Özdemir et al. (2020), and Taha-Resnick (2019) on the potential impact of school principals in facilitating instructional practices that directly influence teachers' self-efficacy.

Despite the perceived impact of principals' instructional practices on teachers' self-efficacy, a growing body of education literature indicates that teachers rarely receive support from their school leaders Daniëls et al., 2019; King, 2016; Montgomery, 2020; Smith et al., 2019). Past researchers have conducted a quantitative study to examine teacher perception of school leadership support and its impact on their self-efficacy. In their study, Mabrouk (2020) tested whether administrators' support enhances teachers' self-efficacy. Results showed that teachers' perceptions of administrative support (TPAS) were strongly associated with higher self-efficacy when controlling the level of teacher education (Mabrouk, 2020). The findings align with past studies in that administrator actions such as recognizing teachers' achievements, encouraging teachers, and creating a clear vision of academic expectations facilitate teachers' self-efficacy (Çalik et al., 2018; Ferrara, 2020; Mabrouk, 2020; Mongillo, 2017; Smith et al., 2019).

Further, researchers have also observed that teacher perception of administrator support reflects the type of teaching environment leaders create. Importantly, there is a need to train administrators. Based on these findings, scholars advocate the need to train school leaders on how to create a supportive environment, thereby ensuring enhanced teacher self-efficacy (Brezicha et al., 2015; Fatih Karacabey, 2021; Özdemir et al., 2020 Pitpit, 2020). These observations align with findings from a growing body of literature concerning the need for administrators to be conscientious of the type of instructional leadership teachers receive in creating environments that support diverse educational practices (Atiles et al., 2021; Barahal & Humberto, 2020).

A recent qualitative study emphasized the importance of instructional practice in K-5 elementary settings (Ficklin et al., 2020). Interview responses from 14 teachers identified three themes related to PD support as essential for teacher competency, integrating instructional practice in K-5 was possible, and teachers felt that preparation programs lacked relevant training (Ficklin et al., 2020). These findings reveal that teachers feel less prepared to facilitate instructional practices in K-5 due to a lack of relevant curriculum and support (Taha-Resnick, 2019; Smith et al., 2019; Zepeda et al., 2014). These findings potentially show that teachers' self-efficacy will likely remain low due to limited PD opportunities. Similar observations to Ficklin et al. (2020) have been made by Ma and Marion (2021) in their multilevel modeling to assess the impact of principal instructional leadership on teachers' self-efficacy and how trust influences the process. In their quantitative study, Ma and Marion (2021) recruited 50 school principals and 714 teachers and found that instructional leadership facilitates the creation of a positive learning environment, directly impacting teachers' self-efficacy. Results emphasized that instructional practices impact teachers' self-efficacy, with trust influencing the level of efficacy and support received from school leaders in facilitating instructional leadership.

A disciplinary literature framework proposed by Ippolito and Fisher (2019) showed the key role that instructional leadership plays in positioning teachers to be more skilled in communicating, writing, and reading. Importantly, principals are considered integral in creating trust (Ma and Marion, 2021) and encouraging teachers to use disciplinary literacy instructional methods to enhance their professional skills (Ippolito &

Fisher, 2019). Nonetheless, school leaders are considered to provide limited support to teachers, which may hinder their PD. For example, Smith et al. (2017) explored dominant leadership skills and found that leaders used transformational leadership more than instructional leadership. In addition, more leaders supported democratic, situation, or authoritarian leadership and had limited knowledge about instructional leadership. Due to such potential shortages among leaders regarding instructional practices, they were not in a position to facilitate teachers' PD (Smith et al.,2017).

Taking the above into consideration, it may be noted that these study findings by researchers Atiles et al. (2021), Barahal and Humberto (2020), Farisia (2019), Garrity et al. (2021), Taha-Resnick (2019), and Ma and Marion (2021) show growing concern about inadequate preparedness and lack of self-efficacy among ECE leaders. Such a shortcoming implies that most school directors, leaders, or principals lack the necessary knowledge to support teachers. Subsequently, a lack of suitable support in terms of PD leaves ECE teachers feeling less capable of organizing and executing the courses of action required to facilitate early childhood learning. Avoiding this situation would necessitate urgent training of ECE leaders with relevant instructional leadership strategies to empower them to provide needed support to teachers in terms of PD and career advancement.

PD Through PLCs

Surveyed evidence from past studies shows concerns about inadequate preparedness among ECE directors and teachers. A further literature search indicates that one of the major concerns stems from the lack of mandatory requirements in ECE

settings for school directors to participate in formal education programs before becoming school leaders (Fatih Karacabey, 2021; Garrity et al., 2021; Heikka et al., 2019). There have been efforts to facilitate training through workshops, on-the-job training, peer learning initiatives, seminars, and educational-sponsored meetings to fill this knowledge gap (Pacchiano et al., 2016; Voelkel & Chrispeels, 2017; Walsh et al., 2020). However, the effectiveness of these methods varies, with some schools lacking learning initiatives that encourage leaders and teachers to advance professional skills.

Walsh et al. (2020) conducted a mixed research method to assess how coaching or training about instructional leadership impacts teacher preparedness. The research was conducted in a mid-sized California school district where data was collected using survey questionnaires and semistructured interview questions. The Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy's (2001) Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale was used to examine the impact of instructional leadership training. Results showed that instructional coaching activities, support, and roles positively impacted teachers. Instructional coaches were also reported to have the greatest impact in developing collaborative PLCs, with strong trust between teachers and leadership (Walsh et al., 2020). Further, teacher efficacy increased in the classroom in terms of instruction delivery, student engagement, and curriculum management (Fatih Karacabey, 2021; Heikka et al., 2019; Walsh et al., 2020). Findings from these studies show that if ECE directors are equipped with instructional leadership, they are adequately empowered to support teachers' PD (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001; Walsh et al., 2020).

Desired PD goals may be achieved through PLCs. Voelkel and Chrispeels (2017) reported that PLCs enhance teacher collaboration, pedagogy development, formulation of relevant teaching methods, and instructional delivery, which are key to student achievement. However, Roles (2018) observed that the PLC process varies in school settings and is often underutilized in ECE settings because leaders lack insights into instructional leadership. Contrasting findings from the literature show that in instructional practices, subordinates' teams comprising of instructors or teachers achieved high functioning in professional skills growth and student learning (Barahal & Humberto, 2020; Farisia, 2019). High-functioning teams felt supported by the principal, while the less well-functioning teams did not due to principals' lack of instructional skills to coordinate or facilitate PLCs (Heikka et al., 2019; Voelkel & Chrispeels, 2017). These findings echo observations by Walsh et al. (2020) and advocate the need for regular principal training on instructional leadership to enable them to facilitate PLCs to achieve the full benefits of teachers' PD.

Despite concerted efforts to improve ECE teachers' skills by improving the working environment and offering refresher courses, literature findings show that the results have been mixed. There is a growing understanding that a sole focus on the classroom and teachers is insufficient (Pacchiano et al., 2016; Tuli & Tynjälä, 2015). Qualitative studies focusing on ECE program leaders emphasize the need for ECE directors to become instructional leaders and critical partners in the daily PD of teachers (King, 2016; Montgomery, 2020; Smith et al., 2019; Pacchiano et al., 2016). However, a key concern is the lack of systematic research on facilitating instructional leadership

among school directors in ECE settings to enable them to design powerful teacher learning and sustained improvement (Smith et al., 2019; Walsh et al., 2020). By contrast to observations made by Voelkel and Chrispeels (2017) and Walsh et al. (2020), Pacchiano et al. (2016) reported that recognizing the critical role leaders play as drivers of organizational change in ECE settings would motivate educational policymakers to design and implement relevant PD interventions that cultivate instructional leadership and instill cultures of collaboration through PLCs.

Carter-Sims (2021) conducted a qualitative study to examine teachers' perceptions of PLCs and the competence of their leaders in facilitating instructional practices in preschool settings. Data for the study was collected using interview questions from preschool and elementary teachers from rural school districts in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The conceptual framework for this study was based on Olivier and Huffman's theory of utilizing PLCs and instructional practices (Carter-Sims, 2021). Five key themes were identified as potential contributing factors for PLCs' success in facilitating teachers' instructional practices. These themes included supportive conditions from school directors, sharing instructional practices, collaborative learning, support for professional learning, and nurturing instructional leadership among school principals (Carter-Sims, 2021). Similar observations have been noted in past research. PLCs have been reported to impact teachers' learning instructional strategies at the preschool level, especially between pre-kindergarten through second-grade levels (Ma & Marion, 2021; Sisson et al., 2021; Thien et al., 2021). Thus, scholars recommend schools and educational districts provide training regarding collective application and learning, working collaboratively,

sharing instructional practices, and making available learning opportunities for leaders and teachers.

Principal leadership behavior has been noted to influence the success of ECE programs and the effectiveness of teachers in early childhood settings (Kingcade, 2019; Tucker, 2019). For example, Kingcade (2019) examined how principal leadership behaviors influence teachers' PD through PLCs in Title I and non-Title I schools. The study focused on preschool teachers and principals in Alexandria City Public Schools, Virginia. School-related policy documents, observation notes, and interview transcripts were used to collect relevant data and assess participants' lived experiences in PLCs. Results showed that principal leadership behaviors substantially influence how PLCs develop in preschool settings (Kingcade, 2019). School principals have been shown to embrace distributive leadership practices and have a strong presence during PLCs when supported adequately (Mikser et al., 2020; Özdemir et al., 2020; Pitpit, 2020). Also, school leaders are more likely to show shared and supportive leadership, create supportive professional learning conditions, and facilitate shared values and vision when fully supported (Daniëls et al., 2019; King, 2016). As a result, teachers' professional skills and knowledge are likely to be enhanced, thereby indicating the positive impact of instructional leadership among preschool leaders on the success of ECE programs (Kingcade, 2019; Tucker, 2019).

Omdal and Roland (2020) explored processes that may be used in building learning organizations and enabling teachers to make many future innovations. A qualitative study on ECE teachers examined areas of PD essential in preschool settings.

Three significant observations were made. These observations included the need to develop PLCs to facilitate continuous learning and PD (Omdal & Roland, 2020). The other factors included promoting instructional practices, transformational leadership, and sustainable instructional practices. However, Omdal and Roland (2020) cautioned that a major problem in achieving this goal was attributed to a lack of uniform education and background among ECE teachers and leaders. Also, the schools were limited in allocating the resources and time needed to create PLCs (Omdal & Roland, 2020).

To address the challenges of limited time allocation for PLCs, Admiraal et al. (2019) recommended the use of suitable interventions tailored to meet specific challenges. In assessing how to address potential challenges in PLCs, Admiraal et al. (2019) collected data using interviews with project leaders and school principals, project documents, and focus group discussions with teachers and leaders. Five effective interventions were identified, including creating a shared school vision, promoting mandatory PLCs for all teachers and principals, and creating collaborative learning. In addition, Admiraal et al. (2019) asserted the need for learning leadership and change in PLC priority to include formal and informal teacher learning groups. These findings show that PLCs may be more successful in ECE settings when the learning process is more embedded in a school's approach to promoting PD.

The complex and diverse nature of these contexts further complicates the effectiveness of PLCs in ECE settings. Therefore, Sisson et al. (2021) noted that these complexes may be addressed by adopting leadership processes that connect with the beliefs and values of the ECE field. Through a cross-case analysis of public schools in the

United States and Australia, Sisson et al. (2021) shared that leadership should be developed organically and be shared among the leadership community. As noted by Admiraal et al. (2019), Sisson et al. (2021) indicated that creating a collaborative learning environment contributes to a democratic learning and teaching environment for teachers. Enhanced collaboration may be achieved through PLCs that are organized annually.

Finsel (2019) observed that an annual professional performance review (APPR) may be an alternative approach to facilitate teacher competency. School leaders should deliberate efforts to promote sustained, differentiated, and collaborative PLCs informed by APPR teachers' guidance and practice. School principals should also remain conscientious about ensuring skillful time allocation in supporting transformative change by leveraging PLCs. According to Finsel (2019), such an approach has been effective in New York schools, enhancing teacher competency and professional skills in 95% of the local schools. These findings further indicate the need for continuous support from schools and leaders in ensuring suitable PLCs are in place to enhance positive PD through well-structured PLCs. As further discussed below, such an approach would help overcome another potential challenge in teacher career growth due to the lack of mandatory instructional leadership preparation programs in ECE settings.

Lack of ECE Preparation Programs on Instructional Leadership

Insights from identified studies show that the lack of mandatory requirements in ECE settings for school directors to participate in a formal education program before becoming leaders creates a gap in the leadership curriculum that leaves most school directors unprepared for instructional practices (Barker et al., 2021; Fatih Karacabey,

2021; Heikka et al., 2019). Researchers have investigated the relationship between school climate and preschool teachers' stress, with college training as a mediating factor. Recent quantitative research was used where 175 novel preschool teachers were recruited into the study (Hu et al., 2019). Survey questionnaires were used to collect data to answer formulated RQs. Two mediation analyses revealed that the lack of instructional leadership programs in teachers' training colleges contributes to unprepared principals for collaborative engagement in school settings (Hu et al., 2019).

Further, researchers also observed that poor leadership skills in instructional strategies significantly negatively impacted preschool teachers regarding stress and job burnout (Mongillo, 2017; Smith et al., 2019; Zepeda et al., 2014). As a result, unprepared school principals due to inadequate programs in teacher training colleges translated to a lack of support for preschool teachers in terms of PD (Hu et al., 2019; Mongillo, 2017; Smith et al., 2019). These findings raise concerns about adequate teacher preparation programs to create a relevant leadership training curriculum to equip future preschool leaders with the skills needed to improve teachers' professionalism.

Researchers have also examined preschool teachers' perceptions about literacy instruction. Quantitative correlational research has been conducted to explore the relationship between preschool teachers' views on self-efficacy for literacy instruction and preschool literacy (Kimmy, 2017). The study was conducted at a local private preschool classroom with Bandura's self-efficacy theory applied as the theoretical foundation for the study. A total of 31 preschool leaders participated in the study, with their perceptions measured using the Komlodi Assessment for Self-efficacy (KASE)

survey. Correlation analysis of the KASE survey showed preschool leaders with limited training before commencing practice had lower literacy levels. The difference in lack of training and literacy levels was statistically significant ($p = .003$). These findings show preschool teachers lack adequate training or experience in instructional practices before commencing practice in preschool settings. Like Hu et al. (2019), insights by Kimmy (2017) emphasize the need to offer PD opportunities to ECE leaders to strengthen their practical skills where they feel less effective. Notably, the findings align with past observations that emphasizing PD and support for early childhood development leaders may promote change as principals create opportunities to facilitate teacher training and skills advancement (Daniëls et al., 2019; King, 2016; Montgomery, 2020).

Lack of preschool practical training and program experience hinders teachers' effectiveness and ECE leader competency (Brezicha et al., 2015; Fatih Karacabey, 2021; Özdemir et al., 2020). For example, a qualitative study by Ferrara (2020) attempted to analyze data from 3 years of educational practices in North Carolina. The focus was to understand teachers' perceptions about their leaders and how the support they receive impacts their self-efficacy and agency in implementing the North Carolina Office of Early Learning created the North Carolina Kindergarten Entry Assessment (NC KEA). The NC KEA is focused on informing leadership development programs to support kindergarten readiness across the state (Ferrara, 2020). The NC KEA program provides a snapshot of skills and knowledge ECE leaders should promote in their teachers to achieve learning goals (Ferrara, 2020). Findings agreed with past research in that teachers are more likely to hold positive attitudes and are motivated to implement curriculum when

they receive close support from school leaders (Orphanos & Orr, 2014; Roles, 2018). However, a lack of training on instructional practices is more likely to delay the implementation process due to inadequate prior knowledge on how to support teachers in implementing curriculum and pedagogy in the classrooms (Atiles et al., 2021; Ferrara, 2020; Roles, 2018). A successful teacher approach to uptake in implementing a set curriculum would require training of school leaders and allocation of resources to achieve the process in ECE settings.

Findings by Ferrara (2020) echo past observations by Dellapenna (2017) regarding the need for coaching early childhood leaders on how to facilitate teacher self-efficacy and professional learning to achieve literacy instruction. Dellapenna (2017) investigated the effect of a professional learning series about peer coaching on teachers' attitudes and beliefs through a mixed research method. Elementary teachers volunteered to learn and practice peer coaching during the study. Findings showed peer coaching provides a personalized, meaningful, and job-embedded form of professional learning for teachers. Teachers expressed improved self-efficacy in instruction delivery with proficiency in key curriculum content. However, teachers expressed a negative attitude towards peer coaching, citing school principals' lack of knowledge to facilitate its implementation in school settings (Dellapenna, 2017). As such, there is a need for professional peer coaching programs to enhance professional training among school leaders. Such insights confirm observations by Hu et al. (2019) and Kimmy (2017) about inadequate preparations among ECE leaders, resulting in their inability to support peer coaching and skills advancement among preschool teachers.

Research on prekindergarten teachers' experiences, efficacy beliefs, and instructional practices indicates a varied lack of experience among instructors due to inadequate programs from partner universities (Barker et al., 2021). Mixed-method research was used to examine how pre-kindergarten teachers perceive their efficacy. Analysis of survey and interview responses shows teachers had inadequate experience in professional learning programs and lacked literacy implementation skills from university courses. However, there was an alignment between teachers' sense of self-efficacy and enrolling in instructional practices (Barker et al., 2021). Recommendations from this study stress the need for learning institutions to make available courses focusing on instructional practices for pre-kindergarten teachers (Barker et al., 2021) and necessary training for early childhood leaders to create a positive perception of the need for teachers' PD among school principals and directors.

