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Head Start Teachers' and Administrators' Perceptions of Reasons for Elevated Teacher Turnover Rates

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Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Amanda Renea Lankford

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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the review committee have been made.

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Walden University

2024

Abstract

Head Start Teachers' and Administrators' Perceptions of Reasons for Elevated Teacher
Turnover Rates

by

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MA, Ashford University, 2012

BS, Ashford University, 2007

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

Walden University

November 2024

Abstract

Many Head Start programs have closed classrooms due to staff shortages, with up to 30% of teacher positions unfilled. Reducing the elevated teacher turnover rate in Head Start centers is critical to maintaining program effectiveness and controlling costs; however, a limiting factor may be differences in administrators' and teachers' perceptions of reasons Head Start teachers leave their positions. Guided by Herzberg's two-factor theory, this qualitative study was conducted to explore perceptions of Head Start administrators, current teachers, and exiting teachers regarding reasons for the elevated teacher turnover rates in Head Start programs. Semistructured interviews with open-ended questions were conducted with four Head Start center administrators and 12 current Head Start teachers within one multicenter regional service area in a Southeastern state of the United States. Additionally, responses were retrieved from archived standardized exit interviews for five teachers who recently left these centers. Data were coded to identify patterns and themes, with comparisons between perceptions of administrators and teachers. Administrators noted salary as the top reason teachers leave Head Start. Current teachers noted lack of support and work conditions as the top reasons for wanting to leave, and exiting teachers reported salary as their top reason for leaving Head Start. Other reasons noted as factors leading to Head Start teacher turnover were company policies and procedures, interpersonal relationships, lack of recognition, benefits, and the work itself. Teachers listed advancement and possibility of growth as motivational factors but did not include the work itself. These findings could lead to positive social change by helping administrators make better program decisions resulting in increased Head Start teacher retention and continuation of services.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Randall; my children, Destiny, Caitlyn, Phillip, and Carly; and my parents, David and Catherine. Each of you have motivated and inspired me to meet my educational goal and encouraged me to earn my doctorate degree! For many years, you have sacrificed time with me to allow me to fulfill my dreams. You are the reason I push myself every day to give my all at everything I do. I hope that I can be an inspiration to each of you and encourage you to reach for your goals. I hope that when you look at my educational journey and accomplishments, you smile and feel proud.

I also dedicate this dissertation to any person striving to further their education. Furthering your education is hard work. It takes lots of time, dedication, and commitment. The completion of this dissertation is proof that it can be done. During my educational journey, I have been a mama to my four beautiful children, wife to my wonderful husband, worked a full-time job, and taught children at church. All four of my children are involved in sports and I was able to be at every game to support them. Each night when my children and husband went to bed, I spent countless hours completing coursework and writing.

The sky is the limit if you put your mind to it. Set a goal for yourself and push yourself to meet the goal. Know in your heart that if you want something bad enough, nothing can stand in your way. Most of all, put your faith in God and He will help you every step of the way. With God, all things are possible. I thank God for the blessing of knowledge that He poured upon me to allow me to complete my doctorate degree. Now, I pray that the knowledge gained throughout this journey can be used to glorify Him.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Head Start serves 1 million low-income children and pregnant women across the United States (Office of Head Start, 2023). The primary goal of Head Start is to support children in school readiness and close early learning gaps. However, achieving this goal is limited by the elevated teacher turnover rate in Head Start programs across the nation. According to the National Institute for Early Education Research (2022), Head Start and Early Head Start teacher turnover in the state of Georgia has increased from 11% in 2018 to 20% in 2021. Sullivan (2022) reported 30% of the teacher positions in Head Start are currently unfilled. Avoiding teacher turnover is important to ensure student success because Head Start teacher turnover is negatively associated with children's language and literacy development and with behavioral and self-regulation skills (Bassok et al., 2021).

Although it is evident that the Head Start teacher turnover rate is a concern and may result in children having negative educational consequences, little research has been conducted on this topic (Grant et al., 2019). A study focused on teachers' and administrators' perceptions of the reasons for Head Start teacher turnover may provide insights related to the problem. This study may offer Head Start administrators the knowledge necessary to understand potential underlying issues of teacher turnover, allowing administrators to develop strategies to address the problem of teacher turnover. In this chapter, the background, problem statement, purpose of the study, and research questions are addressed. The background section addresses the importance of a stable teacher and the positive effects continuity of care has on young children. The problem

statement and purpose for the study are discussed in Chapter 1 by breaking down the difference in the turnover rates in Head Start compared to the public school system. This section validates the need for more research on Head Start teacher turnover.

Background

An increase in Head Start teacher turnover has affected economically disadvantaged children's language, literacy, behavioral, and self-regulatory development (Bassok et al., 2021). Further, teacher turnover rates have negative implications for young children's learning experiences and for efforts to improve childcare quality (Doromal et al., 2022). Because it is vital for children in Head Start to build a relationship with their teacher and teacher assistants, Head Start promotes continuity of care. According to the Office of Head Start (2023),

Continuity of care means Head Start or Early Head Start services provided to children in a manner that promotes primary caregiving and minimizes the number of transitions in teachers and teacher assistants that children experience over the course of the day, week, program year, and to the extent possible, during the course of their participation from birth to age three in Early Head Start and in Head Start. (p. 104)

The teacher also offers a stable environment to children whose families may experience unstable housing, multiple moves, employment issues, and other concerns (Office of Head Start, 2023). The influence of a stable, qualified teacher can have a strong effect on a child's life. Teacher turnover disrupts child-teacher relationships that are crucial to children's developmental outcomes (Kwon et al., 2020), creating a gap in practice that

this study sought to address. Head Start teachers are often considered a vulnerable workforce because they are undervalued, underprofessionalized, and undercompensated (Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center, 2022; Kwon et al., 2022).

The teacher turnover gap in practice coincides with the paucity of research aimed at understanding the reasons for Head Start teacher turnover, in particular the lack of research on the perceptions of Head Start administrators, the leaders at the local education centers, whose perceptions and actions affect the teachers' work environments (see Burkhauser, 2017). Although the Office of Head Start (2023) may suggest strategies to stabilize the workforce (Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center, 2022), the local Head Start administrators select and implement these strategies at their centers. Administrators' perceptions of reasons for teachers leaving may differ from teachers' perceptions, resulting in implementation of ineffective strategies to alleviate the problem.

This study was conducted to address the gaps in research and practice by focusing on the perceptions of administrators and teachers regarding factors leading to Head Start teacher turnover. This study helped to gain a better understanding of perceptions of the reasons Head Start teachers leave the profession, which may provide the knowledge needed for Head Start programs to address the gap in practice and continue to effect social changes in the lives of young children. Addressing the needs of those who take care of the most vulnerable children in the nation can have a meaningful and sustained effect on society.

