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Instructional and Leadership Practices Benefiting Elementary African American Students' Reading Achievement

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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,
and that any and all revisions required by
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Walden University
2024

Abstract

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MA, Texas Women's University, 2009

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

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Abstract

There was insufficient understanding of the instructional and leadership practices that led to increased reading achievement of African students by fourth grade in a high-performing Title 1 elementary school in a suburban school district in Texas. Despite an achievement gap, the fourth-grade African American students outperformed their European American peers on the 2018, 2019, and 2022 State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness reading assessment at the study site. The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore the instructional practices of K-3 teachers and the leadership practices of elementary school administrators that led to increased reading achievement of African students by fourth grade. Ladson-Billings' theory of culturally relevant pedagogy and Khalifa's theory of culturally responsive school leadership served as the conceptual frameworks for this study. Eight K-3 teachers and two elementary school administrators participated in semistructured virtual interviews. Thematic data analysis was used to identify categories, concepts, and themes. Nine themes emerged from the data collected, including relationships, learning environments, strategic planning, instructional practices, educational communities, and the roles and responsibilities of elementary school administrators. Findings may be used to promote academic achievement and positive student outcomes for African American students. Educational leaders, students, families, teachers, and the community may also benefit from the findings in this study.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to the educational advancement of every African American child who dares to dream beyond imposed limits and beliefs. This dissertation would not have been possible without the support and encouragement of my family and closest friends. To my mother, Mary Foreman; my brother, Dr. Wesley Foreman; and my aunt, Charlsie Session, I appreciate every pep talk, prayer, expression of encouragement, and meal that nourished my soul and spirit. To my mentor, Katherine Young; my dear friend, Kimberly (Johnson) Bolden; and my god sister, Felecia Shears, every text, every phone call, and every card in the mail will forever be cherished. To the countless, brazen women leaders who have nurtured and nudged me throughout my educational journey, I extend the deepest appreciation and gratitude. I appreciate everyone's understanding of my absence from family and friends' events so I could devote time to reading articles, writing chapters, and changing my corner of the world. So many have cheered me along the way, and I thank you all for honoring my dreams. Without your love, prayers, and support, this dream would have been unbearable. I thank you and love you all dearly.

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I give honor and praise to my heavenly Father. I thank God for the patience, the perseverance, and the focus on my purpose that enabled me to complete this research study and dissertation.

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I am beyond grateful to my family, especially my mother, Mary A. Foreman; brother, Dr. Wesley Foreman; aunt, Charlsie Session; and a host of cousins and friends who kept me encouraged throughout this journey.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

In the United States, the achievement gap between African American students and their European American peers has been reported since 1969 by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2022). According to the Nation's Report Card (NAEP, 2022), the achievement gap between African American students and their European American peers persisted, as indicated by the significant decline in reading performance percentiles for African American students. The NAEP assessment, administered by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2021), is an evaluation of students' performance in content area subjects such as reading, mathematics, and science and with results reported on national and state levels (NAEP, 2022). The difference in reading performance percentiles for African American students and their European American peers, reported by the NAEP, indicates a disparity in reading development between the two groups of students based on an analysis by Garcia and Weiss (2015).

Since the achievement gap was first reported by the NAEP, successive results revealed that the achievement gap between African American students and their European American peers persisted. The NAEP (2019) reported that only 18% of African American fourth-grade students in the United States were reading at grade level proficiency or higher. In contrast, 45% of European American students in the United States were reading at or above grade level proficiency in the 2019 reporting year (NAEP, 2019). In 2019, the NAEP report indicated that only 16% of fourth-grade African American students in Texas met or exceeded proficient levels in reading. The same reporting year, 48% of European American students in Texas met or exceeded proficient

levels in reading. In 2022, the NAEP reported that reading performance had declined for both African American and European American students in Texas. In 2022, 19% of fourth-grade African American students performed at proficient level of reading while 44% of European American fourth-grade students performed at proficient level of reading according to the NAEP. In Texas, reading performance discrepancies between African American students and their European American peers resemble those at the national level.

The disparity in reading development at the national level has also been found in the state of Texas where the study site is located. The reading underperformance of African American students in Texas has been documented since the early 1970s. According to Texas Education Agency (TEA, 2014), African American students were the lowest performing group out of all racial groups tested on the 2014 Reading State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) in Grades 3–8. The STAAR is the annual content area assessment for Grades 3–8 students; students are assessed on state curriculum standards in reading and writing, mathematics, science, and social studies (TEA, 2022a). Based on students' performance on the STAAR assessments, students are rated on four performance levels that consist of the following: did not meet grade level, approaches grade level, meets grade level, or masters grade level (TEA, 2017). The TEA (2018a, 2018b) reported the continued underperformance of African American students on the 2018 Reading STAAR when only 31% of fourth-grade African American students met grade level proficiency with a scale score ranging from 1550 to 1604 out of 1890.

The scale score of the assessment measures students' reading performance in relation to the proficiency levels (TEA, 2022d).

In the current qualitative case study, I investigated a high-performing Title 1 elementary school in an urban school district in Texas whose STAAR assessment ratings reflected a significant increase on the reading performance of Grade 4 African American students in 2018, 2019, and 2022. The high-performing Title 1 elementary school had a high-percentage of economically disadvantaged students with 85.2% of students receiving free or reduced meals (TEA, 2019). The ethnic distribution of students at the high-performing Title 1 elementary school was 4.7% African American and 8.8% European American (TEA, 2019). Most of the student body was Latin Americans at 82.4%. Consistent with other Title 1 elementary schools in the target district, African American students were one of the least represented student groups at the high-performing Title 1 elementary school.

At the high-performing Title 1 elementary school, the African American students evidenced an increase on the annual end-of-year state reading assessment as measured on the STAAR. According to the STAAR performance levels awarded for 2018, 2019, and 2022, overall reading performances of African American students at the high-performing Title 1 elementary school indicated that African American students experienced academic gains or exceeded the reading performance of their European American peers (TEA, 2018, 2019, 2022.). Due to the small number of African American and European American students participating in the 2021 fourth-grade STAAR reading assessment at the high-performing Title 1 elementary school, the results were masked (TEA, 2021c);

data were not available for 2020 because the state STAAR assessment was not administered due to COVID-19 global pandemic.

Background

The scope of this study was the instructional practices and leadership practices that contributed to increased reading achievement for African American students at the high-performing Title 1 elementary school in North Texas. Researchers expressed the need for greater understanding of effective reading instructional practices for African American students (Snow & Matthews, 2016). Dickinson et al. (2019) proposed the need for direct and indirect instruction of language competencies during early reading development for African American children. Ladson-Billings (1995b) also identified the need for effective instructional practices for African American students. In addition to instructional practices, Khalifa (2018) urged the implementation of culturally responsive leadership practices that included self-reflection, the development of teachers' cultural awareness and competence, the construction of safe learning environments, and the promotion of family and community engagement by school leaders. The current study was designed to explore teachers' and administrators' instructional and leadership practices that resulted in increasing the reading achievement of African American students by Grade 4 at the high-performing Title 1 elementary school.

Problem Statement

The problem that was addressed in this study was that there was insufficient understanding of the instructional and leadership practices that led to increased reading achievement of African students by fourth grade at a high-performing Title 1 elementary

school in a suburban school district in Texas. Of the 20 Title 1 elementary schools in the target school district, all of which use the same required district-developed curriculum, the high-performing Title 1 elementary school serving as the study site was the only school in which fourth-grade African American students met or exceeded the reading achievement of their European American peers according to the results of the 2018, 2019, and 2022 annual STAAR assessment. The STAAR assessment was not administered to any Texas students at the end of the 2020 school year because the COVID-19 global pandemic incited school closures; the STAAR assessment was optional at the end of the 2021 school year when many Texas students remained engaged in virtual learning (TEA, 2020).

In the United States, the underachievement in reading among African American students has persisted in the educational system for decades (Coleman, 1966). According to Kirp (2010), efforts to address the achievement gap between African American students and their European American peers have been guided by assumed beliefs about African American students including limited innate intelligence and low socioeconomic backgrounds. Researchers expressed beliefs that the academic performance of African American students is naturally lower than their European American peers due to the probability that African American students are more likely to experience poverty and have low levels of intelligence (Kirp, 2010).

In 2002, President George W. Bush signed into law an educational reform initiative, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, designed to address the academic needs of the nation's neediest students who were being left behind, according to the U.S.

Department of Education (2002). An important component of No Child Left Behind was the Reading First Initiative that focused on students from low socioeconomic backgrounds in early language, literacy, and prereading development (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Various educational reform efforts before and after No Child Left Behind have included provisions to address the underachievement in reading for African American students.

Despite educational reform efforts to close the achievement gap, African American students' reading performance remained at lower levels compared to their European American peers, though exceptions in the academic performance exist. According to the NAEP (2022), although the achievement gap between African American students and their European American peers narrowed, the achievement gap continued. The average reading scores for African American students in Grades 4, 8, and 12 remained lower than their European American peers (NAEP, 2022). The scores for African American fourth-grade students were lower in 2019, at 18%, compared to 2017 NAEP results when 20% of African American fourth-grade students were reading at grade level proficiency or higher (NAEP, 2019). In contrast, 45% of European American students were reading at or above grade level proficiency in the 2019 reporting year (NAEP, 2019). The achievement gap between African American students and their European American peers persisted, despite some exceptions, as evidenced in the high-performing school that was addressed in the current study.

The Texas Academic Performance Report (TAPR) is an annual report that disaggregates students' STAAR assessment performances according to ethnicity,

socioeconomic class, and student groups (TEA, 2022b). According to TEA (2019), the high-performing Title 1 elementary school in the target school district demonstrated increased reading achievement by fourth-grade African American students as indicated by the percentages of African American who met grade level proficiency on the annual STAAR reading assessment. In 2018, 40% of fourth-grade African American students met grade level proficiency on the STAAR assessment, compared to 67% of fourth-grade African American students on the STAAR assessment in 2019 (TEA, 2019). According to TEA (2022b), 57% of fourth-grade African American students at the high-performing Title 1 elementary school met grade level proficiency on the STAAR assessment after experiencing interrupted instruction during the COVID-19 global pandemic. The high-performing Title 1 elementary school is an exception whereby African American students achieved academic gains in 2018 and outperformed their European American peers on the 2019 and 2022 STAAR reading assessments, meriting study of the instructional and leadership practices that contributed to these results. Due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 STAAR assessment was not administered to any Texas students because schools were closed (TEA, 2020). STAAR results for 2021 were published; however, those data were not comparable to 2018 or 2019 findings because Texas students were permitted to opt out of the assessment due to virtual learning (TEA, 2021a).

In the target school district, the reading instructional practices of K–3 teachers establish the foundation for literacy skills. In Grade 3, students begin the annual administration of the STAAR reading assessment. The STAAR assessment measures

students' reading comprehension when students read a grade-level appropriate text and answer questions based on what is read. By Grade 4, the annual progress measure component of the STAAR assessment is calculated to determine the amount of academic growth a student has accrued from Grade 3 to Grade 4. Comparable to the annual progress measure of STAAR, the NAEP assessment is administered every 2 years to measure students' reading achievement over time beginning in fourth grade. In the target school district and at the national level, fourth-grade reading data on the STAAR assessment and the NAEP assessment reflect the foundational reading skills established by K–3 instructional practices; therefore, the focus of the current study was to explore the instructional practices in reading prior to Grade 4 at the high-performing school study site.

Overall, fourth-grade STAAR reading assessment data in the target district evidenced the achievement gaps found at the national level on the NAEP. The TAPR (TEA, 2018a) showed that only 32% of fourth-grade African American students throughout the target school district met grade level reading proficiency on the STAAR reading assessment, while 47% of European American students throughout the district met grade level proficiency on the STAAR reading assessment. Noting reading performance for the 2019 school year, the TAPR revealed that 31% of African American students met grade level proficiency in reading on the STAAR reading assessment, while 45% of European American students met grade level proficiency on the STAAR reading assessment (TEA, 2019). In 2022, 36% of African American students met grade level reading proficiency on the STAAR reading assessment, while 57% of European

American students met grade level proficiency on the STAAR reading assessment (TEA, 2022b). In the target study district, the achievement gap indicated that African American students continued to underperform their European American peers on the STAAR reading assessment with one exception: the African American students at the Title 1 elementary school that served as the site for the current study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore the instructional practices of K–3 teachers and the leadership practices of elementary school administrators that led to increased reading achievement of African students by fourth grade in a high-performing Title 1 elementary school in a suburban school district in Texas. The results of the study were intended to provide information about instructional practices and leadership practices that may be replicated in other Title 1 elementary schools within the target school district and in similar Title 1 elementary school sites. Professional development may be informed by findings from this study related to improved instructional and leadership practices to increase district K–3 teachers' and district elementary administrators' knowledge of effective practices for African American students. The adoption of more effective instructional and leadership practices may lead to increased learning opportunities, thereby improving academic achievement for African American students within the target school district.

Research Questions

RQ1: What instructional practices do K–3 teachers use to develop the reading skills of African American students in a high-performing Title 1 elementary school?

RQ2: What are K–3 teachers' perceptions of instructional practices used to increase the reading achievement of African American students by 4th grade in a high-performing Title 1 elementary school?

RQ3: What leadership practices do the school administrators use to guide K–3 teachers' instructional practices in a high-performing Title 1 elementary school?

RQ4: What are elementary administrators' perceptions of leadership practices used to increase the reading achievement of African American students by 4th grade in a high-performing Title 1 elementary school?

Conceptual Framework

The theories and concepts that supported this study included the conceptual frameworks of Ladson-Billings' (1995a) theory of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP), and Khalifa's (2018) culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL). Ladson-Billings (1995a) described culturally relevant teaching as a pedagogy that is committed to collective empowerment; the three principles of CRP are that students must (a) experience academic success, (b) develop and maintain cultural competence, and (c) develop critical consciousness that contests the current social order. CRP consists of pedagogical practices that bridge students' deficits by providing scaffolding to help them experience academic success. CRP highlights factors to consider in the design of effective reading instruction for African American students.

Implementing CRP allows students to construct new knowledge through various approaches to learning. Fraise and Brooks (2015) documented that CRP is coconstructed with students, educators, and community members in a given context. In the foundational

research of Au (1998), positive outcomes resulted when a coconstruction approach was applied to literacy instruction, which included important components of CRP such as students' ethnicity, native language, and social class. The use of CRP emphasizes the role of the learner to construct meaning from personal and social experiences.

In addition to personal and social experiences, CRP emphasizes the importance of culture (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). M. G. Jones and Brader-Araje (2002) stated that a child's development is largely influenced by their culture, and higher cognitive functions are innately social. Ladson-Billings' (2014) learning concept, termed *fluid understanding of culture*, happens when students are engaged in social settings where they are influenced by values, beliefs, and perspectives of other students' cultures. The role of culture in addition to the principles of CRP supported the use of Ladson-Billings' (1995a) theory of CRP as a framework for the current study. However, Gay (2010, as cited in Khalifa et al., 2016) explained that culturally relevant teaching, an extension of CRP, is not enough to solve the challenges faced by students of color; instead, all aspects of the educational enterprise, including administration, need to be reformed and transformed. Given this assertion, Khalifa's (2018) model of CRSL served as the second framework for the current study.

CRSL, derived from CRP, includes philosophies, practices, and policies that influence and create culturally inclusive learning environments for African American students who speak African American English (Khalifa, 2018). African American English (AAE) is the variations of the English language spoken predominantly in African American communities (Baugh, 2020). CRSL practices address and mitigate educational,

social, political, and economic inequities that impact marginalized students of color (Khalifa et al., 2016). In developing CRSL, Khalifa et al. (2016) maintained that school leadership is a crucial component of any education reform, second only to teaching. A school leader's role and how the leader responds to students' cultural learning and social needs is crucial to the overall development and advancement of students, particularly students of color (Khalifa et al., 2016). CRSL addresses issues associated with the educational improvements for marginalized students, including a range of academic and personal issues that stem from low teacher expectations, low school performance, and disproportionately assigned discipline penalties (Khalifa et al., 2016). School leaders' adoption of CRSL practices enhance the opportunities for African American students to experience academic success and personal growth.

Nature of the Study

To answer the research questions in this study, I used a qualitative single case study design. According to Rubin and Rubin (2011), qualitative researchers not only gather and interpret data using a variety of methods but also consider the people connected to the data, their lived experiences, and the context surrounding those experiences. A qualitative single case study was the most suitable design for the current study because the study was bounded by setting and time to allow a more in-depth exploration of the participants' experiences with the phenomenon (see Burkholder et al., 2019). Grade K–3 teachers' instructional practices and school administrators' leadership practices were explored by interviewing participants about the practices they use and their perceptions of these practices that resulted in increasing the reading achievement of

African American students as measured on the annual fourth-grade STARR reading assessment.

Yin (2003) and P. Baxter and Jack (2008) defined a *case study* as an empirical inquiry that explores the "how" or "why" of a phenomenon within the context in which it is occurring. According to Yin, context is an important factor to consider when determining whether to use a single case study or multiple case study for better understanding of a phenomenon. The focus on one entity or a single group within one environment due to unique circumstances warrants a single case study (Yin, 2003). Yin defined the design of a case study as rational order that connects the research questions of a study to the collected data and eventually a conclusion. I explored the instructional and leadership practices of K–3 teachers and school administrators at the high-performing Title 1 elementary school to gain an understanding of instructional and leadership practices that increased the reading achievement of African American students by Grade 4. In this study, the high-performing Title 1 elementary school served as a single case.

For this single case study, self-developed interview protocols included open-ended questions and probes to collect sufficient evidence to draw credible conclusions (see Rubin & Rubin, 2011). All interview questions were constructed using the conceptual frameworks of CRP and CRSL. Additionally, interview questions were constructed with consideration of the literature on the reading development of elementary African American students and effective practices to support African American students in reading. To ensure content validity of the interview questions, teachers and school administrators not participating in the study were asked to review the interview protocols.

Data from the semistructured interviews were coded to identify categories, concepts, and themes using a 6-step thematic data analysis process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) to (a) familiarize myself with the data, (b) produce initial codes using open and axial coding, (c) generate categories and begin to search for themes, (d) review themes, (e) define and name themes, and (f) produce the analysis report. Williams and Moser (2019) described open coding as an initial coding process during which words or phrases are used to describe and summarize raw data; axial coding involves combining related codes to establish categories of codes. Both coding methods were used to identify the emergent themes that generated the findings to answer the research questions.

Definitions

The following is a list of terms used throughout the study. The definitions provide the context to the terms as used in the study.

Academic success: The mastery of academic skills as evident in formal and informal assessments; academic success supports students' future learning (Aronson & Laughter, 2016).

African American English (AAE): The variations of English spoken predominantly in African American communities. Also referred to as Black English Vernacular, African American Language, and Ebonics. The usage of AAE is derived from slave descendants (Baugh, 2020).

Cultural competence: A student's culture; cultural competence refers to a person's ability to be rooted in their own culture while gaining fluency in another culture (Ladson-Billings, 1995b).

General American English: The language most used in everyday academic instruction; it is the language that most curriculum materials and resources are printed in (Washington & Seidenberg, 2021).

National Assessment Educational Progress (NAEP): A federally mandated assessment administered every 2 years to fourth, eighth, and 12th graders in reading and math (NCES, 2021).

State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR): An assessment that measures students' mastery of the state curriculum standards; students in Grades 3–12 are annually assessed in reading, math, science, and/or social studies (TEA, 2022a).

Texas Academic Performance Reports (TAPR): Reports that are published annually of varied student performance data for every student in every Texas school district. Available after the completion of annual state-mandated assessments, the TAPR also reports school, staff, demographic, and student programs data (TEA, 2022b).

Title 1 programs: Federally funded initiatives that support state and local educational agencies to provide high-quality education to low-performing students predominantly from low socioeconomic backgrounds (U.S. Department of Education, 2018).

Assumptions

In this study, I assumed that voluntary participation would ensure that participants did not feel coerced to provide information and would increase the likelihood that the data provided by participants would be an accurate and true account of their perspectives

and practices. I also assumed that K–3 teachers of African American students at the study site created learning opportunities that resulted in proficient readers as evidenced in the annual STAAR assessment data. A final assumption was that elementary school administrators at the study site provided the support needed by K–3 teachers and African American students that resulted in academic success for this population of students.

Scope and Delimitations

This study was bounded by the school site and participants at the high-performing Title 1 elementary school in one Texas school district, based on fourth-grade state assessment reading scores. Student achievement measures were delimited to the reading results on the STAAR assessment that is given at the end of the fourth-grade school year. Assessment results for the high-performing Title 1 elementary school indicated exceptional achievement of African American students compared to their European American peers, whereby African American experienced academic gains or exceeded the reading performance of their European American peers. Middle and high school participants were excluded to focus on the practices that build the foundational reading skills developed in Grades K–3 preceding the STAAR reading assessment in Grade 4.

Although other subpopulations of students were considered for this study, the population was delimited to African American students given that Russell and Shiffler (2019) noted a reading disparity and causation for reading achievement gap between African American students and their European American peers linked to instructional practices. Data from K–3 teachers and the school administrators were delimited to the high-performing Title 1 elementary school in the target school district because B. E.

Jones et al. (2019) noted that culturally relevant teaching practices can promote the reading development of African American students. The focus was on the instructional practices and leadership practices that contributed to reading success by fourth grade for African American students enrolled in the Title 1 elementary school in the target school district. It was a delimitation to study the high-performing school using a strength-based rather than a deficit approach to study the phenomenon.

Because of the design, the findings may not be transferrable to other student subpopulations or to students at middle or high schools or students at non-Title 1 schools. However, the findings may be transferable to other Title 1 elementary schools within the target school district that serves African American students in Grades K–3. Though generalizability is unable to be completely accomplished due to sampling and measurement used in qualitative designs (see Hays & McKibben, 2021), the relevance of the findings from this study may be transferable to similar contexts. Findings from the study may be beneficial to the advocacy of the reading development of K–3 African American students and may contribute to the development of teachers' instructional practices and administrators' leadership practices related to African American student achievement in reading in Grades K–3.