Cultivating a Culture of Learning Organizations

Training highly competent instructional leaders in ECE settings should be a continuous PD commitment (Hesbol, 2019; Scamardella, 2021). Continuous training on skills and knowledge acquisition needs to be dynamic and flexible to align with changing needs in student diversity and learning goals (Brissenden-Smith et al., 2018). As such, school principals must cultivate a culture of learning organizations in early childhood development for their instructional practices and competency development in supporting teachers. Hesbol (2019) examined the relationship between principals' perception and self-efficacy in creating a learning organization. Researchers examined specific subcategories of learning organizational attitudes and behaviors that inform principals'

choices for continuous learning and career development. Results showed that creating a learning culture requires principals to successfully persuade others to advance their professional skills (Scamardella, 2021). Learning organizations are founded on the strong belief that principals support active learning, are committed to supporting learning programs, and implement research-based findings on teacher training (Çalik et al., 2018; Ferrara, 2020). As a result, school principals play a central role in developing a school culture that promotes continuous knowledge creation and PD (Barahal & Humberto, 2020; Farisia, 2019).

Teacher learning needs continue to evolve as student dynamics change, necessitating continuous improvement in PD programs. Scamardella (2021) observed that high expectations for student achievement, the constant evolution of teacher evaluation protocols, and the enactment of the Every Student Succeeds Act 2015 have led districts and schools to develop effectively and to provide ongoing PD for teachers. A review of 17 literature studies on instructional leadership noted that instructional coaches facilitate continuous career advancement to align with dynamic educational demands for quality teachers and high performance. Kindergarten and pre-kindergarten teachers who work with instructional coaches learn about curriculum development, classroom management, peer collaboration, and enhanced communication with school leadership. However, Scamardella (2021) observed that most investment in instructional practices from districts and schools has been limited to elementary and high school education levels, with limited resources, time, and money allocated for teachers in preschool settings. As a result, most teachers in early childhood settings lack opportunities for continuous PD (Brezicha et al.,

2015; Fatih Karacabey, 2021). Also, the lack of continuous learning and evaluation programs for ECE leaders hinders proactive efforts to enhance pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers' PD within early childhood settings (Çalik et al., 2018; Ferrara, 2020).

Growing opportunities further necessitate collaboration and continuous support for early childhood educators. Brissenden-Smith et al. (2018) conducted a qualitative study to examine how early childhood development teachers may be facilitated to move from working in isolation and build collaborative and thriving teaching environments. Researchers cited the need for constant support from leaders and inspiration on the need for skills advancement from leadership in creating communities dedicated to continuous professional growth. Like observations made by Scamardella (2021), findings by Brissenden-Smith et al. (2018) showed that using early learning instructional coaches is key to cultivating a long-term and sustained professional learning culture in ECE settings. The learning culture in preschool may be nurtured through intentional strategies to develop PLCs and reflective practices and accelerate collective professional growth among ECE educators (Brissenden-Smith et al., 2018). However, school principals also must be included in the professional training programs with a focus on instructional leadership, where they should be equipped with strategies on how to create and sustain a culture of continuous professional growth and collaboration between teachers and ECE leadership that results in access to high-quality professional skills to achieve learning goals.

A qualitative study by Fonsen and Ukkonen-Mikkola (2019) further reported commitment to high-quality professional skills for early learning leaders. In their research on how ECE teachers interpret professional competency in pedagogical thinking and further training on ECE courses, Fonsen and Ukkonen-Mikkola (2019) emphasized regular training for teachers and principals. Specifically, the researchers stressed the need for instructional practice training on critical aspects of ECE pedagogy and its implementation. A total of 32 ECE teachers and leaders participated in the study, which was executed using a participatory action approach. Results showed that teachers who received regular workshop training and attended biannual PLCs reported professional growth in four key areas. These areas of improved learning include increased curriculum and pedagogy knowledge, awareness of the success or failures of previously implemented curriculum, enhanced developmental skills, and the ability to make the successful implementation of ECE pedagogy (Fonsen & Ukkonen-Mikkola, 2019). These findings echo observations from other studies on the importance of training and PD in instructional leadership to facilitate pedagogical implementation among teachers (Brissenden-Smith et al., 2018; Hesbol, 2019; Scamardella, 2021).

The surveyed literature shows that educational expectations are rising across the field of ECE, further stressing the need for knowledge and skills development in promoting children's learning and development (Copeman Petig et al., 2019; Hesbol, 2019; Scamardella, 2021). However, most ECE instructors eager to advance their careers do not pursue them because of challenges in PD. Copeman Petig et al. (2019) evaluated early childhood PD at the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE). The

evaluation attempted to identify challenges and benefits experienced by teachers in their early childhood development settings and to inform future learning applications through ECE apprenticeship programs. Fifteen themes were identified from the focus group discussions and interview responses. Apprenticeship programs were noted as essential in their skills, knowledge, and practice related to ECE programs. The improved learning areas included integrated curriculum, positively engaged families, participation in school programs, documenting and assessing learning outcomes, and assessment of learning needs (Copeman Petig et al., 2019). However, the study found that the surveyed institutions lacked PD programs for teachers and leaders. As such, there is a need to prioritize continuous learning and training programs for teachers' professional needs and principals' instructional practices (Brissenden-Smith et al., 2018; Copeman Petig et al., 2019).

Achieving continuous learning programs in ECE settings has been problematic due to limited research on the role of school administrators in facilitating instructional leadership. Stosich (2020) set to address this problem by examining the under-researched concept of instructional leadership and how school administrators promote the development of instructional leaders among teachers through instructional leadership teams. Moreover, Stosich (2020) examined efforts that principal supervisors put in place to evaluate teachers' professional growth in high-poverty schools. Interviews were used to collect data from 36 principals and members of instructional leadership teams, such as teachers and assistant school principals. Findings from interview responses showed that principals strongly influenced instructional leadership teams' commitment to instructional

practices. Support from administrators was crucial for successful instructional strategy creation, development, and implementation. Stosich (2020) concluded that school administrators are integral to the success of teachers' professional growth through instructional practices.

Based on the surveyed literature, it may be noted that directors in ECE settings continue to encounter challenges in their leadership development, making it difficult for them to effectively support teachers' PD. The existing literature shows a lack of dedicated learning programs for early childhood personnel in school settings (Hesbol, 2019; Scamardella, 2021). Rather, the existing PD focus is primarily on elementary and high school settings, with a limited emphasis on the ECE environment (Fonsen & Ukkonen-Mikkola, 2019). Addressing these concerns would require creating and implementing continuous learning settings dedicated to ECE facilities, such as using collaborative learning, such as PLCs and instructional coaches (Brissenden-Smith et al., 2018; Copeman Petig et al., 2019). A continuous learning culture would ensure teachers' skills are developed over time to align with the changing educational expectations both in curriculum and pedagogy development to meet the needs of students from multiethnic and multicultural backgrounds (Copeman Petig et al., 2019; Hesbol, 2019; Scamardella, 2021).

Lack of Feedback and Communication

Poor interaction and communication between teachers and principals further hinder efforts to facilitate support for ECE instructors. Gutiérrez (2018) investigated principal's feedback practices that hinder or support teachers' feedback implementation.

Also, the study identified principals' practices in preschool settings that interfere with or encourage teacher's self-efficacy in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten settings. The qualitative research method was used where interviews were used to collect responses from teachers and principals from two different districts in California. Gutiérrez (2018) applied two leadership practices in the study, focusing on principals' use of emotional intelligence when providing feedback and principals' ability to communicate effectively with teachers before, during, and after providing feedback. Findings show that principals provide positive feedback and exude emotions when providing instructional feedback to teachers.

However, Gutiérrez (2018) reported that some interviewed teachers felt their principals lacked adequate experience in instructional leadership. Often, school principals fail to participate in giving classroom instructional feedback, hindering their curriculum development and instruction delivery. Thus, how principals give feedback was a key concern for teachers in eliminating communication challenges in PD. Gutiérrez (2018) added that collaborative opportunities between principals and teachers are essential to facilitate feedback and productive communication. Importantly, principals should receive additional PD opportunities focusing on instructional leadership and support for teachers in early childhood development settings.

Gibbons et al. (2019) explored how school leadership should support teachers' instructional practices in preschool and K-12 settings. To assess how school leaders coordinate instructional planning with teachers, Gibbons et al. (2019) selected cases where coaches were or were not successfully interacting with teachers. Collected data

from field notes were analyzed across four cases. Results showed that the principals have well-established communication and feedback mechanisms in schools where coaches successfully interacted with teachers. Effective communication in such schools helped achieve three outcomes: classroom visits, teacher collaborative meetings, and coach-principal informal meetings (Gibbons et al., 2019). By contrast, schools with unsuccessful coaches reported delayed feedback and poor communication channels between principals and teachers. Subsequently, these school leaders were unlikely to facilitate timely coaching sessions for teachers and less likely to evaluate the effectiveness of coaching programs. They lacked competency in identifying the professional learning needs of their teachers (Gibbons et al., 2019).

Insights from the existing body of literature further contribute to the literature on instructional leadership by specifying how principals should coordinate their individual and collective work to organize support for teachers' learning and career development. These findings align with concerns expressed by Gutiérrez (2018) on the need by principals to organize reliable communication and feedback channels to support instructional coaches and teachers pursuing PD. Similar insights have been examined by researchers such as Zepeda and Lanoue (2017), who evaluated how ECE leaders of the Clarke County School District in Georgia should build their instructional leadership skills through communication, regular conversations, feedback response, and professional learning opportunities. Successful principals develop formal and informal instructional strategies in the school curriculum and monthly workshop training or district academic meetings (Gutiérrez, 2018). Effective feedback may be developed through regular

classroom visits with observations focused on assessing instructional practices. This will enable leaders to identify teachers' challenges, followed by subsequent problem resolution and appropriate feedback response.

Despite poor communication between school leaders and teachers, Hvidston et al. (2019) have also noted that school districts and education policymakers contribute to poor instructional leadership development. Hvidston et al. (2019) examined efforts by school districts to facilitate instructional practice among preschool and elementary principals' leadership capacities. A key focus was determining how principals are evaluated and supervised in North Carolina school districts. Results showed that existing strategies focus on assessing school principals in elementary settings, trust-building, evaluating performance standards, and visits to schools to further the advancement of instructional leadership (Hvidston et al., 2019). However, implemented instructional leadership largely fails to promote early childhood development needs. Education programs largely fail to meet the needs of school leaders and teachers in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten due to poor communication of specific learning needs in these preschool settings (Hvidston et al., 2019). Further, most school principals often lack training or sponsored coaching on instructional leadership, implying that they are unable to share relevant learning goals with their teachers (Gibbons et al., 2019; Gutiérrez, 2018; Hvidston et al., 2019).

Limited Materials and Facilities

Limited resources and material allocation further hinder efforts by early childhood leaders to support the teachers' PD. Çalik et al. (2018) shared that instructional leadership

training among ECE directors is largely influenced by financial support, access to leadership learning materials, training workshops, and sponsored seminars. Çalik et al. (2018) conducted a qualitative study to examine kindergarten teachers' competency in instructional practice within preschool education programs. A total of 38 teachers working in 10 kindergartens participated in the study. Interview responses from the teachers were analyzed using the content analysis method. Findings showed that a third of the teachers felt inadequate in instructional practice. Further insights showed that all schools had limited capacity to use instructional coaches due to limited resources and facilities needed to facilitate teachers' PD (Çalik et al., 2018). The interviewed teachers also noted that they do not have enough access to relevant courses to give them needed educational skills (Çalik et al., 2018). These findings show that for instructional practice to be successful, the preschool curriculum needs to allocate resources and facilities committed to ECE teachers' PD.

A growing consensus in education literature shows that high-quality learning environments depend on teachers' skills and qualifications. However, inadequate working conditions, low pay, lack of training, and limited professional advancement opportunities hamper teachers in their teaching efforts (Schlieber et al., 2019). Çalik et al. (2018) noted that the challenge largely exists among teachers in ECE as well as K-12 settings, fueling the continuous challenge among school principals when hiring, training, and retaining a highly skilled teaching workforce. In their qualitative study, Schlieber et al. (2019) presented findings from the 2019 Marin County SEQUAL study focusing on examining the challenges of ECE teachers in the county. The study included both centers

participating in two teachers' professional improvement programs (i.e., the ECE Quality Improvement Project and the Marin Quality Counts program). Results showed that investment in ECE facilities in Marin County and awareness creation motivate ECE teachers to participate in career advancement opportunities. However, despite the support and resources allocated for teachers' PD, there is a need to enhance working conditions and design relevant curriculum content. Schlieber et al. (2019) recommended that ECE settings support financial allocation and that policymaker's advance resource and material access efforts to enhance continuous PD.

Time allocation from school directors, feedback response, and commitment to program improvement have been cited to further influence teachers' PD. Sebastian et al. (2018) examined how school directors in urban early childhood schools distribute time working to support the implementation of critical school functions. The researchers also assessed who these leaders work with and how they supported teachers in pre-school settings. A quantitative study was used where data was collected from 83 school principals. Results showed that principal practices in allocating time and support resources for teachers vary. Consistent with findings by Çalik et al. (2018) and Schlieber et al. (2019), Sebastian et al. (2018) reported that the principals' workday is characterized by diverse tasks and long work hours. However, inadequate resources in most schools hindered principals' efforts to initiate programs relevant to teachers' training. Thus, the principals allocate limited time to working with teachers to support their curriculum development initiatives. This implies that teachers often work individually designing learning resources to achieve set learning goals (Sebastian et al., 2018). These findings

emphasize the need to allocate resources to school principals and empower them with relevant materials to support teachers in early childhood development learning environments.

Fatih Karacabey (2021) elaborated on the key role principals play in facilitating the PD of teachers in pre-school settings. A cross-sectional survey design was used in this study, with data collected from 4,729 teachers in pre-school settings. Results showed that principals had positive attitudes and perceptions toward the PD of teachers. However, the major constraints principals experienced related to limited relevant resources to support teachers' PD. As a result, some school leaders lacked suitable insights regarding innovations necessary to advance their teaching competency and curriculum development (Fatih Karacabey, 2021). Of the surveyed teachers, 25.5 of the principals supported the PD of teachers sufficiently, while 33.8% only supported their career advancement occasionally, with 41.7% never providing any PD support. Lack of facilities also hindered efforts to allocate time for research tasks, individual reading, access to coaching experts, educational activities like seminars, and monitoring programs to evaluate teachers' proficiency (Fatih Karacabey, 2021). These findings further echo observations by Çalik et al. (2018), Sebastian et al. (2018), and Schlieber et al. (2019), who emphasized that most principals lack the facilities and resources needed to support teachers' PD. Therefore, school administrators and education policymakers need to address these concerns to enable school principals to acquire essential resources for advancing ECE teachers' knowledge and skills.

Organizational Support and Culture

The school learning environment, level of teacher support, and existing professional training culture have been noted to influence the principal's support for teachers' career growth. Stoisch et al. (2019) advocated creating school conditions for teacher growth and collaboration. Specifically, schools with a clear vision of promoting teachers' career development will likely report enhanced student learning. Despite the potential positive effect of organizational support on PD, Stoisch et al. (2019) cautioned that schools remain reluctant to design professional learning on their premises to enhance instructional leadership. Also, past efforts have been unsuccessful since they targeted school principals rather than team leaders or because they were conducted outside school sites instead of being embedded in the school settings. Stoisch et al. (2019) recommended that improving instructional leadership should create a culture that supports school leaders' engagement and involvement with instructional practices. Such a team-based culture is more effective in facilitating the instructional leadership abilities of leaders and teachers.

According to Appova and Arbaugh (2018) and McCray (2018), teachers would be motivated to use skills learned in PD if applied to classroom circumstances. They do not feel that support is individualized according to current knowledge and experience (Brezicha et al., 2015). School leaders need to provide opportunities for teachers to practice new skills with support to bridge the gap between knowledge and practice. Teachers' instructional practices are also affected by autonomy over the PD experience; this is believed to directly affect the teachers' emotions concerning the experience

(Subitha, 2018; Petridou, 2017). However, it cannot be ignored that school leaders' performance is affected by their feelings of self-efficacy in providing what teachers need (Petridou, 2017). This evidences the need for school leaders and teachers to work together for relevance to teacher's needs (Martin et al., 2019). It was found that to support sustainable long-term professional learning, teachers need to be involved along with school leaders in this process (King, 2016; Patton et al., 2015).

Ezzani (2020) also expressed that school culture impacts instructional practices in ECE settings. Through a case study research design, Ezzani (2020) explored how a school culture that values instructional leadership (between teachers and school leaders) promotes learning and culturally responsive practices in school settings. A qualitative study was used to examine the study problem with observations and interviews used to collect data from PLCs, classroom sessions, and meetings. Findings showed that poor student performance and inadequate teacher skills are addressed when school leaders engage teachers in a continuous learning culture. Also, close organizational support is key to successful teacher learning through authentic dialogue in PLCs that promotes student achievement (Ezzani, 2020). These findings by Ezzani (2020) echo observations by Stoisch et al. (2019) on the importance of organizational support and creating a PD culture. A key cultural change should be anchored on encouraging school leaders to distribute leadership to teachers, creating a sense of responsibility through instructional practices.