Problem Statement

The problem addressed by this research was the elevated teacher turnover rates in Head Start programs. Head Start teacher turnover is higher than public school teacher turnover; Head Start loses 25% of teachers each year compared to the public school's kindergarten through third grade teacher turnover of 8% (Hindman & Bustamante, 2019). The Head Start teacher turnover rate is more than twice the annual teacher turnover rate for public school settings (Bassok et al., 2021) where early career public school teachers may make the decision to leave the profession within their first 3 months (Doherty, 2020) as beginning teachers are met with uncertainty when their idea of teaching is met with reality. During the first 5 years, public school teachers decide either to leave or stay in the education field (Hopkins et al., 2019). Although there are studies available that focused on reasons for teacher turnover rates in public school systems (e.g., Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Carrant et al., 2019; Raab, 2018), there is currently little published research on what causes the elevated teacher turnover rates in Head Start (Grant et al., 2019), creating a gap in both research and practice. Teacher turnover creates a gap in practice when teachers leave children without their usual familiar caregivers and the children are forced to adapt to new teachers. Safe, stable environments allow children to grow and learn; when children have built a trusting relationship with a teacher, they can comfortably learn from their surroundings (Lee, 2019).

Research on Head Start teacher turnover is needed to inform evidence-based strategies to reduce teacher turnover that negatively affects children's development, both educational and behavioral, as reported by Choi et al. (2019). Understanding Head Start

administrators' and teachers' perceptions of why Head Start teachers are not retained could help to reduce this gap in practice by helping leadership improve staff retention through the application of evidence-based strategies.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore Head Start teachers' and administrators' perceptions of the reasons for elevated teacher turnover rates in Head Start programs. There is a need for increased understanding of the reasons for elevated turnover rates in Head Start based on the negative effects high turnover rates have on the educational and behavioral development of young children in the program. Gaining a better understanding as to why teachers leave Head Start may help leadership make better decisions on ways to retain Head Start teachers to ensure the necessary continuity of care.

Research Questions

Teachers and administrators may have similar or different perceptions of why Head Start teachers leave the profession. For this study, I explored perceptions regarding Head Start teacher turnover among three groups of educators: Head Start administrators (center coordinators), current teachers, and teachers who have left employment at the research sites. The research questions guiding this study were:

RQ1: What are administrators' perceptions of the reasons that teachers leave Head Start?

RQ2: What are current teachers' perceptions of the reasons that teachers leave Head Start?

RQ3: What are exiting teachers' reported reasons for leaving Head Start?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was based on Herzberg's (1968) two-factor theory. According to Herzberg, there are certain factors in a workplace that cause employee satisfaction and other factors that cause dissatisfaction. Herzberg classified these employment factors into two categories: hygiene factors and motivational factors. *Hygiene factors* are essential in workplaces; these include pay, benefits, physical working conditions, supervisor and coworker relationships, status, and job security. According to Herzberg, these factors do not motivate employees and only satisfy employees for a short period of time. *Motivational factors* encourage employees to strive for excellence by rewarding the employees for their work. Some motivational factors in the workplace are recognition, sense of achievement, responsibility, advancement, growth, and meaningfulness of the work. In an empirical study, Ozsoy (2019) found when motivational factors are absent, employees become unmotivated. In contrast, the presence of motivational factors was found to increase motivation at work. The contextual lens through which the problem of elevated teacher attrition in Head Start was viewed, Herzberg's (1968) two-factor theory, guided the organization of the literature review, development of questions on the interview protocols for the teachers and administrators, and the process of data analysis.

Nature of the Study

A qualitative approach (Creswell, 2009) with qualitative comparisons (Mello, 2022) was used for this study. The qualitative approach was the most appropriate method to address the study topic and research questions because I used interviews to explore the

perceptions of administrators and teachers about reasons for elevated teacher turnover rates. Qualitative research is an iterative process to gain a better understanding of the phenomena being studied (Aspers & Corte, 2019). Head Start administrators and teachers work in the field daily and should therefore have knowledge of the causes and factors leading to teacher turnover and be able to share their perceptions related to those issues. Archived exit interviews with prior Head Start teachers may indicate reasons for leaving their positions. Quantitative research was not well suited for this study because numerical data would not provide the in-depth information required to understand the phenomenon being studied, the reasons Head Start teachers leave their jobs.

The sample selected for the study included four administrators and 12 current teachers, with teachers being selected from the participating administrators' centers to ensure a variety of participants from various locations. The participants were required to have at least 1 year of Head Start experience. Semistructured interviews were used to explore the perceptions of the administrators and teachers on the reasons Head Start teachers leave the field. Archived exit interviews indicating at least five former teachers' reasons for leaving their positions were retrieved from the local human resources director. Data from the semistructured interviews with administrators and current teachers and teacher exit interviews provided information on the factors leading to teacher turnover in Head Start. The interviews with participants were conducted through Zoom, audio recorded, transcribed, and coded for thematic analysis. Current teachers' interview data were triangulated with data from former teachers' exit interviews to gain a better understanding of the classroom experiences Head Start teachers face that are

causing them to leave the field. The data from teachers were compared to data obtained from the administrators to determine similarities and differences in their perceptions of the reasons that teachers leave.

Definitions

Administrators: Head Start center coordinators. The coordinator is the supervisor of the employees at each Head Start center and ensures high-quality service delivery in accordance with the program performance standards (Office of Head Start, 2023). Administrators participating in this study have worked with Head Start for at least 1 year.

Exited teachers: Head Start teachers who have resigned from the agency. Research indicates that 25%–50% of early childhood education teachers exit their profession annually (Miller & Bogatova, 2009; M. B. Wells, 2015).

Head Start: Programs that promote school readiness of children ages birth to 5 from low-income families by supporting the growth and development of the whole child in a positive learning environment through a variety of services, which include early learning, health, and family well-being (Office of Head Start, 2023).

Teachers: In this study are Head Start center-based teachers with at least an associate degree or bachelor's degree in early childhood education or child services who provide comprehensive services to children birth to age 5 (Head Start Performance Standards, 2016) and have at least 1 year of experience working at Head Start.

Assumptions

Assumptions are facts accepted as true but not demonstrably verified. Through the interviews that were conducted for this study, administrators and teachers were

encouraged to share their perceptions of why Head Start teachers leave the profession. It was assumed that the administrator and teacher participants responded to the questions honestly when sharing their perceptions of the reasons for teacher turnover. It was also assumed that the former teachers were honest in their responses during the exit interviews. These assumptions are necessary to describe the phenomena.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study involved perceptions of Head Start administrators, current teachers, and exiting teachers from one multicenter Head Start program in a Southeastern state. Due to the size of the Head Start program and to ensure that I receive sufficient data, four administrators and 12 current teachers were selected to participate in the interviews from various Head Start centers within the service area of one multicenter Head Start program. The administrators and teachers selected had at least 1 year of experience at the Head Start program serving as the research site. Exit interviews of at least five Head Start teachers who left these centers within the past 3 years were retrieved from the archived records of the human resources director.

The delimitations of this study were that the study was confined to one multicenter Head Start program in a rural area of a Southeastern state. Only 16 Head Start staff and at least five teacher exit interviews were selected for the study. Selection criteria for the administrator and teacher participants that were interviewed was limited to those with at least 1 year of experience within the service area serving as the research site.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study that may affect transferability. The first limitation is that because the teachers and administrators selected as participants in the study were only from a rural area within one Southeastern state, the findings may differ in another state. The small sample sizes may limit the transferability of the study findings to centers in the same geographic region or similar regions. Lastly, the teacher exit interview data were based on standard questions used by the local human resources department and are not the same as interview questions asked of currently employed teachers in the study.