Limitations

According to Ross and Zaidi (2019), irrespective of the design of research, all studies have limitations that may influence the findings and outcomes. The current study was limited to one high-performing Title 1 elementary school in one Texas school district where Grade 4 African American students made academic gains or exceeded the

performance of their European American peers on the Grade 4 state reading assessment. Location is often a limitation in qualitative research because of the researcher's access to the study site and the participants. Additionally, the current study was limited to a small sample size, which is inherent in qualitative research, because participants had to have direct experience with the phenomenon (see Theofanidis & Fountauki, 2019). To mitigate scheduling conflicts (another potential limitation of qualitative studies), participants completed semistructured interviews using a virtual conferencing tool. Participants were asked permission to video record their semistructured interviews to produce video recordings and transcripts.

Transferability allows for the data findings to be used in other settings (Leung, 2015). With a limited sample size of participants from one of the 20 Title 1 elementary schools in the target school district, transferability of findings was limited to other Title 1 elementary schools with similar student populations. To increase transferability, thick descriptions and details of the context were disclosed to increase readers' understanding of the phenomenon to determine whether the findings are transferable to other settings.

To address dependability, which is an indication of uniformity in data collection, data analysis, and reporting of data findings (Burkholder et al., 2019), member checking was conducted. I provided the semistructured interview transcripts to K–3 teachers and school administrators to check for accuracy and to provide additional information after the initial analysis of the data. The descriptive details and member checking was used to address limitations inherent in qualitative studies to increase transferability and dependability (see Burkholder et al., 2019).

As the primary researcher of this study, I was a former second- and third-grade teacher and school administrator in the target school district but no longer worked in the target school district at the time of the study. During my years of service in the target school district, I served in a collaborative role with teachers and school administrators. To mitigate any bias, I practiced reflexivity by composing a narrative autobiography in which I disclosed my background experiences as an African American student, an African American second- and third-grade teacher, and an African American elementary administrator. I also disclosed the reasons that inspired me to conduct this research study (see Olmos-Vega et al., 2022). I shared my narrative autobiography with a colleague to expose any underlying biases I may have overlooked.

Significance

This research is significant because it addressed a gap in understanding the instructional and leadership practices that have increased the reading achievement of elementary African American students by fourth grade. The gap is defined by the distance between current practices and the desired instructional and leadership practices that yield increased reading achievement for African American students (Robinson & Kennedy, 2009). Dickinson et al. (2019) identified the importance of providing African American students with instruction related to language development and code-related abilities or phonological processes in the early school years that increased reading comprehension in successive years. Positive social change may result for students as teachers and school administrators increase their knowledge and understanding of effective instructional practices in reading for African American students that were used

at the school study site. African American students within the target school district may benefit from increased reading achievement that led to greater academic success with the adoption of the practices by teachers and administrators in other Title 1 elementary schools.

In the target school district, elementary African American students have historically underperformed their European American peers in reading achievement except at the one Title 1 elementary study site. The high-performing Title 1 elementary school was the only elementary school out of the 20 Title 1 elementary schools in the target district with high reading performance of Grade 4 African American students, which was the reason for its selection as the study site. Khalifa et al. (2016) stated that issues associated with the educational improvements for marginalized students include a range of academic practices that stem from teacher expectations and school performance, which were explored in the current study. Looking at the problem through a lens of culturally relevant teaching and culturally relevant school leadership practices was intended to address the gap in understanding the instructional and leadership practices that increased the reading achievement of elementary African American students by fourth grade, particularly for those students who speak AAE.

The results from this single case study of the K–3 teachers and school administrators at the high-performing Title 1 elementary school who improved the reading achievement of African American students may inform the target school districts' teachers about effective instructional practices for elementary African American students. Likewise, as the school administrators from the high-performing Title 1 elementary

schools share their leadership practices, other elementary administrators within the target school district may gain an understanding of how to guide their K–3 teachers in instructional practices in reading resulting in increased achievement for African American students by fourth grade. The implementation of instructional and leadership practices that benefit African American students' reading performance may lead to successful lifelong opportunities.

Summary

In Chapter 1, the problem of insufficient understanding of the instructional and leadership practices that led to increased reading achievement of African American students by fourth grade in one Title 1 elementary school in a suburban school district in Texas was identified. The connection between effective reading instructional and leadership practices and the outcome of reading performance of African American students was presented. The research questions of this qualitative case study addressed K–3 teachers' instructional practices and their perceptions of the effectiveness of these practices in increasing reading achievement of African American students. Additionally, the research questions focused on elementary school administrators' leadership practices and their perceptions of how their leadership practices influenced reading achievement of African American students. Data for this qualitative single case study were collected using semistructured interviews conducted through a virtual conferencing platform.

This single case study was delimited to K–3 teachers at the high-performing Title 1 elementary school in the target school district. The K–3 teachers at the school study site had experience providing reading instruction to African American students in Grades K–

3; school administrators had experience supporting K–3 teachers and leading African American students in Grades K–3. Assumptions and limitations were disclosed to provide an understanding of the scope of the study. The findings from this study may be beneficial to the target school district curriculum writers, professional development facilitators, early childhood literacy teachers, and elementary school administrators by providing insight into instructional and leadership practices that can address the reading achievement gap between African American students and their European American peers. Chapter 2 contains the literature review related to the study's problem and purpose and begins with an explanation of the conceptual frameworks for the study: Ladson-Billings' (1995a) theory of CRP and Khalifa's (2018) CRSL. The literature related to the historical context of the problem and the recent literature on the instructional practices and leadership practices specific to advancing achievement of African American students are reviewed.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter 2 is a review of literature related to the phenomenon of insufficient understanding of the instructional and leadership practices that yield increased reading achievement of African American students by fourth grade. Although research existed about the reading achievement gap between African American students and their European American peers (Bañales et al., 2019), there was a need for the exploration of instructional practices of K–3 teachers and the leadership practices of elementary school administrators. The research problem investigated in this study was that there is insufficient understanding of the instructional and leadership practices that led to increased reading achievement of African students by fourth grade in a high-performing Title 1 elementary school in a suburban school district in Texas. The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore the instructional practices and the leadership practices that led to increased reading achievement of African students by fourth grade in a high-performing Title 1 elementary school in a suburban school district in Texas. In my study, I pursued understanding how the instructional and leadership practices yielded increased reading achievement for African American students (see Marshall & Khalifa, 2018).

The research literature indicated the problem to be significant with further study needed for understanding. Lack of understanding of how teachers' instructional practices and administrators' leadership practices influence African American students' academic achievement may perpetuate the problem and negatively impede future successes of this group of students (Boutte & Bryan, 2019). Additional research about instructional

practices, in particular those that would address teachers' perceptions of cultural deficits, was relevant to the educational discipline (Bertrand, 2023). Researchers noted gaps between existing instructional and leadership practices and desired instructional and leadership practices as reasons why African American students underperform their European American peers in academic settings. Jenkins (2021) asserted that African American students often suffer in school settings because there is a lack of linguistic, curricular, and pedagogical references for them to relate. When African American students are criticized for their language and ways of speech, Boutte and Bryan (2019) described these practices as linguistic violence. Curricular and pedagogical content that values Eurocentric ways of understanding is another way that African American students suffer in educational settings (Boutte & Bryan, 2019). School leaders, in particular school administrators who fail to embody culturally responsive leadership practices for diverse student populations, perpetuate the school's ineffectiveness in creating learning environments that are inclusive and value every student (Brown et al., 2019). Mindful of the problem of this study, my intention was to identify culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive leadership practices that supported African American students in reading achievement by Grade 4.

Chapter 2 comprises five sections. A review of literature related to the two conceptual frameworks for this study is provided that consists of Ladson-Billings' (1995a, 1995b, 1995c) theory of CRP and Khalifa's (2018) theory of CRSL practices. Next, a review of literature related to the achievement gap between African American students and their European American peers is presented. Then, the role of language

variances in literacy development is addressed. Finally, the literature pertaining to the impact of effective instructional practices and literature related to the impact of effective leadership practices is reviewed.

The literature review was conducted using a systematic approach of phrases and key terms related to the problem, purpose, and research questions of this study. The Walden University Library and various search engines were used that included Walden University dissertations, EBSCO, ERIC, ProQuest, and SAGE. Google Scholar and Emerald Insight were also used to search for more peer-reviewed articles. Basic and advanced searches were conducted using these search engines. A search filter was used to identify relevant sources published within 5 years of the publication of this study. Seminal works were more than 5 years old were accessed to substantiate the conceptual framework theories and history of the achievement gap between African American students and European American students. Aside from using search engines, I used references cited from other related research articles to identify applicable research articles.

The phrases and key terms used in the Boolean searches were *dialect, literacy development, African American* or *Black Persons* or *Black People*, *literacy development* or *emergent literacy* or *early, African American* or *Black Persons* or *Black People, kindergarten* or *preschool* or *early childhood education* or *first grade* or *grade one* or *second grade* or *grade two* or *third grade* or *grade three*, *literacy, African American* or *black persons* or *black people, kindergarten* or *preschool* or *early childhood education* or *first grade* or *grade one* or *second grade* or *grade two* or *third grade* or *grade three,*

reading achievement, culturally relevant leadership, culturally relevant leadership and *black students* or *African American students* and *achievement' elementary principals* and *black students* or *African American students*, *elementary principals* and *effective leadership* and *African American students, literacy development* and *African American students* or *children*, and *achievement gap* and *African American students*. Research articles that correlated to the focus and intent of this study were selected and reviewed for relevancy of content and conclusions.

Conceptual Frameworks

The conceptual frameworks for this study were derived from two theories: Ladson-Billings' (1995a, 1995b, 1995c) theory of CRP and Khalifa's (2018) theory of CRSL. CRP incorporates culturally relevant pedagogical practices that support the academic advancement of African American students. Ladson-Billings' (1995a, 1995b, 1995c) CRP centralized the beliefs and attitudes of teachers of students from multicultural backgrounds. CRP is akin to Gay's (2013) culturally responsive teaching, which focuses on teacher practices. Both strands of multicultural education focus on the importance of students' cultural identities and the incorporation of their cultural backgrounds with classroom curriculum to increase academic successes of African American students and other marginalized students of color (Mensah, 2021).

CRP

CRP is a commitment to effective instructional practices that embrace and employ the cultural identities of African American students; the implementation of CRP empowers students to become stewards and advocates of their learning (Ladson-Billings,

1995a). For African American students to experience academic success, researchers expressed that teachers need to implement CRP in a safe, supportive classroom environment (Gay, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b, 1995c). The framework for the current study was constructed in part on the theory of CRP. Literature reviewed for this study provided understanding of how CRP is connected to the reading achievement of African American students. Employing CRP as one of the conceptual frameworks for this study provided a foundation to understand factors related to effective instructional practices that contribute to the reading achievement of African American students attending the high-performing Title 1 elementary school in the target district.

Khalifa's (2018) CRSL was the second conceptual framework for this study. According to Khalifa et al. (2016), CRSL is a form of transformational leadership that encompasses the culturally responsive leadership practices employed by school leaders to effectively serve and lead marginalized students such as African American students. Khalifa described CRSL practices as philosophies, practices, and policies that influence and create more inclusive learning environments for diverse students such as African American students who speak AAE. Gay (2010, as cited in Khalifa et al., 2016) explained that transformation and reformation are needed in all aspects of the educational organization to confront the educational challenges of students of color. Solely relying on the culturally relevant teaching practices is not enough to sustain reformation. Like Ladson-Billings' CRP, Khalifa's CRSL embodies practices that recognize the importance of students' cultural beliefs and values in the learning environment without the assimilation of different cultures, as described by Magno and Schiff (2010). CRSL was

employed as the second conceptual framework for this study because it provided a foundational understanding of the many leadership factors related to the academic achievement of African American students.

The term CRP was coined by Ladson-Billings (1995a) after the consideration of teaching practices that reform education by incorporating aspects of students' cultural backgrounds into classroom instruction. Ladson-Billings evaluated the seminal work of Au and Jordan (1981), who attributed the reading success on standardized assessments of native Hawaiian students to their permissible use of a common language style; the instructional practices were described as culturally appropriate. Mohatt and Erickson (1981) found similar academic successes when teachers engaged with Native American students using language patterns that were representative of their home cultures. Mohatt and Erickson referred to these instructional practices as culturally congruent.

Later, Jordan (1985) defined the term *culturally compatible* as instructional practices incorporating students' cultures to produce desirable academic behaviors. Irvine's (1990) research with African American students attributed academic success to the acceptance of cultural speech and language patterns as well as other African American social norms. Ladson-Billings' (1995a) CRP extends beyond the integration of cultural language patterns for African American students' academic successes to affirmation of African American students' cultural identity while developing a conscious awareness to question social injustices.

CRP encompasses instructional practices that make learning possible for all students. Culturally relevant pedagogy links the importance of schooling and culture.

Teachers play a pivotal role in CRP. An underpinning of CRP teachers use students' cultural backgrounds as a vehicle to desired academic achievement. In CRP, students' cultural background is viewed as an asset rather than a deficit (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). According to Drevdahl (2017), teachers are significant influencers in the academic success of African American students when they acknowledge students' cultural identities to help them propel toward successful learning. Acknowledgement and acceptance of students' cultural background within the school environment is an important factor of CRP and for future academic success of African American students. When teachers reflect and reframe their biases, develop an appreciation for the diversity of their students, and confront the barriers that challenge their students, they are more inclined to create an equitable and inclusive learning environment (Samuels, 2018). The use of effective instructional tools within the learning environment improves teachers' efforts to mitigate racial biases and focus on students' strengths, which includes positive perceptions of their cultures (Hugh-Pennie et al., 2021). Researchers have noted the positive effects that acknowledgment of students' cultures have on African American students. The acknowledgement of students' diversity and cultural backgrounds is an important component of CRP and has significant implications for the academic achievements of African American students.

Incorporating students' cultural backgrounds includes parent and community engagement, which is also important to the achievement of African American students (Khalifa, 2018). Ladson-Billings (2021) noted that for African American students to master the work, the school community is required to do the work with student families

and the community. In the age of education after the COVID-19 global pandemic, Ladson-Billings encouraged school personnel to rethink and renegotiate the role of parents in their child's education. Through collaborative efforts, policymakers, parents, community-based partners, and educators can disassemble unjust educational practices to reconstruct an educational system that supports the comprehensive needs of all students (Akin-Sabuncu et al., 2023), regardless of cultural backgrounds. The roles and responsibilities of parents and community engagement are vital to understanding the influence of cultural backgrounds in the quest for academic achievement for African American students.

With pedagogical research spanning back to the 1980s, Ladson-Billings (1995a) found that many classrooms lacked equitable instructional practices designed to elevate the academic achievement of African American students. Ladson-Billings highlighted the inclusion of three instructional behaviors necessary for learning to occur in the learning environment. These instructional behaviors, which are the underlying principles of CRP, are academic success, the development and maintenance of cultural competence, and critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995a).

Academic success entails students' skill development, meaningful learning, teachers' expectations of academic excellence for all students, and a focus on students' unique needs (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). Ladson-Billings (1995a) noted that students must experience academic success. In many instances, academic success has not been achievable due to factors including teachers' low expectations and negative biases about African American students (Wright & Ford, 2016). However, regardless of these and any

other factors, Gay (2013) believed that it is the right of all children to experience academic success.

The development and maintenance of cultural competence is another important underlying principle of CRP. Ladson-Billings (1995a) noted the importance of merging academic achievement with cultural awareness, of inviting parents to be a part of the classroom learning environment, and of encouraging the use of home language for speaking and writing in the learning environment. Drevdahl (2017) described cultural competence as effective functioning within different cultural settings. Boon and Lewthwaite (2015) shared findings from a qualitative study of 27 Aboriginal ninth–12th grade students and 27 parents and guardians noting that the ability to respect different cultures is a contributor to students' sense of belonging (Boon & Lewthwaite, 2015). With a focus on and integration of students' cultures, learning is achievable for all students (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Cultural competency is important for the implementation of CRP in the learning environment.

Critical consciousness is the third principle of CPR. Critical consciousness is an awareness of societal differences and its effects on students (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). Students exercise critical thinking skills through critical consciousness that benefits students across grade levels and content areas. Findings from a study assessing literature preferences for Grade 1 and Grade 2 African American students by Cartledge et al. (2016) indicated that children's fiction and nonfiction literature should be used to introduce and explain critical consciousness to students of color. Historically, schools have been charged with the task of steering students' awareness of social injustices

(Amin et al., 2017). Bertrand (2020) noted that children's literature can support the facilitation of classroom discussions about social concerns with elementary-age students. The use of picture books during classroom instruction affords students opportunities to encounter their economic and cultural realities through characters and conversations (Quast & Bertrand, 2019). According to Dee and Penner's (2016) quantitative study of an ethnic studies curriculum pilot program, academic achievement was positively linked to the development of students' critical consciousness of social injustices. Critical consciousness plays a significant role in the fidelity of CRP.

CRSL

Culturally responsive school leadership comprises practices, attitudes, and beliefs that effectively serve historically marginalized students, such as African American students. Khalifa (2018) expressed that school leaders can confront assumptions, stereotypes, and biases by executing inclusion-based principles, curriculum, and pedagogy in efforts to create a more culturally relevant learning environment. A school leader has to possess the capacity and skill level to transform schools into learning environments that produce positive student outcomes (Khalifa, 2018). Opportunity gaps can be minimized when school leaders promote culturally relevant learning environments that support diverse student populations (Flores, 2018).

Leithwood et al. (2020) suggested that school leaders should be responsive to the context they are charged to lead. Establishing greater communication and family engagement in efforts to create a shared vision is a charge of school leadership (Goodall, 2018). Culturally responsive school leaders are community leaders who engage and

empower the community; family and community engagement serve as a vehicle that promotes learning environments where minoritized students like African American students can thrive academically. Culturally responsive school leadership prioritizes community relations with the collaboration of administrators, teachers, parents, and cultural and community leaders (Khalifa, 2018). Khalifa added that school leadership that values the collaboration with community members and that empower students and their families are creating optimal learning environments for African American students.

Employing CRSL practices is a response to evolving demographics within school environments (Campos-Moreira et al., 2020). School leaders who use CRSL practices are equipped to meet the needs of diverse populations they serve (Khalifa et al., 2016). Khalifa (2018) accredited three basic assertions of culturally responsive school leadership: (1) school leadership must embrace cultural responsiveness; (2) culturally responsiveness should be a priority and consistently practiced by school leaders; and (3) culturally responsive school leadership is characterized by four core leadership behaviors including (a) critically self-reflective, (b) establish and maintain culturally responsive curriculum and teaching staff, (c) promote inclusivity, and (d) engage students' cultural backgrounds which includes their communities.

Khalifa (2018) described critical self-reflection as school leaders' ability to recognize oppressive practices and disparities to either reproduce or contest those practices. Critical self-reflection is useful for school leaders who confront and attempt to comprehend inequities (Hallberg & Santiago, 2021). For school leaders, practicing critical self-reflection can create trusting relationships with parents and communities as

dialogues begin to shift toward reform (Banwo et al., 2022). In a qualitative study that included three Australian primary school leaders, L. Baxter et al. (2021) found that self-reflection increased school leaders' awareness of their underlying beliefs and assumptions that guided their behaviors and professional practices in challenging situations. As a result of practicing critical self-reflection, L. Baxter et al. (2021) posited a notable climate shift within the learning environments as school leaders' perceptions and reactions to issues changed due to increased self-awareness. Critical self-reflection is a fundamental component of CRSL.

Additionally, culturally responsive school leaders recruit and train teachers who are aware of culturally relevant pedagogical practices that meet the needs of diverse student populations (Clark & Chrispeels, 2022). Culturally responsive school leaders must be prepared to lead improvements in school environments that are constantly diversifying (Shields & Hesbol, 2020); school leaders must coach teachers in lesson designs that are relevant to diverse groups of students (Khalifa et al., 2016). According to Khalifa et al. (2016), professional development is needed to continuously ensure that teachers are versed in culturally responsive practices that serve minority students. Furthermore, the use of a culturally relevant curriculum equips teachers with knowledge and skills to execute culturally responsive practices (Wynter-Hoyte et al., 2019). Culturally responsive school leaders understand that meaningful learning occurs when students' cultural backgrounds are reflective in the curriculum, materials, and teaching practices.

The ability to focus on inclusivity, understanding and acceptance of the role of diverse cultural backgrounds within the learning environment, is also a crucial behavior of culturally responsive school leaders. Culturally responsive school leaders promote inclusivity by welcoming and nurturing students' diverse cultural backgrounds (Shields, 2018). Culturally responsive school leaders foster inclusive learning environments where marginalized students, like African American students, are welcomed and feel a sense of belonging (Khalifa, 2018). By establishing communities of inclusiveness, culturally responsive school leaders uphold socially just systems that challenge all stakeholders to think critically while maintaining interdependence (Khalifa, 2018; Shields, 2018). Culturally responsive school leaders have an influential role to advance inclusivity for all students and is paramount for the success of African American students.

In the research of Cureton (2020) and Weir (2020), school leaders found it challenging to engage parents of historically disadvantaged and culturally diverse communities. Khalifa (2018) recommended school leaders to engage the communities they serve in culturally responsive ways. Culturally responsive school leaders value and elicit cultural wealth from the diverse communities they serve (Khalifa, 2018; Shields, 2018). Additionally, culturally responsive school leaders establish positive relationships with the community in efforts to develop positive understandings of students and their families (Khalifa, 2018). Engaging students' cultural backgrounds and communities is an integral leadership behavior for school leaders who create opportunities for African American students to achieve academic success.

Studies Related to Conceptual Frameworks

Ladson-Billings (1995a) posited that culturally relevant pedagogy must be implemented to drive the academic success of African American students. The adoption of culturally relevant pedagogy that integrates students' cultures into instructional practices has shown to be effective as evident in studies of successful teachers of African American students (Griner & Steward, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1995a). The acknowledgement of all cultures, not the assimilation of cultures, promotes compassion and tolerance as students learn to value cultures outside of their own (Fraise & Brooks, 2015). With a better understanding of the influence of students' cultures in the learning environment, teachers can use their students' cultural backgrounds to foster students' success, which may produce academic gains for African American students.