Lopez and Hossain (2021) asserted that amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, instructional leadership has emerged as a critical approach to sustaining school learning.

Specifically, student success and learning are indirectly impacted by the role of school leaders in maintaining a positive school culture, supporting teachers' PD, and engaging educators, students, and families. However, despite this, school leaders need to be instructional leaders in learning and teaching; there remains a gap in practice and expectation in creating a positive culture and managing instructional programs (Lopez & Hossain, 2021). These insights further elaborate on the need to create organizations that support adult learning in instructional practices, with iterative routines in place to create a culture of teachers' PD.

However, achieving sustained learning and skills development is often hindered by conflicting areas of expertise between teachers and school leaders. According to Jimerson and Fuentes (2021), instructional leadership will likely become more complex if schools fail to support teachers' learning. As a result, school leaders should use different approaches to bridge this divide, including collaboration, specialist career development personnel, and creating leadership knowledge content. In their qualitative study, Jimerson and Fuentes (2021) shared how school leaders may be encouraged to promote instructional leadership and resolve problems in mismatched career areas. Findings from 31 respondents showed that school factors influence how leaders understand and implement their roles in instructional practices. Jimerson and Fuentes (2021) also reported that organizational support structures such as engagement, feedback, emotional, and material support influence teachers' instructional practices.

Other researchers have also reported organizational influence on instructional practices. For example, Hughes and McCartney (2019) examined the experience of first

year ECE teachers and elementary teachers to assess their confidence levels and understand the factors influencing their practices. Interviews and focus groups were used to collect data with the key themes identified, including school structure and a high disconnect between administrators and teachers. Such a disconnect contributed to low organizational support for teachers' career growth and skills development in instructional practices (Hughes & McCartney, 2019). Tingle et al. (2019) recommended that schools provide support for adult learning because university-based principal preparation programs largely fail in training principals for their leadership roles. Such an approach should be anchored on growing your leaders where schools train instructional leaders in their settings.

Supportive school culture in instructional practices has been cited to be key in facilitating teacher collaboration. According to Liu et al. (2020), instructional practices become effective with a school culture committed to change where the organization aspires to ensure teacher job satisfaction and self-efficacy. Specifically, distributed leadership and instructional practice are strongly linked with teachers' self-efficacy and job satisfaction, necessitating the creation of a school culture that promotes these aspects in day-to-day practices. Davis and Boudreaux (2019) investigated instructional practices in charter schools using Mendel's five effective leadership practices for instructional leaders. Results from their qualitative case study advocated the need for schools to promote diverse engagement approaches, promote professional growth opportunities, use different data to inform instructional decisions and practices, and create instructional time with few daily interruptions (Davis & Boudreaux, 2019). These findings further attest to

the central role that school support and the presence of a culture of adult learning play in facilitating instructional practices among principals and teachers.

Leadership Coaching Initiatives

Teachers' access to coaching initiatives has been identified as important in facilitating instructional practices in ECE settings (Çalik et al., 2018; Fatih Karacabey, 2021). A further review of the literature shows that productive coaching opportunities may close the gap between school leaders' competence in instructional practices and their support for teachers' PD. Gibbons and Cobb (2017) shared that instructional improvement initiatives in most schools may include instructional coaching as a primary form of workplace-based support for teachers' career development. Nonetheless, there are limited insights in the academic literature on specific initiatives coaches should facilitate when seeking to improve teachers' professional needs (Çalik et al., 2018).

Gibbons and Cobb (2017) noted that when curriculum development researchers propose professional growth needs, they hardly justify why such initiatives may be essential in meeting teachers' needs. Such uncertainty raises concerns about whether instructional leadership coaching and PD should be generalized or formulated to meet individualized teacher needs. In their study, Gibbons and Cobb (2017) drew insights from in-service and preservice teacher education literature to identify learning activities among adult learners in science and math coaching. Results show that teacher leadership coaching initiatives must be based on meeting individual learning needs and addressing personal teacher shortcomings in instructional practices (Gibbons & Cobb, 2017).

The debate on teachers' professional coaching needs has also been shared by Wise and Cavazos (2017). In their quantitative study, Wise and Cavazos (2017) sent surveys to public school principals in the United States to examine whether they received leadership coaching. Results showed that half of the school leaders had not received leadership coaching. Principals who have received coaching noted that it is highly supportive and beneficial to them, and they believed it influenced student achievement through suitable engagement with teachers in creating and delivering the curriculum. As such, these findings indicate that leadership coaching may strongly promote principal's competency in leading their staff toward achieving organizational goals. Like Gibbons and Cobb (2017), the study by Wise and Cavazos (2017) recommended expanding leadership coaching programs to facilitate the implementation of instructional leadership practices among teachers.

Huggins et al. (2021) explored how the leadership coaching capacity of school leaders may be developed to support less experienced leaders in schools. The study focused on insights from a 2-year study of experienced school leaders enrolled for coaching skills, knowledge, and career growth to enhance their instructional competency. Qualitative research using interviews was employed to collect data from 12 teachers who underwent 70 job-embedded coaching sessions over 2 years. Findings showed that facilitated learning and community-based initiatives may be used to promote instructional leadership. Coaching initiatives were reported to facilitate learning and career development among school leaders, which in turn helped these leaders promote and facilitate career development among their staff. Huggins et al. (2021) recommended

further research on leadership coaching to understand how its capacities may be integrated into schools to facilitate continuous learning communities such as PLCs.

A similar study to Huggins et al. (2021) undertaken by Hayes and Burkett (2020) assessed coaching programs sponsored by school districts to enhance the PD of leaders. The coaching program lasted one year, focusing on assessing its impact on career advancement and growth in a leadership capacity among assistant school leaders. Interviews, focus groups, and observations were used to collect qualitative data from 26 teachers in Texas. Findings showed increased leaders' confidence in their leadership skills and abilities after coaching training. These findings emphasize the importance of supportive schools in creating an enabling environment for school leaders' PD to ready them when transitioning into school principals and empowering them to support teachers' career growth. Lochmiller and Mancinelli (2019) added that coaching facilitates principals to engage in in-depth observational practices, shared responsibilities, and external support to improve their instructional competency.

However, Cutrer-Párraga et al. (2021) shared that successful leadership coaching must address potential resistance that some teachers show towards professional growth. Addressing teacher resistance to change would facilitate school principals' literacy coaching efforts, which is key to developing ECE teachers' skills. In their qualitative study with 5 literacy coaches and 6 kindergarten teachers, Cutrer-Párraga et al. (2021) found that although relationship-focused strategies are important for all teachers, they are essential for low-implementing, initially resistant teachers. Further, low-implementing, initially resistant teachers of instructional practices would benefit from leadership

coaching. Although building relationships between teachers and school leaders requires trust, improving their teaching skills demands navigating resistance and bridging differences between coaches and teachers (Cutrer-Párraga et al., 2021). Brandmo et al. (2019) added that effective leadership coaching should focus on building trust, establishing authentic interactions, and formulating a teacher-centered focus to achieve instructional learning. School principals who have experienced transformational learning from coaching as a PD strategy are likelier to create instructional practice cultures at their lead schools. Besides teacher resistance, Wieczorek and Manard (2018) noted that leadership coaching would be fully implemented in schools where leaders address budgetary constraints and create a clear vision. Also, trust is key to successful leadership coaching to sustain instructional practices, mentoring, and teachers' PD in schools.

Special Education Incompetency

Additional concerns about the principal's lack of effective support for teachers' PD emerge from the special education needs. Early childhood learning is often vital in identifying the special learning needs of some children who join mainstream kindergarten (Kraft, 2016; Stites et al., 2021). However, most teachers, including school directors and principals, have limited knowledge of identifying and supporting children with unidentified learning disabilities. Stauffer (2018) noted that principals' lack of instructional practice competency in special learning environments implies that they are unable to support ECE teachers in mainstream facilities to advance their careers. Specifically, mainstream teachers are less likely to express interest in advancing their teaching skills to include special learning needs (Stauffer, 2018). According to Stites et al.

(2021), most principals fail to support teachers' achievement of effective inclusion due to negative attitudes from some mainstream teachers regarding limited knowledge of teaching learners with special needs.

A qualitative study by Stauffer (2018) examined principals' perceptions of instructional leadership and special education competencies in PreK-12 settings in Nevada. Findings from interview sessions with 11 principals showed that principals lacked confidence in implementing special education and were unskilled in assisting teachers with instructional practices relevant to support families and children with special needs. Considering the need to enhance student achievement, Stauffer (2018) recommended supporting instructional leadership with professional advancement for school leaders and teachers to equip them to identify and offer support for students with special needs. Such a PD approach would ensure students with disabilities are identified on time and placed in relevant special learning programs. It would also enable teachers to learn how to design teaching strategies to meet their tailored needs.

Stites et al. (2021) conducted a qualitative study to assess the experiences of preservice, ECE, and general education teachers and determine the level of support they receive from their school leaders. Findings from the interview responses showed that effective inclusive teaching continues to be an area of uncertainty for practicing mainstream and preservice teachers. However, teachers in special education settings receive some support and help from their leaders regarding PD in special education courses. In all cases, teachers noted that introduction to special education courses was a mandatory teaching qualification. However, during preservice training, no field

experience was made available to teachers in mainstream settings (Stites et al., 2021). More teachers in mainstream schools than peers in special learning facilities reported low competency among school leaders when working with children with disabilities. Due to a lack of pedagogical skills and instructional practices in special education settings, school leaders rarely emphasized PD in this area. However, special education teachers were more likely to get mentor teachers who facilitate their pedagogical skills in special education (Stites et al., 2021). These findings further emphasize the need for career development and training for mainstream school principals to position them in offering relevant support to ECE teachers' PD, especially in special education skills and knowledge.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 and the Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 emphasize the need for teachers to have relevant insights into instructional responsibilities. However, Kraft (2016) noted that these laws do not necessitate additional training for teachers or instructional practice for principals in special education. A key challenge related to failure among teachers is to deliver instruction to meet the expected student needs since principals lack knowledge in special education instructional leadership. Qualitative meta-analysis research by Kraft (2016) showed that principals need training on instructional leadership in special education. Additional training would enable school leaders to address growing challenges in special education instructional practice, meet the training needs of instructional leadership, and offer recommendations to address the identified needs and challenges (Kraft, 2016). The findings from the surveyed literature emphasize the need to ensure ECE leaders have

some level of competency in instructional leadership in special learning needs. Such training would enable them to help teachers manage students with special needs.

Summary and Conclusions

In the current chapter, I synthesized past studies on how ECE directors support teachers' PD. Insights from the reviewed studies showed that school leaders are largely optimistic toward instructional leadership. Also, school leaders in early childhood settings tend to have positive perceptions toward supporting teachers in advancing their professional skills and knowledge. Teachers who receive support from their leaders are more likely to formulate effective teaching methods and design curricula to meet needed goals and learning outcomes.

Despite the positive outcomes associated with principals' support for teachers' PD, findings from the existing literature revealed potential shortcomings among school leaders that hinder them from supporting teachers. Key challenges identified from the study include lack of preparedness, low self-efficacy, and less commitment to facilitate professional learning within preschool settings. Also, school leaders face challenges in creating a culture of PD, potentially due to limited resources and financial support. There are issues in the facilitation of PLCs and pedagogical implementation. School leaders have difficulty facilitating teacher self-efficacy and motivation in organizational support and school culture. It was also found that teachers lack instructional coaching, feedback, and adequate communication from the school leader. This leads to trust-building issues between the teacher and the school leader. Poor communication and delayed leader feedback hinder teachers' learning goals due to a lack of clear career development goals.

Most school leaders also express concerns that their qualifications are limited to mainstream settings while lacking experience when supporting teachers to help students with special needs.

While school directors may positively support teachers' PD, most are inadequately prepared for this role of facilitating adult learning. Most school leaders do not have formal structured instructional leadership training and/or coaching initiatives. This results in challenges in providing active learning that applies to teacher's needs. This presents the need for further research.

The next chapter presents the research methods and strategies used to collect data to answer the formulated RQs.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' and school leaders' perceptions about the challenges faced in providing support for teachers' instructional needs for improved teaching performance at the early childhood level in a segment of the northeast United States. Insights from past studies showed that school leaders in ECE settings encounter challenges when supporting teachers (Barahal & Humberto, 2020). Specific concerns alluded to a lack of training on instructional leadership practices, meaning they cannot help teachers (Brandmo et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2020). As such, there was a need to conduct this study and investigate the perceptions of ECE leaders and teachers regarding challenges that ECE directors experience when providing instructional support and PD to teachers.

The specific purpose of this methodology chapter is to present and discuss the methods and approaches used to collect data from ECE school leaders and teachers. The chapter first addresses the research design and its rationale. Further, I discuss the role of the researcher, potential misperceptions about the topic, the possible impact that my role might have on findings, and approaches to reduce researcher bias. Subsequent sections then detail this study's key methodology, focusing on issues such as research setting, participant selection, sampling technique, instrumentation, and procedures for participant recruitment. The data analysis plan is also detailed, followed by strategies used in the data analysis plan. Potential threats to validity are also discussed, in addition to the ethical procedures related to this study. The chapter concludes with a summary of the key methods used in the data collection process.

Research Design and Rationale

The RQs that guided this study were as follows:

RQ1: What are teachers' perceptions about school leader support for their instructional needs and for improving their teaching performance at the early childhood level in a segment of the northeast United States?

RQ2: What are school leaders' perceptions of the challenges in providing support for teachers' instructional needs for improved teaching performance at the early childhood level in a segment of the northeast United States?

This study used a qualitative case study design to explore the formulated research aim and questions. Yazan (2015) reported that case study design is a commonly used qualitative research design in educational settings. The other qualitative research designs include grounded theory, ethnography, biography, and case studies (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), although the focus of this study was only limited to case study research design. According to Yin (2018), case study design focuses on assessing an individual's lived experience with a phenomenon under study. In the current research, the case study research design was appropriate because the information was collected from ECE school principals or leaders and teachers who were requested to share their opinions about providing or receiving support on PD.

Further, in this study, the goal was to understand the structure and meaning of the experience from the perspective of ECE leaders tasked with supporting the career advancement of teachers. Also, I sought to understand teachers' perceptions of their ECE leaders' competency and ability to support them in their PD. Valentine et al. (2018)

shared that case study understanding and insights result from questioning participants through deep questioning, reflective wondering, focused reminiscing, and sensitive interpretation of meanings that individuals attach to their shared experiences.

In light of the above considerations, it may be noted that the rationale for selecting the case study research design was informed by the need to understand the meaning of ECE teachers' and leaders' experience with PD. As such, the purpose of the current study aligned with the primary construct of qualitative designs that focus on assessing what people have experienced in the past and how they make sense and attach meaning to such experiences (see Webb & Welsh, 2019). Considering these assessments, a case study design is considered more appropriate to allow the researcher to maintain the consciousness of the individual participants while seeking to comprehend their firsthand experiences on the topic (Creely, 2018).

According to Burkholder et al. (2016), case study design provides some advantages, including helping examine peoples' experiences and the meaning they attach to experiences and allows a researcher to adjust to new ideas and issues as they emerge. Also, a case study design largely contributes to new theory development, and collecting relevant data is often natural, giving participants a conducive environment to share in-depth insights about the topic (Burkholder et al., 2016). Despite its advantages, Creswell and Creswell (2018) shared that a researcher should be cautious about case study design due to potential limitations such as considerable time and resources. Moreover, it may be challenging to systematically compare interview data because of varied and subjective participant responses to the same question.

In this study, the choice of case study design also aligned with qualitative research, where the focus is to capture nonnumeric data using interviews. A qualitative study enables a researcher to undertake an in-depth, detailed, and richer assessment of the topic under study (Bryman, 2016). As applied to this study, collecting nonnumerical data enabled me to collect important insights about ECE leadership support for teachers' PD. The qualitative aspect concentrated on theoretical findings based on the study questions, focusing on a holistic view of the participants being studied to comprehend their real-world experience with the support of teachers' PD.

Qualitative case studies emphasize contextualizing, understanding, examining, self-analysis, and theory construction (Cohen et al., 2018). The choice of this qualitative method also aligned with sample size selection and the need to attain data saturation. The estimated sample size was small, ranging between 12 and 14 participants. The data analysis was also nonstatistical, with the constructs examined being an individual teacher or ECE leader experience supporting teachers' PD. The initial focus was to develop a preliminary comprehension of strategies used to support career growth among teachers in ECE settings and to formulate effective decision-making about the problem. Therefore, qualitative case study design was more appropriate than quantitative methods to answer formulated RQs.

The quantitative research method was not used in this study because it is not appropriate in understanding the human elements of this research. Key human elements captured in this study included feelings, opinions, views, and perceptions about teachers' PD and the help they receive from ECE leaders or directors. Moreover, quantitative

research is limited to capturing numerical data, key trends, measurable variables, and statistics on a study topic to establish correlations between variables (Clark et al., 2019). Quantitative research also focuses on establishing generalizable findings from a large sample size or large targeted population groups (Bryman, 2016). Therefore, quantitative research was not appropriate in this study or in helping me answer the formulated RQs. The rationale for the qualitative research method over quantitative research was informed by its potential advantages.