An inherent concern in conducting qualitative research, particularly interviews, was the possibility of researcher bias of being introduced into the data. Although I am not presently employed by Head Start, I worked in Head Start for 18 years and served as a center director for 10 years. To avoid having this experience affect the data, I did not interview any persons I have worked directly with. Interviews were recorded and transcribed; reports of the study reflected the content of these interviews with my own analysis of these data clearly denoted. I maintained a reflexive journal to record my thoughts and feelings throughout the study processes.

Significance

Head Start programs were created to promote school readiness of low-income children by enhancing social emotional, cognitive, language, and literacy skills (Office of Head Start, 2023) and have demonstrated significant benefits for at-risk children and families across the nation (Bitler et al., 2017; De Hann & Leuven, 2019; Gupta & Lucia,

2019). To ensure that Head Start continues to create social change, it is important that these most at-risk children have quality teachers. Therefore, there is a need for better understanding of the reasons for elevated teacher turnover rates in Head Start, which may inform strategies to retain teachers. This study adds to the Head Start literature by comparing the perceptions held by Head Start administrators and the perceptions of teachers on the reasons for elevated teacher turnover rates. Identification of discrepancies in the perceptions of these two groups could lead to administrators initiating workplace changes that would increase the job satisfaction of teachers who may then remain in their positions continuing to produce positive social change by providing educational services to at-risk children and their families.

Summary

A stable learning environment and continuity of care for children is critical for children to grow and develop. Head Start programs experience elevated teacher turnover; however, there is a lack of research comparing the reasons for this teacher turnover as perceived by Head Start administrators and teachers. This information may lead to addressing the factors causing Head Start turnover. In Chapter 2, an in-depth discussion of literature related to Head Start teacher turnover is presented along with the search strategy used to identify this literature. The literature review is organized by Herzberg's motivational and hygiene factors. The conceptual framework is discussed, and literature related to the framework is referenced.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Chapter 2 provides an in-depth discussion of the literature related to the problem addressed by this study: the elevated teacher turnover rates in Head Start programs. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore Head Start teachers' and administrators' perceptions of the reasons for these elevated teacher turnover rates in Head Start programs. A better understanding of the reasons Head Start teachers leave their positions may help administrators develop solutions to address the issues leading to teacher turnover.

Recent literature points to workplace satisfaction, pay, classroom responsibilities, workload, stress, and ongoing support as issues contributing to Head Start teacher turnover (Brooker & Cummings, 2019; Gagnon et al., 2019; Grant et al., 2019; L. Jeon & Wells, 2018; Rinke & Mawhinney, 2017). Further, trends in the literature reveal that new Head Start teachers are not provided with adequate support, training, and coaching (Sikma, 2019). This study differs from previous research because it explored the reasons administrators perceived that teachers leave their positions, Head Start teachers' perceptions of reasons teachers leave, and self-reported reasons from teachers who left their Head Start teacher positions. Although, as previously noted, there have been studies conducted on reasons teachers leave the Head Start workforce, I found no research comparing the perceptions of administrators and teachers on the reasons for Head Start teacher turnover. Gaining a better understanding of the reasons for Head Start teacher turnover may provide administrators the knowledge needed to retain qualified teaching

staff. This chapter begins with search strategies used during the literature search, followed by a description of the conceptual framework, an overview of Head Start programs and services, and a review of studies related to teacher turnover organized by categories within Herzberg's (1968) two-factor theory.

Literature Search Strategy

To locate current published research, I searched the following databases: Academic Search Complete, Business Source Complete, Education Source, ERIC, PsycINFO, SocINDEX, and Teacher Reference Center through the Walden University Library. In addition, I searched Google Scholar, the Office of Head Start website, the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center, and Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES) studies. The following keywords in combined phrases were used to search peer-reviewed journals, mostly from the last 5 years: *Head Start programs, pre-K, early intervention, administrators, teachers, turnover, teacher attrition, teacher retention, teacher turnover, teacher persistence, job satisfaction, attitudes, opinions, intent to stay, intent to leave, experience, view, reflection, and perceptions*. I searched topics and read all articles identified as being related to the study.

Although I found no literature on Herzberg's (1968) two-factor theory related to Head Start administrators and teachers, there was literature on motivational and hygiene factors of other professions. Therefore, research for related fields was searched by using the terms *motivational factors, hygiene factors, Herzberg's theory, administrators, teachers, and early childhood educators*.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was based on Herzberg's (1968) two-factor theory. According to Herzberg, individuals are not satisfied by meeting the lower order needs at work, such as salary levels or safe and pleasant working conditions. Instead, employees want to be recognized, advanced, and have more responsibility. Herzberg drew these conclusions after conducting a study of 203 engineers and accountants in the Pittsburgh area who were asked to describe times when they were happy and unhappy at work. The findings revealed that job characteristics related to an individual's work have the capacity to gratify needs such as achievement, competency, status, personal worth, and self-realization, which make a person happy or satisfied. Dissatisfaction results from company policies, supervision, technical problems, salary, interpersonal relations, and working conditions. To satisfy employees, supervisors must focus on the workplace environment and the nature of work itself.

Herzberg's (1968) two-factor theory indicates motivation and hygiene factors are related to overall job satisfaction. Improving motivation factors increases job satisfaction while improving hygiene factors decreases job dissatisfaction. Thus, in Herzberg's (1968) two-factor theory, job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction are viewed as being on different continua. Herzberg's (1968) two-factor theory focuses on the fact that employees are not motivated based on pay or working conditions alone. Sense of importance, achievement, and recognition are motivators that increase job satisfaction whereas job security, fringe benefits, working conditions, and vacations are hygiene factors that decrease job dissatisfaction.

There is a lack of research relating Herzberg's (1968) two-factor theory to Head Start teacher turnover or the motivational and hygiene factors for Head Start teachers; however, Herzberg's theory has recently been applied in research on other professions, such as nursing, factory working, and psychology (Chiat & Panatik, 2019; Hur, 2018; Sobaih & Hasanein, 2020). Guided by Herzberg's theory, Holliman and Daniels (2018) studied the influence of economic climate on job satisfaction of faculty in small- to medium-sized private higher education institutions, finding that two motivational factors, recognition and advancement, contributed to job satisfaction. The hygiene factor, policy and administration, demonstrated significant interrelationships with recognition and advancement. Overall, economic climate influenced employee attitudes regarding job satisfaction. In Holliman and Daniels's application of Herzberg's theory to college professors, the findings suggest that college administration has a strong effect on job satisfaction, indicating that leadership can play a critical role in job satisfaction, and job satisfaction can lead to staff retention.

Herzberg's (1968) two-factor theory was selected as the conceptual framework for this study because it is based on two sets of needs that people have in the working environment—hygiene factors and motivational factors—that represent the numerous complex considerations that go into decisions about staying or leaving a job. Gaining a better understanding of these two factors helps define the reasons Head Start teachers leave their positions and may assist administrators in developing means of reducing teacher attrition.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variables

Retaining highly qualified teachers is difficult, both for Head Start and public school teaching, which may be the profession most closely related to Head Start teaching and about which much research is available. With the ever-increasing demands placed on public school teachers from excessive workloads, lack of support, student discipline, and low pay scales, many are pursuing other professions (Kutsyuruba et al., 2019). Public school teachers leave the field for various reasons, including dissatisfaction with their workplace due to working conditions, exhaustion, stress, disillusionment, and school administrator frustrations (Rinke & Mawhinney, 2017). Teachers in public schools report feeling emotionally exhausted and stressed (Grant et al., 2019); they are more prone to leaving the field and less likely to promote child development. Public school teachers also leave the field due to ineffective leadership practices and lack of professional acknowledgment (Brooker & Cummings, 2019). In addition, certain students cause teachers stress that can lead to turnover in the public schools (Gagnon et al., 2019).