Researchers have identified a positive link between the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy and the academic success of African American students (Griner & Steward, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b, 1995c). Because this study explored K-3 teachers' instructional practices at one high-performing Title 1 elementary school in the target district that resulted in increased reading achievement for fourth-grade African American students, Ladson-Billings' (1995a) CRP serves as a conceptual framework for this study. A second conceptual lens, Khalifa's (2018) CRSL, was also used to explore the leadership practices of school administrators at one high-performing Title 1 elementary school study site in the target district. The leadership practices of school administrators were explored to determine their relevancy as related to the increased reading achievement for fourth-grade African American students.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variables

The Achievement Gap

Historical Review Related to the Achievement Gap

In the United States, African American students have significantly underperformed compared to European American students in terms of academic achievement (Bañales et al., 2019). Student underperformance refers to the discrepancy between students expected performance based on students' academic potential and students' actual performance (Feron & Schils, 2020). Students' underperformance contributes to the achievement gap. According to National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), this phenomenon known as the achievement gap, develops when one ethnic or racial group of students underperforms another ethnic or racial group of students on standardized achievement assessments creating a statistically significant difference (NCES, 2022). The achievement gap has been studied by researchers who have sought to understand contributing factors and ways to mitigate this issue (Hung et al., 2020). Despite education reform efforts to increase per pupil funding in underperforming school districts, researchers have found that funding is, in fact, not the leading contributor to the achievement gap; rather, household adult education attainment levels contribute most to the achievement gap (Hanushek et al., 2019; Hung et al., 2020). Understanding the achievement gap phenomenon has implications for the education field and those who work within it, including teachers and school leaders; additionally, the implications of the achievement gap extend beyond school years and results in other gaps such as the wage

gap, income-based achievement gap, and gender achievement gap (Birnbaum et al., 2021).

Social Factors Related to the Achievement Gap

The achievement gap has been the center of several education reform efforts. McKendall et al. (2019) argued that legislation like Brown v. Board of Education and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 were enacted to remedy an education system that was failing African American students due to structural racism. However, as one study showed, the achievement gap has remained relatively unchanged in the years since the decades-old legislation, No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 (Hanushek et al., 2019).

Conversely, Hashim et al. (2020) conducted a study to determine whether there was a relationship between the achievement gap and socioeconomic status, with the achievement gap being affected by the latter. Using school level aggregated data and the March Current Population Survey to determine the relationship between student achievement and income, Hashim et al. (2020) discovered that although the income-based achievement gap still exists between African American students and European American students, the achievement gap is slightly and slowly narrowing.

Goudeau et al. (2021) found that COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the income-based achievement gap for many families, particularly families who were African American and lower socioeconomic status (SES). Prior to the pandemic, African American students were already more likely to experience disadvantages due to the compounded effects of marginalization of the intersectionality of race and class. Goudeau

et al. analyzed global parents' survey data collected during the 2020 COVID-19 school closures. Goudeau et al. noted that the survey data of middle- and upper-class families, who are less likely to be African American, had more cultural alignment with the traditional education setting. Middle and upper-class families, who were more likely to have already experienced forms of virtual learning, were better equipped to support their students at home and were more likely to understand the resources they needed to access to supplement in-school learning (Goudeau et al., 2021). Although students from lower class families are more likely be at an educational disadvantage, when those students are African American, the likelihood is even higher. As Carnoy et al. (2020) asserted in their study, many factors contribute to achievement gap, including the inequitable distribution of resources among schools.

Racial Identity and the Achievement Gap

Other researchers, like Binning and Browman (2020), sought to understand the achievement gap from a socio-psychological standpoint. Binning and Browman conducted a study to examine types of threats and their impact on student achievement. Identity threats, which are concerns about a person's or group's positive image that arise from negative comments or behaviors of others, often experienced by African American students, have a negative influence on student achievement. However, Binning and Browman found that deliberate interventions to reduce stress and feelings of potential harm positively influenced African American student achievement. Similarly, Morsy and Rothstein (2019) analyzed family survey data gathered from 2003-2005 and found that African American children are more likely than European American children to

experience childhood stress and are less likely to have access to adequate resources to support them. Morsy and Rothstein (2019) found that these sources of stress including traumatic experiences, racial discrimination, residential segregation, poverty, incarcerated family members and other related toxic stressors, contribute to an academic achievement gap.

A longitudinal study conducted by Borman et al. (2021) corroborated the relationship between identity threat and achievement among African American students. Implementation of the study occurred during the 2011-2012 school year with 1,048 parents giving consent for their children, who were seventh graders, to participate. The study concluded at the end of the students' 12th grade year in 2016-2017. The results of the study indicated that although African American students are more likely to perceive threats related to their racial identity that negatively impacted their achievement in school, there were interventions teachers could implement to mitigate these threats (Borman et al., 2021). For example, the researchers used a self-affirmation intervention with middle school students and saw positive influences on the achievement of African American students compared to those who did not receive the intervention. Borman et al. (2021) attributed the success of their study to its longevity of the interventions as compared with other self-affirmation interventions typically conducted during one school year.

It is important to examine the achievement gap from a critical race lens so as to not undermine the influence of systemic racism on achievement as well as other factors that influence achievement (Hashim et al., 2020). A study conducted by Jaramillo (2023)

focused on the manner in which discussions about achievement, without a critical lens, failed to acknowledge the true gap that exists—the opportunity gap—which serves as a major barrier to achievement or academic success. Jaramillo conducted a critical analysis of selected Toronto District School Board educational policies that were established to address achievement gaps. After a critical analysis of language structure, definitions of achievement gap, positionality of diverse groups within the policies, and the relationship between student groups and the educational institution, Jaramillo found that the educational system was deemed as superior, diverse groups were depicted through a deficit lens, and achievement for the diverse groups was only achievable through assimilation.

Likewise, Rivale-Bell (2022) also found significant sociohistorical barriers embedded in school policies that adversely affect African American students and other students who have marginalized racial identities. These barriers include curricula that are devoid of cultural relevance for African American students as well as practices that allow room for biased decisions to be made concerning discipline that result in exclusionary practices (Rivale-Bell, 2022).

Literacy Development

Literacy development, particularly early literacy development, is largely shaped by a student's home literacy environment or HLE (Zhang et al., 2020). The HLE includes all the resources within a home that contribute to a student's language acquisition. The home literacy model can be used to describe code-related and meaning-related literacy experiences. For example, code-related experiences are those that involve explicit

teaching of literacy skills such as decoding. Meaning-related experiences involve those during which a caregiver co-experiences literacy with a child, such as reading a book aloud and engaging in a literary discussion (Zhang et al., 2020). According to Wetzel et al. (2019) and Zhang et al. (2020), literacy development is a socio-cultural process, heavily reliant on shared meaning-making, collaboration, and community.

For many African American students, literacy development can be hindered in schools when literacy curriculum all but erases their cultural experiences (Thomas & Dyches, 2019). The mismatch between African American students' home cultures and the teaching methods and materials used to foster literacy development in schools creates a gap in opportunity for African American students to fully connect to and engage with the curriculum (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). While cultural congruence is likely not directly responsible for the academic success of students from the dominant culture, studies have shown that students whose racial identities are underrepresented in the curriculum are afforded less opportunities to relate to the materials and make deep connections with their peers (Ladson-Billings, 1995b).

For African American students, literacy development is a rather complex process during which their racial identities face tension as the cultural attributes that might be celebrated in their homes and lives are not seen in the literature they read or in the styles of writing and speaking that are held as standard in the classroom (Henderson et al., 2020). In this sense, literacy development also influences cultural identity development as African American students experience harmful microaggressions in classrooms when their style of speech is corrected and when most of the main characters, they encounter in

texts do not look like them, or if they do, they are less likely to be represented positively (Ford et al., 2019). Ishizuka and Stephens (2019) conducted research to determine the portrayal of European American characters and characters of color in children's literature and how the characters' roles substantiated racism. This study produced examples of anti-blackness in books consumed by young children. Popular children's literature analyzed in this study dehumanized characters of color and often portrayed them in subordinate manners. Early exposure to children's literature that promotes deficit-based narratives and reflects characters of color in inferior roles is detrimental to children's development of racial identity (Ishizuka & Stephens, 2019).

Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction

An integrative, critical review of articles pertaining to culturally relevant literacy instruction in elementary grades was conducted by Kelly et al. (2021). Based on definitions of Ladson-Billings' (1995a, 1995b) culturally relevant pedagogy and Gay's (2000, 2013) culturally responsive teaching, 91 studies were reviewed by Kelly et al. The researchers proposed that literacy instruction must be related to students' cultures and cultural experiences and that this consideration is just as important, or even more important, than the technical instruction of literacy-related skills. Specific culturally responsive literacy teaching methods recommended by Kelly et al. included collaborative learning opportunities and the use of relevant text from students' cultures, as well as learning opportunities that actively engage students in the learning process. In this review, Kelly et al. also highlighted studies that recognized non-academic practices as culturally relevant including parent and community involvement. Additionally, Kelly et

al. underscored the need for a more critical or thoughtful approach to the conversation about the achievement gap in literacy. Rather than adopting a deficit lens related to the literacy development of African American students, teachers and school leaders should closely examine the curricula and instructional practices to ensure they are designed to truly meet the literacy development needs of all students (Kelly et al., 2021).

Moats (2020) argued that reading instruction is a science and must be methodically taught for students to be adequately supported in literacy development. According to Moats (2020), quality in-school literacy instruction is an important factor in a student's literacy development, just as a student's HLE has a strong influence. This assertion is supported by Ladson-Billings (1995b), who posited that reflections of students' cultures must be visible in the curriculum to provide students with maximum access to high engagement and achievement.

Glass (2019) conducted a study seeking to gain greater understanding of how disengaged students who had limited encounters with seeing themselves and connecting with texts would respond in a small group setting with culturally relevant texts. One of the three known frameworks for this study was Ladson-Billings' theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. Though the selected participants for the study were six African American students from an alternative high school, Glass anticipated findings would enlighten teachers on practices to support students' literacy engagement in earlier grades. Findings from Glass's qualitative study were derived from semistructured interviews, surveys, and observations and revealed that students with adverse views of reading could have positive encounters with texts that were culturally relevant and engaging. Glass

recommended that teachers acquaint themselves with students by learning their prior reading experiences, selecting culturally relevant text that yield rich, engaging literary discussions, solicit student choice, and foster empowerment by allowing student led discussion groups.

The Role of Language Variances in Literacy Development

Dominant European American Literacy Instruction

The achievement gap between African American students and their European American peers has been documented for decades. African American students and other groups of marginalized students have underperformed on standards-based assessments compared to their European American peers (NAEP, 2019; 2022). Due to the demands of state and federal accountability measures and high-stakes achievement assessments, school districts and educators have sought curriculum including interventional resources to accelerate the reading acquisition skills of African American students (Thomas & Dyches, 2019). Increased reading performance of African American students on achievement assessments may make a positive impact on the achievement gap (Thomas & Dyches, 2019).

According to Thomas and Dyches (2019), curricula is print-based text that provides messages about how individuals and groups of people interact within the world, within different environments. In the United States, educational publishers produce curricula and support materials using GAE, the dominant language of classrooms and instruction (Washington & Seidenberg, 2021). Ghiso et al. (2019) stated that when curriculum does reflect multiculturalism, it lacks the complexities of cultural experiences

and knowledge, and that school curriculum often encompasses one culture or reflects only one language.

Thomas and Dyches (2019) performed a content analysis of Fountas and Pinnell Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI) program that investigated the symbolic qualities and exposed implied ideologies within the program texts. The Fountas and Pinnell LLI is a color-coded reading intervention system used to supplement reading instruction for students who are deemed struggling readers or those students who perform below grade level reading expectations. This content analysis focused on the teal-colored system, which includes 144 fiction and nonfiction books organized into six levels. Inductive coding, codes derived directly from the instructional materials, was employed to identify themes pertaining to representation of European American and people of color in the texts. At the conclusion of the study, Thomas and Dyches (2021) found within the teal level of the LLI system a disproportionate representation of people of color as inferior or deviant. In contrast, European American characters were represented as protagonist, reflecting positive character traits like heroic, determined, and successful.

According to Boutte and Compton-Lilly (2022), the European American culture, which uses GAE, dominates in school. Literacy instruction that includes phonics, language, reading, and writing caters to European American monolingual students whose native language is the language of instruction and assessments (Willis, 2019). According to Washington and Seidenberg (2021), African American students who speak AAE tend to struggle on assessments that do not consider language variations different from GAE.

Lee (2022) conducted a study centered around Black linguistic norms with teacher candidates as part of their educational program. Teacher candidates explored early childhood and elementary literacy practices like daily oral language and writer's workshop practices that often times do not account for the linguistic systems of AAE. According to Lee, findings from the study acknowledged the predominance of European American linguistic norms in literacy instruction. The dominance of European American culture in literacy instruction and lack of African American linguistic norms in instruction and assessment practices perpetuates the belief that GAE is superior (Lee, 2022).

Code Switching for African American Students

A contributing factor in the reading performance gap between African American students and their European American peers is the linguistic variances (Byrd & Brown, 2021). The use of AAE for many African American students hinders the acquisition of literacy skills due to the language variances between AAE and GAE (Byrd & Brown, 2021). While the high usage of AAE slows reading growth for African American students, the implementation of code switching is instrumental in their development of strong literacy skills (Washington et al., 2018). Code switching refers to a communication style where speakers convey meaning by employing different languages within the same setting (Ali & Mwila, 2021).

In a longitudinal study of 869 African American students from 5-12 years of age, Puranik et al. (2020) investigated the impact of dialect density on the development of reading and writing skills of students who speak AAE. Growth models consisting of

reading and writing skills and dialect density were created to show students' skill development from first grade to fifth grade. Assessed in sequential grades, students exhibited decreased dialect density for the first three years with improved reading and writing skills. However, overall findings indicated a negative correlation between dialect density and reading and writing skill development (Puranik et al., 2020).

In a similar study investigating the impact of dialect density in 835 elementary African American students' oral and reading skill development, Washington et al. (2018) also determined a negative association between dialect density and oral language and reading development. The African American students were evaluated twice using various oral language, reading, and cognitive assessments over the course of the 5-year longitudinal study. Improvements in reading skills were exhibited in first grade through third grade as dialect density decreased, but growth stabilized by fourth and fifth grade. Washington et al. attributed the decrease in dialect density to code switching. Significant findings from this study revealed a reciprocal relationship between poor reading skills of African American students and high dialect density of students who speak AAE (Washington et al., 2018). Reading acquisition challenges created by the language variances between AAE and GAE have hindered the reading development of many African American students. To mitigate some of the challenges, like language variances and other cultural differences faced by African American students, researchers have expressed the importance of strong, student-teacher relationships, in particular African American teachers, which has positively influenced the achievement of African American students (Howell, 2019; Ladson-Billings & Anderson, 2021).

The Role of African American Teachers

In the United States, ethnically diverse student groups are the majority in public schools (Cormier et al., 2023). According to Cormier et al., the demographic shift and the escalated awareness of social justice, has reignited efforts to recruit and retain African Americans teachers in the public school system. In particular, relationships between African American students and African American teachers have resulted in positive effects including increased academic achievement, acknowledgement of real-world experiences, and the exploration of social advancement (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). Howell et al. (2019) posited that African American teachers create learning environments that acknowledge and affirm African American students' cultural backgrounds by incorporating the students' experiences into the learning process.

Osei-Twumasi and Pinetta (2019) reanalyzed data gathered from the Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) study that explored race relations in six urban school districts in the United States. With a particular focus on race relations within classroom dyads between European American teachers and African American students and African American teachers and African American students, positive correlations were found between teachers and students with the same cultural backgrounds. In terms of classroom management and emotional support, African American teachers scored higher in classrooms with high African American student count compared to European American teachers with high African American student count. Responsive classroom practices and effectiveness of advancing African American students toward academic success were also positive attributes derived from Osei-Twumasi and Pinetta's (2019) analysis of the

MET study. Though it is the responsibility of all educators to cultivate positive relationships that foster the academic success of all students regardless of racial identity (Hopper et al., 2022), literature supports the benefits derived by African American students with the tutelage of African American teachers (Howell et al., 2019; Ladson-Billings & Anderson, 2021).

Impact of Effective Instructional Practices

Reading development requires the implementation of effective instructional practices, so students acquire and attain the skill of reading. Vaughn et al. (2020) urged teachers to implement effective strategies that integrate the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of students as an alternative to instructional approaches that are skill based. Reading education embodies teachers' day-to-day instructional judgement that includes the proper selection of materials and resources, differentiation, and the delivery of engaging instruction (Paige et al., 2021). Rogers (2019) posited that teachers' judgement is based upon their knowledge of their students as evidenced in a teacher-student relationship. The role of the teacher is pivotal in early literacy instruction as teachers use their judgement to employ the science of teaching reading (Seidenberg et al., 2020). According to Paige et al. (2021), the science of reading requires explicit instruction of critical components that are essential to the acquisition of strong literacy skills.

Science of Teaching Reading

As of January 1, 2021, the state of Texas required PK – Grade 6 teachers to demonstrate proficiency in early literacy instruction on the Science of Teaching Reading examination (TEA, 2021b). According to the TEA (2021b), House Bill 3 (HB 3) was

unanimously passed by the 86th Texas legislature that established the requirement that teachers participate in reading academies in efforts to support Texas teachers in the instruction of early literacy skills to improve students' reading outcomes. Similar to Ladson-Billings' theory of CPR that consider students' background for the benefit of learning and academic success (1995a, 1995b, 1995c), the science of teaching reading (STR) standards takes into consideration the unique needs of students and the need for teachers to consider students' backgrounds and interests (TEA, 2022c).

The STR standard includes expectations for the instruction of word recognition skills, phonics skills, fluency practice, vocabulary instruction, and comprehension monitoring using both fiction and nonfiction texts. Reading education that includes explicit instruction of the five components of reading--phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, oral language and text comprehension, and fluency--leads to student development of strong literacy skills thereby increasing students' opportunities for academic success (Paige et al., 2021). However, historically, elementary-age African American students have exhibited challenges in the acquisition of strong literacy skills as evidenced by the existing reading achievement gap between African American students and their European American peers (Washington & Seidenberg, 2021). According to Washington and Seidenberg, many classroom teachers lack guidance on how to enhance reading development for African American students. Washington and Seidenberg also believed that language variances create complexities to reading instruction. Many African American students speak AAE, which differs from the language of instruction, which is GAE (Washington & Seidenberg, 2021).

Guided Reading

Guided reading is an instructional approach most commonly used in elementary reading education that promotes independent reading through listening and speaking comprehension (Young, 2019). According to Young (2019), guided reading is one form of small group instruction where students with similar skill deficits engage in prereading, during-reading, and post-reading behaviors to comprehend unfamiliar texts. Typically, a preassessment is conducted to determine students instructional reading level. The amount of time that students engage in guided reading groups is also dependent upon students' skill levels and needs; students may participate in guided reading groups daily or weekly. Guided reading instruction is enhanced when teachers consider the unique needs of learners to make informed instructional decisions (Davis et al., 2019). According to Fountas and Pinnell (2017), text selection is crucial as teachers identify texts that prompts students' thinking and are compatible to students reading comprehension level.

Young (2019) conducted a quantitative study consisting of a quasi-experimental design. Seventy-nine 2nd graders of diverse cultural backgrounds from a Title 1 elementary school participated in the yearlong study. Forty-one students were selected for the treatment group and 38 students for the comparison group. The purpose of Young's (2019) study was to determine if increased duration and targeted instruction during guided reading influenced students' independent reading level by end of the year with the goal of guided reading being to elevate students to reading grade level texts.

Young (2019) used the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA2) to determine students' instructional reading levels. According to Young (2019), both groups met

throughout the school year for guided reading; however, the treatment group met more frequently and received more individualized and targeted instruction than the comparison group. There was a considerable difference in the effect sizes for each group; participants in the treatment group outperformed those of the comparison group yielding an increase in independent reading levels. Overall findings from this study exemplified the effectiveness of guided reading on students' reading advancement when coupled with greater frequency and targeted instruction (Young, 2019).

Read Alouds

Duggin and Acosta (2019) conducted an explanatory, mixed-methods study exploring teachers' read aloud practices and the impact on student literacy growth. Read alouds were defined as research-based instructional practices that have been attributed to improved oral language abilities, vocabulary development, and improved comprehension skills of students with low reading performance (Duggin & Acosta, 2019). Aside from the explorations of teacher perceptions and practices of read alouds, the researchers also explored the implementation of the Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts (CCSS ELA). Considering these two vantage points afforded Duggin and Acosta with opportunities to measure teachers' understanding of reading policy and how that translates into instructional practices within the classroom.

Participants who completed Duggin and Acosta's (2019) study included 64 predominantly European American primary grades (K-3) teachers of African American students across five Title 1 elementary schools. Two major themes emerged from data: teacher challenges in conducting read alouds with consistency and the prioritization of

read alouds in light of other instructional demands. Some teachers' perceptions were that reading aloud added value to African American students' growth and reading achievement, but due to pressures of reading policy mandates, reading aloud was not consistently implemented as a high-ranked instructional practice. The teacher participants believed the abundance of required standards and assessments were of greater importance (Duggin & Acosta, 2019). Conversely, data revealed that other teachers who saw greater pedagogical risks and employed more autonomy in instructional practices, engaged students more with read alouds because it was perceived as best for students' literacy development (Duggin & Acosta, 2019).