Davies (2020) shared that qualitative study enables a researcher to collect in-depth, richer, and more detailed data about the study problem. Detailed and comprehensive participant responses are crucial to understanding and making sense of their experiences in line with the case study research design (Davies, 2020). Creswell and Creswell (2018) added that the nature of qualitative data is strongly linked to human elements such as feelings, opinions, and views that help a researcher to construct the meaning participants have towards a given topic. As a result, the researcher's position to answer the why and how questions are impossible to explore through quantitative research methods. Flick (2019) observed that qualitative data move beyond mere numerical descriptions of quantitative research and seek to attach meaning to the observed quantitative trends.

Ghauri et al. (2020) reported that during the interview sessions, a researcher creates a collaborative and engaging environment with the participants. Participants relax and respond more openly (Ghauri et al., 2020). Thus, there is a strong collaborative process with the open environment enabling participants to share new information, detail

their responses, and potentially open new themes about the topic that a researcher might have understated, omitted, or overlooked (Ghauri et al., 2020; Mohajan, 2018). In this study, I created a warm, friendly, and engaging environment with ECE directors and teachers during the interview sessions to encourage them to share their experiences regarding support for teachers' PD. However, qualitative research has potential limitations, and the findings should be interpreted cautiously (Bryman, 2016; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Davies, 2020).

A limitation of qualitative research relates to the small sample size often recruited to examine the study problem. In the current qualitative case study design, 12 interviewees participated. Hennink et al. (2019) reported that a sample of eight to 20 participants is enough to achieve saturation in a qualitative study. However, findings from a small sample size may not necessarily be transferable to other settings, thereby limiting their application (Davies, 2020). Compared to quantitative research, collecting interview responses may be time-consuming and increase the cost of conducting primary research (Davies, 2020; Heotis, 2020). Subjective responses during data collection and researcher influence may also introduce bias in the final findings. Participants' experiences may also vary from person to person, making it difficult to systematically compare the interview responses.

Role of the Researcher

As a teacher, school leader, and current researcher, I was uniquely positioned to interview school leaders within the ECE settings to understand how they support teachers' PD and to discover teachers' perceptions about the support they receive.

Through preestablished contacts, I was in a critical position to engage with teachers and instructors to understand how they perceive the support they receive or do not receive from school directors, leaders, or principals. The preestablished contacts included colleagues from different schools interacted with during previous meetings and training. While the participants were school leaders and teachers like me, we did not work in the same school. However, we all worked in various schools within the same district. Therefore, my relationship with them had no influence or power relations that could have influenced their responses.

Despite my experiences with teachers' PD as an educator, I had potential misperceptions about the topic that might have introduced bias and influenced final findings. Based on my experience, I believe that ECE directors have failed to provide needed support to facilitate teachers' PD. The lack of programs for mandatory qualification before becoming an ECE leader has further worsened the problem as leaders either lack relevant training on instructional leadership practices or show laxity due to a lack of accountability mechanisms to ensure teachers receive relevant support. Therefore, I expressed a personal concern that ECE leaders must show more commitment or deliberate efforts in acquiring instructional leadership skills while motivating teachers to advance in their careers. Also, ECE settings need to create professional advancement programs for teachers and educate school leaders on achieving key goals of such career advancement initiatives.

Considering that this topic is of significant interest and passion to me, there was a need to embrace strategies to avoid bias due to strong emotional attachments during data

collection, analysis, and interpretation. The bracketing technique was used in this study to enable me to manage potential biases that might impact the findings. According to Gregory (2019), bracketing enables qualitative researchers to mitigate possible damaging effects of personal misconceptions about the topic. Bracketing may be achieved in three ways: dialogue, taking memos or having in place a bracketing journal, and reflexivity. Dialogue has been achieved through detailing my personal experience, insights, and potential misperceptions about the topic (see Gregory, 2019; McNarry et al., 2019).

A journal was used in detailing data collection, analysis, and reporting, helping me focus on how the insights collected from the participants contribute to understanding the topic under study (see Gregory, 2019). Reflexivity ensured I turned the inquiry process back to myself and recognized or took responsibility for my situatedness within the study and the effect such situatedness may have had on questions being asked, participants being researched, data being collected, and its analysis and interpretation (see McNarry et al., 2019). Undertaking such approaches helped enhance the robustness of the findings and reduce potential bias. As later discussed under trustworthiness, I also used the four strategies Schwandt et al. (2007) recommended to reduce personal bias and ensure the robustness of the findings. The four strategies include information credibility, dependability, transferability, and conformability (Schwandt et al., 2007).

Methodology

In the current section, I detail the methodology used to recruit participants and collect data to answer the formulated RQ. The section details the research setting, research population, and participant selection. Further, procedures for recruitment,

participant selection, and participation are presented. Also, the interview instrument used in the data collection process is presented and discussed. The section concludes with a detailed discussion of the data analysis plan focusing on coding and thematic analysis.

Participant Selection

The research setting was located or limited to a segment of the northeast United States. In this segment, approximately 87 ECE learning centers largely cover five regions. These ECE settings serve approximately 36,350 preschool, prekindergarten, and kindergarten children. There are approximately 1,500 teachers in these facilities and over 300 school leaders. However, the population of research interest was limited to 15 school leaders and 21 ECE teachers drawn from five schools across a segment of the northeast United States. Thus, the population of research interest was limited to 36 school leaders and ECE teachers drawn from five areas within the segment of the northeast United States. The final sample size included 12 school leaders (seven ECE teachers, three principals, a school director, and a head of department). Because it would have been difficult to interview all the 1,800 participants from the ECE settings across the segment of the northeast United States, volunteer participants were recruited into the study. Although participants volunteered for the research study, they must have met the selected criteria.

Despite its potential shortcomings, Valentine et al. (2018) reported that purposive sampling has a major advantage in diversifying the sampling process. In addition, purposive sampling is highly cost-effective and time-effective because the researcher uses already established contacts and participants with relevant knowledge on the topic

(Davies, 2020). Bryman (2016) elaborated that purposive sampling may be the only suitable technique when there is a limited number of primary data sources or participants who may participate in a study. Creswell and Creswell (2018) added that the purposive sampling technique effectively examines humanistic situations where the discovery of meaning primarily benefits from an intuitive approach, like when making deductions from case study research. As such, purposive sampling was considered an effective sampling technique to facilitate participant selection for this study, as further detailed below. The inclusion criteria were limited to (a) ECE directors, leaders, principals, and ECE teachers; (b) those who had a work experience of at least 2 years in the same ECE facility, assuming that years of experience translated to more knowledge about the topic; (c) those who participated or intended to participate in career advancement; (d) those knowledgeable or not knowledgeable in instructional leadership practices; and (e) those who resided and worked in the segment of the northeast United States. This last item was determined by verbally asking participants whether they resided in the segment of the northeast United States. The fourth item was determined by verbally asking participants whether they were familiar with instructional leadership practices. The specific focus was limited to recruiting 12 participants.

The sample size of the 12 participants was informed by the need to achieve data saturation and ensure methodological rigor. Cobern and Adams (2020) reported that methodological rigor ensures a detailed analysis of the procedures used to draw conclusions from a study. By contrast, data saturation focuses on collecting in-depth, rich, and detailed information from participants to the extent that no new information or

themes would emerge, even with the addition of more participants (Cobern & Adams, 2020). Creswell and Creswell (2018) recommended that in a qualitative study, recruiting 8-20 interviewees is enough for rich rigor in data collection. In this study, the use of 8-12 was anchored on attaining rigor and considered enough to examine directors' perceived leadership influence in ECE settings in supporting teachers' PD.

Instrumentation

Semistructured interview questions (see Appendix A and Appendix B) were used to collect participant responses on how directors in ECE settings support teachers' PD and how teachers perceive school leader support for their instructional needs in improving their teaching performance. Two separate semistructured interview questions were used to collect data from the participants. The interview questions were researcher-produced and informed by three studies on concerns about inadequate school leadership support to help teachers in ECE settings (Barahal & Humberto, 2020; Carranza, 2019; Smith et al., 2019). The same interview questions used for school leaders were modified to collect perceptions from the teachers. Since the three studies are publicly accessible, there was no need for permission to use the interview questions.

A 5-item interview question list (see Appendix A) was used to collect responses from teachers. The five questions were used to answer RQ1, which was created to explore the following: What are teachers' perceptions about school leader support for their instructional needs and for improving their teaching performance at the early childhood level in a segment of the northeast United States? Teachers were asked to share their views about the concepts of teacher learning and PD, whether their ECE directors

offer them support in advancing their careers, and whether they think their ECE leaders have relevant insights about adult learning in instructional leadership practice, and how this competency informs the level of support they receive in their PD (Barahal & Humberto, 2020; Carranza, 2019). Teachers were asked what is their perception of the support they currently receive from school leaders to create an understanding of what they would like to receive. This provided a basis for whether school leaders believe they are prepared to provide the support expected.

A 10-item interview question list (Appendix B) was used to collect responses from school leaders. The 10 interview questions were used to answer RQ2, which was formulated to investigate the following: What are school leaders' perceptions of the challenges in providing support for teachers' instructional needs for improved teaching performance at the early childhood level in a segment of the northeast United States? School leaders were asked to share their views and duties as instructional leaders within ECE settings and describe their current leadership skills and knowledge in providing support to teachers in ECE settings. Also, leaders were encouraged to share their professional qualifications, career advancement, and how educational programs have readied them to understand how adult learners learn and whether they are well-equipped and competent in supporting teachers' PD (Smith et al., 2019). Leaders were also asked to share whether they receive any training support and if they have relevant skills to help their teachers advance in their careers (Carranza, 2019).

The use of semistructured interview questions as data collection tools was essential in this research. Bryman (2016) reported that using interview questions in

qualitative data collection allows interviewers to explore various angles of the question to understand the study problem. Interviews have also been noted to generate a better response rate compared to mailed questions. Importantly, people who may not write, read, or be conversant with the language have access to question clarification, breaking the language barrier and contributing to appropriate responses (Ghauri et al., 2020). During the data collection process, participants gave voluntary consent before participating in the study.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

A predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria discussed in the Participant Selection section were used to recruit participants for this study. These participants were recruited from five ECE schools (pseudonyms A, B, C, D, and E) located in a segment of the northeast United States. The choice of these schools was informed by their geographical proximity to me and the existing contacts with teachers and some leaders or directors of the schools.

To recruit participants, email and phone calls were sent to five ECE settings in a northeast United States segment. The emails contained a letter with the research purpose and procedures for this proposed study. The informed consent approved in the IRB process was attached to the emails. The IRB-approved consent form highlighted ethical issues emerging from the study, including participant privacy, data confidentiality, and data handling. Participants were informed that participating in the study is voluntary and they may leave the study at any time without any repercussions. The consent form included detailed information about the study, explained why participants had been

considered, and asked for their voluntary consent before participation (see Ghauri et al., 2020).

All the participants who expressed interest in the study were contacted, and relevant plans were initiated for subsequent interview sessions. Participants were encouraged to ask questions about the study using the phone number and email contacts provided. Participants who met the inclusion criteria were contacted via telephone to discuss the details of the study and the interview questions. The first 12 participants to fill in consent forms were considered for the study. Any additional participants were thanked for their interest and informed that the study had been closed.

If, for any possible challenges, the initial recruitment process failed to capture the 12 participants, additional emails would be sent to other ECE schools in the regions (i.e., ECE settings F, G, H, I, and J). Under this follow-up plan, the researcher would consider various measures to recruit more participants. Key measures would include resending emails to other ECE settings. Flyers would be posted to physical and virtual community announcement boards such as daycare centers and virtual bulletin boards related to education. Such follow-up measures would have helped the researcher collect more than enough participants for the interview sessions.

Data Collection Plan

Data collection commenced after obtaining Walden University's IRB approval number for this study, 04-14-22-0173307, and electronic informed consent from the participants. Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, all the interviews were conducted through online data collection (Zoom). According to Miller et al. (2020), online data

collection through interviews is more cost-effective and time-efficient than face-to-face or paper-and-pencil data collection techniques. Also, online data collection minimizes physical contact and reduces the risk of COVID-19 spread. For participants, online platforms ensure they experience and express their feelings openly, resulting in detailed responses (Miller et al., 2020). In this study, the semistructured interview questions were used to build rapport with all participants while ensuring a flexible approach to data collection. Specifically, participants were encouraged to share richer and more detailed personal experiences regarding the support that ECE directors give teachers toward their PD.

Every interview session was scheduled conveniently for all the participants to ensure sufficient time for their responses. Before participating in the interviews, participants were notified 48 hours before the interview sessions. Each interview session was expected to last between 30 minutes and 40 minutes. The participants' privacy was assured by conducting all the interviews in a private room to reduce interruptions and allow for the audio recording of the participant's responses (Bryman, 2016). However, before recording the responses, participants were informed that their replies would be recorded for further transcription. Each participant was asked the same set of questions, except that further interpretation may be made, or questions rephrased to ensure everyone understood the aim of each question.

Upon completing the interviews, I thanked all the participants for volunteering for the study. Participants were informed that further follow-up will be made if additional clarification is needed. Also, the participants were notified that a transcript of their

responses would be available for review to ensure every detail was captured to avoid misunderstanding or misstating their responses (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). After completing member checking, the participants were released from the study. Subsequently, the researcher completed observation notes to ensure optimal recall and accuracy of each interview response. The collected audio responses were transcribed verbatim and coded using synonyms. The coded data was saved in a password-protected computer to ensure no unauthorized access.

Data Analysis Plan

Verbatim transcribed data were kept from the audio responses on a Microsoft Word file. The 6-step qualitative data analysis process, as cited in Campbell et al. (2021), originally proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), was used to code and conduct a thematic analysis of the raw data to identify key trends related to ECE directors' support for teachers' PD. The 6-step thematic analysis process entails becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing created themes, defining themes, and writing findings (Campbell et al., 2021).

Step 1 focused on data familiarization. Campbell et al. (2021) recommended that a researcher read the raw data and re-read the transcripts in this step. Reading through raw data ensures that a researcher is familiar with the entire data body of responses before commencing data analysis. Importantly, this step includes making initial notes and recording early impressions, capturing key sentences, phrases, or sentences related to the study. Campbell et al. (2021) added that in some cases, a researcher may also reply to the

recorded audio to ensure a thorough understanding of the participants' responses. Understanding collected data is key to success in subsequent thematic analysis steps.

Step 2 entailed generating initial codes. Campbell et al. (2021) recommended that a researcher start to organize captured data meaningfully and systematically. Through coding, a researcher potentially reduces a substantial amount of information often characteristic of qualitative studies into small and manageable categories of relevant meaning. A specific coding method will depend on a researcher's perspective and type of qualitative questions. This study addressed specific RQs related to perceptions of leadership influence on teacher PD. Thus, a theoretical thematic analysis was conducted instead of an inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Specifically, each data segment with relevant information was coded, or anything interesting to this topic from interview responses was captured. However, if inductive analysis were used, the focus would be on using line-by-line coding to code every single line (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Bryman, 2016). Further, open coding was used, implying that there would be no pre-set codes; instead, the codes would be developed and modified as the researcher worked through the coding process (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Step 3 focused on searching for themes. In this study, a theme refers to a pattern that captures interesting or significant information about the RQ or data. Braun and Clark (2019) explained that there are no fast and hard rules on what constitutes a theme. Instead, a theme is identified by its significance. For example, if there is a small data set like a short focus group, there may be an overlap between the coding stage and the process of identifying preliminary themes. Codes with similar and close meanings are

grouped to form a single theme (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Also, initially created codes may be split, deleted, or modified to have consistent themes.

Step 4 related to reviewing themes. In this phase, the researcher reviews, modifies, and develops themes identified in Step 3. The focus is to scrutinize initial themes and assess whether they make sense. At this point, the researcher gathered all data from across the body of text to ensure their relevance to each theme. The process was achieved by the cut-and-paste function in Microsoft Word. Campbell et al. (2021) recommended reading the associated data with each theme and considering whether the data supports specific themes. Further, the researcher compared themes to assess whether they work in the context of the entire body of data to make systematic comparisons on participants who identified the same theme.

Step 5 dealt with defining themes. The phrase relates to the final process of analyzing themes, and the purpose is to define and refine what every theme is about (Campbell et al., 2021). Important questions include exploring what every theme communicates and, if there are sub-themes, how they relate and interact with the main theme. Also, a researcher may ask how each theme relates to the other in a broader sense of the RQs. Therefore, continuous refining of themes is necessary to enhance the formulated themes to ensure clear working definitions. In the process, the successful identification of themes results in creating a unified story from the data emerging from the interview responses (Campbell et al., 2021).

Step 6 related to writing up findings. At the end of the thematic analysis process, the focus is to write a report on findings, often a dissertation or a journal article. This

study focuses on writing dissertation findings on perceptions of leadership influence on teacher PD. Campbell et al. (2021) shared that a report from the thematic analysis should be anchored on vivid and compelling examples from the interview responses. The examples may include quoting verbatim information, sentences, or interview excerpts supporting the identified themes. Identified themes should also mirror the RQs and contrast findings to past literature and conceptual framework to identify areas of agreement and contention with past studies on the topic (Campbell et al., 2021). Importantly, a final report should be presented to convince the target audience or readers regarding the merit and validity of the qualitative data findings (Campbell et al., 2021).