Similar to public school teachers, the reasons reported by Head Start teachers for leaving are (a) low pay, (b) excessive workloads, (c) lack of support, (d) ineffective leadership practices, and (e) student discipline (Brooker & Cummings, 2019; Jeon & Wells, 2018; D. Phillips et al., 2000; Sikma, 2019). Student discipline was the least mentioned reason for Head Start teacher turnover (Jeon & Wells, 2018). However, these studies only reported data collected from teachers. I found no studies reporting data collected from administrators on their perceptions of the reasons Head Start teachers leave their positions. To fully understand the phenomena of why teachers leave Head

Start, it is important to consider the perceptions of both teachers and administrators. Administrators have the power and resources to make changes in the work environment that could affect Head Start teachers' decisions to stay or leave, and those changes would likely reflect the administrators' perceptions of why teachers leave and why they stay in their positions.

Following an overview of the Head Start Program, the remainder of the chapter will address how Herzberg's (1968) hygiene and motivational factors can be used to explain the effects of variables related to teacher turnover as incentives or disincentives for teachers to remain in their positions, citing studies specific to Head Start teachers where available and, alternatively, studies about early childhood and public school teachers.

Overview of Head Start Program

According to the Office of Head Start (2023), Head Start is a program of the U.S. government to provide early childhood education and related services to families in need, especially low-income families. Head Start began as an 8-week summer program in 1965 intended to meet the needs of disadvantaged preschool children by preparing low-income children for school entry; the program was expanded to a year-round program the next year. In 1994, Early Head Start was initiated to serve younger children from birth to age 3.

Both programs are currently administered by the Office of Head Start, within the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, providing grant support to about 1,700 Head Start agencies in local

communities through more than \$10 billion per fiscal year appropriated under the Head Start Act (2019) to provide comprehensive services to more than 1 million children every year, in every U.S. state and territory, farm worker camps, and more than 155 tribal communities (Office of Head Start, 2023). In addition to the national Head Start Office in Washington, D. C., there are 12 regional offices across the nation that provide support to the local Head Start programs.

The goal of Head Start is to prepare disadvantaged children from low-income families and those children who are below or at the poverty line for entry into schools. Head Start provides comprehensive services to children and their parents including health, social welfare, nutrition, and schooling (De Hann & Leuven, 2019). Some of the services provided cover early learning and development, health, and family well-being with a focus on engaging the whole family and the understanding that parent involvement is key to a child's overall success. Head Start services start supporting the family beginning with prenatal and postnatal care for pregnant mothers, following through with Early Head Start services from birth to age 2 and a half.

For children ages 3 to 5, the connection between the family and the Head Start program starts with the enrollee intake application and continues throughout the preschool program. An assessment to determine the developmental level of each child within the first 45 days provides the teaching staff an opportunity to learn how to start supporting each child. Each Head Start program builds school readiness goals that are used to help prepare each child for the public school system. Head Start staff also support

the family by focusing on regular health, dental, attendance, and wellness checks for children within the first 45 days of school.

Head Start educational programs are housed within school-like environments, usually called *centers*, although some outreach services may also be provided in children's homes. Larger Head Start programs may be *multicenters*, having multiple centers across a specific geographical area. A center coordinator serves as the administrator for each center, and a program director oversees all services provided by the centers from a centralized administrative location. Within the centers, Early Head Start classrooms have a ratio of eight children to two teachers. Head Start classrooms have 17 students with one teacher and one teacher assistant. According to the Head Start Performance Standards (2016), Head Start center-based teacher qualification requirements specify that, nationwide, 50% or more of all Head Start teachers must have a bachelor's degree in child development, early childhood education, or the equivalent course work. To meet this requirement, all programs must "ensure all center-based teachers have at least an associate's or bachelor's degree in child development or early childhood education, or equivalent coursework."

The immediate and long-term beneficial effects of Head Start programs have been demonstrated (e.g., De Hann & Leuven, 2019; Gupta & Lucia, 2019). Although the breadth of these outcomes can be attributed to the comprehensive nature of the services provided to families in need, the core of these services is the preschool educational program and the teachers who choose to remain in their positions to promote student

learning every day. These choices are based on many variables that will be discussed under Herzberg's (1968) categories of hygiene and motivational factors.

Herzberg's Theory: Hygiene Factors

Teachers' Pay

Teachers' pay is a hygiene factor according to Herzberg's (1968) two-factor theory. According to the National Institute for Early Education Research (2022), in the state of Georgia, Head Start teacher salaries in 2022 averaged \$30,172 compared to public school teachers' average salaries of \$60,408, over a \$30,000 difference in salaries between Head Start teachers and public school teachers. Teachers are trying to meet the needs of students, although the teachers' needs are not being met (Balingit, 2024).

In 2015, the Institute of Medicine and National Research Council called for a bachelor's degree, with specialized knowledge and competencies, for all teachers working with children birth through age 8 (Allen, 2015). According to the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (2016), in 2017, 70% of Head Start teachers nationwide held a bachelor's degree or higher in early childhood education. The recently updated Head Start Act (2019) requires that at least 50% of Head Start teachers nationwide must have these credentials.

However, with higher level credentials required, teachers may demand higher salaries, putting stress on tight agency budgets. One strategy for addressing the overall cost of teachers' pay is to reduce the number of children who are being served in Head Start, which would leave many children without the opportunity to attend an early childhood education program. Head Start programs are already pressed to serve all the

children in need within their community. According to the National Institute for Early Education Research (2022), the total number of children and pregnant women in the state of Georgia that are enrolled in Head Start is declining. In 2011-2012, there were 25,112 Head Start and Early Head Start children served in the state of Georgia compared to 23,259 in 2020-2021. The decrease in the number of children served is due to staff turnover and insufficient federal funding, not need for services. According to Balingit (2024), “Head Start programs receive enough funds to cover 755,000 child slots, but the programs cannot fully enroll due to not having enough teachers.” Head Start programs are having to choose between serving children and paying staff (Balingit, 2024).

According to the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (2022), in June of 2022, it was recognized that Head Start staff are the backbone of the Head Start program. Therefore, funds were allotted to pay Head Start staff competitive bonuses to help with retention.

Many public school teachers cite pay as a reason for leaving the profession (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). In a study conducted by Harris et al., (2019), a vast majority, 93%, of public school teachers reported feeling that they are not paid adequately, including those who have been working in the teaching field for many years. Over the years, preschool teachers have experienced lower wages than other jobs in their area, which could lead to them leaving the field (D. Phillips et al., 2000). However, Harris et al. (2019), found that raising pay may be only a partial solution to retaining teachers because compensation was indicated by public school teachers as the least important factor when deciding to leave the profession. The lower pay of Head Start

teachers compared to public school teachers (Office of Head Start, 2023) may make pay a more important factor to consider when deciding to stay or leave a position.