Culturally Responsive Instruction

Ladson-Billings' (1995a, 1995b, 1995c) theory of CRP requires the integration of students' cultural backgrounds as means to increase student empowerment and achievement, students' cultural competence and students' critical consciousness. During the delivery of culturally responsive instruction, teachers engage in instructional practices that acknowledge and value the use of students' cultural backgrounds and experiences as strengths rather than deficits (Debnam et al., 2023). Ladson-Billings (1994a, 1995b) and Griner and Stewart (2013) posited that integrating culturally responsive teaching practices contends with the educational gaps between students of color and their peers. Recognizing culturally responsive teachers, Muniz (2019) highlighted certain traits and behaviors including (a) self-reflection of one's own culture, (b) addressing systemic bias, (c) integration of students' cultures into instruction, (d) integration of real-world issues into instruction, (e) modeling of high expectations for all students, (f) modeling of respect

for students' differences, (g) collaboration with families and surrounding community, and (h) employing of culturally responsive communication.

In a related study of culturally responsive instruction, Debnam et al. (2023) conducted a qualitative study that explored teachers' perceptions of culturally responsive practices. Thirteen teachers who were deemed exemplary and culturally responsive by their school administrators were nominated to participate in semistructured interviews. Debnam et al. sought to identify instructional practices within the classroom environment that aligned with culturally responsive practices. Data analysis revealed some consistencies between culturally responsive practices and commonly instructional practices including clearly defined behavioral expectations, differentiated instruction that considered students' individualities and interests, respectful communication between home and school, consideration for students' voices, and the development of student-teacher relationships (Debnam et al., 2023). Based on teachers' perceptions, Debnam et al. also found that the implementation of culturally responsive practices can bear positive or negative influences on students but future studies that include observations were recommended to investigate culturally responsive practices in the classroom setting.

In a comparable study investigating culturally responsive instructional practices employing multicultural texts, Gunn et al. (2021) conducted a qualitative case study that explored how access to multicultural books positively impacted African American students during the COVID-19 pandemic. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many students were abruptly quarantined without access to rich, meaningful literature. Gunn et al. developed and implemented a book distribution program to low-income African

American students and their families that included students ranging from kindergarten to high school freshmen. Each student in the study received five books with attached comprehension questions to support their on-going learning during quarantine. Additionally, parents/caregivers completed phone interviews that inquired about the impact of the pandemic on their child's learning.

According to Gunn et al. (2021) the multicultural texts were purposely selected because they were culturally relevant, affirmed students' cultural identities, and supported students' social emotional health. Findings from the study revealed positive impacts on African American students. Gunn et al. reported that students enjoyed their texts, both students and families expressed appreciation for the literacy support during the pandemic, and students' reading and learning continued despite the transition from school to home while quarantined. African American students access to multicultural texts helped them to establish and maintain connections to their community while continuing to affirm their identities during school closures due to the pandemic.

In a similar study exploring culturally responsive instructional practices, Lim et al. (2019) conducted a qualitative case study consisting of semistructured interviews and observations of five middle school teachers in Singapore. After having read "But That's Just Good Teaching: The Case for Culturally Relevant Pedagogy" by Ladson-Billings (1995b), the teacher participants were observed conducting classroom lessons and then completed individual semistructured interviews. In this study, Lim et al. recounted teacher culturally relevant experiences in the classroom that created transformational learning experiences for students.

According to Lim et al. (2019) the integration of students' ethnic, religious, and social backgrounds into instruction indicated the employment of culturally relevant teaching practices thereby creating a culturally responsive classroom. Teacher participants in this study affirmed and appealed to the culturally diverse backgrounds of students that yielded increased engagement, empowerment, and students' ownership of their learning (Lim et al., 2019). The recognition of culture in instruction is crucial as it fosters inclusive and diverse learning environments that leads to improved student outcomes. In conjunction with culturally responsive instructional practices, a school leaders' adoption and implementation of culturally responsive leadership practices positively influences student success and supports the entire school community.

Impact of Effective Leadership Practices

In addition to classroom instruction, school leadership is one of the most notable contributing factors that influence student learning and achievement (Grissom et al., 2021). For school leadership, the understanding and implementation of culturally responsive measures in addition to recruiting and retaining culturally competent staff is vital to meeting the needs of a culturally diverse student body (Carter, 2021). Culturally responsive school leadership adds to the concept of transformational leadership as both theories encompass social justice awareness, inclusion, and equity across the school community to promote student achievement (Shields & Hesbol, 2020). Culturally responsive school leaders possess qualities and employ high-yield behaviors that transform school communities, particularly communities that serve students from culturally diverse backgrounds.

Culturally Responsive School Leadership Practices

The CRSL framework is a type of transformational leadership that provides a model for educational leaders to proactively respond to challenges within a culturally diverse learning environment (Khalifa et al., 2016). Transformational leadership theory was first introduced in seminal work by Burns in 1978 as a transition from a vertical, top-down leadership approach to leadership that is more inclusive and collaborative (Dey, 2022). As a form of transformational leadership, culturally responsive school leadership emphasizes the importance of school leaders to acknowledge the cultural differences of the communities they serve (Khalifa et al., 2016; Khalifa, 2018). Khalifa (2018) identified critical behaviors and practices of culturally responsive school leaders which are critical self-reflection, community advocacy and engagement, school environment, and instructional leadership. These behaviors and practices describe the ways in which culturally responsive school leaders advocate for culturally diverse groups and engage with students, their families, school staff, and surrounding communities to promote positive relationships and create inclusive environments (Khalifa et al., 2016). A leader's development of the core characteristics of a culturally responsive school leader largely impacts a leader's ability to influence stakeholders and produce positive change. Furthermore, a culturally responsive leader has been noted to positively influence staff behavior and organizational outcomes (Afshari, 2022).

Critical Self-Reflection

According to Khalifa et al. (2016), critical self-reflection is an ongoing, foundational process in which leaders must understand who they are and how they lead.

Each year, from 2011-2015, Hermond et al. (2018) investigated the cultural intelligence of five different groups of educational leaders who participated in a one-week study abroad experience in Central America. In this mixed method study, researchers collected survey data and participants' reflections. Findings from the Hermond et al. study demonstrated the leaders' ability to reflect on their own cultural views, the participants gained greater understanding of the new culture's practices and norms, and they reflected on how their leadership behaviors should change to meet the needs of the diverse groups of students they lead (Hermond et al., 2018).

Similarly, Hur (2022) conducted a study from 2014 to 2019 whereby 12 school leaders from the United States participated in a study abroad experience in South Korea. A 10-day immersion into Korean culture in South Korea was devised to support the leaders' understanding of a growing population of this diverse group of students in their communities. Data collection consisted of focus group interviews, individual semistructured interviews, and self-reflection papers. Participants' self-reflections revealed how it felt to be the minority and also revealed how participants gained new insight into their current leadership practices and the changes they needed to make to create a more inclusive learning environment and community (Hur, 2022). Khalifa (2018) posited that culturally responsive school leaders engage in critical self-reflection to acknowledge their background, beliefs, and biases in order to confront and deconstruct the oppressive actions within the environments they lead. To effectively lead diverse groups and communities, it is fundamental for culturally responsive leaders to engage in self-reflective practices.

Community Advocacy

According to Khalifa et al. (2016), culturally responsive leadership includes multiple stakeholders including district-level leadership, school administration and classroom teachers. Hollowell (2019) considered CRSL most fitting for school leaders to adopt as CRSL enables them to gain an understanding of their culturally diverse school communities and to establish inclusive school communities whereby all stakeholders are welcome. Kadir et al. (2022) echoed that culturally responsive school leaders create environments where students, their families, and communities of diverse backgrounds are welcomed and valued. In a quantitative study conducted by Kadir et al., Malaysian teacher participants completed a three-part questionnaire inquiring about culturally responsive leadership practices and the instructional environment. Findings from Kadir et al. revealed a positive connection between student achievement and school leaders' promotion of inclusive school environments.

Likewise, Hollowell (2019) conducted a qualitative study to identify culturally responsive leadership practices used by 15 Title 1 Southern California administrators. Two major findings from this study were that culturally responsive leaders capitalized on the cultural wealth of the community by soliciting and valuing parents' voices in decision making, and culturally responsive leaders established and maintained positive relationships with parents and the community to stay abreast of community concerns and issues (Hollowell, 2019). Khalifa (2018) explained that community engagement and ultimately community empowerment produced more successful students, stronger and

more trusting relationships with families, and more culturally competent and reflective teachers.

School Environment (Culture and Climate)

A primary responsibility of culturally responsive school leaders is to promote a school climate that acknowledges and includes all diverse student groups (Khalifa et al., 2016). Inclusion extends into the community as these leaders establish and maintain positive relationships with community members (Khalifa et al., 2016). In a qualitative case study of one principal's leadership practices, Ezzani (2021) collected data through semistructured interviews, a teacher-leader focus group, school walkthroughs, and observations from professional learning community meetings. Ezzani found that the principal employed culturally responsive school leadership practices when the principal inspired rapport and trust with a Black business leadership group who engaged with African American students in a mentoring program. Soliciting support from the community and capitalizing on the intellectual wealth offered by community members through the mentoring program led to significant reductions in disciplinary referrals of African American male students (Ezzani, 2021). As evidenced in CRSL, culturally responsive school leaders are aware of and concerned about equity and achievement for all students. Culturally responsive school leaders are advocates for community involvement and improvement (Khalifa et al., 2016; Robey et al., 2019).

Likewise, in a study related to community involvement, Levitan (2020) served as a research collaborator on a project conducted in one Peruvian secondary school. In this study, an educational leader facilitated a community-voice inquiry project whereby 146

secondary students, 25 research collaborators, and 11 parents completed a questionnaire about what they felt was important to learn and values they wanted emphasized in the school. Data revealed concerns about different aspects of the school's culture. These findings were shared with the school's principal that consisted of data reflecting students' and parents' values and goals to address in future decision-making (Levitan, 2020). As culturally responsive school leaders, it is important for educational leaders to create and maintain avenues of inclusivity by which all stakeholders' voices contribute to the establishment of a positive school environment (Khalifa et al., 2016).

Instructional Leadership

Khalifa et al. (2016) posited that it is the responsibility of instructional leaders to employ culturally responsive practices to develop and improve teachers' craft in ways that yield improved student outcomes. In a six-month case study with five educational leaders, Marshall and Khalifa (2018) conducted semistructured interviews and observations to explore the understandings and perceptions of instructional coaches who promoted teachers' culturally relevant instructional practices. Significant findings that contribute to the study of CRSL practices emerged from this study. One finding was that strong, trusting relationships must be developed between instructional leaders and teachers. Secondly, instructional leaders must support teachers' development of cultural competence and improve student achievement by providing professional development related to equity and culturally responsive practices. And thirdly, instructional leaders should promote paradigm shifts toward culturally responsive practices through open-ended dialogue (Marshall & Khalifa, 2018).

Similarly, Alhanachi et al. (2021) conducted a qualitative study that revealed positive findings from professional development. In this study, 15 Dutch teachers participated in structured professional learning communities (PLCs) rooted in culturally relevant teaching practices. Data that emerged from teachers' semistructured interviews revealed increased awareness of the importance of culturally relevant practices and teachers' reflections and adjustments of current instructional practices toward diversity resulted from their participation in PLCs (Alhanachi et al., 2021). In this study, a limitation was noted in that the principal's perceptions about culturally relevant teaching were not explored, even though the principal consented to the study and encouraged teachers to participate. Developing and supporting culturally competent teachers who implement culturally relevant practices is a crucial undertaking for school leaders (Khalifa et al., 2016). As the primary instructional leader of a school, culturally responsive school leaders can employ leadership practices that promote professional development, support collaboration and reflective practices, and manage resources that contribute to improved student outcomes.

Summary and Conclusions

To compose Chapter 2, literature that identified a need for understanding the instructional and leadership practices that yielded increased reading achievement for African American students in fourth-grade was included. Ladson-Billings' (1995a, 1995b, 1995c) theory of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) and Khalifa's (2018) theory of culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) provided the foundation that guided the literature review. These established conceptual frameworks served as a lens to guide

the study and add to the existing body of practice regarding effective instructional practices and effective leadership practices for African American students attending Title 1 elementary schools.

This literature review focused on key concepts of the study including the reading development of African American students, the elementary classroom, culturally relevant pedagogical practices and culturally responsive leadership practices. Information presented in Chapter 2 provides insight into knowledge gained from previous research as to what is currently known regarding this phenomenon and what is needed in future scholarship. The acknowledgement and adoption of CRP and CRSL within the school environment is paramount to the advancement and academic achievements of African American students (Khalifa, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b;). The most influential contributing factor to the academic achievement of African American students, second only to classroom teachers, is the role of a school leader (Grissom et al., 2021; Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016). The literature reviewed in this study reflected the need for both school leaders and classroom teachers to develop cultural competence as they acknowledge and affirm the cultural backgrounds of African American students. Engaging with students, their families, and the community in culturally responsive ways are fundamental to gaining trust and establishing relationships that promote the reading achievement of African American students (Akin-Sabuncu et al., 2023; Khalifa, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995a; Muniz, 2019).

Through the literature review, the importance of CRP as a viable, effective instructional approach for the reading development of African American students

attending Title 1 schools was presented. The literature resounded the need for teachers' awareness of students' needs and to render instructional decisions that would best serve the students' needs (Paige et al., 2021; Rogers, 2019). According to the literature, the presence of culturally relevant materials and literature in the classroom is important to increase student engagement; students are more likely to connect with the text if they see themselves in that text (Ford et al., 2019; Rivale-Bell, 2022; Thomas & Dyches, 2019). Understanding the role of CRP established the exploration of how CRP influences African American students' learning opportunities.

Additionally, the literature review focused on instructional practices that influence the reading development of African American students. A major factor identified in the reviewed literature was the language variances between the home language of many African American students and the language of instruction, curriculum, classroom resources, and assessments (Ghiso et al., 2019; Thomas & Dyches 2019; Washington & Seidenberg, 2021). Literature related to this topic denoted an exploration of language dialects, how to address the language differences during instruction, and effective instructional practices that supported increased reading achievement for African American students. Knowledge of the role of language in the reading development of African American students assisted in guiding this study to contribute to the existing body of literature pertaining to ways to increase the reading performance of African American students thereby mitigating the achievement gap between African American students and their European American peers.

During the course of the literature review for this study, the research questions guided the process. In this study, the outcome was to gain greater understanding of the instructional and leadership practices that were successfully implemented and yielded African American students outperforming their European American peers in reading. The findings from this study were intended to contribute to the existing body of information that benefit primary teachers, school administrators, and the culturally diverse students' groups they serve.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Of the 20 Title 1 elementary schools in the target school district, the fourth-grade African American students at one high-performing elementary school exhibited academic gains according to the 2018 STAAR reading assessment and outperformed the reading achievement of their European American peers on the 2019 and 2022 annual STAAR reading assessment (TEA, 2018a, 2019, 2022b). The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore the instructional practices of K–3 teachers and the leadership practices of elementary school administrators that led to increased reading achievement of African students by fourth grade in a high-performing Title 1 elementary school in a suburban school district in Texas. This study was framed by Ladson-Billings' (1995a, 1995b, 1995c) CRP and Khalifa's (2018) CRSL. Upon completion of this study, information related to the achievement of the fourth-grade African American students at a high-performing Title 1 elementary school was provided.

Chapter 3 consists of the research design and rationale and the role of the researcher. In Chapter 3, a detailed explanation of the methodology for this single case study is provided, including participant selection, procedures for recruitment and participation, data collection, instrumentation, and data analysis. Chapter 3 concludes with an explanation of strategies used to ensure trustworthiness of the single case study in addition to ethical procedures and a summary.

Research Design and Rationale

A single case study was used to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What instructional practices do K–3 teachers use to develop the reading skills of African American students in a high-performing Title 1 elementary school?

RQ2: What are K–3 teachers' perceptions of instructional practices used to increase the reading achievement of African American students by fourth grade in a high-performing Title 1 elementary school?

RQ3: What leadership practices do the school administrators use to guide K–3 teachers' instructional practices in a high-performing Title 1 elementary school?

RQ4: What are elementary administrators' perceptions of leadership practices used to increase the reading achievement of African American students by fourth grade in a high-performing Title 1 elementary school?

Central Phenomenon

The central phenomenon of this single case study was the instructional practices of K–3 teachers and the leadership practices of administrators in a high-performing Title 1 elementary school in the target school district. More specifically, I focused on K-3 instructional practices and the school administrators' leadership practices that led to high achievement levels of fourth-grade African Americans students who met and exceeded the reading norms on the annual state assessment in 2018 and 2019. The K-3 instructional practices were analyzed through the lens of Ladson-Billings' (1995a, 1995b, 1995c) theory of CRP, and the elementary school administrators' leadership practices were analyzed through the lens of Khalifa's (2018) theory of CRSL.

Research Tradition

To address the problem, purpose, and the research questions of this study, I used a qualitative single case study design. A case study seeks understanding of a phenomenon within a given context (P. Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2003). For a better understanding of a phenomenon, context is an important factor to consider when choosing to use a single case study or multiple case study (Yin, 2003). Yin (2009) recommended a single case study if the case represents a unique situation. Unique single case studies can be insightful and are worth documenting and analyzing (Yin, 2009).

Quantitative research designs allow a researcher to investigate a social phenomenon by conducting measurements, analyzing the numerical data, and drawing conclusions based on the data analysis (Watson, 2015). In contrast, qualitative research designs enable a researcher to gather and interpret data considering the people connected to the data, their lived experiences, and the context surrounding those experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Because the current study was based on real-world experiences and practices, a qualitative single case study was the most suitable design because the study was bounded by setting and time to allow a more in-depth exploration into the phenomenon (see Burkholder et al., 2019). A quantitative research design would have limited opportunities to explore the perceptions of K–3 teachers and elementary school administrators regarding instructional and leadership practices.

The elementary K–3 teachers and the elementary school administrators at one high-performing Title 1 elementary school in the target district represented the case in this single case study. The data sources consisted of semistructured interviews to explore

the practices and perceptions of K–3 teachers and the practices and perceptions of elementary school administrators. Data collection resulted in the development of revealing commentary to provide greater understanding of the instructional and leadership practices that yielded increased achievement for fourth-grade African American students.

Role of the Researcher

According to Burkholder et al. (2019), both the researcher and the participants are collaborators in the study. However, Ravitch and Carl (2021) urged qualitative researchers to reflect on their role throughout the research process. Qualitative researchers reveal their personal background, beliefs, values, and biases that may influence the interpretations of the data analysis (Creswell, 2013). As the primary researcher, I conducted semistructured interviews with the participants who were responsible for the K–3 instructional practices and leadership practices that were implemented at the high-performing Title 1 elementary school. The scope of my role included recording the data collected during the interview process, analyzing the data collected, and writing the research report.

As a public-school educator for 17 years, I served 15 years in the target school district serving as a classroom teacher, interventionist, academic coach, curriculum writer, and assistant principal. However, during the course of this study, I did not serve in any capacity at the high-performing Title 1 elementary school and did not have a supervisory or evaluative relationship with any participants in this study.

To mitigate any unintentional biases, I reflected on my experiences, perspectives, and biases that may have emerged throughout the study. According to Ravitch and Carl (2021), researchers should be aware of biases and take steps to avoid them. To monitor myself as the researcher, I incorporated reflexive journaling throughout the research process (see Yin, 2016). I composed a narrative autobiography of my personal and professional experiences in education. Composing a narrative autobiography ensured my experiences and views did not influence research findings during the data collection and data analysis process. The research plan was employed cautiously to exclude any unintentional biases about instructional and leadership practices.

Methodology

The most suitable methodology for this study was a qualitative approach, which encompassed a thorough examination of human behaviors including thoughts, reasoning, perceptions, and norms (see Daniel, 2016). A single case study design enabled me to explore the instructional practices of the K–3 teachers and the leadership practices of the elementary school administrators at the high-performing Title 1 elementary school in the target school district.

Participant Selection

According to Burkholder et al. (2019), small sample sizes are common in case study research. I used purposeful sampling to select K–3 teachers from the high-performing Title 1 elementary school in the target school district, according to fourth-grade reading scores on the annual state assessment (TEA, 2018a, 2019, 2022b), to interview for this study. Babbie (2017) stated that purposeful sampling allows for the

researcher to select participants based on alignment with the purpose of the study. Participants selected for the current single case study were individuals who provided insight into the phenomenon to answer the research questions (see Burkholder et al., 2019). I used a set of criteria to purposively select participants who had information to answer the research questions. Purposive sampling is the primary approach used in qualitative research for the participant selection process (Ravitch & Carl; 2016). Teachers in Grades K–3 and the elementary school administrators were the most suitable participants who provided information to gain understanding of the instructional and leadership practices that led to increased reading achievement for fourth-grade African American students in the target school district.

Criteria for Selection

Participants were selected according to their involvement in the planning and delivery of reading instruction in Grades K–3, the enrollment of African American students in their class and school, and their involvement in leading a Title 1 elementary school. The inclusion criteria for teachers consisted of (a) being a K–3 teacher, (b) having experience in teaching reading in the K–3 grade band for at least 2 years, (c) having K–3 African American students enrolled in their classes, and (d) having documented an increase in reading achievement of K–3 African American students. I sought to include at least eight to 10 K–3 elementary teachers who met the criteria from the high-performing Title 1 elementary school.

The total sample of participants in this qualitative single case study was to be 10–15 participants with a minimum of eight K–3 teachers and elementary school

administrators from the high-performing Title 1 elementary school in the target school district. Within the K–3 grade at the high-performing elementary school, there were 23 teachers. If the minimal sample had not been met, I intended to recruit fourth-grade teachers in the study school who met the inclusion criteria. According to Staller (2021), because qualitative research primarily relies on purposive sampling, the sample size is more flexible when the goal is to gain a deeper understanding of the studied phenomenon through rich and detailed evidence.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

According to Ravitch and Carl (2021), appropriate recruitment, participation, and data collection are vital to a study. Upon evaluation of the 2018, 2019, and 2022 published state assessment scores for the target school district, I identified one Title 1 elementary school based on the percentage of fourth-grade African American students who achieved academic gains or outperformed their European American peers (TEA, 2018a, 2019, 2022b). The fourth-grade African American reading scores at the selected Title 1 elementary school were higher than other Title 1 elementary schools in the target school district.