Trustworthiness

Unlike quantitative research focusing on data validity and reliability, qualitative research findings are anchored on establishing trustworthiness (Nyirenda et al., 2020). The aim of establishing the trustworthiness of a qualitative study is to support the findings and ensure that the findings are worth paying attention to among researchers and practitioners (Schwandt et al., 2007). As such, trustworthiness establishes a rationale behind which the findings of a qualitative study are acceptable. In this section, strategies that were used to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings are discussed. The trustworthiness criteria used in this study were anchored on the four constructs developed by Schwandt et al. (2007). The four constructs include ensuring credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the study findings.

Credibility

Credibility denotes how a study's findings accurately capture the participants' experience with the case under study (Gill et al., 2018; Schwandt et al., 2007). According to Amin et al. (2020), credibility seeks to describe and establish the internal validity of the findings. Various strategies were used to ensure the credibility of this study. These strategies include adopting a detailed data collection plan, naturalistic inquiry, deep engagement, member checking, narrative truth, rival explanations, thick description, research reflexivity, and researcher experience (Amin et al., 2020; Gill et al., 2018). Adopting a formulated data collection and analysis plan established the authenticity of the findings. Previous sections have elaborately presented the use of semistructured interview questions in data collection, data collection planning, and data analysis planning that ensured the credibility of this study.

Fundamental knowledge of naturalistic inquiry was also applied to establish credibility. According to Cloutier and Ravasi (2021), naturalistic inquiry ensures critical realism is established where the essence is to collect data from participants in their natural settings. Interviewing ECE leaders and teachers ensured the inquiry process captures data from real participants who have experienced the case under study. Therefore, the participants interviewed helped understand the study problem and helped formulate solutions that may be applied in other settings (Amin et al., 2020; Gill et al., 2018). Deep engagement was also used while collecting data to allow participants sufficient time to share their experiences, document their insights, and listen to their attitudes toward the topic (Amin et al., 2020).

Member checking further increased the authenticity of the final interview transcripts. Specifically, participants checked the transcribed data to ensure their responses were not misstated, omitted, or understated (Gill et al., 2018; Schwandt et al., 2007). Narrative truth implies that the researcher will represent the authenticity of the interviewees' comments, reflections, perspectives, and stories during the thematic analysis process. Such an approach ensures the researcher minimizes personal bias during the data collection (Amin et al., 2020). Rival explanations or negative cases that emerged during the study concerning patterns that do not align with the study were also explored concerning the potential impact they might have on the study (Amin et al., 2020).

Researcher reflexivity ensured constant self-awareness about how findings from interviews unfold, documenting emerging themes based on participant responses as opposed to personal misperceptions (Gill et al., 2018). As noted under the researcher's positionality, using a reflexive journal would help clarify the lens through which the social world of the participants will be understood while acknowledging how personal background might influence data collection and analysis (Schwandt et al., 2007). The thick description would also ensure those insights from participants are described in a detailed and rich manner (Amin et al., 2020; Gill et al., 2018).

Transferability

Schwandt et al. (2007) described transferability as the degree to which findings of a study apply to future research, other settings, practice, and policy. In this case, transferability relates to the generalizability of the findings. Gill et al. (2018) elaborated that transferability seeks to address external validity issues in a study. This study

achieved transferability using key strategies, ensuring a thick description, and sampling sufficiency (Schwandt et al., 2007). A thick description ensures sufficient information is provided on the background data upon which the study findings are anchored.

Nyirenda et al. (2020) noted that the greater the detailed description of the case study, the more meaningful the findings become when exploring the topic under study. Sampling sufficiency establishes the findings and their application to other settings. Sampling sufficiency denotes both the sample size and the suitability of the selected sample to collect relevant information on the study. This study ensured sampling sufficiency through purposive sampling using predefined criteria to ensure only participants with relevant knowledge about ECE directors' support for teachers' PD were included. Moreover, the sample size of 12 participants ensured enough participants in the study to reach data saturation and collect enough data and themes to extensively answer the formulated study questions.

Dependability

Dependability may be defined as the degree to which the study procedures have been documented and are reliable in line with the formulated study aims and objectives (Schwandt et al., 2007). Dependability was achieved through various strategies such as conducting audit trails, providing evidence, in-depth methodological description, data analysis plan, clear aligning, and peer debriefing (Amin et al., 2020; Gill et al., 2018; Schwandt et al., 2007). An audit trail ensured elaborate documentation of the inquiry process as discussed under the research methodology, research design, and rationale through case study (Schwandt et al., 2007). Further, evidence was provided to support the

findings using full interview transcripts, elaborate documentation of the data collection processes, and the data analysis plan (Gill et al., 2018; Schwandt et al., 2007).

An in-depth methodological discussion provides a comprehensive record of how data will be gathered, transcribed, coded, and thematic analysis process to identify key findings of the study. Schwandt et al. (2007) shared that meticulous description increases the study's soundness, which may be useful in future research. Gill et al. (2018) reported that records of the data analysis procedure might include coding schemes, codebooks, documenting initial primary and secondary codes, and examples from the datasets, including verbatim transcripts of interview excerpts. Clear alignment should also elaborate on key study objectives, problem statement, RQs, research design, and methodology (Gill et al., 2018; Schwandt et al., 2007)

Peer debriefing was also used to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, where the researcher consulted with mentors or experienced qualitative researchers to discuss interview responses and receive feedback. Peer debriefing occurred before data collection, during data collection, and after completing the study.

Confirmability

Rose and Johnson (2020) defined confirmability as other researchers' ability to corroborate and confirm the reported qualitative findings. In this study, confirmability was developed through strategies such as coding, providing detailed evidence, intercoder reliability, researcher reflexivity, detailed methodological descriptions, identifying the shortcomings in study methods, and identifying the researcher’s assumptions (Schwandt et al., 2007). Coding entailed presenting a well-defined and elaborate approach to data

analysis, naming patterns identified from thematic analysis, and detailing how the codes emerged (Rose & Johnson, 2020). Key patterns identified in the study included ideas, stories, and narratives shared by participants about their perceptions of leadership influence on teacher PD. The ideas were presented and supported using keywords, phrases, or sentences supporting shared stories (Rose & Johnson, 2020).

Providing ample evidence to support findings further contributed to results confirmability. Nyirenda et al. (2020) reported that findings claimed should be supported using interview excerpts and verbatim responses from participants during the interview sessions. Moreover, intercoder reliability may be used to enhance confirmability where the coded data may be assessed by two individuals to inductively develop a list of codes and their definitions and compare emerging themes (Gill et al., 2018). Two individuals were not available for this comparison. Admission of the researcher's assumptions and beliefs helped identify the potential impact on interpreting findings. Assumptions embraced in this study hold that the participants voluntarily shared their experiences honestly and truthfully. Also, the researcher assumed that the shared responses reflect current practice regarding leadership influence on teachers' PD in ECE settings.

Researcher reflexivity was used to maintain awareness of how findings unfold and how documentation of emerging patterns emerges (Schwandt et al., 2007). Reflective commentary further enabled the researcher to state the lens through which teachers' experience with PD emerged and their perceptions about ECE leadership support. Importantly, researcher reflexivity was the key to evaluating how personal background may influence data interpretation (Gill et al., 2018). An in-depth description of the

research methods further ensured the integrity of the findings while allowing other researchers to examine and confirm the findings of this study (Amin et al., 2020). Detailing methodological approaches enabled the researcher to present the integrity of findings and their scrutiny by others (Schwandt et al., 2007). Finally, recognizing shortcomings in the study's methods and their potential effects allowed readers to interpret the scope of the findings and the extent to which they could be generalized to other settings.

Threats to Validity

Different factors might affect the validity of the findings. These factors include participant selection, experimental mortality, location, instrumentation, testing, history, and maturation (Creswell, 2017; Ghauri et al., 2020). Participant selection and recruitment might have interviewees who have diverse characteristics, and their differences might impact the findings. These differences include attitude, age, fluency, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and knowledge about the topic (Ghauri et al., 2020). Bryman (2017) shared that diverse participant demographic characteristics result in varied responses that are largely subjective based on personal experience, making it difficult to systematically compare the participants' responses.

Experimental mortality might also affect findings due to the possible loss of potential participants due to family relocation, illness, or lack of time to participate in the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Absent during data collection of failure to complete interview sessions might also contribute to experimental mortality (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Location and site where data is collected might also impact the information

collection process, further influencing the findings (Ghauri et al., 2020). The instrumentation might also influence findings with changes in questions that might affect findings, with demographic factors such as ethnicity, gender, and language patterns contributing to potential bias (Cloutier & Ravasi, 2021).

Bryman (2016) reported that history also presents a potential threat to the validity of findings. For example, unexpected events might occur during the study that might alter the outcome or results of the study. Maturation further contributes to a negative impact on the validity of the findings, including possible changes in subjects during the study that may not be part of the study, such as changes due to experience, aging, education policy changes, and retirement (Cloutier & Ravasi, 2021). The participants' attitudes also threaten validity since their opinions and views about the topic might influence findings (Bryman, 2016; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Implementation might also become a potential threat to validity due to the personal bias of a researcher in favor of one research methodology over another (Ghauri et al., 2020).

Ethical Procedures

The involvement of human participants in this study raises potential ethical issues. These ethical issues include obtaining IRB approval, informed consent, privacy, data confidentiality, data handling, and information storage. Before initiating the data collection process, the researcher applied for IRB approval from the university (approval 04-14-22-0173307). DiGiacinto (2019) shared that IRB approval is vital to ensure human participants are not exposed to physical, emotional, psychological, or economic harm. In this study, the IRB approval detailed measures taken into consideration to avoid exposing

participants to potential harm during the data collection process (DiGiacinto, 2019). However, due to its non-experimental nature, participants who participated in this study were not exposed to any emotional, physical, or psychological harm.

Informed consent was also obtained from participants before participating in the interview sessions. All interviewees filled in an electronic consent form and were informed that participating in the study was voluntary (Ghauri et al., 2020). Participants were informed of their right to leave the study at any time without any negative consequences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Also, participants were assured that no deception or coercion was used during the data collection process. Participant privacy was maintained by coding the names of participants. The researcher did not collect personal information such as names, specific places of residence, and specific names of schools or workplaces (Bryman, 2016). Telephone numbers and emails were coded and kept secure in a password-protected computer and were not revealed during data reporting (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Data confidentiality was maintained by coding responses and collecting interviews in a safe and private room. Collected raw data was coded using synonyms and secured in a password-protected computer to avoid unauthorized access (Cloutier & Ravasi, 2021). Participants were assured that their responses would be kept safe, with their responses being a top priority. The raw transcripts were backed up to a flash drive for future reference or retrieval if the researcher's computer was lost or damaged. Ghauri et al. (2010) recommended that raw data should be stored for up to 5 years before being

destroyed or permanently deleted. By backing up raw data to a flash drive, it will be possible to securely store it for a period of up to 5 years before it is permanently deleted.

Summary

The purpose of the current methodology chapter was to discuss the methods and approaches used to collect data from ECE school directors and teachers to understand how they support teachers' PD. Specific focus has been anchored on detailing the qualitative case study research design and its rationale in helping answer the RQs. The role of the researcher, background knowledge about the topic, personal biases or misperceptions, and their effects on findings have been discussed, in addition to using measures such as bracketing to minimize personal bias. Specific methodology related to the study has also been discussed, detailing the research setting, participant selection, procedures for recruitment, semistructured interviews, and the data collection plan. Further, the chapter has discussed how raw data was coded and thematic analysis conducted to identify potential themes from the interview responses. Issues of trustworthiness and threats to validity have also been discussed, and possible ethical issues that might emerge during the study were discussed. The next chapter presents the study's findings, focusing on key themes identified from the interview responses from the participants.

Chapter 4: Results

In this chapter, I explore school leaders' and teachers' perceptions about the challenges faced in providing support for teachers' instructional needs for improved teaching performance. The interviews were collected from two sets of respondents, school leaders and teachers, which were thematically analyzed after framing relevant codes and themes in light of the RQs.

The two RQs that guided this study included the following:

RQ1: What are school leaders' perceptions of the challenges in providing support for teachers' instructional needs for improved teaching performance at the early childhood level in a segment of the northeast United States?

RQ2: What are teachers' perceptions about school leader support for their instructional needs and for improving their teaching performance at the early childhood level in a segment of the northeast United States?

The current chapter focuses on identifying and undertaking a thematic analysis after assessing the interview responses of 12 participants. I present the research setting where the study was conducted and identify the data collection, data analysis, results, and evidence of trustworthiness.

Setting

The setting of this study was limited to five schools located in a segment of the northeast United States. After sourcing the necessary consent, the interviews were conducted with five school leaders and seven ECE teachers recruited from five schools. The five school leaders included three school principals, a school director, and a head of

department. All interviews were conducted online via Zoom due to the cost, time-effectiveness, and convenience of the participants. Based on the informed consent received, each participant was assigned an alphanumeric code (see Table 1).

Table 1

Demographic Profiling of Interviewees

Participant #	Teacher/ leader	Present experience	Current experience (in years)	Past experience	Unique code
1	Teacher	ECE teacher	9	Teacher in 2 schools	T1
2	Teacher	Prekindergarten	8	English to Hispanic pupils at the elementary level	T2
3	Teacher	Kindergarten & playgroup therapy	5	Kindergarten and playgroup therapy pupils for 11 years	T3
4	Teacher	Kindergarten	7	Kindergarten for 13 years	T4
5	Teacher	Elementary school teacher	6	Prekindergarten children for 6 years (teaching students with Hispanic and English backgrounds)	T5
6	Teacher	Prekindergarten	7	Works in a special education integrated setting	T6
7	Teacher	Kindergarten	3	Preschool and kindergarten teacher for 5 years	T7
8	Leader	Principal	5	Middle school teacher for 15 years, deputy principal for 6 years	L1
9	Leader	Principal	7	Special education teacher and elementary school teacher for 21 years	L2
10	Leader	Principal	3	Middle school teacher for 12 years, head of department for 4 years, deputy principal for 7 years	L3
11	Leader	School director	3	Member of the school board, evaluates staff L5 performance and is involved in school policymaking.	L4
12	Leader	Head of department	4	Students' instructional program, maintains students' academic records and supervises the teaching and learning process within the department.	L5

Based on the interviewee profiling in Table 1, the interview participants possessed sound working experience and awareness about challenges faced in providing support for teachers' instructional needs for improved teaching performance.

Data Collection

Thirty-six email invitations were sent to 15 school leaders and 21 ECE teachers across five schools, requesting them to participate in the study. Initially, six responses were received from two principals and four ECE teachers. A follow-up email invitation was sent to the same schools. A total of four responses were obtained from two ECE teachers, the head of the department, and the school principal. A third and final reminder was sent to the five schools where two more participants (a school director and a school principal) responded to participate in the study. In total, 12 participants expressed interest in participating in the study (seven ECE teachers, three principals, one school director, and one head of department).

After obtaining informed consent, Zoom videoconferences were used for all interviews. Participants provided a call-back number and a time to call. Participants signed an email expressing their consent with initials. The background information, the study's objective, and its significance were provided to the participants. Regarding the research issues, participants were asked the applicable corresponding interview questions, found in Appendices A and B. All Zoom interviews were conducted at my residence in privacy. I recorded data on my password-protected PC. Each of the interviews lasted 30 to 40 minutes. To guarantee the accuracy of the final transcripts, I used member checking. Participants received a copy of their comments through email after the interviews. Each

participant was thanked for participating in the study and was told the interview had concluded.

Data Analysis

Once the data had been collected, the individual interviews were transcribed in Microsoft Word. Next, manual open coding was undertaken, which helped me identify the key themes and perform thematic analysis. I completed the manual coding by reading all the interview scripts, and the important keywords were identified and highlighted. The research objectives and questions were considered while marking these keywords. Codes refer to similar words, phrases, or terms expressed by participants during the interviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Davies, 2020). The codes with similar meanings were grouped to form initial codes. For example, keywords like "leader support," "instructional needs," "teaching performance," and "instructional leadership" were grouped because they aligned with teachers' perceptions about school leader support.

Once similar codes were identified after reading through the interviews, I systematically searched the body of texts from all 12 interviews to find all instances of similar phrases, terms, or words. Each time a term, word, or phrase was found from other raw interview texts, a copy was made using codes, and I examined its immediate context. In the process, the emergence of the relevant themes discussed in this study was identified by physically sorting the interview feedback into piles of similar codes with the same meaning. Themes are generally broader than codes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Davies, 2020). Combining several codes with similar meanings gives a single theme. Several codes with similar meanings were then combined to form a single theme. Three

main themes were identified from the thematic analysis process. Table 2 presents the identification of the initial codes and themes identified during open coding.

Table 2

Initial Codes and Themes

No.	Codes	Initial themes
1	Teacher learning; professional development; new skills; new information; career growth; skills development	Definition of teacher learning and professional development
2	Providing guidance; giving inspiration; mentorship and guidance; supporting teachers; organizing learning workshops	School leader's role in facilitating learning and professional development
3	Access to relevant information; learning courses; professional development opportunities; resource allocation	Support teachers receive from school leaders

Next, the codes with similar meanings were grouped to form final themes. A total of eight themes were identified from the thematic analysis process. The codes and initial themes from Table 2 were then named and defined to create the final themes, as shown in Table 3. Themes 1 to 5 helped to answer RQ1, while Themes 6 to 8 helped answer RQ2.