Teacher Work Expectations and Conditions

Teacher workloads and work expectations are hygiene factors in Herzberg's (1968) two-factor theory. The workload and work expectations for teachers are ever-increasing. Head Start teachers have high expectations placed on them to maintain Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) scores above the national average. CLASS is used across the nation to measure the quality of interactions between teachers and students (Muntner, 2008). Head Start programs are investing in CLASS to ensure that teachers engage children with stimulating and responsive interactions essential to improving academic and social-emotional outcomes (Muntner, 2008). CLASS scores are determined based on the classroom environment, child-to-adult interactions, planned activities, and the teacher's ability to engage children throughout the day. Failure to meet the minimum federal guidelines would mean the agency must re compete for grant funds, proving they are the best fit program by providing evidence of services provided. Therefore, Head Start program administrators promote high CLASS scores and have high expectations for their teachers to ensure compliance with the Head Start Performance Standards.

In addition, Head Start programs receive triennial federal reviews during which the Federal Office of Head Start inspects the Head Start program for compliance. During the federal review, the review team visits classrooms and conducts in-depth monitoring. The process can be weeks long; the teachers are interviewed, paperwork is reviewed, and

the entire program is assessed to determine the quality of services provided to the community. Failure of the center to prove they provide quality care and failure of the teachers to demonstrate high child-to-adult interactions could result in the agency not having secure funding for the following year.

Other than the added work required to demonstrate effectiveness for continued grant funding, the effects of workload for Head Start teachers is similar to that of all preschool teachers. Thirty percent of preschool teachers across the nation leave the field due to workloads (Gagnon et al., 2019). Stahl and King (2020) found that much of early childhood educators' planning time is on weekends and after hours; teaching is perceived as a take-home job (Buetel et al., 2019). Job demands such as workload and work hours negatively affect teachers' family lives (Gupta & Lucia, 2019) and high work demands can create family conflict which may affect the teacher's decision to leave the position.

Challenging Student Behaviors

The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations of Early Learning defined challenging student behaviors that may be found in all classrooms as (Hunter & Hemmeter, 2009):

- Any repeated pattern of behavior that interferes with learning or engagement in pro-social interactions with peers and adults.
- Behavior that is not responsive to the use of developmentally appropriate guidance procedures.

- Prolonged tantrums, physical and verbal aggression, disruptive vocal and motor behavior (e.g., screaming, stereotypy), property destruction, self-injury, noncompliance, and withdrawal. (p. 7)

Although Jeon and Wells (2018) reported that issues related to student discipline were the reasons least mentioned by Head Start teachers for teacher turnover, addressing challenging student behaviors in classrooms is one of the most difficult tasks teachers face (Garwood et al., 2018), and teachers in lower grades deal with more discipline problems than teachers in higher grade levels (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017), which adds to teacher stress (Uchegbu, 2020).

Kwon et al. (2022), found that behavioral challenges in the classrooms were causing stress among Head Start teachers. Five nationally renowned high-quality Head Start programs reported extreme behavioral challenges such as acting out, defiance, and behaviors that threatened other students, staff, and property. Unfortunately, many of the strategies used to address the behaviors have been unsuccessful. Teachers consider leaving Head Start due to the stress associated with students' behavioral issues. According to Bullough et al. (2012), 58% of Head Start teachers consider leaving.

Teacher Stress

Research indicates that teaching is a stressful profession (Newberry & Allsop, 2017) and early childhood teachers have among the highest levels of stress (McCartney, 2018). Although various reasons have been found for teacher turnover, it is evident that teachers are coping with a number of stressors while working to support children's growth and development. Chen and Phillips (2018) discussed several stressors for Head

Start teachers including workload, lack of support, and teacher-parent conflict.

Paperwork and working in the classroom with children can be stressful; teachers felt they wore “too many hats” (Chen & Phillips, 2018). Chen and Phillips (2018) reported the feelings of one teacher:

Some parents have the mentality that teachers have the full responsibility of educating their children. I’m not talking about alphabet, I’m talking about eating with a fork, taking care of your toilet needs, and the difference between an elephant and a giraffe! (p. 90)

The Head Start teachers in the study by Chen and Phillips (2018) referred to the parents as irresponsible and uncooperative. In addition, teachers must deal with parent conflict that causes stress.

Teachers having feelings of well-being without mental health issues tend to have better interactions with children and may be less likely to leave the field (Choi et al., 2019). Research conducted by Whitaker et al. (2015) indicated that women who work at Head Start have poorer health than those working at similar jobs. The teachers at Head Start in the study by Whitaker et al. (2015) reported higher incidences of migraine headaches, back pain, asthma, obesity, high blood pressure, and diabetes when compared to other jobs in the nation.

The work conditions and stressors of working in early childhood education affect teachers’ emotional and physical health, psychological status, and well-being (Farewell et al., 2022). Farewell et al. (2022) found that teachers experienced stress about the trauma that their students were enduring, and this led to them feeling helpless. Teachers in Head

Start, according to the study, also faced compassion fatigue, which often poured into the teachers' home lives and affected their emotional state.

Administrative Leadership and Support

No studies were found that addressed administrative leadership and support related to teacher attrition in Head Start programs, nor specifically for preschool or early childhood teachers. According to Garrow-Oliver (2017), many teachers in early childcare go unheard. They are often undervalued, bullied, and silenced. In general, administrators failing to support teachers when dealing with student behaviors had the strongest association with turnover in early career educators (Kim, 2019). Similarly, Reitman and Karge (2019) found that support provided within the first years of a teacher's career is important to retention, but teachers are often placed in the classroom with little to no support.

Teacher Support

Teachers in general often report that they lack both administrative and collegial support (Sikma, 2019) which leads to job dissatisfaction. In a study to determine the types of support and professional development teachers reported needing, Gault (2020) found that teachers need to be valued by their administrators, to be supported by their coworkers, and to receive professional development that honors experience and allows collaboration.

A study to explore the levels of depression in Head Start teachers found that several types of support helped teachers to feel less depressed, including social support, skills support, and curriculum training (Hindman & Bustamante, 2019). Providing

additional support in curriculum helped the teachers to feel more fluent in the curriculum. Social support helped teachers to be able to deal with negative emotions and create more productive teaching partnerships.

One example of support for public school teachers was found in a project that focused on supporting, mentoring, and coaching teachers (Wilcoxen et al., 2019). When teachers felt empowered and trusted, they were more likely to remain the profession. Individualized coaching for teachers also helped them feel empowered. When a coach focused on a teacher's skills that needed improvement, the teacher continued to grow professionally (Wilcoxen et al., 2019).

Job Satisfaction

Understanding teachers' job satisfaction can play a critical role in determining why teachers leave the profession. Jeon and Wells (2018) conducted an early childhood job satisfaction survey with 84 Early Head Start and Head Start teachers at two locations in the United States. The survey included three subscales: workplace satisfaction, classroom responsibilities, and ongoing support. The findings indicated that workplace satisfaction determined turnover, but ongoing support was not shown to have a substantial influence on teacher turnover. In contrast to findings of other studies, on the classroom responsibilities subscale, teachers reported that they were adequately paid for their work. Teachers' attitudes toward their workplace were more positive when they had a better relationship with the director.