Participants were recruited using the target school district's public records and the study school's website. Upon written approval from the superintendent or their designee at the target school district (see Appendix A) and Walden University's Institutional Review Board (08-14-23-1078570), I emailed the elementary school administrators and the K–3 teachers who met the inclusion criteria at the high-performing Title 1 elementary school. According to Burkholder et al. (2019), the communication between the researcher

and the participants that confirms the participants' rights if they agree to participate or their right to decline participation at any point is known as informed consent. The informed consent provided potential participants with an explanation of the research process, benefits of the research study, an anticipated timeline of completion, an invitation to participate in the research study, and an explanation of the informed consent process, which included the recording of semistructured interviews. Participants' engagement in this single case study was voluntary. The informed consent was included in an email to potential participants. If there were no responses from participants to the invitational email, a follow-up email was sent 5 days later.

Participants who agreed to accept participation in the study responded to the recruitment email with "I consent." Upon consent, participants scheduled an interview date and time by clicking on a calendar link provided in the email. The consent was retained as an official document, and a copy was provided to the participants. Consent to participate in this study included consent to be recorded. The interviews were then scheduled to proceed upon participants' agreement to participate in this single case study.

All semistructured interviews were conducted using a virtual conferencing tool. DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019) recommended audio recording interviews to allow the researcher to focus on building rapport with the participant and to avoid the distraction of notetaking. In addition to the benefit of building rapport with the participants and to avoid notetaking distractions, I used a virtual conferencing tool because it expedited the recording and transcribing of interview data.

All K–3 teachers and elementary school administrator participants, were interviewed individually. Approximately 1 hour was scheduled for each interview to allow participants ample time to provide in-depth initial responses and to allow time for probing questions, as needed. Throughout the interview process, I recorded memos in the margins of the interview protocol; memos consisted of my reflections and a list of thoughts and perceptions that helped to improve the quality of later interviews (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). My contact information was shared with participants at the close of each interview after debriefing, should participants have any further questions about the research process. According to Babbie (2017), debriefing ensures transparency and clarity and is an expression of integrity on the researcher's part. Following the semistructured interviews, individual transcripts were verified and shared with participants by email to allow the participants the opportunity to review, edit, or revise any of their responses. Transcript verification is one aspect of member checking when research findings are shared with participants to establish credibility in trustworthiness (Shenton, 2004).

Instrumentation

In qualitative research, researchers use instruments to gather data in the form of words and pictures that can be analyzed to gain better understanding of a phenomenon (de los Rios & Patel, 2023). In this study, two researcher-designed interview protocols consisting of open-ended interview questions comprised the data collection instruments. One interview was designed for teacher participants (see Appendix B), while a second interview protocol was designed for the administrator participants (see Appendix C). The

instruments that were used in this study were designed to collect data to answer the study's research questions.

According to DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019), semistructured interviews are an effective method for qualitative researchers to collect open-ended data to understand participants' points of view, experiences, beliefs, and attitudes about a phenomenon. For this single case study, interview protocols consisting of semistructured interview questions serve as the primary data collection instruments. Semistructured interviews account for open-ended, study-specific questions that are aligned to the research questions (Chenail, 2011). Semistructured interviews afforded the opportunity to be flexible and ask probing questions to ensure understanding of participants' responses (Ruslin et al., 2022). The interview questions were developed using Ladson-Billings' (1995a, 1995b, 1995c) theory of culturally relevant pedagogy and Khalifa's (2018) theory of culturally responsive school leadership and aligned to the research questions for this study to establish content validity. Additionally, the interview questions integrated information from the CRP and CRSL theories and the related literature pertaining to the reading development of African American students.

An important concept of instrumentation, content validity, describes the ability of the instrument to measure the study's phenomenon (Long & Johnson, 2000). Content validity pertains to whether an instrument is able to measure the phenomenon of the study (Long & Johnson, 2000). To ensure that sufficient responses were collected and answered the study's research questions, the interview protocols were field tested by two nonparticipating K-3 teachers and two nonparticipating elementary administrators. I

emailed the individuals who were not participating in the study to evaluate the interview protocols and provide feedback. The interview protocols were revised according to feedback provided by the selected nonparticipating individuals. By field testing the interview protocols, the content validity of this study has been ensured. Through the interview questions and responses, I gained an understanding of the phenomenon explored in this single case study.

Data Analysis Plan

The data analysis process is important in qualitative research as data analysis concurs with data collection (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). According to Babbie (2017), the data collection process, the analysis process, and the conceptual framework are all closely related. A qualitative researcher must follow a methodical plan understanding that a degree of underlying subjectivity exists in data analysis (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The data analysis process was guided by the conceptual frameworks, CRP and CRSL, and the research questions in order to evaluate the data presented in this study (Burkholder et al., 2019).

Throughout the data collection and analysis process, it is the responsibility of the qualitative researcher to ensure trustworthiness. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that trustworthiness is one way that researchers and readers can be convinced that the research findings of a study are credible. During the data collection and analysis process, I continuously interacted with the data for analysis purposes to identify patterns, themes, and categories (Patton, 2002). In this study, data collected from the semistructured interviews was coded using a six-step thematic analysis process which included (1)

familiarizing myself with the data, (2) producing initial codes using open and axial coding, (3) generating categories and begin to research for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the analysis report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Each of these steps were explained in this section.

For this study, I engaged with the data repeatedly to search for meaning and to identify patterns (Nowell et al., 2017). Initially, I began data analysis after each semistructured interview as I review the transcription while listening to the virtual recording. This review process allowed me the opportunity to check for transcription accuracy and to document any reflective thoughts I had about the data. Upon completion of the data collection process, I thoroughly read all the data before I began coding to identify possible patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Saldaña (2016) defined a code as meaning assigned to data using a word, phrase, or abbreviation. During this qualitative data analysis process, I repeatedly engaged with the data gathered from the semistructured interviews and any documented memos to identify certain characteristics about the data (Nowell et al., 2017). As I analyzed each data item, open coding was used to assign words, phrases, or abbreviations to describe what was gleaned from the data initially (Williams & Moser, 2019). After completing open coding, axial coding was used to combine any related codes identified among the different data items. Employing open and axial coding aided in identifying recurring themes across each data item regarding the instructional and leadership practices that led to increased achievement levels for fourth-grade African American students at the high-performing Title 1 elementary school. Both coding methods, open and axial coding, were

used to identify themes that addressed the research questions as well as to denote any discrepancies or inconsistencies in the data.

The progression of the coding process from open coding to axial coding and the relationship between the two coding methods develops into themes, which provides meaning to the data (Williams & Moser, 2019). According to DeSantis and Ugarriza (2000), themes assign meaning and identify recurring experiences found in the data; themes unify data into a meaningful whole. Any identifiable subthemes were labeled through inductive coding, a coding process based on the raw data and does not conform to any preexisting coding frames (Nowell et al., 2017). As themes, and any identifiable subthemes were developed throughout the data analysis process, I documented the process to help establish confirmability (Nowell et al., 2017)

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), the validity of the themes determined whether the themes accurately reflected the meanings of the data findings. Throughout the data collection and analysis process, I exercised flexibility between the review of the coded data and the raw data to determine whether the participant's voice was reflected in the assigned themes. During this phase, I refined themes by identifying any inadequacies in the initial coding, deleting overlapping codes, establishing new codes that appeared, and divided codes into separate themes (Nowell et al., 2017).

After a thorough review of the themes, themes were defined and named. Braun and Clarke (2006) advised to name themes that capture the readers' attention and convey what the theme is about. I composed a detailed analysis of each theme ensuring that the theme descriptions accurately conveyed the story told and conformed to the story of the

overall data set as related to the research questions (Nowell et al., 2017). I debriefed with a non-participating peer to identify any aspects of the research process that were omitted or not thoroughly executed. In the creation of each theme, I included words used by the participants to capture their voice in the research process.

For this single case study, I conducted a thorough case analysis of the data. A final report provided a concise, descriptive, and logical account of the data and the themes. Participants' quotes were included in the report to provide detail and transparency of the data findings. Using thick descriptions of the participants' data and details of the findings was provided to substantiate the themes of the study.

Expert peer debriefing assisted in identifying any discrepancies or inconsistencies in the data (Nowell et al., 2017). Any inconsistencies or discrepancies that were found as part of the data analysis process were included in the discussion of the findings. The final discussion of the thematic analysis addressed the problem, purpose, and research questions of this single case study and highlighted the literature used to prompt and support the argument of the study (Nowell et al., 2017).

Trustworthiness

According to Amankwaa (2016), the quality of a qualitative study is established by the trustworthiness of the data through transferability, dependability, credibility, and conformability. Meticulous documentation and other steps are needed to ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of qualitative research (Hays & McKibben, 2021). In this study, high levels of trustworthiness were established through deliberate implementation of the outlined data plan.

Credibility

The credibility of qualitative research is the extent to which the study and its findings may be trusted (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The credibility of this research study was established using several strategies. For one, the interview protocols were followed for all participant interviews to ensure that all participants were asked the same questions for consistency. Moreover, I used reflexive journaling to record reflexive memos and journaling while reviewing the data to mitigate potential researcher biases that might arise (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Lastly, member checking was used to provide all participants with a copy of their interview transcripts for transcript verification. Participants were asked to confirm the accuracy of the transcript through email and to inform me if there are any discrepancies or omissions that need to be addressed.

Transferability

Transferability, known as generalizability in quantitative studies, is a point of evaluation for qualitative research that allows the data findings to be used in similar settings and contexts (Leung, 2015). Further, transferability also refers to the degree to which the methodology may be reliably applied by other practitioners and researchers to learn more about a similar phenomenon of interest (Hays & McKibben, 2021). The findings of this study may be applicable to similar regions and schools within the United States; however, due to the concentration in a local study district within Texas, assumptions regarding applicability of the findings can be made by the readers through the use of thick descriptions. Rich and detailed descriptions were provided related to the characteristics of the study sites and participants, while maintaining their confidentiality,

as well as to the time frame of and details about the data collection and analysis (Shenton, 2004).

Dependability

To address dependability, which is an indication of uniformity in data collection, data analysis, and reporting of data findings (Burkholder et al., 2019), member checks were conducted. The virtual conferencing transcripts were emailed to K-3 teachers and school administrators to check for accuracy and enable them to provide additional information after the initial analysis of the data. I maintained an audit trail throughout the data collection and analysis process to keep an account of the research process by documenting daily activities pertaining to the research process including raw data, field notes, personal reflections, transcripts, and any insights that are gained. Ravitch and Carl (2021) highlighted the importance of transparency through the use of an audit trail and reflexivity practices to ensure an unbiased study.

Confirmability

Maintaining documentation of the data analysis process including identification of themes established confirmability of this research study. According to Babbie (2017), confirmability is an important aspect of trustworthiness. To achieve confirmability in this study, transparency of the research process was evident in the data and through the use of member checks. Additionally, I maintained and archived raw data in a password-protected personal computer to create an audit trail that was used for later data analysis and interpretations (see Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Ethical Procedures

According to Babbie (2017), ethical concerns are of the utmost importance in research, particularly those including human participants. With this awareness, careful attention was paid to the participants in this study. All participants in this research study read and signed an informed consent acknowledging their voluntary participation in this study following the requirements set forth under the direction of Walden University as required for the Advanced Education Administrative Leadership (AEAL) Program. Because participation in this study was voluntary, participants were permitted to decline participation at any time in the research process without an adverse response. The informed consent also included the nature of the study, the methodology employed throughout the study, expected data findings, why they were selected for this study, participants intended role in the study, and Walden University's IRB number upon approval from the IRB (Husband, 2020). A partnership agreement between Walden University and the study site were secured to confirm my participation in conducting this research study. I masked the study site and the name of the school district in all documents and materials.

Though I was employed by the target school district for 16 years, during the course of this research study, I did not previously serve in a supervisory role with any of the participants in the study. To maintain the awareness of ethical concerns in this research study, I did not offer material or financial incentives to the participants in this study. Only individuals who met the inclusion criteria and gave consent participated in this study. Participants were assured that any personal or identifiable information was not

disclosed in the final dissertation. Participant codes, consisting of alphanumeric identifiers, were assigned at the beginning of each interview and used in reporting the study results to maintain confidentiality. All responses, documents, and materials remained confidential. The data were securely stored in a password protected computer with hard copies of data kept secure in a locked file cabinet in my home office and will be retained for 5 years. After that time period, all data will be destroyed by permanently deleting all electronic data and shredding all hard copies of data. Employing these measures confirmed that this study met high ethical standards for qualitative research.

Summary

Chapter 3 addressed the methodology of the study including the role of the researcher, participant criteria and recruitment, data instruments, the data analysis process, trustworthiness strategies, and measures that ensured high standards of ethics. Each step of the recruitment, data collection, and data analysis process was outlined in Chapter 3 in detail to convey the alignment between the problem, the purpose, and the design to ensure that the study's research questions can be addressed. Chapter 4 contains an in-depth description of the data results and findings of this single case study.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore the instructional practices and perceptions of K–3 teachers and the leadership practices and perceptions of elementary school administrators that contributed to increased reading achievement of African American students by fourth grade in a high-performing Title 1 elementary school in a suburban school district in Texas. Prior to this study, it was unknown how K–3 teachers' instructional practices and elementary school administrators' leadership practices increased the reading achievement of African American students in a suburban school district in Texas. K–3 teachers and elementary school administrators participated in this study to achieve the purpose of the study. Purposive sampling was used to recruit eight K–3 teachers and the elementary school administrators for this study at the study site. There were four research questions in this study:

RQ1: What instructional practices do K–3 teachers use to develop the reading skills of African American students in a high-performing Title 1 elementary school?

RQ2: What are K–3 teachers' perceptions of instructional practices used to increase the reading achievement of African American students by fourth grade in a high-performing Title 1 elementary school?

RQ3: What leadership practices do the school administrators use to guide K–3 teachers' instructional practices in a high-performing Title 1 elementary school?

RQ4: What are elementary school administrators' perceptions of leadership practices used to increase the reading achievement of African American students by fourth grade in a high-performing Title 1 elementary school?

To answer the four research questions, I collected data from the K–3 teachers and the elementary school administrators by conducting semistructured interviews. Data were analyzed through the lens of the two conceptual frameworks that guided this study: CRP and CRSL. Chapter 4 includes a description of the setting of the study, the data collection process, and the data analysis process. Additionally, this chapter includes an explanation of the results. The chapter concludes with the trustworthiness strategies employed to establish credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Setting

The setting of this study was one high-performing Title 1 elementary school located in a suburban school district in Texas. Within the target district, which has approximately 32,000 students, there are 20 Title 1 elementary schools that serve approximately 14,000 students from prekindergarten through fifth grade. The Title 1 elementary school selected for this study was identified as high-performing based on the high reading performance of African American students on the fourth-grade reading STAAR assessments for the 2018, 2019, and 2022 school years. According to National School Lunch Program (2023) data, the free and reduced lunch rate for the high-performing Title 1 school was approximately 65%. The student demographics of the high-performing Title 1 elementary school included African American students at approximately 30%, Hispanic students at 56%, European American students at 8%, and other ethnic groups at 6%.

A total of eight teacher participants responded to the recruitment email. Of the K-3 teachers who participated in the study, two taught kindergarten, two taught first grade,

three taught second grade, and one taught third grade. There were two administrators who participated in the study: one principal and one assistant principal. Each participant was assigned an alphanumeric identifier to mask their identity and ensure confidentiality. The K-3 teacher participants in this study were assigned alphanumeric identifiers from ET1 to ET8. The elementary school administrators were assigned alphanumeric identifiers from ESA1 and ESA2. Confidentiality was maintained in the 10 virtual, one-on-one, semistructured interviews. All semistructured interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by embedded features within the virtual conferencing tool. Table 1 and Table 2 reflect the K-3 teacher participants and the elementary school administrator participants' demographic data, respectively.

Table 1

Kindergarten Through Grade 3 Participants' Demographic Data

K–3 teacher	Gender	Identified ethnicity	Current grade level teaching	Experience in K–3 grade brand (years)
ET1	Female	African American	1	2
ET2	Female	African American	2	4
ET3	Female	European American	K	7
ET4	Female	African American	3	3
ET5	Female	African American	2	6
ET6	Female	African American	K	12
ET7	Female	Mexican American	1	7
ET8	Female	African American	2	9

All eight of the K-3 teacher participants identified as female. Six of the eight participants identified as African American, one identified as European American, and one identified as Mexican American. The K-3 teacher participants' experience teaching in the K-3 grade band ranged from 2 years to 12 years. All teacher participants' years of service had been in a Title 1 district.

Table 2

Elementary Administrator Participants' Demographic Data

Elementary administrators	Gender	Identified ethnicity	Administration experience (years)	Total experience in education (years)
ESAP	Female	African American	2	32
ESP	Female	African American	15	25

Both elementary school administrator participants identified as African American females. The elementary school assistant principal (ESAP) had been in education for a total of 32 years, including leadership experience as grade level team lead and elementary campus instructional coach. Participant ESAP expressed "even as a teacher leader, I have always been a school leader." When inquired about the decision to pursue school leadership, Participant ESAP explained "I wanted to understand how schools run and how to help teachers impact student achievement." Participant ESAP had been an elementary campus administrator for 2 years. Like Participant ESAP, Participant ESP also served in campus leadership roles including grade level team leader and campus instructional coach prior to becoming a campus administrator. Participant ESP expressed wanting "to help teachers on a wider scale" as the reason for pursuing an administration certificate. Participant ESP believed that a greater impact on student achievement would be attained by providing instructional and leadership support to teachers. Participant ESP had served in education for a total of 25 years. Both Participant ESAP and Participant ESP had gained all educational experience at the elementary campus level.

Data Collection

There was one primary source of data for this single case qualitative study. The primary source of data was semistructured interviews conducted with K-3 teacher participants and the elementary school administrators at the study site. All semistructured interviews were scheduled through an online calendar tool that was included in the recruitment email. All semistructured interviews were conducted using a virtual conferencing tool that allowed audio only and audio transcriptions in English. There were no variations to the data collection plan presented in Chapter 3.

For data collection, I developed and implemented two interview protocols, one for K-3 teachers and one for elementary school administrators. All participants agreed to the recording of their individual semistructured interviews; each interview was scheduled for 60 minutes to allow sufficient time for participants to respond to interview questions. Teacher participant interview times ranged from 29 minutes to 44 minutes; the semistructured teacher interviews were conducted over a 6-week period. Each interview was recorded and saved in the cloud to my password-protected account.

During all semistructured interviews, I collected qualitative data pertaining to the participants' experiences, perceptions, and practices in instruction or leadership. K-3 teachers and elementary school administrators who participated in the study were transparent as they provided details of their experiences and perceptions. Within 24 hours of each semistructured interview, I downloaded the audio recording and the transcription from the cloud and listened to the audio recording while perusing the audio transcription to ensure accuracy. Audio transcripts were revised, as needed, based on the participants'

responses in the audio recording. Each revised interview transcript was saved as a Word document to my password-protected computer and emailed to each participant for transcript review to validate their transcript.

Transcript review allowed participants to review their responses to enhance accuracy of data (see Shenton, 2004). In each email, participants were asked to review their attached transcript for accuracy. Participants were allowed 5 days to review their transcriptions. All eight K–3 teachers and two elementary school administrators validated their interview transcripts by responding to the email with "approved." There were no revisions to any transcripts.

Attention to detail and accuracy were maintained throughout the data collection process. Each step of the planned data collection process, including participant recruitment, implementation of the interview protocols, and transcription of the semistructured interview responses, was carefully followed. Data were collected without incident and according to the data collection plan presented in Chapter 3. Adhering to the original data collection plan established higher credibility to the outcomes of the study (see Amankwaa, 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

Data Analysis

The data analysis process was guided by the two conceptual frameworks (CRP and CRSL), the literature review, and the research questions (see Burkholder et al., 2019). The semistructured interviews of the K–3 teachers and the elementary school administrators were analyzed using inductive coding (see Nowell et al., 2017). The data analysis process consisted of six phases following Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic

analysis framework. The steps that were followed included (a) familiarizing myself with the data, (b) producing initial codes using open and axial coding, (c) generating categories and identifying the themes, (d) reviewing the themes, (e) defining and naming themes, and (f) producing the results in a written report.

Phase 1: Familiarization With the Data

Prior to conducting the semistructured interviews, I reviewed the interview protocols and began noting ideas for possible codes. I maintained a reflexive journal throughout the data collection process to note any ideas that came to mind during the semistructured interviews and monitor myself for any biases stemming from my perceptions and prior experiences. To familiarize myself and organize the data in a Word document, I aligned each interview question with the corresponding research questions. Interview Questions 4, 5, 6, 9, 11a, 11b, 14, 15, and 17 were aligned with RQ1. Interview Questions 7, 10, 12, 13, 16, 16a, 16b, 16c, and 16d were aligned with RQ2. As I began collecting the raw data, I recorded each participant's responses in a Word document according to how the responses aligned with the research questions and the interview questions. After each interview, I repeatedly engaged with the data by listening to the audio recordings multiple times to familiarize myself with the data and identify codes found across participants' responses.

Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes

Revisiting the data multiple times during and after transcription allowed me to identify commonalities among the participants' responses. In the right margin of each transcription, I used a form of open coding (line-by-line coding) to assign word-based

codes to participants' responses. Line-by-line coding allowed me to gain a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon (see Al-Eisawi, 2022). A second round of coding ensued as I modified codes based on participants' interview responses to interview questions. After I completed the first and second round of coding for each transcript, I opened a Word document and input the assigned line-by-line codes for each participant. Color coding was used to identify related responses, which were then calculated to determine the number of appearances throughout the data set. Next, axial coding, which is the combining of related codes, was used to generate categories (see Williams & Moser, 2019).

Phase 3: Generating Categories and Searching for Themes

When generating categories, I identified patterns and related ideas that were aligned to the research questions. Categories that had the most related codes were identified as emergent themes. Considered to be a higher level of abstraction, themes are significant concepts that capture something important related to the research question (Braun & Clark, 2006; Williams & Moser, 2019). During this phase of analysis, the emergent themes were a broad expression of participants' initial responses collected as raw data.