Key findings showed that ECE teachers had a generally positive perception of school leadership's support for their instructional needs. As a result, there was increasing improvement in teachers' performance within early childhood settings. However, school leaders perceived that while they focused on assisting their teachers in working towards the set objectives in ECE settings, there was a need for more support from school administrators regarding leadership training on how to help ECE teachers as adult learners remain inadequate.

Table 3

Main Themes Identified From the Interview Responses

Theme #	Main identified themes	Subthemes
1	Definition of teacher learning and professional development	Learning new skills; acquiring new concepts and methods; knowledge sharing; professional development
2	School leader's role in facilitating teacher learning and professional development	Providing support & guidance; organizing development opportunities; supervising teachers' progress
3	Support teachers receive from school leaders	Access to relevant information on professional development; offering professional development opportunities
4	Nature of future support from school leaders	Financial support; external support/opportunities
5	School leader competency in supporting teachers' professional development	Knowledge, guidance, and support
6	School leaders are knowledgeable about their leadership roles	Students' performance; work towards best practices; leadership role awareness
7	Clear policy guidelines and job description requirements	Managing daily tasks, leading teachers
8	Professional development of school leaders	Support from school administration; school sponsors annual conferences; understanding adults' learning needs

Results

The interview scripts were assessed based on the above-mentioned themes to answer the predetermined RQs. The themes aligned with the formulated RQs, with Themes 1 to 5 focusing on RQ1, and Themes 6 to 8 focusing on answering RQ2. Each theme was assessed using excerpts from the interviews with the 12 interviewees.

Theme 1: Definition of Teacher Learning and PD

In this theme, the teachers' perceptions about the meaning of teacher learning and PD were gauged. The teachers were asked to define teacher learning and PD in ECE school settings. Several subthemes emerged while assessing this theme: learning new skills from others, acquiring new concepts and methods, knowledge sharing, and PD. Each of these subthemes is further assessed below.

Learning New Skills

Many teacher interviewees responded that teacher learning is about learning new skills and sharing them with others. T1 shared,

> Just like any student, teacher learning is a process of sharing and capturing information. This is so teachers have individual exposure to new information that serves to eliminate previous misconceptions, making a teacher better in his or her teaching in the classroom.

T3 added, "Teacher learning is a process in which a teacher develops new ideas about a subject that they were not clear about." Moreover, T4 explained that learning "is the process by which a teacher learns new ideas, methods of teaching, or how to solve classroom problems." The actual time spent to obtain transmitted knowledge, abilities, and attitudes to teachers by trainers adds to this learning." T2 commented, "Teacher learning is a process in which new insights are gained that the teacher did not have before." The actual time spent to obtain transmitted knowledge, abilities, and attitudes to teachers by trainers adds to this learning." Finally, T7 asserted, "If a teacher is exposed

to new insights, for example, it means the teacher has learned something new… improves their current level of awareness."

Acquiring New Concepts and Methods

Some respondents even explained teacher learning in the context of acquiring new concepts and methods. For example, T3 said, "In order to obtain new expertise, a teacher must be exposed to new teaching concepts and methods." In addition, T6 commented that learning is "a process where the teacher gets to learn new concepts and ideas related to their work."

Knowledge Sharing

T2 even considered teacher learning as a process of sharing information with others after they gain new knowledge, as given in the following interview excerpt: "teacher learning could be described as the interaction that takes place between a teacher and a student, where an educator conveys knowledge to learners in a manner that is appropriate to the student's age, capabilities, skills, and dispositions."

PD

Some respondents, along with providing the meaning of teacher learning, also defined the meaning of PD. They considered PD an opportunity to improve their existing careers, excel, and enhance their overall confidence level. T1 claimed,

> Professional development is an opportunity a teacher has to use what they have learned to improve their career…this opportunity may include enrolling in a college course and gaining access to new teaching tools and resources to improve teaching effectiveness and quality.

Moreover, T7 explained that PD is a "process through which a teacher improves their skills to better satisfy the requirements of their careers." T3 stated that PD is "access to career advancement opportunities where a teacher formally improves their skills and other competencies." T4 added, "Professional development is related to allowing teachers to train and develop personal skills to improve their career or increase their confidence and keep on top of an ever-changing teaching career." T5 described "exposure to opportunities that help a teacher learn more about teaching or to improve on their already acquired skills and experience." T6 shared, "That's the opportunity I can get to improve my career competency skills or other, for example, getting sponsorship to do my preferred ECE." Moreover, T7 asserted that PD is "the improvement in career skills by enrolling in a new course or advanced diploma or degree other than the one that I possess at the moment."

While the interviewed teachers provided various definitions of teacher learning and PD, findings show that they agree that learning focuses on getting new skills and methods and sharing knowledge. In contrast, PD relates to opportunities to formally improve and excel in their careers. That is, teacher learning occurs continuously within the classroom in day-to-day interactions with students in ECE settings. By contrast, PD involves accessing resources such as financial support and enrolling in formal academic courses. As such, teacher learning is informal and occurs while on the job, while PD is a formal skills acquisition that occurs by enrolling in a teachers' training institute or college program outside their ECE settings.

Theme 2: School Leader's Role in Facilitating Teacher Learning and PD

The second theme concerns identifying the role or responsibility of the school leaders in facilitating teacher learning and PD in the ECE school. Findings showed that school leaders play various roles in enhancing teacher learning and PD. Based on these responses, the sub-themes are identified as providing support and guidance, organizing developmental opportunities, and supervising teachers' progress. Each of these sub-themes is further assessed with these supporting interview excerpts:

Providing Support and Guidance

A total of four teachers expressed positive support from school leaders. T6 responded, "My school leader evaluates my work and how I deliver instruction in the classroom." In addition, T6 acknowledges that their school leader advises on areas that need improvement. T1 spoke fondly of their school leader by stating:

> My school leader is quite an amazing guy; he is very effective in his work; he controls everything in this school; and this means he can empower or hinder teachers' learning … but he is more supportive than a hindrance.

T4 spoke about their assessment experience from there school leader by sharing:

> They always ask questions in order to assess my needs. If I'm not sure about a particular subject or I need guidance, the school leaders provide directions on how to solve my problem to improve my teaching.

T1 expressed, "My school leader always challenges me to always aspire to be my best and get a new skill or two each week... so he is quite supportive."

There were also instances when the teachers perceived that their school leaders provided proper guidance and assistance in teacher learning. However, they did not necessarily support formal teacher professional development. T6 expressed their dissatisfaction by replying:

> He has not been very supportive in my formal career development, so most learning and skills improvement take place informally within the classroom or school setting; once in a while, he invites a coach to the school who helps us learn new teaching methods.

T7 responded to their experience related to child development and learning and said, “I have not learned new skills outside the school so it’s more like working within the school setting only.” T3 revealed their school leaders lack of guidance during the pandemic and stated:

> The school leader is great with providing necessary guidance; however, during the pandemic, the school leader recommended I enroll in a certificate course to learn how to teach via the online environment and how to create virtual tasks and student assessments to improve their professional skills.

Although these mixed responses indicate that school leaders do provide assistance according to their individual capabilities, four teachers out of seven expressed the need for further support outside of the school setting. Teachers are looking for support and guidance in a formal setting as opposed to the informal occasional assistance currently received.

Organizing Development Opportunities

While assessing the interviewees' responses, it was further found that some teachers did receive adequate resources and tools that fostered their PD by organizing workshops, seminars, and conferences. Although T3 did not receive school leader guidance during the pandemic, they stated, "The school leader shares any tools, resources, and available training sessions they come across that they feel will help improve teaching quality and effectiveness for students." T3 further elaborated on what they receive and shared:

> The school leader offers their input on how to improve teaching strategies or other areas requiring further skill development. The school leader created peer learning groups where they consult with colleagues and learn how to improve by sharing expertise. These professional learning teams build self-esteem by giving colleagues the opportunity to share experiences as well as solutions to common problems. The school leader shares any tools, resources, and available training sessions they come across that they feel will help improve teaching quality and effectiveness for students.

T1 received a similar experience in their setting and shared:

> Twice a year, the school leader makes sure teachers attend a district seminar to improve our skills, or the school leader hires part-time coaches during scheduled meetings to help all teachers learn new teaching concepts.

There have also been instances where the school leaders did not offer much support or adequate growth opportunities for the development of the teachers. T5 described these opportunities by stating:

> It's just like some of the basics of child growth, and development in terms of like social and emotional well-being. It hardly focuses on how I engage in learning, and maybe on a rare occasion, they'll assess how far I've implemented the curriculum or like advanced student performance.

These inconsistencies in the varied settings indicate an unstructured availability of opportunities for development.

Supervising Teachers' Progress

Another important role provided by the school leaders, as perceived by teachers, is concerned with supervising teachers' progress and ensuring that the teachers act competently. T2 described their school leaders' actions by stating, "He supervises their classroom to ensure they are using suitable teaching strategies and offers assistance." T3 believes their school leader has a more active role and replies:

> My school leader, like my colleagues and myself, is an active participant in the process of instruction. He makes sure that every one of us teachers is competent about pedagogical issues and able to deliver classroom instruction.

From the overall analysis of this theme, it has been found that there have been mixed findings about the supportive role played by the school leaders in facilitating their learning and PD. Although many leaders played a significant role in providing guidance, inspiration, mentorship, organizing learning workshops, supervising teachers' progress in

the classrooms, and providing recommended areas for further skill improvement, some leaders failed to provide adequate support in teacher development.

Theme 3: Support Teachers Receive From School Leaders

The next theme discusses the teachers' views on exploring the support received from the school directors, leaders, and principals for their PD. Teachers answered that their school leaders provide various types of support, including access to relevant information, learning courses, PD opportunities, and relevant teaching resources. Each of these sub-themes is discussed as follows:

Access to Relevant Information, Learning, and Teaching Courses

Most respondents perceived that their school leaders provided them with the motivation and support to learn and accelerate their PD by providing important information on learning, seminars, workshops, etc. T1 believes, "He always helps me, and my colleagues know about new learning opportunities relevant to my career." T3 has a similar experience and shares, "There's also a newsletter for teachers and notices of potential career growth opportunities, which the principal encourages us to pursue."

Additional favorable responses in this area were shared by T4 who stated, "The school shares potential career support opportunities, including training, workshops, seminars, and retreats across the school district or the state when they occur." T6 is supported by their school leader and shares, "There's active communication and goal setting from the principals on how to teach and improve my students." Last, T7 shared a favorable response and said, "There has been close support from my principal over the years to become a better teacher in curriculum design and implementation."

Offering PD Opportunities

Only one teacher perceives that the school leaders would allow them to enhance their PD by providing adequate exposure and funding for courses and training. This is asserted in the following presented interview excerpt where T1 responded, "I am encouraged to attend annual refresher courses in child training and development."

However, most of the teachers expressed that there is a scarcity of PD opportunities, which need to be built in the future. They asserted that though the school leaders provided them with information, they never took any direct initiatives to enroll the teachers in different teacher PD courses. T2 expressed their dissatisfaction in this category by saying, "There's no external support for professional advancement in my school, and it's my hope for the future that there will be more opportunities available to help me further my studies." T6 described the scarcity in their setting by stating that, "There are hardly any external trainers involved in terms of professional development…just limited verbal help and guidance." T3 and T4 both chose to offer suggestions in addition to their dissatisfaction with what is available. T3 shared:

> I think directors need to allocate funds and other resources. The school board should offer sponsorship programs …Without school support, only a few teachers could enroll to advance their professional skills.

Similarly, in the description by T4 who was looking more in terms of financial help they shared:

> So basically, the support is in the form of information on what is required of me to be a more competitive teacher, but I have no financial resources to support my career progression, and the school could help with this.

Finally, one of the teachers feels that her school leaders neither provide information nor direct opportunities to enroll and enhance their PD. T5 said, "I have not received any direction that I need to advance like that."

These findings show that four teachers received close support from school directors, leaders, or principals regarding their PD. The main support they received was access to relevant information about their required skills, learning workshops or courses, PD opportunities, and appropriate teaching resources. However, three teachers felt that their school leaders have not been supportive in aiding them to advance their professional skills within the ECE setting. However, all but one teacher perceived that the school never directly invested in such development programs or that no school-sponsored training had been provided for the teachers. Also, the teachers cannot finance their PD training, and without the explicit support of the school leaders, the development is not highly progressive.

Theme 4: Nature of Future Support From School Leaders

The teachers' responses were further probed to learn about the nature of support they received or expect to receive in the future from the school leaders and directors in their PD. Teachers described the support they receive or expect to receive in the future to be largely positive regarding curriculum development, and external career advancement

opportunities. However financial support programs to make external support accessible are scarce. Each of these sub-themes is further discussed below:

Financial Support

Two teachers asserted that the support from school leaders could be in the form of financial support so that the necessary funds can be mobilized for enrolling in different PD initiatives. T1 presented this response:

> So far, so good… the support is positive, just that maybe I could get college enrollment support in terms of tuition support or subsidies when seeking to advance academic skills because of high costs; that would be a major milestone, I hope!

T3 believes seeking outside help through program development is a wiser plan of action and stated:

> I think directors need to allocate funds and other resources… the school board could offer sponsorship programs; you know the principal is limited in that aspect even if he informs or motivates us to better our game… without school support, only a few teachers could enroll to advance their professional skills.

External Support Opportunities

Apart from financial help or enrolling the teachers in different career development programs, the teachers also perceived the importance of support in having external trainers and experts to help them learn new skills and accelerate their professional growth and development. The need for external training, hiring experts, and providing exposure

for personal career growth is described by teachers. T2 is optimistic in their thinking and replied:

> My hope for the future is that there will be more opportunities available to help me in furthering my studies and improving my early childhood development skills… Maybe more needs to be done to create school-based training workshops and collaboration with trainers just to acquire new methods of teaching and implementing curriculum.

T7 discussed the insufficiency of external support in their setting and stated:

> There is more support focused on the delivery of curriculum and instruction. Besides the learning on the job, and exchanging ideas with colleagues, there is no external support for professional advancement in my school.

T6 also has a similar experience and responded, “But the support is limited to learning on the job; there are hardly any external trainers involved in terms of professional development.” T4 is hopeful in terms of the possibility of change and revealed positive thoughts by stating, “More can be done financially, especially by leaders like, say, paying fees and hiring coaches or trainers to help teachers improve their current skills and match up to new teaching trends.” Finally, T1 is looking forward to positive change and stated, “Future support by the school with college course enrollment to advance even further will be awesome for me.”

In summary, all but one teacher (T5) felt she had not received support from her school leaders or directors. Six teachers were optimistic that they had been receiving some necessary support in their ECE settings, however felt there were issues. The issues

identified during the support process were financial support, assistance with curriculum development, and knowledge about career advancement opportunities. Teachers who received close support were more likely to be optimistic about their progress in ECE settings regarding curriculum development and professional growth.

Theme 5: School Principal Competency in Supporting Teachers' PD

The next theme probes the teachers' views about the school principals' competency in assisting teachers' career growth and PD. Findings from the interview responses showed that most teachers were optimistic that their principals have the required competency to help them grow their careers in ECE settings. Two main sub-themes are determined while assessing all the responses from the teachers, namely knowledge, guidance, and support. These sub-themes are further analyzed below:

Knowledge

Some interviewees found that their school principal possesses sound knowledge of his work and role and the competencies in extending support for the support of teachers' PD. Four teachers did not question their school leaders knowledge and responded favorably. T1 stated:

> He is really knowledgeable about his work; he knows his role as a school leader and works to ensure teachers complete assigned curriculum tasks and that they have the relevant knowledge to deliver desired objectives.

Others replied with similar responses, T6 stated, "Definitely, my school principal has the necessary knowledge related to my career." Likewise, T2 replied, "You know, you've seen our teaching program. It's mostly prepared by our principal … she is quite thorough

and knows her role." Another comparable response came from T3 who replied, "My principal is quite thorough and knows their role. He always works to ensure we show results in student growth and performance."

Guidance and Support

Under this sub-theme, the teachers' responses are assessed to find whether the school principal, out of his/her competency, provided any support and guidance to the teachers for their PD. The findings for this theme have been mixed since three teachers asserted that their principal provided adequate support and guidance for their learning and career development, while two teachers felt the absence of any support or guidance. T2 enthusiastically responded by stating:

> Yes, she is a hands-on lady, always willing to assist me in my teaching experience by proposing new courses to take or locating trainers she thinks are needed to help me improve my competency.

Similarly, T6 provided a self-gratified response and replied:

> He encourages me to think of new and innovative teaching approaches and how to manage students … my principal also appreciates my efforts, and he encourages me to seek support when I'm not so sure.

Last, and in line with other favorable responses shared by teachers, T7 revealed:

> I'm glad he's assisted me to grow within the school and how I create lessons, methods to use when teaching new ideas, and possible weaknesses that I need to improve on.

Two respondents perceived that despite any competencies, their principals are lacking in extending adequate support for teachers' career development. T4 shared an unfavorable response and replied:

> Honestly, the principal manager of my tasks and my classroom goals to ensure my curriculum is implemented has not been directly supportive of me in terms of my career path or my career growth; so long as learning is taking place, he's not actively asked for any advancements.