In addition, Jeon and Wells (2018) found that teachers have better attitudes when they have more support, but when teachers are not supported, negative attitudes are

developed. Negative attitudes can be attributed to the amount of support teachers receive from their coteacher and center director in the following areas: organizational regulations, workplace relationships, structural quality of their classroom, children with behavior issues, and the time needed to complete their paperwork. Less support received in these areas contributed to a more negative attitude, which in turn, resulted in a higher turnover rate (Jeon & Wells, 2018).

Herzberg's Theory: Motivational Factors

Recognition

No studies were found that addressed recognition related to teacher attrition in Head Start programs, nor specifically for preschool or early childhood teachers, although recognition is a motivating factor in Herzberg's (1968) two-factor theory. If teachers are recognized, they may be more motivated, and this may decrease turnover. Mallah (2018) conducted a study focused on recognizing teachers' work by using monetary incentives, social incentives, and vision-based incentives. Mallah found that teachers exert more effort when they were incentivized for their hard work. The quality of their teaching also improved.

Meaningfulness of the Work

No studies were found that addressed meaningfulness of the work related to teacher attrition in Head Start programs. However, in a survey of 265 early childhood professionals, Herman et al. (2023) found that if staff felt that their work was a calling to teach, as is sometimes expressed as related to religious roots, they had less intent to leave. Salma and Sajid (2018) reported that teachers are motivated by achievement, recognition,

advancement, and work. Jung and Sohn (2022) studied 250 workers over a 5-month period to determine if passion for work affected commitment to the job. They found that employees with passion for their jobs often had high levels career commitment. Ensuring that teachers are passionate about the job they are doing could produce long lasting commitments to the early childhood workforce.

Sense of Achievement

Wang and Wang (2022) studied the motivational factors influencing the teaching career choice of 10 students. One of the motivational factors was a sense of achievement. Achieving their personal goal of becoming a teacher motivated them to stay in the teaching profession. The teachers also felt a sense of achievement when they helped young people.

Summary and Conclusions

A review of the limited available literature makes it evident that more research needs to be conducted on Head Start teachers' and administrators' perceptions of reasons for high teacher turnover in Head Start programs, but not just more research, instead, different research. Some of the major themes evident in the literature on reasons for Head Start teacher turnover are low teacher pay, heavy workloads, lack of support from administration, stress, and issues concerning children's behaviors. Teachers who stayed in the teaching profession felt a sense of personal achievement, were often recognized, and felt their work was meaningful. Although the literature clearly defines the challenges all teachers face, including Head Start teachers, it is unknown how the perceptions of Head Start teachers and administrators differ regarding teacher turnover related to these

challenges. Gaining a better understanding of these perceptions could help develop solutions to decrease Head Start teacher turnover, in turn benefitting at-risk children in communities.

Much of the current literature focuses on studies conducted using quantitative methods such as surveys designed using the thoughts of the researchers, rather than the words of the educators themselves forming the data. No current research was found comparing Head Start teachers' and administrators' perceptions of the reasons teachers leave the profession, a comparison that could reveal a basis for the gap in practice that results in poor Head Start teacher retention. Therefore, these gaps in both practice and literature indicate the need for further research on reasons for Head Start teacher turnover based on perceptions of the teachers and administrators who can provide first-hand knowledge about teacher turnover. In Chapter 3, the research design and rationale are described. The nature of the participants selected for the study and data collection tools are also discussed.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore Head Start teachers' and administrators' perceptions of the reasons for the high teacher turnover rates in Head Start programs. In this chapter, the research design and rationale are discussed. In addition, the methodology, data collection, and analysis are described. Lastly, the nature of the participants along with how the participants were selected is explained.

Research Design and Rationale

The research design used for this study was a qualitative design (Raskind et al., 2019) with use of qualitative comparisons (see Mello, 2022). Qualitative research is different from quantitative research, which is primarily used when a researcher is trying to discover how many or how often something occurs. This study was not focused on how often or how many; instead, I was focused on teachers' and administrators' perceptions of a phenomenon, specifically elevated Head Start teacher turnover rates, and the reasons Head Start teachers leave their positions. The research questions for this study were:

RQ1: What are administrators' perceptions of the reasons that teachers leave Head Start?

RQ2: What are current teachers' perceptions of the reasons that teachers leave Head Start?

RQ3: What are exiting teachers' reported reasons for leaving Head Start?

Semistructured interviews were conducted with four Head Start administrators who serve as site administrators and 12 Head Start teachers to obtain their perceptions of

the reasons for teacher turnover. Although I previously worked as the Head Start director of this agency, teachers or administrators whom I directly supervised were not selected to participate in the interviews. An interview protocol was used for teachers (Appendix A) and a separate interview protocol was used for administrators (Appendix B). Open-ended interview questions were used in the interviews that were conducted, audiotaped, and transcribed using Zoom audio conferencing software. Following the suggestions from Saldaña (2014), interview transcripts were coded to find patterns and identify themes indicating the main reasons reported for teachers leaving, resulting in high teacher turnover in Head Start programs.

In addition to interviews of administrators and current teachers, through the local human resources director, I accessed five archived, deidentified written records of exit interviews for teachers who recently left the Head Start centers. Exit interviews were conducted by the local human resources director who takes notes of the exiting employee's responses to a standardized set of questions (Appendix C) for all individuals leaving the Head Start program. The written reports of these teacher exit interviews were analyzed using a method similar to the coding, identification of patterns, and development of themes used to analyze the interviews of current employees. To increase credibility of the study, data for the two groups of teachers were triangulated.

Role of the Researcher

My role as the researcher was to collect, analyze, and interpret the data. To reduce the possibility of personal bias entering into the data collection and analysis, audio recordings were used for data collection and transcription. The summarized data were

reviewed by the currently employed participants for member checking of preliminary findings.

To further ensure against personal bias or potential conflicts of interest, interviews were conducted with teachers and administrators whom I did not directly supervise. The individuals interviewed did not receive any type of incentive for participating in the study. When discussing administrators' and teachers' perceptions, I reported the information accurately and did not assume all teachers and administrators are in the same category. When reporting research and interview information from teachers and administrators, I used evidence to avoid introducing any forms of bias. Although many teachers in Head Start are women, I was careful not to use words that indicated gender. Instead, a pseudonym for each participant was created.

As the researcher, I used reflexive journaling as described by Meyer and Rosalind (2019). Keeping an accurate record of what was done, why it was done, and my reactions to the data collection and analysis allowed me to reflect on the research process. Reflexive journaling is implemented to avoid intrusions of personal bias into the findings.

Methodology

In this section, I will further discuss the methodology used in this qualitative study including recruitment and selection of participants as well as the semistructured interviews and exit interviews used to collect data for this research. In addition, I describe the data analysis process used for the study.

Research Site and Participant Selection

The research site was a multicenter Head Start program in a Southeastern state of the United States that is a nonprofit organization that serves Head Start children in seven communities, with a center located in each community. The program serves close to 700 children and families and has over 30 classrooms. The organization has approximately 200 employees. Each center houses one administrator, known as the center coordinator. The number of teachers varies by center depending on the number of classrooms housed in each community.