Phase 4: Generating and Reviewing Themes

I reviewed the themes, all data collected, and the experiences and perceptions that were shared by each participant. The validity of each theme was considered as I continued to review the data to check for the meaning of the data as a whole across the participants (see Braun & Clark, 2006). During this phase, themes were reviewed once

more, and final themes were scrutinized at least twice (see Nowell et al., 2017). Lastly, themes were constructed into thematic statements.

Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes

Each thematic statement was related to its corresponding research question to tell a significant part of the story for this study. Tables were constructed to identify the initial codes that were organized into categories and then themes. These tables exhibited the relationship between the themes and the research questions after open and axial coding. No further refinement was needed because all codes, categories, and themes were aligned after three rounds of coding (see Williams & Moser, 2019).

Phase 6: Producing Analysis Report

After the themes were established, I began constructing the results of the study in an analysis report. According to Braun and Clark (2006), the final analysis report should be a concise, logical, and interesting description of the data. To establish the trustworthiness of the study and accuracy of the data collected and analyzed, I maintained a reflexive journal that I reviewed throughout the data collection and analysis process. To support the findings represented by the themes of the study, I used excerpts from the interviews that included direct quotes and paraphrased responses from the participants throughout the analysis report. To maintain credibility of the study, results of the data analysis were included in the final report and transcript review was conducted to ensure accuracy of participants' views and interpretations of the phenomenon (see Nowell et al., 2017).

Results

The results from this qualitative single case study analysis indicated that the phenomenon of K-3 teachers' effective instructional practices and elementary school administrators' leadership practices are partly explainable by the underpinnings of the two conceptual frameworks for this study, culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive leadership practices. Ladson-Billings' (1995a, 1995b, 1995c) theory of culturally relevant pedagogy asserts that the academic success of African American students is linked to the embracing and employment of students' cultural backgrounds within supportive classrooms. Likewise, Khalifa's (2018) culturally responsive school leadership theory asserts that school leadership embody philosophies, practices, and policies that create inclusive learning environments where marginalized students are recognized, valued, and can experience academic success. At the study site, a high-performing Title 1 elementary school in Texas, both the K-3 teachers and the elementary school administrators were culturally aware and dedicated to the academic success of all students including African American students. The results of this study developed from an exploration of the practices and perceptions of K-3 teachers and elementary school administrators in a high-performing Title 1 elementary school in Texas.

Research Question 1

Research question 1 asked: What instructional practices do K-3 teachers use to develop the reading skills of African American students in a high-performing Title 1 elementary school? Upon completing data collection and analysis of all eight teacher participants' transcripts, the themes that emerged for RQ 1 related to relationships,

consistency and intentionality, strategic planning, and student-centered learning environments. Table 3 identifies the initial codes, categories, and themes derived from the raw data during the data analysis process.

Table 3

Overview of Codes, Categories, and Thematic Statements for RQ1

Code	Category	Theme
• Getting acquainted • Trust • People • Needs • Connections • Communication • Parental involvement	• Relationship-based • Community-based • Roles • Expectations	Relationships and high expectations establish community
• Consistent • Cultural background awareness • Multicultural classrooms • Respect • Acceptance	• Intentionality • Acknowledging diversity • Establishing inclusive environments	Consistency and intentionality create culturally responsive learning environments
• Curriculum components • Differentiation • Planning • Diagnostic assessments	• District, campus expectations • Small group instruction • Collaboration	Strategic planning leads to effective, data driven instruction
• Routines • Student ownership • Student interests • Positive praise	• Establish classroom norms • Recognition	Student centered learning environments influence academic success

All eight K-3 teachers had at least two years of educational experience teaching in the primary grades. Each teacher participant described in detail instructional practices used that impacted the reading achievement of African American students. K-3 teachers recalled practices and how they were implemented in the classrooms. Table 4 indicates the practices implemented by each teacher participant. Overall, many practices disclosed

during the semistructured interviews were used among all of the teacher participants regardless of the grade levels they taught.

Table 4

K–3 Teachers' Instructional Practices

ET1	ET2	ET3	ET4	ET5	ET6	ET7	ET8
Relationships Carpet time SEL activities Directives, clear expectations Consistency Diverse texts Differentiation Student voice, choice Positive praise Inclusion Enrichment activities Customized homework Instructional videos for parents	Relationships Carpet time SEL activities Read alouds Movement Chunk instruction Frequent breaks Student voice, choice Positive praise Inclusion	Relationships Carpet time SEL activities Multicultural texts Differentiation Extension activities Consistency After-school tutoring Vocabulary and Word study (building words) Reading, writing activities Elkonin boxes Alphabet chart Articulation of learning objectives Spiral objectives	Relationships Carpet time SEL activities Student voice, choice Open communication Differentiation Positive praise Inclusion	Relationships Carpet time SEL activities Directives, clear expectations Consistency High expectations differentiation Student incentives Positive praise Inclusion High frequency words Goal setting Enrichment activities Listening to Reading Choral reading Multicultural texts	Relationships Carpet time SEL activities Learn their names Direct vocabulary instruction Consistency Images, illustrations High frequency words choice Extension activities Inclusion Words their Way Poetry Music Movement Videos	Relationships Carpet time SEL activities Directives, clear expectations High frequency words Videos Music Movement Differentiation	Relationships Carpet time SEL activities Directives, clear expectations Consistency Differentiation Student voice, choice Positive praise Inclusion

Theme 1: Meaningful Relationships and High Expectations Establish Community

Building meaningful relationships with students and their families was a resounding theme that emerged from the data analysis process. K-3 teachers emphasized building relationships and maintaining high expectations for African American students to establish a successful learning community. Teacher participants shared strategies they implemented to get acquainted with students and their families. All teacher participants described morning "carpet time" or "morning meetings," whereby teachers and students would engage in social-emotional learning activities to build community and to get to

know each other individually. These activities included asking and answering questions that prompted students to share about themselves, their interests, and their families. Participant ET1 noted establishing relationships from the beginning of the year with students and their parents by having academic and non-academic conversations.

Teacher and family relationships are essential to students' academic success. Participant ET3 added, "I know that if I need help [with a student's progression], I have to call dad, and let him know skills we are working on like sight words and letter sounds, so that I can get help from home." Participant ET3 explained that it was important to invest time in communicating with families so all stakeholders could play active roles in students' learning process. Participant ET2 recalled, "Having parents sign up for Class Dojo is important because I often use it to show what we're doing in class. Parents appreciate when I send them pictures of their child reading with a friend or doing something fun in class." Participants ET5 and ET6 concurred with participants ET2 and ET3, adding weekly homework folders, emails, social media, and daily use of Class Dojo and Remind were tools used to maintain communication with parents and enhance the home-school connection. Participant ET5 shared how they incentivized student to return completed weekly homework folders with parent signatures, acknowledging that parents review students' progress throughout the week. Supporting students' progress, "parents also get a copy of sight words students know and don't know, some parents help at home. The ones that help at home go above and beyond," explained ET5. Student and parent relationships were pertinent for student success, establishing relationships as a foundational instructional strategy to implement before all other instructional strategies.

Theme 2: Intentionality and Consistency Creates Culturally Responsive Learning Environments

Teacher participants intentionally and consistently employed strategies to create culturally responsive learning environments that contributed to the reading achievement of African American students. Participants ET1, ET2, ET4, and ET6 used student surveys and parent questionnaires to learn about students' cultural backgrounds. In addition to student surveys, ET6 explained, "as a second-grade teacher, I would take sticky notes and label them with each child's name, then we would stick it on the map in the classroom so that we have an idea of where everyone came from." As a kindergarten teacher, ET6 explained, "Each child and their family would decorate a blank flag representing their native country. One year, I had students who spoke French, Bengali, Portuguese, Spanish, and Filipino, so representation is very important to me and my students." All teacher participants shared how they acknowledged students' cultural celebrations throughout the school year.

Additionally, all teacher participants shared how students' cultural backgrounds were integrated into instructional practices to increase student engagement. For example, participants ET1, ET3, ET4, and ET6 recalled using multicultural texts that portrayed characters from diverse backgrounds in a positive way. In addition to multicultural texts and resources embedded within the district curriculum, ET1 also consulted with the local library to find materials and resources to increase student engagement. "It's important for all of my students to feel comfortable and connected in our classroom, so I find materials to help create that type of environment," said ET1. Participant ET1 emphasized the

importance of using relevant instructional materials, stating "I think it's not used enough for [African American] students. Sometimes, they may be disruptive. They [African American students] may be bored because they are using irrelevant materials that they cannot connect to." Elementary teacher 1 added that building background is important; however, if "you're using materials where every single time you have to provide a lot of background knowledge, then those materials are not relevant enough." Participant ET1 concluded that learning becomes a challenge if students can't connect with the learning materials. Participant ET6 also asserted, "You have to find relevance in it for them . . . they have to make connections to their world or themselves." Intentional and consistent use of learning materials that represented students' cultural backgrounds created culturally responsive learning environments that influenced the academic success of African American students.

Theme 3: Strategic Planning Leads to Effective, Data-Driven Instruction

Teacher participants' strategic planning and use of data-driven instruction was another theme that emerged from the raw data. Participants ET2 and ET3 mentioned collaborating and planning with other grade-level teachers during weekly planning meetings. During planning meetings, grade-level team teachers discuss the curriculum, lessons, assessments and effective implementation strategies. By collaborating with other grade-level teachers, the K-3 teacher participants found strategic planning beneficial to the overall reading development of their African American students.

All K-3 teachers acknowledged the importance of using data to drive effective instruction. As part of campus and district expectations, teacher participants administered

beginning-of-year assessments to determine students' reading level. In addition to universal assessments, teacher participants ET1, ET3, ET5, and ET6 administered one-on-one reading assessments including running records and developmental reading assessments (DRA) to determine the specific reading skills to focus on during small group instruction. Elementary teacher 6 explained, "you can do some running records, a quick test, to find out where the gap is using a small book. Reading doesn't always have to be a long passage; I sometimes do running records using a post-it note and have students read one page of a text." Likewise, ET5 shared, "DRA is a good way to see where they are, and then I use that to determine my next [instructional] move." Elementary teacher 5 added, "even after students take the MAP assessment, an online universal test for all students, I conduct a DRA to see for myself how they're reading. The teacher participants use students' reading assessment data to determine instructional practices.

During small group instruction, consisting of four to six students, teacher participants differentiated instruction according to students' reading skill needs. Participant ET6 noted, "in small groups, you have to meet them where they are and teach them on their level." Participant ET4 added that during small groups, students can "take their time" to learn concepts, while participant ET8 said, "in small groups, I can reteach concepts they struggle with and maybe don't understand." Participant ET5 echoed the use of assessments to "see where they are, if they got it, and if they're ready to move on . . . I pick out their reading materials for a small group, then it's more strategic." According to all teacher participants, planning and data-driven instruction contributed to the reading

achievement of African American students. Disaggregated assessment data and regular teacher planning were part of a continuous improvement cycle that led to increased reading achievement.

Theme 4: Student-Centered Environments Influence Academic Success

Data analyzed from teacher participants highlighted the importance of student-centered learning environments. Each teacher participant believed in the importance of establishing positive relationships with students whereby they would get acquainted with students and learn their interests. Participants ET1, ET2, ET3, and ET6 considered students' interests to select text and other instructional resources. For example, ET6 shared that if students were interested in sports and also struggling with digraphs, they would intentionally use sports-themed texts featuring digraphs during small groups. "I would try to find books that had the SH in it, not once, but repeatedly, several pages worth," explained ET6.

Participant ET5 recalled how one student's love of baseball inspired an extended research project that included reading and listening comprehension activities and writing activities. Participant ET5 recalled,

> One of my students was so excited to learn about Jackie Robinson that we decided do more for Black History as a class. Most of my students chose to dress up as the person they researched. They presented their work and hung their posters in the hallway. We did gallery walks and students took notes about all the important figures. I gave them questions and they took notes from that. The students had so much fun with this project, they went all out.

For some vocabulary and phonics instruction, participants ET5 and ET6 explained how they used videos with child-friendly lyrics and urban beats to increase student engagement. Elementary teacher 6 shared,

> I like to use Gracie's Corner stuff. I think it's geared toward African Americans but they [students] love it, it has a different beat. It's culturally aligned; they have fun while learning the ABCs and the letter sounds.

Teacher participants found that repetition of these media resources increased students' reading acquisition skills.

In addition to considering students' interests, teacher participants also expressed the importance of empowering students to take ownership of their learning. Participant ET3 described how students could articulate the learning target and explain what success means to them. Elementary teacher 3 said, "if you ask my students what success means, they'll tell you the learning target. These little kids are using learning targets, these big words." Elementary teacher 6 added, "when we affirm their identity and use materials they can connect to, they'll enjoy learning." Likewise, ET8 shared, "I take the time to listen to their stories which helps me connect and build positive relationships with them." Participant ET8 continued, "my students love to set goals for their learning. They like sharing when they've met their goals with me and their parents. We try to do something special in class to celebrate their progress." Student ownership of their learning is essential to maintain a student-centered environment.

Another component of student-centered learning environments that emerged from the data was routines. Participant ET5 expressed, "when I think about reading instruction,

some African American students don't have a routine at home … I know that everything I do in class matters even more." Participant ET6 repeated the relevancy of routines during school as "many of them may not pick up a pencil when they get home." Maintaining a daily routine, being consistent, and employing intentional reading instruction within a student-centered learning environment were pivotal to African American students' reading development and achievement.

Research Question 2

Research question 2 asks: What were K-3 teachers' perceptions of instructional practices used to increase the reading achievement of African American students by 4th grade in a high-performing Title 1 elementary school? Two themes that emerged from the data that directly pertained to RQ2. Table 5 identifies the codes, categories, and themes extracted from the raw data during the data analysis.

Table 5

Overview of Codes, Categories, and Thematic Statements for RQ2

Code	Category	Theme
• Getting acquainted • Norms • Behaviors • Roles • Relationships • Relevance • Familiarity • African American English	• Awareness • Acceptance • People • Language	Language acceptance enhances instructional practices
• Lack • Modify, pivot • Mismatch • Equity	• Performance • Support • Adjustments • Professional Development	Enhanced teaching practices yields student achievement

Theme 5: Language Acceptance Enhances Instructional Practices

Each teacher participants shared their experiences teaching African American students who speak AAE. Teacher participants shared student accomplishments despite students' use of AAE. Participant ET1 expressed that students' use of AAE "has nothing to do with their intelligence" and that students are only "speaking the language of their community." Participants ET1, ET3, ET4, and ET8 all commented on accepting students' language as an asset to use during instruction. Participant ET5 asked students to tell the meaning of some AAE colloquialisms and later used these terms to connect with students. Participant ET5 shared, "sometimes, they say stuff like 'You winning, son, and I'm like, what does that mean? They usually laugh at me but will teach me what it means. They're shocked when I later use it on them." Like other teacher participants in this study, ET2 and ET6 expressed how they might correct students' word mispronunciations in a non-threatening manner. ET 2 stated, "I will correct them, maybe not as a whole group, because I don't want to embarrass them. I can tell them without embarrassing them." All teacher participants perceived nothing wrong with students' use of AAE. All teacher participants found value in acknowledging and accepting students' use of AAE in the learning environments.

Theme 6: Enhanced Teaching Practices Yield Student Achievement

Throughout this study, each teacher participant expressed the lack of district or campus-mandated professional training about the reading development of African American students. However, the K-3 teacher participants adopted and implemented culturally responsive teaching practices that resulted in reading achievement for African

American students. Teacher participants made the best use of materials and resources within and outside of the district. “Getting materials and resources outside of our district is not something I have to do, but I believe it’s what’s best for my students. If there is a lack of materials for us, it’s my job to find what they need,” expressed ET1. All teacher participants spoke proudly of the effectiveness of their instructional practices. Participants ET5, ET6, and ET7 noted the importance of giving students what they needed to succeed. “Ultimately, it’s my responsibility that they learn; it all comes back to me. It’s a great responsibility and reward to teach my students. I must do all I can so they can be successful,” stated ET6. Participant ET2 shared, “sometimes I go on YouTube to get ideas or ask other colleagues [who had students in previous grades] what works best for them [African American students].” Although training related to African American students’ reading development was sparse, all K-3 teachers in this study had positive perceptions of their instructional practices.

Research Question 3

Research question 3 asks: What leadership practices do the school administrators use to guide K-3 teachers’ instructional practices in a high-performing Title 1 elementary school? Table 6 identifies the codes, categories, and themes related to RQ3. Research question 3 themes pertained to fostering educational communities amidst time constraints and data-driven professional learning communities.

Table 6

Overview of Codes, Categories, and Thematic Statements for RQ3

Code	Category	Theme
• Getting acquainted • Parent engagement • Community relations • No time • Too many tasks	• Relationship-based • Community-based • Lack of time	Fostering educational communities amidst time constraints
• Cultural awareness • Leadership practices • Data • Curriculum • Resources • Assessments • Campus support • Grade level meetings • Professional development	• Acknowledge, respect diversity • Campus and district expectations • Data-driven • Team time	Clarity cultivates data-driven professional learning communities

Theme 7: Fostering Educational Communities Amid Time Constraints

Both elementary school administrators described a campus administrator's multifaceted role and responsibilities. While managing responsibilities such as administrative duties, teacher development, family and community engagement, and challenges such as time constraints, both elementary campus administrators described how they created and supported learning environments that promoted student achievement.

During the semistructured interviews, both campus administrators reflected upon the importance of establishing relationships with students, students' families, teachers, and the community. The elementary school principal (ESP) and elementary school assistant principal (ESAP) described optimizing time during arrival and dismissal to greet

students and become acquainted with their families. During arrival and dismissal, ESP commented, “while parents are waiting to pick up their child, I make observations of pets that may be in the cars or even younger children that may be in the cars.” Making observations is one strategy used to make connections with students and their families. “I try to make myself available during school events to meet parents and younger siblings. This helps me know who will be coming to our school in a couple of years,” added ESP. The elementary school assistant principal (ESAP) also commented that during school events, “As I walk the hallways and visit classrooms, I sometimes ask the students to introduce me to their families.” Beyond knowing students from campus data, both elementary school administrators shared that visiting classrooms and conversing with students in the cafeteria are other leadership practices used to become acquainted with students. Both school administrators recounted the importance of their presence on campus to establish meaningful relationships with students and their families.

Establishing and maintaining relationships while assuming other administrative responsibilities can be a challenge. The elementary school principal described how “sometimes relationships are formed as a lead-off from something else.” Addressing disciplinary issues and parental concerns is another opportunity for administrators to connect with students and their families. When addressing parental concerns ESP said, “I intentionally make myself available well after school hours to address parents’ concerns during a time that is best suitable for their schedule.” ESP added, “it’s not easy knowing what parents’ needs are; I try to meet them.”

Regarding disciplinary issues, ESAP commented, “there are times during the day that I have to speak with parents and request to have a meeting regarding their child’s behavior; these are not comfortable phone calls or meetings, but they are necessary so as a team we can address the issue,” ESP concluded. “We do our best; it’s difficult because of the campus size to meet all families’ needs, but we try. It’s a difficult task because of other tasks that administrators are responsible for.” Despite the challenges and responsibilities, both elementary school administrators expressed the importance of establishing and maintaining relationships with students and their families.

Likewise, both elementary school administrators acknowledged leadership practices used to establish relationships with teachers. “As I’m walking through the hallways and popping into classrooms during morning arrival, I often engage with teachers as well as students,” recalled ESAP. The elementary school assistant principal also shared the importance of conducting classroom walkthroughs and asking teachers what their needs are to help maintain their relationship and extend instructional support. “When I ask teachers what they need, I listen and use that to help guide what I do next with them in collaborative meetings,” recalled ESAP.

Likewise, ESP shared how attending training alongside teachers nurtured their relationship and displayed teacher support. “The teacher saw me in training today. Just like they were in training, I was too so I’ll be able to support them better,” commented ESP. The elementary school principal continued, “I’m there to help them, and they can call on me for assistance any time. It’s not a gotcha. Let’s get the work done because we

have goals to meet [for our students].” Both elementary school administrators expressed the value and importance of relationships on campus.

Additionally, community relationships and engagement were important to establishing an educational community. Despite time limitations and many administrative responsibilities, both administrators shared how they maintained community relations and engagement. “Sometimes, I’ll ride the school bus in the evening. This gives me a greater awareness of who and what all is in our community,” shared ESAP. “As a campus leadership team, we’ve discussed hosting some family nights at one of the local grocery stores that our families typically visit,” commented ESAP. Establishing the school’s presence throughout the community was significant to fostering student support. Partnering with local businesses and other entities can helps establish a thriving educational community. “We have one of the local labs that hosts science night each year. Our partnership with them has greatly influenced student performance in science,” shared ESA. ESP added, “a local church in our community is one of our educational partners who donate goods to our families, provide assistance during the holidays, and often volunteer throughout the school year.” Despite time constraints, both elementary school administrators conveyed that maintaining the school’s presence and community relations have added value to the educational community.

Theme 8: Clarity Cultivates Data-Driven Professional Learning Communities

Two important responsibilities of campus administrators were teacher development and fostering a healthy campus culture. During their semistructured interviews, each elementary school administrator shared their experiences and

perspectives on the importance of professional learning communities. As described in the study, professional learning communities, referred to grade-level team meetings where the campus leadership, the campus instructional team, and grade-level teachers meet to discuss curriculum, student performance, data, and instructional practices.

As the primary instructional leaders on campus, both campus administrators emphasized the importance of their presence in the professional learning communities. "During professional learning communities, we look at student groups and how they perform," said ESP. The ESP further explained that when one group seemed to perform differently or lower than others, it led to a discussion about instructional practices and what support may be needed. "Having conversations with teachers about their walkthroughs and asking them what they need help with during PLCs is how I interpret teachers' needs," shared ESAP. The elementary school assistant principal also shared how coaching teachers is another leadership practice to support and develop teachers. "During coaching sessions, we can dive deeper into their [teachers'] needs and instructional practices that impact student performance," ESAP added. "There are times when we'll do a quick on-the-spot training [during professional learning communities] for teachers because that's what the grade-level needs are at that time," stated ESAP.