Consistently T5 had a comparable point of view and reiterated:

> I have been in the same career and job description for some time now. Nothing much has changed in supporting preschool children … just similar ideas from the last decade; the focus is to ensure all students succeed. So, I only went back to college 5 years ago for my state early childhood teacher certification after years of employment and working in a school-based setting. I haven't been informed about the need for further career growth and the process of acquiring basic technology and online teaching skills in 2020 to assist students at home during the pandemic.

These findings further show that most teachers felt their school leaders had a positive influence in helping them advance their skills and professional career growth. However, some teachers felt there was still more room for growth regarding resource allocation and the provision of training workshops.

Theme 6: School Leaders Are Knowledgeable About Their Leadership Roles

The school leaders' perceptions were assessed to learn their knowledge and awareness of the leadership roles in ECE settings. All five school leaders, including the

school principals, school director, and department head, shared that they believed they were aware of their roles as instructional leaders. These responses are categorized into sub-themes of students' performance, work towards best practice, and leadership role awareness. Each of these sub-themes is further evaluated as follows:

Students' Performance

The leaders' responses show they can implement their instructional leadership role and exert due efforts to ensure that the student's performance excels. They also instruct the teachers efficiently, establish constructive student development goals, and monitor their progress. L1 stated, "I have 5 years' experience as an instructor, always helping teachers to do their best in helping preschool early learners."

Both L3 and L4 expressed concern for communication as the key. They both believe as school leaders, they oversee the instruction and assist teachers in monitoring the progress and academic assessment of each student. L3 stated, "…just ensuring that I communicate goals to teachers and engage with my staff, and together, set clear goals related to the development of these kids." Similarly, L4 replied, "I also supervise instruction and help the teachers monitor every student's progress and academic assessment…you see, my main role here is to communicate high expectations for teachers and students."

L2 and L5 believed in a hands on approach in which they work alongside the teacher in order to be as supportive as possible at setting goals.

Work Towards Best Practices

The school leader ensures that the teachers and related staff have the best work practices, and to do that, they must work directly with staff and teachers. They also ensure the curriculum is well-prepared and other methods that ensure smooth school operations are in place. These findings are implicit in the responses of the school leaders.

L2 chooses a teamwork approach and replied, “I work alongside my teachers to provide all the needed support and guidance in establishing best practices in teaching.” However, L3 believed,” As a leader, I regularly work to set goals and create methods to achieve set objectives.” In this way L3 is able to ensure the smooth running of the school at all levels.” L5 has a different role for working towards best practices. L5 shared his responsibility by stating that, “My role is limited to coordinating subjects with teachers as a department that supervises science, math, and language to ensure cohesive curriculum content is developed in the classroom.”

The findings show that the school leaders are positive about their roles as instructional leaders and their work with teachers in ensuring appropriate goals and objectives are achieved, especially curriculum development within ECE settings.

Leadership Role Awareness

In this sub-theme, the school leaders’ perceptions of their leadership skills to support teachers in ECE settings are also gauged. Findings showed that school leaders offer direction, advice, and needed assistance to ECE teachers, which are presented in the following interview excerpts:

L3 accepted the responsibility of his role and stated that:

> I have a duty as an administrator to help determine the early childhood development mission and to create a positive climate for teachers and their students … I must have the necessary abilities and the exposure to relevant professional development, as well as the capacity to make observations and engage in communication with other leaders, the board, teachers, parents, and the students.

However, L1 and L2 admitted to having limited leadership skills and they are still in the process of acquiring more skills. L1 said, "I received some training on instructional coaching, and I have managed to offer needed direction to educators." L2 said "… continuous personal learning has enabled me to have the required competency to guide my teachers effectively as they deliver instruction and guide students in the classroom."

These school leaders' responses also show that they do not possess adequate knowledge about the direct PD of the teachers and can only assist in guiding them. L2 declared, "I am more focused on how children learn, and since I am not a career mentor, I can only assess how teachers meet their teaching objectives but not how they learn." L4 further elaborated by saying:

> At my level, I can give advice and guidance about needed job qualifications. A teacher must evaluate whether they meet these standards. I am not particularly clear about facilitating teachers' professional development; you need to be certified as a coach.

Furthermore, when inquired about his competency for providing direct career related PD L1 commented:

> Not really... this should be in teacher training colleges, and since I am not a lecturer, I cannot really help teachers in their professional skills growth, just assessing their ability to deliver curriculum content and giving a personal opinion on areas they need to improve on or maybe tell my teacher, you know, 'you need to know this and that, or you can enroll for this course… and such.

The above findings show that school leaders feel adequately prepared to lead their teachers within ECE settings. However, the key focus was to create curriculum goals, ensure students' learning needs were met, and communicate high expectations to teachers. Most school leaders feel they have the leadership skills and knowledge to offer educators the required support. However, a significant gap exists in providing direct leadership to teachers for their career and PD. While school leaders advise teachers, their current knowledge about how adults learn is insufficient, making it difficult to provide relevant support in facilitating their teachers' PD.

Theme 7: Clear Policy Guidelines and Job Description Requirements

The school leaders were further probed about the effectiveness of current school policies and their role in defining the duties and responsibilities of instructional leaders. It is also important to learn whether the existing policy guidelines adequately provide school leaders with the definition of their job roles and duties and how well the teachers' career development and professional growth fit into it. Some of the sub-themes that are created under this theme are managing daily tasks and leading teachers, as seen below:

Managing Daily Tasks

The responses below showed that the school leaders agreed that existing school policies provide needed guidelines about their duties. L2 replied:

> …as a leader, I am tasked with providing strategic direction in my school. My responsibilities include the implementation of standardized curricula, the evaluation of teaching methods, the monitoring of student achievement… so yes, the school policy is clear...

L1 had a similar viewpoint and affirmed, "My work is cut out as a school leader and a principal in leading teachers and managing day-to-day operations." L3 also agreed and verbalized, "Yes, I believe that the policy guidelines are clear. I am tasked with shaping the vision of academic success for all students in every grade."

Leading Teachers

Another aspect of the school guidelines and policies extracted from the interview is the role of school leaders in managing and leading teachers and working toward their development and growth. The following interview excerpts provide the leading roles of the school leaders beginning with L4 who articulated:

> As a school director, I am responsible for providing the school with leadership, guidance, and coordination as part of their job responsibilities … it is also my primary goal to establish and sustain educational programs that are successful within my school, as well as to support the improvement of teaching and learning within school classrooms.

L3 shared similar insight and verbalized, “I also work with teachers to create a climate conducive to learning and cultivating leadership in my teachers … when situations demand, I have to step in and improve instruction while also managing learners, teachers, and other processes.” Last, L5 remarked, “…the roles were clear, especially when offering direct and appropriate leadership to the teachers who are placed under me.”

Some leaders feel that their role is not to provide for teachers’ development explicitly or directly but to recruit a competent teacher who effectively meets their academic goals. Moreover, as a leader, they believe they provide the required advice and guidance to the teachers to foster their PD. This perspective is viewed under the following words spoken by school leaders, when L1 responded and said:

> My job is that of leading teachers to accomplish learning and teaching effectively, so the role is clear. The assumption with teachers’ careers and competency is that they are already qualified enough.

L3 had a different perspective and said:

> I must ensure every teacher is qualified and content and keep updating them about any gaps they need to address in their career skills. So, I support teachers with relevant advice related to their competency and required outcomes.

However, L2 felt more simplistically about the subject and stated, “…sure, my roles are clear enough for me, as I shared earlier. That is, I assess teachers’ competency and help recommend areas for improvement.”

The findings show that school leaders positively perceive the existing school policies. Assigned roles provide a framework to enable them to offer guidance about

professional skills teachers need to deliver appropriate curricula. Through assessment of individual competency, school leaders help teachers assess possible career shortcomings and identify required training to improve their limited skills. However, there is no evidence of any school policies that help leaders directly assist teachers in their career development.

Theme 8: PD of School Leaders

It has been found that school leaders lack adequate skills and knowledge in providing for the PD of the teachers and are majorly focused on assisting them and defining areas of improvement. To probe the reasons for this, school leaders were further asked about the factors reflecting their PD. Some key sub-themes that evolved under this theme include support from school administration in instructional leadership, school-sponsored annual conferences to facilitate instructional leadership, and understanding adults' learning needs.

Support From School Administration in Instructional Leadership

The school leaders were asked how far the school administration supports them in learning about instructional leadership, which can be utilized in managing their tasks as school leaders and leading and supporting teachers in their PD. It was found that all the interviewed school leaders received no support from their administration, as signified by the following responses:

L1 expressed their dissatisfaction with their administration and responded:

> Since I was hired in this school, there has not been any support for me to improve my skills. I'm just stuck in my job description, and any effort to improve my professional skills today is just from my personal need to become better. … not because the school pressured or supported me to … but you know the only way to keep your job security is to keep learning new things, or someone will replace you. So, it's the fear of job security that drives me to enroll in a new course to improve my leadership skills, but not due to direct support from my school.

L2 feels that they are not supported and replied, "I don't remember getting any engagement with instructional leadership support from the administration; I just possess my skills and any additional expertise I get to acquire from personal learning." L3 commented, "My school has not given me any directions about professional development; I just have to check the job qualifications and responsibilities and ensure I have the needed skills to execute the assigned duties." L4 continues the same dissatisfaction with the support received, however seemed satisfied with having to do it on their own and stated:

> At the moment, I have not received any support from the school. I guess it's more of a personal responsibility when focusing on an issue related to professional development, so any lessons on how to be a competent instructional leader are informed by experience and learning at work.

Last, L5 proclaimed, “In terms of instructional leadership … no, the school has not shown any support to me; I just have to apply leadership skills of collaborating and working with teachers to meet the already assigned tasks.”

School leaders’ findings showed that they do not receive enough support from their school administrators concerning their PD in instructional leadership. Moreover, school leaders feel inadequately supported in improving their knowledge about instructional practices. As a result, school leaders shared that they were unable to effectively assist teachers in achieving their adult learning needs.

School-Sponsored Annual Conferences to Facilitate Instructional Leadership

To further understand the support provided by the school administration, school leaders were asked whether the school sponsors regular leadership training opportunities through initiatives such as workshop training or conferences to improve their knowledge about instructional leadership practices. L1 optimistically reported:

> It’s more of school district seminars and conferences than the individual school … but the school supports all other initiatives like annual school leader conferences where we chat about changes moving forward in the education sector … how to make the education sector more fruitful, and leadership is one of the issues among many.

L2 commented:

> The principal is a member of the school’s administration, and we have regular meetings that can be general to specific. All matters are discussed at the annual meetings, including education curriculum, resource allocation, school projects,

> and the achievement gap…the training is tailored more on the entire school and not just workshops for facilitating instructional leadership.

L3 did not receive anything in this category and replied, "My school does not sponsor leadership training … There are no specific leadership workshops that are dedicated to my leadership development."

L4 had something to report and said:

> Yes, there are regular leadership meetings organized by the school, although they are not all about training. The meetings relate to collaborating about new policy changes, new curriculum, and how to implement new legal guidelines from the education department. So, it is more about the assessment of wider policy implementation and other general issues key to the school's progress.

L5 did not receive what they needed and stated, "The meetings and seminars that are planned from time to time are more about comparing school performances and curriculum implementation, teaching methods, and setting goals."

The above findings show that school leaders regularly attend leadership training conferences in school districts. Thus, schools sponsor annual conferences but are not necessarily on leadership training. While school leaders attend various conferences and seminars, schools do not specifically sponsor them for leadership training. The focus is more general on school progress than on facilitating individual leaders to improve their knowledge of instructional leadership practices. Thus, the conferences and workshops sponsored by schools are less focused on facilitating school leaders' PD regarding instructional leadership practices.

Understanding Adults' Learning Needs

As a part of the PD acquired by school leaders, either with or without the support of the school administration, school leaders were asked whether they understand how adults learn so that they may offer teachers the required help in their career growth. L1 had no formal adult learning instruction and went about thing in the following manner by stating:

> In my career, I have learned to allow teachers to set the pace and goals for their learning. Since each teacher is aware of their strengths and weaknesses, I encourage them to act in teams to solve their daily challenges. I support peer learning and professional development, where individual expertise is learned from more experienced teachers… I only facilitate the process and make available materials and time allocation needed for its success.

L2 much like L1 does not have experience with adult learning and replied:

> The school does not give me much professional support when dealing with how adults learn. But what I do is that I embrace the need to listen to and guide my teachers through active collaboration… I believe that by allowing teachers to come up with solutions, I am in a position to empower them.

L3 takes a different approach to compensate for his shortcomings in the adult learning category and stated:

> I meet regularly with everyone and examine their performance, brainstorm ideas, and identify where they have problems. Once I identify personal challenges, we

> then create solutions depending on the issues, which might be more than just teacher learning and career development.

L4 attempts to offer support differently and responded:

> I am sure career advancement is at the core of high-performing teachers. As the learning needs of students change, there is also a change in teachers' job descriptions. As a director, I have regular mentorship programs and workshop training that help teachers stay up to date with new teaching or learning needs.

L5 did not receive direct instruction in adult learning but understands the need for teachers to direct their own learning. L5 commented,

> I believe the needs of teachers keep changing, and I respect that teachers are proactive in sharing their shortcomings. Teachers who feel less prepared to teach often ask for help and, in the process, they obtain skills to solve potential challenges they face … this means learning occurs when a specific need arises.

Insights from the interview responses show that school leaders report receiving inadequate support from school administrators regarding their learning needs and their teachers' learning needs as adult learners. However, they asserted that they understand how to provide needed leadership that helps teachers to remain professionally competent in delivering instruction. The school leaders also feel that the need for teachers' PD is closely assessed and monitored during teaching performance in the classroom.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

The current section details the evidence of trustworthiness as applied to this study. A key focus is on reflecting on how trustworthiness was achieved in light of the strategies

stated in Chapter 3. The key focus is limited to the implementation of issues of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the collected data to answer the study problem, as further detailed below.

Credibility

This study established credibility by collecting detailed data from various school leaders, including ECE educators, principals, school directors, and department heads. Insights collected from diverse participants ensured robust and in-depth responses to help answer the study problem, thereby ensuring credible findings. Also, the study ensured thick descriptions by collecting detailed insights from individual participants. Member checking was also conducted to ensure the authenticity of the responses, thereby eliminating potential errors of omission of what participants meant in their responses. The researcher also ensured that the findings were credible by engaging in reflexive practice during data analysis to ensure constant self-awareness about how interview findings unfolded, as evident from the open coding and data analysis process.

Transferability

Transferability was achieved in this study via thick description and sampling sufficiency. A substantial description of participants and their responses helped guarantee that the background information on which the study's conclusions are based is adequately disclosed. As such, the study could be repeated and applied in other settings, replicating the findings in different schools outside the current research setting. In addition, using responses from 12 participants ensured data saturation, and adding more participants to the study could not have generated new themes. Thus, the obtained findings could still be

reflected if the research were conducted in another ECE setting. Sampling sufficiency, therefore, helped ensure the transferability of the current findings.

Dependability

During the research, dependability was achieved through audit trails, providing evidence, in-depth methodological description, data analysis plan, and member checking. The audit trail ensured there was elaborate documentation of the entire inquiry process, noting how participants were identified, the research setting, participant recruitment, the data collection process, and how codes and themes emerged from the study. Evidence of transcripts from teachers, principals, directors, and department heads indicates their responses to the interview questions. The data analysis process further detailed the coding themes and sub-themes emerging from the coding process. Results clearly align the collected data, study objectives, and RQs, ensuring the current qualitative findings are dependable.

Confirmability

Researcher assumptions, study limitations, methodological descriptions, and detailed evidence have been used in this study to establish confirmability. Confirmability of the results ensures other scholars can corroborate the obtained findings. The role of the researcher has been detailed in collecting data and analyzing key themes. Potential subjective bias by the researcher and how this might have influenced the findings has been discussed in addition to processes taken into account to mitigate potential biases. Each interview protocol guide and a reflexive journal documented personal reactions from interviews to bracket researcher bias during the study. The journal included a list of

ways participants mentioned challenges and issues that influence school leader support in ECE settings. All contents of the reflexive journal were reviewed before each interview, review of the transcripts, and interpretation of the data to eliminate researcher bias to focus objectively on participant perceptions about school leader support.

Summary

The current chapter has presented and detailed key themes obtained from the thematic analysis of the collected interview responses. Teachers had diverse views about school leader support for their instructional needs and improving their teaching performance at the early childhood level in a segment of the northeast United States. Their approach toward teacher learning and PD varied depending on their experience. Teachers felt that school leaders are important in facilitating teacher learning and PD. They are noted to receive close support and assistance from their leaders, but no formal PD training is planned. It is even found that future support from school leaders (as perceived by the teachers) can be in the form of financial assistance for participating in teacher development training and making external support and opportunities available.

In addition, school leaders are found to be knowledgeable about their leadership roles. They are self-motivated in enhancing their knowledge and skills, which makes them effective leaders. However, there remain concerns about inadequate support from school administration regarding sponsorship on how leaders should direct teachers' adult learning needs. There is also a lack of support from the school administration for developing instructional leadership skills.