The target population for data collection was teachers and administrators working in the multicenter program. Participants included four Head Start administrators and 12 Head Start teachers. Three teachers were purposefully selected from among volunteers at each of the Head Start centers led by the four volunteer administrators selected to participate in the study. Three teachers participating from each of the centers was the minimum number required to maintain confidentiality of the data. Participants were selected from the same multicenter program for consistency in program policies but from different centers for diversity in administrative leadership. In addition, deidentified archived teacher exit interview reports reflecting reasons for leaving were retrieved for five teachers who left these centers within the past 3 years.

Prior to collecting the data, I received approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and permission from the executive director of the multicenter Head Start program. Four administrators and 12 teachers from their respective centers were selected as participants for the study. The selected participants

had at least 1 year of experience working in the Head Start program serving as the research site. The local Head Start human resources department provided me email addresses of administrators who had been employed at least 1 year. I emailed invitations to participate in the study to the administrators, selecting four volunteers as participants. The local human resources department subsequently provided me work email addresses of teachers who met the selection criteria at each of the centers whose coordinators agreed to participate in the study. Three teachers randomly selected for participation at each site were emailed invitations. Because the number of participants needed for the study were recruited, no follow-up emails needed to be sent requesting participants.

Instrumentation

Semistructured interviews were used for data collection from the administrators and teachers. A researcher-developed interview protocol for teachers (Appendix A) and an interview protocol for administrators (Appendix B) with questions paralleling those for the teachers were created based on Herzberg's (1968) two-factor theory and information derived from the literature review. These initial open-ended and follow-up interview questions, developed to relate directly to the research questions, were used to ensure consistency in the interviews. The interview protocol for administrators and interview protocol for teachers were reviewed for content validity by three administrators and three teachers, respectively, to ensure questions were clear and relevant. These reviewers were similar to the study participants, but not eligible to participate in the study because they were affiliated with a different multicenter program.

Archived data from exit interviews of five teachers who left the Head Start centers within the past 3 years were accessed through the local human resources department. Exit interviews for teachers leaving Head Start are conducted by the human resources director and include questions regarding the pros and cons of the job, reason the employee resigned, and the employee's suggestions for how the agency could improve (Appendix C). Therefore, three separate, but related, instruments including two interview protocols and one exit interview, were used to collect data for the three research questions, one instrument for each research question.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Prior to beginning the research study, approval was obtained from IRB and the executive director of the Head Start multicenter that served as the research site. Although written permission was obtained from the Head Start executive director, giving permission for the administrators and teachers to participate in the study, the executive director did not know which staff members participated, only that the study was being conducted. The local human resources director provided a list of administrators and teachers from each Head Start center who have been with the agency for at least 1 year. Administrators were invited to participate in the study through information sent to their email accounts, and then teachers with 1 or more years of experience were selected randomly from the Head Start sites with participating administrators and were also sent email invitations. Invitations to participate specified my Walden University contact information with an explanation of the study, including that participation in the study was voluntary, there was no compensation for participating, and no repercussions if they did

not participate. Potential participants had 7 days to decide if they wanted to participate in the study and to email me indicating, "I consent." Only those individuals who responded by email within 7 days participated in the study.

Four administrators and 12 teachers were selected to participate in the study, but the interview process began once I received informed consent from one administrator and three teachers from the same center. The interviews were scheduled and conducted through Zoom; the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed using the features available in Zoom. The participant interviews were conducted in approximately 1-hour sessions. Before the interviews began, the participants were informed of how their identity would be protected, the reason for the study, the type of questions that would be asked, and that they could stop the interview at any time. The same interview questions were asked of participants within their respective group of administrators or current teachers, although follow-up questions may have differed between participants as needed to obtain complete responses. Participants were asked if there was anything they would like to add at the end of the interview. The member-checking procedure and how they may access a copy of the final study were discussed, and they were thanked for their participation in the interview.

Within 7 days of the interview, each participant received a summary of their interview responses to review and verify. If changes were needed, participants were instructed to email me within 5 days specifying the requested modifications; however, no changes were requested.

Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis is one of the most powerful stages in qualitative research (Raskind et al., 2019). Data analysis began with transcribing the interviews using the Zoom software. After the interviews were transcribed and member checking was completed, the information was coded (see Saldaña, 2014). The interview data were sorted into categories with common words and phrases representing inductive codes that emerged from the data and deductive coding with Herzberg’s motivational and hygiene factors serving as a priori codes. The teacher exit interview data were similarly coded and sorted and, where possible, coded for Herzberg’s motivational and hygiene factors, although these exit interview questions were not developed for this purpose. In addition, the interview responses were sorted by group—administrators and both current and former teachers—and the group responses were compared (see Mello, 2022) to determine if the groups had responded similarly or differently. Lastly, the responses were organized into common themes and subthemes. Discrepant cases were not removed from the data and were included when reporting the findings.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative studies ensures a study is credible, transferable, confirmable, and dependable (Stahl & King, 2020). Qualitative researchers simplify the meaning of trustworthiness as, “can the findings be trusted” (Korstjens & Moser, 2018, p. 121).

Credibility

Credibility was established through triangulation. Triangulation was used to compare responses of current teachers with exit interview data of former teachers. Triangulation of the findings from these two groups provided an indication of the credibility, or internal validity, of the study. Triangulation between administrators and teachers indicated that they have some similar and some different perceptions. Therefore, triangulation of sources was used to compare and contrast the perceptions from these two different groups.

Transferability

To ensure transferability, there is a rich, thick description of the location of where the individuals worked and where the interviews were conducted. In addition, the participants were described in detail while maintaining their anonymity within the study. It is important for readers to understand the description to determine if the findings of my study can be transferred to their setting.

Dependability

Dependability was ensured at the same time by using an audit trail and triangulation of data among the four Head Start centers. Data were collected from all participants within a short time period to avoid data being affected by changes in the environment of the research setting.

Confirmability

Confirmability was achieved by checking the data routinely to ensure the codes were repeated for more than one participant and maintaining a reflexive journal.

Researchers use reflexive journals to assist in neutralizing the influence of their subjectivity, acknowledging it, explaining it, or capitalizing on it (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023).

Ethical Procedures

Prior to collecting data, I obtained written approval to conduct the study through the Walden University IRB as well as the executive director of the Head Start program. The protection of human participants is critical in conducting qualitative research; confidentiality of the individuals and their responses is key to ensuring the process is ethical. Prior to conducting the interviews, I ensured each participant understood the interview process and how their responses would be used. After the individuals understood the purpose of the interviews, they had the option to decline to participate at any time, with no repercussions for declining. If the individuals had any questions or concerns about the interview process or the research, they were addressed prior to requesting informed consent. The identities of individuals who participated will not be revealed and their personal information will remain confidential. Alphanumeric codes such as C1 and T11 were used to distinguish the center coordinators and teachers in reports of the research. No one other than the researcher has access to the codes and the identifiers they represent. The codes will be kept in a secure location separate from the rest of the data and will be destroyed when the full data from the study are destroyed, per Walden University guidelines.