During one PLC, the ESAP provided a brief training to support the grade-level teachers. They provided an example of how one grade level team needed clarity and guidance on implementing a writer's workshop. "Attending PLCs is one of those non-negotiables because so much planning, development, and strategizing takes place during those meetings," explained ESAP. Both elementary administrators shared how their

presence during professional learning communities helps to create safe and supportive learning environments for teachers to grow and develop their craft.

The elementary school principal acknowledged that another effective leadership practice is attending training alongside teachers. “I’ve attended training with teachers, when it comes to reading expectations and assessments, there have been a lot of changes.” The ESP added that district expectations include the administration of different reading assessments. By attending training alongside teachers, the ESP can “know what teachers are being asked to do so that I can support them in increasing reading achievement.” During professional learning communities, “we have streamlined things because our teachers have a lot of resources. We give obvious expectations for small group [reading] instruction,” explained ESP. The ESP also shared.

> Some teachers may see this as taking away their autonomy, but it’s giving them the materials they need that they don’t have to plan. The plan is already there with scripted lessons.” [In our district], we’ve moved away from guided reading and back to the science of teaching reading, so we try to take some of the burden from our teachers and provide them with clear expectations and materials to use during reading instruction.

Both elementary administrators believed that establishing clearly defined expectations contributes to data-driven professional learning communities that ultimately influence student achievement.

Research Question 4

Research Question 4: What are elementary administrators' perceptions of leadership practices used to increase the reading achievement of African American students in a high-performing Title 1 elementary school? Table 7 delineates the codes, categories, and the theme as related to RQ4.

Table 7

Overview of Codes, Categories, and Thematic Statements for RQ4

Code	Category	Theme
• Diversity • Relationship • Teacher, parent connections • Juggling duties, tasks • Not enough time	• Cultural awareness • People • Communication • Balance	The balancing act: Responsibilities of a campus administrator

Theme 9: The Balancing Act: Responsibilities of a Campus Administrator

The responsibilities of an elementary school administrator are numerous. As the cornerstone of the educational community, elementary school administrators serve as connectors among students, families, teachers, and the community. Both elementary school administrators commented about other critical administrative responsibilities, like attending district meetings and managing other day-to-day campus operations, that sometimes reduce time devoted to teacher development and family and community engagement. "Some meetings I must attend are online, so I am on campus. But I am disconnected from everyone because I must be present for the meeting," ESP commented. "Even when I am not present on campus I'm still thinking about our teachers and students," commented ESAP.

As former instructional coaches, ESP and ESAP enjoy devoting time to teachers' development. The ESP recalled starting their career in education because they wanted to help teachers. With an educational career spanning more than 30 years, ESAP spent most of their time being a classroom teacher and eventually supporting teachers as an instructional specialist. Despite the many other administrative responsibilities, both elementary school administrators expressed the importance of teacher development. Administrators viewed teacher development necessary because it led to student achievement.

Both elementary school administrators valued teacher development because of its relationship to student achievement. Their recollections of professional learning communities included collaborating with teachers to enhance instructional practices, address the diverse needs of students, and implement initiatives to promote student engagement, attendance, and positive behavior. "There are those extreme times when I have parent conversations about why their child is not attending school regularly," stated ESP. The ESP added, "I also remind teachers that our students must be present to learn. But once they're here, what are we doing to ensure they are learning?"

The ESAP recalled supporting teachers by "encouraging them [teachers] to get to know their students and integrate books and stories and other important things to them into their daily instruction." The ESAP added, "I think my librarian does an excellent job of doing that, too. She does a really good job of getting diverse books, advertising them in the library, and reading them aloud when she visits classrooms." In addition to recognizing the use of multicultural texts within classrooms, ESP shared, "for career day,

one thing I charged the committee to do was invite a culturally diverse group of professionals to attend." The ESP concluded, "We all play an important role in ensuring the academic success of our students; there is no one job that is too great or small." Both elementary school administrators recognized the importance of regular attendance and student engagement.

Amidst other important responsibilities, both elementary school administrators shared the importance of maintaining community relations. The ESP stated that "JA [Junior Achievement] in a Day partners with ACE Cash Express, and they come in regularly to do financial literacy lessons for our students . . . Our campus counselors do a good job of maintaining those relationships with those partners."

The administrators explained that their awareness of new businesses and homes being built in the community is important to maintaining a connection with the community. "Due to the demands of the job, there is little time to visit neighboring businesses . . . so one thing that I do is drive around when I go grab something for lunch to see what's going on in our community," expressed ESP. "Our parent liaison often reaches out to different community agencies to support our students and their families," said ESAP. Though limited time is devoted to community engagement, both administrators expressed the value of solid relationships with the community. As elementary school administrators, some community engagement tasks are delegated to other stakeholders to ensure continuous collaboration. Both elementary school administrators have leadership experience ranging from two years to 15 years. Each elementary administrator participant described in detail leadership practices used to

support K-3 teachers and that impacted the reading achievement of African American students. Table 8 indicates the practices implemented by both elementary administrator participants.

Table 8

Elementary Administrators' Leadership Practices

ESP	ESAP
Establish and maintain relationships with stakeholders	Establish and maintain relationships with stakeholders
Hire culturally responsive teachers	Diversify staff according to student population
Hire growth-mindset teachers, open to new learning	Teacher coaching
Employ teachers with good communication skills	Regular teacher conversations about instructional practices
Diversify staff according to student population	Employ beginning and middle of year data talks with teachers
Open to listen to students, families, teachers	Frequent classroom walkthroughs
Data-driven, address gaps in data	Ask teachers what they need
Frequent classroom walkthroughs	Be present and participate during PLC
Be present and participate during PLC	Assess grade level needs
Employ beginning and middle of year data talks with teachers	Model instructional expectations
Promote use of multicultural texts and resources	Monitor fidelity of expectations
Follow through with commitments	Be intentional – reviewing data
Follow up on teacher development	Be supportive to teachers
Be present to plan with teachers	Strategically monitor data
Assess teachers' instructional needs	Be available, approachable
Offer professional development within school day	Work in collaborative groups with teachers, community groups
Align campus goals with students needs	Follow up on teacher development
Be intentional – reviewing data	Be present to plan with teachers
Be supportive to teachers	
Strategically monitor data	
Set clearly defined expectations	
Streamline use of teacher resources	
Spiral professional development as needed	
Attend trainings with teachers	
Be available, approachable	
Work in collaborative groups with teachers, community groups	

Evidence of Trustworthiness

The validity of a study relies on the trustworthiness of the study. The trustworthiness of a study also indicates the rigor of the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

Four criteria that establish trustworthiness in qualitative research are: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (see Amankwaa, 2016).

Credibility

According to Ravitch and Carl (2021), credibility refers to the connection between the research study findings and reality to demonstrate whether the findings are true. I used interview protocols, maintained a reflexive journal, and I used member checking to establish credibility. There were two separate interview protocols, one for K-3 teacher participants and one for elementary campus administrators. I adhered to the interview protocols for each participant so there was consistency in the data collection process. While collecting and analyzing data, I maintained a reflexive journal where I recorded my perceptions using memos to monitor myself as a researcher during the data collection process. I also used member checking whereby all participants received their interview transcripts by email and reviewed them for accuracy. Participants notified me by email if any revisions were needed for their transcriptions. All interview transcripts were verified without revision by the study participants.

Transferability

According to Leung (2015), transferability is an evaluative point for qualitative research whereby the findings from a study may be replicated by other researchers in similar contexts and settings. All sections of this study were aligned and replicable. I used the Walden EdD program dissertation rubric and checklist to ensure transferability. I provided details about participant selection and participation during the study while maintaining confidentiality. Additionally, I provided rich and detailed descriptions of the

setting, instrumentation, and data collection and analysis process to establish transferability (Shenton, 2004). I included thick descriptions, particularly from participant interview excerpts, in the final data results. I also presented the context of the study so the reader could determine if results from this study were applicable.

Dependability

According to Ravitch and Carl (2021), dependability refers to the reliability of a study. I undertook measures to establish dependability for this study, including member checking. Upon completing all semistructured interviews, I emailed the virtual-system generated transcripts to all participating K-3 teachers and elementary campus administrators. While reviewing their transcripts, I asked participants to check transcripts for accuracy and provide any edits or revisions as needed. The participants did not provide any edits or revisions. All transcripts were validated by the participants through member checking. Additionally, to establish dependability and transparency, I maintained an audit trail that documented the research process by disclosing personal reflections, insight about the raw data, and other research activities that about the study. I followed the research plan with fidelity by employing audit trails and reflexive practices.

Confirmability

According to Burkholder et al. (2019), confirmability is the degree to which research procedures form the findings of a study and are not associated with researcher bias. I attained confirmability of my study by documenting the data collection and analysis process, including theme identification. I maintained a reflexive journal to

monitor myself as the researcher and mitigate bias. Member checks also addressed the confirmability of the data.

Summary

In this qualitative single case study, I explored the instructional and leadership practices of K-3 teachers and elementary campus administrators, respectively. Additionally, I explored participants' perceptions about instructional and leadership practices. I extracted a total of six themes from data collected from K-3 teachers, and three themes were extracted from data collected from elementary campus administrators. Each theme related to the academic achievement of African American students in grades K-3 at a high-performing elementary school in Texas.

All study participants asserted the importance of relationships with students, teachers, parents, and the surrounding community. It was also apparent that relationships are necessary for the academic achievement of African American students to be possible. Establishing relationships that acknowledged and accepted diversity was the strongest strategy employed by K-3 teachers and elementary campus administrators in the high-performing Title 1 school. There was a consensus that integrating culturally relevant curriculum components was needed to increase engagement for African American students in grades K-3. The teachers and the administrators highlighted using data to drive their respective practices. K-3 teacher participants expressed the importance of creating inclusive, student-centered learning environments that valued the diverse backgrounds of student groups, including students' home language. Despite often overwhelming and time-consuming responsibilities, elementary campus administrators

found it important to devote time to support teachers through clearly defined expectations, collaboration, and professional development.

Chapter 5 of this study contains a detailed discussion and presentation of my interpretation of key findings related to the conceptual framework and literature. I also described the limitations of my study. Lastly, recommendations for future research and implications for practice related to the findings are shared, as are the potential impacts for positive social change. Chapter 5 ends with a conclusion derived from the findings of the study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore the instructional practices of K–3 teachers and the leadership practices of elementary school administrators that led to increased reading achievement of African American students by fourth grade in a high-performing Title 1 elementary school in Texas. Research from Coleman (1966) to NAEP (2022) evidenced a persistent gap in the reading achievement of African American students as compared to their European American peers. Moreover, there was a gap in the research related to the implementation of effective instructional practices and leadership practices for African American students (NAEP, 2022). This was in contrast to the fourth-grade African American students at a high-performing elementary school in a suburban district in Texas who had demonstrated exceptional reading achievement according to the 2018, 2019, and 2022 annual STAAR reading assessment. For this study, I explored the instructional practices and perceptions of eight K–3 teachers at the high-performing elementary school that led to the achievement of the African American students in Grade 4, as well as the leadership practices and perceptions of two elementary school administrators at that school. The findings addressed the four research questions that guided the study:

RQ1: What instructional practices do K–3 teachers use to develop the reading skills of African American students in a high-performing Title 1 elementary school?

RQ2: What are K–3 teachers' perceptions of instructional practices used to increase the reading achievement of African American students by 4th grade in a high-performing Title 1 elementary school?

RQ3: What leadership practices do the school administrators use to guide K–3 teachers' instructional practices in a high-performing Title 1 elementary school?

RQ4: What are elementary school administrators' perceptions of leadership practices used to increase the reading achievement of African American students by fourth grade in a high-performing Title 1 elementary school?

Participants shared their professional experiences pertaining to the reading development and achievement of African American students by Grade 4. Both K–3 teachers and elementary administrators were asked questions pertaining to the instructional and leadership practices and their perceptions of those practices that supported the reading achievement of African American students by Grade 4. A key finding was that the instructional and leadership practices fostered collaborative relationships with educational stakeholders. K–3 teachers and elementary administrators had common practices of establishing and maintaining relationships with students' families and the school community; the establishment of these relationships was foundational in the academic achievement of African American students. Four key findings from this study were related to the conceptual frameworks CRP and CRSL. Additional key findings pertained to the exhortation of collaborative relationships, instructional and leadership practices that honored inclusivity and cultural awareness, and learner-centered environments that promoted continuous improvement and development for students and teachers.

In this section, findings from this qualitative single case study are interpreted in the context of the related literature. This single case study at the high-performing Title 1

elementary school was unique in nature as evidenced by the reading achievement of African American students by Grade 4. Chapter 5 includes the interpretation of findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, implications, and conclusions.

Interpretation of the Findings

The study's findings are presented in alignment with the conceptual frameworks, CRP and CRSL, and the research presented in the literature review in Chapter 2. The data analysis revealed patterns of similarities in the nine thematic statements derived from this study. The key findings were grouped by corresponding research questions that guided this study. Table 9 includes similarities in the thematic summaries of the eight K–3 teachers and the two elementary school administrators in relation to each research question.

Table 9

K–3 Teacher and Elementary School Administrator Theme Summary

Research question focus	K–3 Teacher	Elementary school administrator
RQ1: Instructional practices used by K–3 teachers RQ3: Leadership practices used by elementary administrators	Theme 1: K–3 teachers implement many instructional practices to establish relationships. Theme 2: K–3 teachers implement many instructional practices to create culturally responsive environments that acknowledges all cultural backgrounds represented. Theme 3: K–3 teachers continuously engage in planning and use student data to determine best instructional practices for student achievement. Theme 4: K–3 teachers created student centered environments incorporating students' interests and that supported students' ownership of their learning to increase student engagement.	Theme 7: Elementary school administrators implemented various leadership practices to establish relationships throughout the educational community. Theme 8: Elementary school administrators value professional learning communities that support teacher development and disaggregate student data to determine best instructional practices for student achievement.
RQ2: K–3 teachers' perception of instructional practices RQ4: Elementary school administrators' perception of leadership practices	Theme 5: K–3 teachers are unbothered by students' use of AAE; AAE does not interfere with student achievement. Theme 6: K–3 teachers do what's best for student achievement despite specific professional development geared toward literacy development for AA students.	Theme 9: Elementary school administrators balance responsibilities including teachers' professional development, student engagement, and other day-to-day campus operations.

Research Question 1

RQ1 focused on the instructional practices used by eight K-3 teachers to increase the reading achievement of African American students by fourth grade at a high-performing Title 1 elementary school in Texas. The data revealed many of the same instructional practices used by teachers across grade levels from Kindergarten to Grade 3. The instructional practices highlighted in this study were effective as evidenced by the African American students' reading performance on the annual state assessment.

Key Finding 1: Relationships With Students, Families, and Community

The importance of establishing and maintaining relationships with students, their families, and community members was a foundational focus that was apparent throughout this study. This was evident in the literature review as Debnam et al. (2023) believed that positive student–teacher relationships are characterized by nurturing interactions and communication; positive student–teacher relationships are crucial in shaping a student's sense of belonging, which yields increased engagement and student academic performance. Gay (2013) believed that the absence of positive student–teacher relationships would negatively impact student learning. K-3 teachers voiced the need for strong relationships to be established for African American students to experience academic success. All teacher participants expressed that it is essential to form strong relationships.

As indicated in the study results, teachers exhibited respect for students to establish strong relationships. According to Debnam et al. (2023), culturally responsive teachers have consistently practiced the development of student–teacher relationships. As

noted by the K–3 teachers in this study, devoting time to listen to students and establishing relationships has a strong influence on students' academic performance throughout the school year. Strong, genuine student–teacher relationships increase students' confidence levels, their perceptions of themselves, and their academic achievement.

As indicated in Table 1, six of the eight K–3 teachers identified as African American. Ladson-Billings and Anderson (2021) expressed the advantages for African American students to experience learning from African American teachers. Howell et al. (2019) and Ladson-Billings and Anderson believed African American students learning from African American teachers was more likely to affirm African American students' cultural backgrounds because the teachers identify with and incorporate cultural experiences into learning. In the current study, all eight of the K–3 teachers employed culturally responsive practices that validated and valued students' cultural backgrounds. Hopper et al. (2022) believed that regardless of race, it is the responsibility of all teachers to cultivate positive relationships with their students. In the current study, each teacher participant expressed the importance of positive student–teacher relationships and shared instructional practices they employed to establish positive student–teacher relationships.

All K–3 teachers referenced the importance of home–school connections. This reflected the findings of Akin-Sabuncu et al. (2023), Khalifa (2018), Ladson-Billings (1995a), and Muniz (2019), who believed that to promote reading achievement, it is necessary to engage with students, their families, and the community in culturally responsive ways to gain trust and establish relationships. Meaningful relationships with

students' families are equally important to foster the academic achievement of African American students. The K–3 teacher participants in the current study shared how students' families were invited to participate in activities to learn about students' cultural backgrounds and engage in other learning opportunities. Five of the eight teachers expressed strong beliefs that though they are the teachers, they are also the connectors between home and school. This aligned with Drevdahl's (2017) research that teachers significantly influence the academic achievement of African American students.

Key Finding 2: Engaging Activities

According to the K–3 teacher participants, planning engaging activities that incorporate students' cultural backgrounds, their interests, and an understanding of their skill levels is fundamental for the academic success of students. This was evident in the findings of the literature review where Ladson-Billings (1995a, 1995b, and 1995c) cited that the consideration of students' cultural backgrounds increases the students' engagement in learning activities. Some of the K–3 teachers spoke extensively about assessing students' skill levels to identify their skill proficiency and skill deficits to determine how best to serve their needs. The practice of administering preassessments to determine students' skill levels was directly aligned with the research of Young (2019). The K–3 teachers conduct DRAs then plan reading instruction to address students' skill deficits.

Typically, in small groups the K–3 teachers integrated students' cultural backgrounds with the use of multicultural texts and students' interests to maintain student engagement and learning. Evidence supporting the use of multicultural texts was also

found by Gunn et al. (2021), who reported that the use of multicultural texts increased student engagement and student learning while acknowledging and affirming students' cultural identities. Frequent targeted, small-group instruction proved beneficial for African American students who demonstrated reading achievement. K–3 teachers who sought ways to construct learning opportunities that yield increased student engagement was also aligned with the conceptual framework of CRP (Ladson-Billings, 2021). Engaging students in purposeful small group instruction can prove beneficial for others student groups. Findings from this study substantiated the research outlined in the literature review.

During data collection, K–3 teachers described reading instructional practices that included read alouds. Implementation of read alouds is a research-based instructional practice recommended by Duggin and Acosta (2019), who credited read alouds for improving oral listening skills, oral comprehension, and vocabulary development. As part of morning circles, K–3 teachers use multicultural text read alouds to boost student engagement and build community. Read alouds are used to spark student dialogue offering students opportunities to share their experiences, thoughts, and beliefs. According to Bertrand (2020), using children's literature with elementary-age students can foster classroom discussions on social issues and other issues that matter to students. K–3 teachers often engaged students using read alouds. According to Duggin and Acosta's research, read alouds are valued instructional practices that add value to the reading development of African American students. Read alouds are engaging activities that can be used to improve reading achievement for similar student populations. The use

of read alouds at the study site was aligned with findings presented in the studies in the literature review.

Research Question 2

RQ2 focused on K–3 teachers' perceptions of the instructional practices used to increase the reading achievement of African American students by fourth grade at a Title 1 elementary school in Texas. The data revealed that K–3 teacher participants in this study maintained positive perceptions of the instructional practices they used. Teachers' perceptions make a difference in the instructional practices implemented by classroom teachers.

Key Finding 3: Language

All K–3 teachers shared their experiences and perceptions of students who speak AAE. According to Washington and Seidenberg, (2021), AAE differs from the language of instruction, which is GAE, and results in African American students who speak AAE struggling with literacy development. At the study site, the K–3 teachers shared experiences of teaching African American students who speak AAE. Though research identified a negative correlation between students who speak AAE and reading achievement (Washington et al., 2018), the K-3 teachers in the current study shared positive experiences as they accepted students' home language and frequently used students' language to increase student engagement. Irvine (1990) acknowledged academic success for African American students when teachers accepted cultural language patterns. The K–3 teachers' acceptance of AAE spoken in the classrooms also

aligned with Ladson-Billings (1995a) CRP that acknowledges the use of cultural language as a means to affirm students' identities.

All K–3 teachers perceived AAE, which is often characterized by slower speech, as a positive student attribute rather than a deficit. Washington and Seidenberg (2021) articulated that as students process two languages, home language and school language, they may respond slower because they are still developing the skill to manage two different languages. One K–3 teacher expressed how students' use of AAE does not equate to a lack of intelligence. The K–3 teachers' acceptance of AAE aligned with other researchers' findings and reflected the importance of not overcorrecting students' use of AAE in the classroom, which has a negative impact because students often become disengaged (Washington & Seidenberg, 2021). Only one K–3 teacher shared how some African American students' use of their cultural language was corrected but in a harmless, nonthreatening manner, and the teacher expressed the importance of treating students respectfully. The manner in which K–3 teachers accepted the use of AAE maintained students' dignity and aligned with the research presented in the literature review and the conceptual frameworks of the study. The acceptance of students' cultural language was one instructional practice used by most of the K–3 teachers to foster reading development and achievement of African American students.

Dickinson et al. (2019) stated the importance of direct and indirect instruction to develop students' language skills including phonological processes in primary grade years. During the semistructured interviews, five of the eight K-3 teachers emphasized the delivery of language instruction during small group instruction. In their description of

small group instruction, language development was addressed through direct instruction of vocabulary, phonics, and phonemic awareness skills. The five K-3 teachers perceived the language development crucial to reading sustainability in successive years. Incorporating the use of students' native language in conjunction with direct language instruction may yield reading achievement for other student groups. The K-3 teachers' instructional practices conducive to language development aligned with the research of Dickinson et al. (2019).