The following section discusses the key findings obtained from this study, identifies limitations, and outlines recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' and school leaders' perceptions about the challenges faced in providing support for teachers' instructional needs for improved teaching performance at the early childhood level in a segment of the northeast United States. A qualitative case study was conducted to answer the formulated RQs, with relevant data collected using semistructured interview questions. Findings showed that teachers hold different perceptions about school leaders' support for their instructional needs towards improving their teaching performance in ECE settings. Teachers in this study thought that school principals facilitated their learning in schools and classrooms through various supportive roles. The most essential duties that ECE teachers attributed to their principals were offering direction, inspiration, mentorship, and feedback on students' classroom achievement. Most teachers also experienced school administrators who evaluated their lessons, teaching strategies, and student performance and assist them in enhancing classroom management. In addition, teachers in this study believed that school leaders can evaluate individual teacher competency concerning curriculum development goals and instruction delivery to achieve school objectives.

Despite their optimism that their school leaders gave daily advice, feedback, and support, the majority of ECE teachers who were interviewed believed that their PD was not directly supported. Instead, ECE teachers stated that school administrators had a limited advisory role concerning critical skills they lacked while offering instruction in the classroom or areas that needed improvement in the future. School leaders played a vital role in achieving this objective by advising ECE teachers on relevant courses, giving

incentives for skill development, and sharing information about crucial learning conferences, seminars, and workshops. In contrast to the comments of the ECE teachers, the school leaders thought that their school administrators provided inadequate support for their PD in instructional leadership. As their former job descriptions still constrained the majority of school leaders, a lack of assistance for developing emerging abilities was a significant issue among school leaders.

Individual aspirations and drive were also the only factors contributing to PD, with minimal involvement from school officials. Principals in this study were unable to provide adequate PD support for their ECE teachers due to insufficient assistance from the school administration. Specifically, the findings indicated that school leaders were more likely to provide little or no assistance to their subordinates regarding successful professional skill development activities if they believed there was insufficient support for coaching or mentoring programs in their schools. A lack of support from school administrators could signal that principals lack the resources and competence to identify the skills issues teachers encounter, posing obstacles to the development of appropriate solutions. Principals usually feel underappreciated for their efforts to develop their careers, even though teachers want school administrators to assist them. This lack of support diminishes the confidence of school leaders in their capacity to inspire their subordinates to improve their teaching effectiveness.

Interpretation of the Findings

RQ1 was developed to understand the following: What are teachers' perceptions about school leader support for their instructional needs and for improving their teaching

performance at the early childhood level in a segment of the northeast United States? Thematic analysis of the interview responses showed that teachers positively perceived the role school leaders play in assisting them to achieve instructional needs within the ECE settings.

Specifically, the interviewed ECE teachers shared that school principals have a myriad of roles to play in facilitating teacher learning within the classrooms. Key among the important roles that ECE teachers associated with their principals included providing guidance, inspiration, mentorship, and feedback about individual progress in the classrooms. Teachers also observed that school leaders assessed their instruction, teaching methods, and student performance, enabling them to improve classroom management. Importantly, school leaders can evaluate individual teacher competency against curriculum development goals and instruction delivery to meet school objectives.

While the interviewed ECE teachers were optimistic that their school leaders provided daily guidance, feedback, and support, most felt that they were not directly assisted in improving their PD. Instead, ECE teachers felt that school leaders only provided a limited advisory role in areas that need future improvement or important skills they still lacked when delivering instruction in the classroom. To this end, school leaders serve an important role in guiding relevant courses ECE teachers should take into consideration, inspiration on areas for skills improvement, or sharing information about important learning workshops, seminars, or conferences. These findings echo observations from past research in that teachers are likelier to report less support from school leaders when their career growth and evaluating PD (Atiles et al., 2021; Barker et

al., 2021; Fatih Karacabey, 2021). The problem is compounded by the concerns that school leaders lack insights about teachers' PD needs and how to meet the changing knowledge gaps among adult learners (Garrity et al., 2021).

Based on the interview responses, the ECE teachers noted that school leaders provided support within the classrooms when accessing the required curriculum guidelines. However, school leaders hardly offered professional assistance in skills improvement, coaching, and learning new concepts related to early childhood development. Instead, the ECE teachers considered it their duty to seek relevant avenues such as enrolling in courses or attending training workshops to advance their professional skills. Thus, there is a potential disconnect between the perceived support teachers receive from school leaders and the actual assistance they experience. That is, while school leaders offer moral support and advice, the assistance is largely theoretical, and teachers have to evaluate the specific courses to enroll in to improve their skills. In most cases, teachers cannot enroll in refresher courses due to financial constraints and instead resort to peer-supported learning through PD groups within their schools.

RQ2 was created to help me explore the following: What are school leaders' perceptions of the challenges in providing support for teachers' instructional needs for improved teaching performance at the early childhood level in a segment of the northeast United States? Thematic analysis of the school leaders' responses showed that they hardly received enough support from their school administrators concerning their PD in instructional leadership. Key concerns among the school leaders included a lack of support for improving emerging skills because most leaders were still limited to their

previous job descriptions. Efforts towards PD were also limited to individual aspirations and motivation, with little to no input from school administrators. Due to limited support from school administration, principals failed to provide adequate PD support to their ECE teachers.

The findings align with concerns expressed by scholars that most efforts by principals to facilitate teachers' PD remain unsuccessful because of limited assistance on how to guide individual career development among educators (Tuli & Tynjälä, 2015). Lack of support potentially leaves school leaders feeling inadequately prepared to assist their followers in improving their professional skills (Smith et al., 2019). Specifically, schools where leaders feel inadequate coaching or mentorship are likely to offer limited to no support to their subordinates regarding adequate career skills development initiatives. Scamardella (2021) noted that a lack of competency in adult learning could hinder school leaders' ability to guide and implement processes to improve teacher competency. Lack of support from the school administrators could imply that principals lack the resources and capability to identify skills challenges teachers face, thereby creating hurdles in formulating relevant solutions.

Findings from this study showed that although teachers demand support from school leaders, the principals frequently feel unsupported in the growth of their profession. Such lack of support has been noted to negatively influence school leaders in terms of feeling less confident in their ability to promote teaching performance improvement among their subordinates (Fluckiger et al., 2014). The majority of school leaders believed they lacked the abilities essential to help teachers and evaluate their

progress. These observations reveal that across the interviewed schools, it is problematic for school leaders to support the instructional demands of early childhood instructors. On the contrary, researchers have emphasized that school leaders should be well prepared to serve the PD requirements of teachers as adult learners (Scamardella, 2021; Zepeda et al., 2014). Therefore, there is a need for school administrators to employ diversified support measures to meet the instructional needs of school leaders if the PD needs of ECE teachers are to be realized.

These findings may be understood in the light of the adult learning theory, where school leaders support the need to employ tactics that include collaboration between principals and ECE teachers. At present, school leaders offer theoretical solutions to ECE teachers' learning needs, such as providing feedback and advice on areas requiring professional improvement (Smith et al., 2019). In adult learning, bridging the gap between teachers' and school leaders' knowledge and practice is vital to improve student results (Brezicha et al., 2015; King, 2016). According to Knowles et al. (2005), adults are more likely to be motivated to learn new concepts if they are informed about the need for new learning and actively engaged in the learning process. Adults are also more likely to direct their actions and anticipate being responsible for their judgments (Martin et al., 2019; Subitha, 2018).

According to Puteh and Kaleannan (2016), the theory of andragogy openly acknowledges the distinct disparities between the educational experiences of children and adults. Adult learners such as school leaders commence learning with preconceived notions about the learning process, largely informed by prior experience. When it comes

to education, school leaders are likely to be more committed to teachers' PD if they believe such an approach would be directly applicable to their schools' daily running and management (Cox, 2015). That is, school leaders are more likely to derive meaning from the need to support teachers' professional skills development from the information contained in the learning experience to connect it to functions that are beneficial to them. If school leaders do not believe that what they are facilitating among their teachers is essential, then school leaders are more likely to show indecision in implementing PD initiatives in their ECE settings (Stites et al., 2021). To promote teachers' PD, school administrators need to actively involve school leaders to appreciate the need to create programs to identify the professional needs of ECE teachers and formulate strategies to meet the identified issues.

Based on the responses from the school leaders, some of the needs include providing suitable career opportunities, enrolling in courses, time to practice and apply new skills, and feedback on progress. In addition, school leaders identified a lack of support affecting their motivation and commitment to assisting ECE teachers to improve their PD goals. Financial constraints and resource allocation, such as learning materials, also hinder efforts by teachers to work towards improving personal career growth. Importantly, making available the necessary resources and opportunities need to be anchored on facilitating self-directed learning and transformative learning, which are key aspects of andragogy or productive adult learning. PD has to be relevant to both ECE teachers and the school leaders within the early childhood development settings to be transformative, with dedicated learning sessions for reflection and analysis of the entire

learning progress. The gap between ECE teacher learning and school leader engagement needs to be bridged. Also, these findings emphasize the necessity of school administrative leadership support for the learning and motivation of school leaders and ECE teachers, which is necessary to encourage continued PD.

Limitations of the Study

While the insights from the current qualitative research have largely focused on answering the formulated RQs, potential limitations might have affected the obtained findings. First, insights drawn from the interview responses may not be generalized to other teachers from different schools across a different segment of the northeast United States. As such, it is difficult to achieve transferability of the findings to other ECE settings in schools that did not participate in the current study.

Second, the data used in this study were obtained from interview responses only. As such, there was no triangulation of data collection methods, potentially affecting data quality. Third, the findings of this study are limited to a few teachers and school leaders drawn from ECE settings. The findings on school leaders' support for teachers' PD may differ between ECE schools and those in elementary schools or a higher grade.

Recommendations

Limitations identified in this study inform recommendations for future research to improve the findings of this study. First, in the future, researchers could enhance the current findings by using a representative sample size of all ECE settings across a segment of the northeast United States. This could enable researchers to generalize their findings to all schools across this region. Second, because the data source was only

obtained from interviews, future researchers may improve the quality of collected insights by triangulating the data collection methods. For example, future researchers could collect detailed data using survey questionnaires, focus group discussions, archival data, and field notes to supplement data collected through interviews. Third, school leaders' competency in supporting teachers' PD could be improved by including educators from other grades besides the ECE settings. Such an approach could help to understand whether school leaders offer similar PD support to educators in upper grades compared to those in early childhood grade levels.

Implications

The findings of this study have potential implications for positive change in the PD support for educators in ECE settings. A positive change could be experienced at the levels of ECE teachers, school principals, and school administrators. At the level of ECE teachers, there is a need for awareness creation and assessment of main curriculum requirements. Concerns about individual competency in designing and delivering relevant curricula could help identify potential shortcomings and individual PD needs. As adult learners, teachers' PD needs evolve as new curricula and policy guidelines from the Department of Education keep changing. By regularly comparing individual competency against the curriculum guidelines from the Department of Education, ECE teachers can seek relevant professional support from their school leaders and administrators. Ignorance against individual professional needs would hinder efforts by school leaders to provide desired support, which is crucial to realizing the instructional needs of teachers at the early childhood level for improved teaching performance.

At the level of school principals, there is a need to shift beyond instructional leadership and incorporate PD roles for educators. Findings from the interviews showed that while ECE teachers anticipate receiving guidance from school principals, these school leaders often feel inadequately prepared to facilitate teachers' PD needs. Moreover, school principals have inadequate knowledge about how teachers acquire new skills and knowledge as adult learners. As a result, school leaders only guide curriculum development and instruction delivery while offering advice on areas ECE teachers may need to enroll in new training courses. Thus, school principals feel they lack the necessary skills to directly facilitate ECE teachers' training and professional advancement within their schools. Educating principals on coaching and mentoring ECE teachers regarding professional skills and career growth could reduce the time and cost needed for educators to enroll in new courses outside their classrooms.

At the level of school administrators, there is a need for adequate support for both school principals and teachers to ensure highly competent educators and leaders who can execute the school's vision and mission. Support from school administrators could be achieved through policy change and resource allocation. In terms of policy change, schools need to have in place PD opportunities for principals and ECE teachers to ensure constant learning and continuous skills improvement. By contrast, school administrators also need to make available relevant resources (both financial and non-financial) to facilitate teachers' PD. Teachers noted that despite individual motivation to advance their skills, they faced financial constraints when enrolling in new courses relevant to ECE development. In addition, school administrators need to provide access to teacher coaches

and mentors to help ECE teachers access and acquire new skills in their field of early childhood development as the curriculum is revised and the needs of the ECE students keep changing within these settings. As a result, school administrators will have highly equipped and competent educators who could ensure their schools transform into high-performing learning institutions.

Conclusion

A growing body of literature shows that school leaders experience challenges when facilitating the PD of their teachers' instructional needs at the early childhood level for improved teaching performance in a segment of the northeast United States (Appova & Arbaugh, 2018; Fluckiger et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2019). Lack of continuous PD could negatively affect teachers' performance within ECE settings in terms of curriculum design and instruction delivery. While research has been undertaken to explore the PD needs of teachers, little is known regarding school leaders' perceptions of the challenges faced when providing support for teachers' instructional needs for improved teaching performance in the ECE settings. A qualitative case study was conducted to understand this problem, where seven ECE teachers and five school leaders from five schools across a segment of the northeast United States were recruited into the study.

Insights from the interview responses showed that teachers hold positive perceptions about the support they receive from school leaders to meet their classroom instructional needs. In elaboration, teachers felt that principals play a central part in enhancing their curriculum development and instruction delivery efforts. Principals achieve this by providing regular guidance, inspiration, and mentorship within the ECE

settings. In addition, principals assess teachers' classroom performance and provide feedback on areas that require further skills improvement. Teachers also felt school leaders communicated relevant information about available learning workshops, seminars, and conferences. Teachers felt that their school leaders provided instructional leadership by supervising their progress and sharing recommendations for skills development and professional improvement. However, teachers expressed concerns that while principals provide needed assistance with instructional needs, they do not receive essential assistance with PD support. Therefore, teachers felt less supported in improving teaching performance in early childhood development settings. Such issues could be addressed if school leaders could support PD through learning courses, opportunities such as being facilitated to access PD courses, and access to relevant teaching resources.

School leaders shared that they had relevant academic qualifications and were aware of their roles as instructional leaders. On a daily basis, school leaders noted that they work closely with ECE teachers to ensure successful outcomes in the classrooms. The existing school policies enable principals to provide leadership in efforts to work towards the school vision and objectives. While school leaders remain dedicated to supporting teachers to achieve their goals, they expressed concerns that they hardly receive enough support from their school administrators concerning their PD in instructional leadership and adult learning. As a result, school leaders are unable to understand the learning needs nor facilitate the PD of ECE teachers. Instead, their role is largely limited to guiding teachers on effective instructional methods, curriculum design, lesson planning, and classroom management based on prior experience and knowledge of

pedagogy. While school administrators are involved in sponsoring annual workshops, seminars, or conferences, the focus of these events does not consider how to enable principals to provide support for teachers' instructional and adult learning needs. Thus, school leaders continue to experience challenges in improving their teaching performance among teachers in the ECE settings. Providing instructional leadership training which includes adult learning and coaching knowledge prior to entering their role as school leaders could substantially enable school leaders to guide and facilitate teachers in improving their skills and enhancing their instructional methods and long-term performance in their schools.

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Appendix A: Teacher Interview Questions

1. How would you define the terms “teacher learning” and “professional development” in ECE school settings?
2. What is the school principal’s role or responsibility in facilitating teacher learning and professional development in your ECE school?
3. What type of support have you received from school directors, leaders, or principals regarding your professional development?
4. How would you describe the support you receive from your school leaders or directors in your professional development?
5. In your view, what would you say about your school principals’ competency in helping you in your career growth?

Appendix B: School Directors, Leaders, Principals' Interview Questions

1. How would you describe yourself as an instructional school leader in ECE settings?
2. How would you describe your current leadership skills and knowledge in providing support to teachers in ECE settings?
3. Briefly outline your background journey as a school leader since college or university.
4. Please explain whether the training you received adequately prepared you for your current job as an instructional leader in ECE settings?
5. What is your perception about the existing school policies that establish or define your duties and responsibilities as an instructional leader?
6. How do you define the level of support you receive from the school administration in your professional development in instructional leadership?
7. How does the professional development support you receive from the school help you in understanding how adults learn, thereby offering teachers' necessary help with their career growth?
8. Please share whether your school sponsors you for regular leadership training opportunities through initiatives such as workshop training or conferences to improve your knowledge about instructional leadership practices?
9. Do you think your current knowledge about how adults learn is sufficient in helping you provide relevant support to teachers' professional development?

10. How do you feel your current job description is clear enough in terms of your roles and responsibilities in providing support to teachers' professional development?

Appendix C: Participation Invitation Letter

Dear Invitee,

My name is Sandra Greatheart. I am a doctoral student at Walden University's Educational Administration and Leadership EdD Program. I am kindly requesting your participation in a doctoral research study that I am conducting titled: Perceptions of Leadership Influence on Teacher Professional Development.

Study Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore teachers and school leaders' perceptions about the challenges faced in providing support for teachers' instructional needs for improved teaching performance at the early childhood level.

Procedures

This study will involve you completing the following steps:

1. Take part in a confidential, online audio recorded interview (phone option available) (1 hour)
2. Review a typed transcript of your interview to make corrections if needed (email option available) (10 minutes)
3. Speak with the researcher one more time after the interview to hear the researcher's interpretations and share your feedback (this is called member checking and it takes 20-30 minutes, phone option available)
4. The researcher will send a $20 Amazon gift card to all participants.

If you would like to participate in the study, please email XXX@waldenu.edu.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Sandra Greatheart, M.A. Ed, Doctoral Candidate

Walden University