Key Finding 4: Planning and Collaboration

During the semistructured interviews, the K-3 teachers acknowledged collaborating with grade level teachers during weekly team meetings and professional learning communities. As found in the research of Alhanachi et al. (2021), the K-3 teachers experienced positive outcomes from engaging in collaborative meetings like professional learning communities. During collaborative meetings, K-3 teachers reflected and shared best practices, disaggregated student data, and determined best instructional practices to implement based on student data and performance. Frequent participation in collaborative meetings served the K-3 teachers well as they expressed appreciation for the support of their colleagues and peers. One K-3 teacher expressed how they relied on their colleagues for instructional support and guidance as they were new to the grade level. Khalifa (2016) expressed the importance of teachers' continuous development in culturally relevant practices to better serve the need of minority students, like African American students. The K-3 teachers' engagement and participation in collaborative meetings was aligned with research outlined in the literature review.

Research Question 3

RQ3 focused on the leadership practices of elementary administrators used to support K-3 teachers in high-performing Title 1 elementary school in Texas. Data were collected and analyzed from two school administrators, one principal and one assistant principal. The leadership practices found in this study can assist elementary school administrators as they develop collaborative relationships with teachers, families, and the community. Additionally, these leadership practices can provide support to elementary school teachers.

Key Finding 5: Relationships With Educational Stakeholders

The elementary school administrators articulated their experiences engaging with and building relationships with students, teachers, families, and the community. Both elementary administrators expressed how they engage with students and their families during school events as well as arrival and dismissal times. Kelly et al. (2021) viewed these types of interactions as non-academic culturally relevant practices that engage the families and the community. Engaging with students' families and the community fosters positive relationships that promote academic achievement of African American students (Khalifa, 2018). The ESP reflected on an experience of purposely conducting a phone meeting with a parent after school hours because it best accommodated the parent's schedule. Visibility of an elementary school administrator and their understanding of parents' needs were leadership practices that support positive relationships with parents.

As culturally responsive leaders, the elementary administrators leveraged their positive relationships with community organizations to foster student achievement. Both

elementary administrators engaged with community organizations to create learning environments where African American students have opportunities to thrive. The ESP attributed partnerships with a local science lab and a neighborhood church for increased student engagement and academic performance. The ESAP shared leadership practices that included administrator's promotion of adult-literacy classes after school hours. Additional community engagement was evident in their practices as the ESAP shared they sponsored a national fathers empowerment group so fathers could learn how to better serve their families. These practices aligned with research of Khalifa (2018) that concluded family and community engagement are vehicles that promote learning environments and empower the community and that such environments are optimal for African American students' learning. Both elementary administrators expressed the importance of creating inclusive, welcoming environments that valued and respected the diverse population of students they serve. Engaging with families and community organizations are culturally responsive leadership practices that may benefit other student groups; leadership practices identified in data collection and analysis mirrors culturally responsive leadership practices identified in the literature review.

Key Finding 6: Professional Learning Communities

In this study, both elementary school administrators spoke extensively about leadership practices that supported K-3 teachers. Khalifa (2018) identified one of the four critical behaviors of a culturally responsive school leader is as an instructional leader. The elementary school administrators created opportunities for teachers to continue development of instructional practices during professional learning communities. During

professional learning communities, customized instructional strategies were formulated, and plans for implementation were established. Both elementary school administrators expressed value in professional learning communities as teachers are supported and offered professional development according to specific grade level needs. As an experienced former instructional coach, ESAP conducted trainings during professional learning communities to model effective instructional practices.

In addition to professional learning communities, the elementary school administrators continued to support teachers during individual training opportunities. These leadership practices are the type of practices Khalifa et al. (2016) recommended to support teachers' development to improve student achievement. The ESP expressed the importance of attending professional development trainings with teachers to show support. While teachers were learning best instructional practices to promote student achievement, ESP attended the same training with the teacher to learn how best to support the teacher. The data findings in this study identified the advantages of teacher development and collaboration in promotion of student achievement.

Research Question 4

RQ4 focused on elementary administrators' perceptions of the leadership practices used to increase the reading achievement of African American students by 4th grade at a Title 1 elementary school in Texas**.** Elementary administrators' perceptions of leadership practices directly influence the choice of practices implemented. Additionally, the choice of leadership practices implemented may affect the academic achievement of

students. The role of school administrator is multifaceted and important to the academic achievement of all students.

Key Finding 7: Responsibilities

The elementary school administrators had positive perceptions of their leadership practices as campus leaders. Khalifa (2018) identified critical behaviors of culturally responsive school leaders including self-reflection, advocacy of family and community engagement, promotion of positive school environment, and instructional leadership. Both elementary school administrators reflected upon and commented about the great number of responsibilities as a campus administrator. In their practices, both ESP and ESAP expressed a limited amount of time devoted specifically to community engagement. However, when reflecting on their practices, the administrators employed strategic efforts to foster community engagement due to other leadership priorities. The demands of day-to-day operations, managing and supporting teachers, and serving students consumed ample amounts of time. Data findings related to culturally responsive leadership practices and perceptions were aligned with the research presented in the literature review and in the conceptual framework of CRSL by Khalifa (2018).

Limitations of the Study

The transferability of the study was limited to the high-performing Title 1 elementary school in Texas. Data collection was dependent upon the current K-3 teachers and elementary campus administrators at the study site. Another limitation of the study was the potential for researcher bias, as the sole researcher I was also the primary data instrument in this single case qualitative study. At the time of this study, I did not serve in

any capacity within the study site. I did not have any previous direct supervision or appraisal responsibilities with any of the K-3 teacher participants. Nevertheless, bias is a concern for researchers (Carl & Ravitch, 2021). I was intentional to minimize bias and maintained a reflexive journal throughout the study where I regularly recorded my thoughts and ideas about the research process.

Recommendations

There remains a significant need to further explore the instructional practices of K-3 teachers and the leadership practices of elementary school administrators that yield the reading achievement of African American students by 4th grade. There are additional research topics that may increase the understanding of this phenomenon.

Regarding instructional practices of K-3 teachers, I recommend a longitudinal study of K-3 teachers to commence upon completion of culturally relevant professional development that includes the reading development of African American students. K-3 teachers could engage in the suggested training prior to start of the school year and implement these instructional practices over one full school year. K-3 teachers in this study experienced increased reading performance despite lacking these specific trainings. Offering culture-specific professional development and extending the study to a full school year may offer greater understanding of how and why African American students succeed in reading. Findings from a longitudinal study could offer additional data to analyze for further interpretation and understanding of this phenomenon leading to K-3 teachers' increased understanding of how linguistic variations impact reading development and instruction (Washington & Seidenberg, 2021).

Regarding the leadership practices of elementary school administrators, I recommend a longitudinal study that includes field observations of both elementary school principals' and assistant principals' leadership practices. As part of the longitudinal study, the principal and the assistant principal could maintain a reflective journal for the duration of the study to record their daily activities, thoughts, perceptions, and beliefs about their responsibilities as an administrator. In this study, both elementary school administrators emphasized the multitude of responsibilities required in their roles as school administrators. Extending the time of data collection and incorporating additional data instruments, such as field observations and reflective journals, would offer a greater dataset over an extended amount of time. Longitudinal research may provide greater insight into time management and how administrators balance their responsibilities.

Both administrators in this study shared how relationships with community organizations are established indirectly. Most of these relationships were formed and maintained in relation to other responsibilities. A qualitative study yielding greater insights on administrators' use of time may identify opportunities to devote more time to family and community engagement. While the elementary administrators' inadvertent relationships with parents and community organizations produced positive outcomes for student achievement in this study; there may be the potential for even greater outcomes for student achievement with more intentional parent and community engagement. Khalifa (2018) elaborated on the idea that fostering community involvement leads to increased student success and stronger and more trusting relationships with families.

Increased positive relations with families and communities may lead to greater student achievement outcomes.

Stronger, more trusting relationships with parents would also produce opportunities for parental input. Ladson-Billings (1995b) emphasized the importance of parental input. An appropriate approach for further exploration would be to conduct a research study that gathers parents' insights regarding factors that positively influence their child's educational experience, their preference for their child's classroom teacher, and their perceptions of why their preference is best for their child. In a research study conducted by Kourea (2016), positive parental relations provided greater insight into students' cultural backgrounds, which led to more learning opportunities.

Implications

The findings from this study could foster positive social change for the students of K-3 teachers who deliver reading instruction to African American students in other Title 1 elementary schools in Texas and similar contexts. K-3 teachers working with African American students can leverage the insights gained from this study to implement targeted instructional practices to enhance academic achievement in reading for African American students. The acquisition of a deeper understanding of how to effectively enhance the reading development of African American students can be transformational for K-3 teachers and the instructional practices they employ with this population of students. Educators' knowledge of planning and implementing effective reading instruction saves time and alleviates stress, affording more time to deliver enriched learning opportunities.

Enriched learning opportunities cultivate a thriving learning environment that fosters students' academic and social-emotional needs.

Additionally, findings from this study could foster positive social change for African American students enrolled in other Title 1 elementary schools in Texas and similar contexts. If implemented by teachers and administrators, findings from this study can benefit African American students by increasing students' reading proficiency and critical thinking skills resulting in greater academic success and positive social interactions. Proficient reading skills enable African American students to advance in other academic areas, as reading is a fundamental skill and vital for comprehension. Proficient reading skills increase students' ability to think critically; African American students are more likely to think independently with improved critical thinking skills. As proficient readers, African American students are more likely to develop a more critical and discerning mindset and engage in meaningful discussions on issues relevant to them and their communities. The advantages of strong reading skills are unlimited, affording African American students more opportunities to pursue higher education and seek professional careers. Developing and sustaining strong reading skills is paramount in becoming a life-long learner.

Conclusion

Historically, African American students have underperformed their European American peers in reading on state and national assessments (NAEP, 2022). This qualitative single case study delved into the instructional practices of K-3 teachers and the leadership practices of elementary school administrators at a high-performing

elementary school in a Title 1 district in Texas. At the study site, fourth-grade African American students defied historic achievement trends outperforming their European American peers on the annual state reading assessment in 2018, 2019, and 2022. Through a comprehensive exploration of K-3 teachers' instructional practices and elementary administrators' culturally responsive leadership practices, this research study revealed effective practices that produced positive academic outcomes for African American students in a high-performing Title 1 elementary school.

The findings from this study reiterated the impact of effective, targeted instructional practices and visionary leadership practices that resulted in the reading achievement of African American students. By fostering collaborative and inclusive culturally responsive learning environments, empowering teachers with culturally relevant pedagogical resources, and engaging African American students with content that meets their academic and social needs, a transformative educational change can create more equitable learning opportunities for African American students.

Equitable learning opportunities and increased reading proficiency for African American students influence the narrowing of the achievement gap and expand the prospects for greater societal advancements for African American students. Findings from this study emphasized the need for culturally relevant pedagogical practices and culturally responsive leadership practices for African American students to experience academic success in reading and potentially later in life (Khalifa, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995a).

In conclusion, implementing instructional and leadership practices that acknowledge and embrace the cultural identities of African American students is a celebration of the wealth that this heritage possesses. Recognizing and prospering from the value of the African American culture is a commitment to acceptance and inclusivity. Ultimately, inclusivity yields transformational educational experiences that positively shape the trajectory of African American students' lives for years to come.

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Appendix A: Partner Organization Agreement

WALDEN UNIVERSITY

A higher degree. A higher purpose.

Partner Organization Agreement
for AEAL Dissertation

[redacted]

July 31, 2023

The doctoral student, **Tammeka Foreman**, will be conducting a doctoral study as part of the AEAL (Education Administration and Leadership for experienced administrators) EdD program. The student will be completing Walden IRB requirements *and our organization's research approval processes*.

I understand that Walden's IRB has given the student tentative approval to interview leaders (supervisors, board members, PTA leaders, community partners, state department personnel, and similar decision-makers) with whom the student has no power relationship. Details will be created for the final proposal, and the informed consent letter attached will be used. Depending upon the details of the student's study, deidentified organization data* may be requested.

> **At the discretion of the organization's leadership, the student may analyze deidentified records including: aggregate personnel or student records that have been deidentified before being provided to the doctoral student, other deidentified operational records, teaching materials, deidentified lesson plans, meeting minutes, digital/audio/video recordings created by the organization for its own purposes, training materials, manuals, reports, partnership agreements, questionnaires that were collected under auspices of the partner organization as part of continuous improvement efforts (SIPs, for example), and other internal documents.*

I understand that, as per doctoral program requirements, the student will publish the doctoral capstone in ProQuest (withholding the names of the organization and participating individuals), as per the following ethical standards:

a. The student is required to maintain confidentiality by removing names and key pieces of evidence/data that might disclose an organization's or individual's identity.
b. The student will be responsible for complying with policies and requirements regarding data collection (***including the need for the organization's internal ethics/regulatory approval as applicable***).

c. Via the Interview Consent Form, the student will describe to interviewees how the data will be used in the doctoral study and how all interviewees' privacy will be protected.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research activities in this setting.

Signed,

Authorization Official Name
Title

This template has been designed by Walden University for the purpose of creating a partnership agreement between an education agency or district/division and a Walden doctoral student in support of that student's capstone study. Walden University will take responsibility for overseeing the data collection and analysis activities described above for the purpose of the student's doctoral study.

Appendix B: Interview Protocol for K–3 Teachers

Title of Study: Instructional and Leadership Practices Benefitting Elementary African American Students' Reading Achievement

Date: _____

Location: _____

Time of Interview: _____

Interviewer: Tammeka Foreman

Interviewee: _____

Greeting

Hello Dr./Mr./Ms. _____. I appreciate you being here today. My name is Tammeka Foreman, and I am a doctoral student at Walden University. I sincerely appreciate you agreeing to participate in this study. I hope you find this process rewarding as your participation will help add to a gap in current research. I have selected you to participate in this study because of your experience as a primary teacher and your experience serving African American students. I have received your *Informed Consent* form; however, I want to be sure that I, again, have your consent to proceed with this interview and record it. Please remember that you may withdraw consent at any time during the process and I will, immediately, destroy all your information and properly discard it. I want to remind you that all efforts will be made to maintain confidentiality; your name and all other personal information will remain private. Do you have any questions for me about the study, including the process, or any of the information provided on the *Informed Consent*?

Interview Norms

- Speak from the *I* perspective.
- Please refrain from disclosing others' personal information, including their names and school names.
- Please ask for clarification if a question does not make sense to you.
- Please remember you may decline to respond to a question and cease participation in this study at any time.

Do you have any questions before we proceed? Do you wish to proceed?

Background/Purpose

"This interview is designed to help me gain a better understanding of the instructional practices you use to develop the reading skills of African American students. Additionally, I will ask questions about how you engage with your students and their families and your views on the importance of culture recognition in the classroom. I encourage you to share freely, providing as many details as you can. You may notice me taking some notes, but I will record this interview to make sure I don't miss anything. You will notice that I will be looking at you and looking down at my notes, but please know I am paying attention and appreciate what you have to say. I will also be reading questions I prepared ahead of time. However, I might also ask follow-up questions if I need you to clarify a point or want more information."

Do you have any questions? Do I have your permission to proceed with this interview and recording?

Questions

1. How long have you been teaching? How long have you taught in the current grade level?
2. Why did you choose teaching as a profession?
3. How many African American students are in your class?
4. How do you get acquainted with your students?
    a. Probe: What specific strategies or activities do you use?
    b. Probe: Did you encounter any challenges or difficulties? If so, can you elaborate more on the challenges or difficulties? How did you overcome them?
5. How do you get acquainted with students' families?
    a. Probe: What specific strategies or activities do you use?
    b. Probe: Did you encounter any challenges or difficulties? If so, can you elaborate more on the challenges or difficulties? How did you overcome them?
6. What do you do to learn more about the cultural and educational backgrounds of your students?
7. How involved are families with their child's educational lives?
    a. Probe: What measures do you take to keep families engaged and involved?
8. How would you define cultural competence?
    a. Probe: What do you do to increase your cultural competence?
9. How do you create an inclusive classroom culture?
10. What does the term "culturally relevant" mean to you?
11. What are cultural biases?
    a. Probe: How do you recognize cultural biases?
    b. Probe: How do you ensure that your cultural biases don't negatively impact students?

12. Do you consider yourself a culturally relevant teacher?
13. How would you define "culturally relevant teaching practices"?
14. What specific instructional approaches for reading are implemented in your classroom that you believe improves reading achievement for African American students?
15. How do you select materials and classroom resources to support your lessons?
16. What are your perceptions of the instructional practices used to increase reading achievement for African American students?
    a. Probe: What are your perceptions of students who speak African American English?
    b. Probe: Have you attended trainings about African American English? If so, what do you recall from the training? If so, how did you implement your new knowledge into classroom instruction?
    c. Probe: Have you attended trainings or received support about the literacy development of African American students? If so, can you describe the training or support? If so, how did you implement your new knowledge into classroom instruction?
    d. Probe: During instruction, how do you address students who speak African American English?
17. What supports/trainings have you received to increase student engagement?
    a. Probe: How did you apply your new knowledge to daily classroom instruction?
    b. Probe: What was the outcome of implementing these new practices?

Closing

Thank you so much, again, for your time today. I appreciate you participating in this study and providing me with your open and honest feedback. I want to remind you that your responses will be kept confidential, and you may still withdraw participation at any time. I will follow up with you within a week to review my notes and your transcript so you may review them for accuracy. My notes and transcripts will be emailed to you within one week of this interview. As you are reviewing the transcript for accuracy, please know that you may contact me should you have any questions or concerns regarding my notes or the transcription or wish to add any additional information.

I will leave my contact information with you at this time. Thank you and have a wonderful day!

Appendix C: Interview Protocol for Elementary Administrators

Title of Study: Instructional and Leadership Practices Benefitting Elementary African American Students' Reading Achievement

Date: _____

Location: _____

Time of Interview: _____

Interviewer: Tammeka Foreman

Interviewee: _____

Greeting

Hello Dr./Mr./Ms. _____. I appreciate you being here today. My name is Tammeka Foreman, and I am a doctoral student at Walden University. I sincerely appreciate you agreeing to participate in this study. I hope you find this process rewarding as your participation will help add to a gap in current research. I have selected you to participate in this study because of your experience as a primary teacher and your experience serving African American students. I have received your *Informed Consent* form; however, I want to be sure that I, again, have your consent to proceed with this interview and record it. Please remember that you may withdraw consent at any time during the process and I will, immediately, destroy all your information and properly discard it. I want to remind you that all efforts will be made to maintain confidentiality; your name and all other personal information will remain private. Do you have any questions for me about the study, including the process, or any of the information provided on the *Informed Consent*?

Interview Norms

- Speak from the *I* perspective.
- Please refrain from disclosing others' personal information, including their names and school names.
- Please ask for clarification if a question does not make sense to you.
- Please remember you may decline to respond to a question and cease participation in this study at any time.

Do you have any questions before we proceed? Do you wish to proceed?

Background/Purpose

This interview is designed to help me gain a better understanding of the leadership practices you employ to serve American students. Additionally, I will ask questions about how you engage with your students and their families and how you support classroom

teachers to serve diverse student groups. I encourage you to share freely, providing as many details as you can. You may notice me taking some notes, but I will record this interview to make sure I don't miss anything. You will notice that I will be looking at you and looking down at my notes, but please know I am paying attention and appreciate what you have to say. I will also be reading questions I prepared ahead of time. However, I might also ask follow-up questions if I need you to clarify a point or want more information.

Do you have any questions? Do I have your permission to proceed with this interview and recording?

Questions

1. How long have you been an elementary school administrator?
    a. Probe: How many of those years have been at your current school?
    b. Probe: Why did you pursue school leadership?
2. How do you familiarize yourself with your students?
    a. Probe: What methods or approaches do you use?
    b. Probe: Did you encounter any challenges or difficulties? If so, can you elaborate more on the challenges or difficulties? How did you overcome them?
3. How do you familiarize yourself with your students' families?
    a. Probe: What methods or approaches do you use?
    b. Probe: Did you encounter any challenges or difficulties? If so, can you elaborate more on the challenges or difficulties? How did you overcome them?
4. How do you familiarize yourself with the surrounding community?
    a. Probe: What methods or approaches do you use?
    b. Probe: Did you encounter any challenges or difficulties? If so, can you elaborate more on the challenges or difficulties? How did you overcome them?
5. What does the term "culturally responsive" mean to you?
6. How do you determine if the teachers' instructional practices are aligned with the academic needs of African American students?
    a. Probe: What specific steps do you use to make this determination?
    b. Probe: How do you determine if those practices are increasing the reading achievement of African American students?
    c. Probe: What are your perceptions of how K-3 teachers engaging with African American students?
    d. Probe: What are your perceptions of K-3 teachers' reading instruction, specifically for African American students?
7. How do you determine what your classroom teachers' instructional needs are?
    a. Probe: Do you use data to help determine teachers' instructional needs?
    b. Probe: If so, what data do you use to help determine teachers' instructional needs?

8. What are some professional developments that have been offered on your school that address the academic needs of African American students?
    a. Probe: How did you determine the effectiveness of professional developments?
9. What leadership practices do you use to guide K-3 teachers' instructional practices?
10. How do you perceive that the leadership practices used increased the reading achievement of African American students?
11. What specific actions/steps did you take to support teachers to increase the reading achievement of African American students?
12. What leadership practices do you feel most reflect your support of K-3 classroom teachers?

Closing

Thank you so much, again, for your time today. I appreciate you participating in this study and providing me with your open and honest feedback. I want to remind you that your responses will be kept confidential, and you may still withdraw participation at any time. I will follow up with you within a week to review my notes and your transcript so you may review them for accuracy. My notes and transcripts will be emailed to you within one week of this interview. As you are reviewing the transcript for accuracy, please know that you may contact me should you have any questions or concerns regarding my notes or the transcription or wish to add any additional information.

I will leave my contact information with you at this time. Thank you and have a wonderful day!