The interviews were conducted through Zoom with both the participant and I in separate private, quiet locations away from others to ensure confidentiality. When

listening to the interview responses, headphones were used in a private location to ensure others could not hear the responses. The data have been stored in a locked file cabinet and will be kept there for at least 5 years and will then be disposed of following Walden University protocols. I am the only person with a key to the cabinet where the data will be stored.

Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the multicenter Head Start program that served as the research site for this study conducted using a qualitative design comprising qualitative comparisons of interviews with Head Start administrators and teachers to explore their perceptions of reasons for elevated Head Start teacher turnover rates. Archived exit interviews with former teachers were also included in the study. This chapter also described the individual interview process, member checking, and data analysis using inductive and deductive coding, along with steps that were taken to ensure ethical procedures were followed. Chapter 4 presents the results of the interviews.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore Head Start teachers' and administrators' perceptions of the reasons for elevated teacher turnover rates in Head Start programs. I conducted semistructured interviews to collect data from 12 teachers and four administrators with a minimum of 1 year experience. I also accessed five exit interviews and examined their perceptions of Head Start teacher turnover. The conceptual lens used to frame this study was Herzberg's (1968) two-factor theory. The research questions were:

RQ1: What are administrators' perceptions of the reasons that teachers leave Head Start?

RQ2: What are current teachers' perceptions of the reasons that teachers leave Head Start?

RQ3: What are exiting teachers' reported reasons for leaving Head Start?

At the conclusion of the interviews, I transcribed the responses and used the data to develop categories and themes based on the conceptual framework. In this chapter, I describe the setting, data collection procedures, and data analysis process.

Setting

The setting for this study was a multicenter Head Start program in a Southeastern state of the United States. The program serves low-income families and children with disabilities, as well as expectant families. In addition, the program offers nutrition, health, social, emotional, and parent support services. The Head Start region serves more than

170,000 children and families. The region serves 40,000 teachers and administrators. The center coordinators who participated in the study had at least 1 year of experience directing a Head Start center within this multicenter Head Start program. The participating teachers had at least 1 year of experience working in a Head Start program. The teachers and center coordinators responded to seven interview questions and follow-up questions related to teacher turnover. The questions gave me an in-depth understanding of each teacher's and center coordinator's perceptions on the reasons for teacher turnover.

Demographics

Participants in this study represented various Head Start centers within the same Head Start program. The experience for the center coordinators ranged from 7 to 20 years. Two of the four center coordinators also had experience working in public schools, and two had no experience working with children prior to their position at Head Start. All center coordinators were women.

The teachers' experience working with Head Start ranged from 1 to 17 years. Three of 12 teachers interviewed were Black and nine were White; all the teachers interviewed were women. The teachers interviewed had various experiences outside of Head Start, including four with experience in daycare settings, two had experience in public school systems, one was a tutor, one worked in retail, and one had experience in the medical field. Two of the teachers did not have any work experience other than their Head Start experience.

Data Collection

The data collection process followed the steps outlined in Chapter 3. After gaining IRB approval (no. 11-28-23-0663883), I emailed a letter of cooperation to the executive director of the research site. After receiving the signed letter of cooperation, I requested email addresses of all center coordinators and Head Start teachers who had been employed for at least 1 year. I randomly selected four center coordinators to send invitations to participate in the study. Once the four center coordinators agreed to participate, I randomly selected three teachers at each of their sites. I emailed each of the randomly selected teachers and center coordinators an invitation to participate in the study, which included an overview of the study, benefits, confidentiality procedures, and potential risks in participating. The email also informed the potential participants that participating was voluntary and there would be no compensation for participating. All 16 potential participants, 12 teachers and four administrators, responded positively to the first email invitation, and I then emailed them a consent form. Following receipt of their consent to participate, I worked with each participant to schedule a date and time for the interview, then emailed each participant a Zoom link to join their individual interview. The interviews were conducted over a 4-week period and varied in length, but none of the interviews was over 60 minutes.

After gaining permission from each participant, the interviews were audio recorded using Zoom. I briefly reviewed the information in the consent form and ensured there were no further questions regarding the interview prior to starting. When there were no further questions, I asked the participants to describe their positions held at Head Start

along with any other experience they had outside of Head Start. This informal conversation created a more relaxed environment. I then used the interview protocols (see Appendix A and Appendix B) when asking questions, which allowed me to ask all the participants in each group the same questions and similar questions between those in the teacher and administrator groups.

To ensure confidentiality, I had assigned each center coordinator, teacher, and exiting teacher interview an alphanumeric code starting with C for the center coordinators (C1 to C4), T for the teachers (T1 to T12), and E for the exiting teachers (E1 to E5). Following each interview, I saved the audio recording in a file with the confidential code to protect the privacy of each participant.

I transcribed each interview using the transcribe feature in Zoom and saved the files for each participant with the same code as the audio recording. All names that may have been mentioned in the interview were removed from the transcript. After the transcript for each interview was complete and saved, I listened to the audio recordings again and compared them to the transcripts for accuracy. I read the transcripts several times and started sorting the data into several different groupings based on interview questions.

Data Analysis

The interview data were analyzed using content analysis. Content analysis is a research methodology to make sense of the content of messages, be they texts, images, symbols, or audio data (Gheyle & Jacobs, 2017). I used the five-phase process for data analysis adapted from Bingham (2023). The five-phase process is as follows: organizing

the data, sorting the data, understanding the data, interpreting the data, and explaining the data.

The first phase in the process was organizing the data. I created a chart for the teachers and a chart for the administrators for each interview question and found common words and phrases. Then, I used the find tool in Microsoft Word to look for words that I heard mentioned several times during the interviews. After finding the words that were mentioned the most, I highlighted the words and moved the raw data, quotes, from the interviews to a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and extracted the common words to put them in categories.

After organizing the data, I moved to the second phase of the process, sorting the data. I sorted the data into categories with common words or phrases representing inductive codes that emerged from the data and deductive coding with Herzberg's (1968) motivational and hygiene factors serving as a priori codes. The teacher exit interview data were similarly coded and sorted. The responses of the current teachers, exiting teachers, and center coordinators were coded and sorted. Table 1 provides an example of the codes used based on the center coordinators' responses.

Table 1*Sample Coding of Center Coordinators' Perceptions of Factors That Motivate Teachers*

Participant	Raw data	First coding	Second coding	A priori code
C1	You've got a great job that has great hours. You're getting paid to play with kids. You're you've got paid holidays, you've got benefits.	Hours Holidays	Benefits	Hygiene
C2	The program itself is wonderful, and you've got some teachers that are staying because of what we do, what we stand for and, because they are warm hearted. Wanting to make these children and families lives better.	The program itself What we do What we stand for Warm-hearted	The work itself	Motivational
C3	It is the relationships.	Relationships	Interpersonal relationships	Hygiene
C4	The merit raises to show that they're doing a good job.	Merit raises	Salary	Hygiene

The interview responses were then sorted by group—administrators and teachers—and the groups' responses were compared (see Mello, 2022) to determine if the groups had similar or different responses. Lastly, the responses were organized into common themes and subthemes. Discrepant cases were considered valid data representing differences in opinions and motivating factors among the small sample of participants and were therefore included and are discussed within the results.

After the data were organized, I moved to the third phase, understanding the data. To help me understand the data, I used open coding. Saldaña (2014) suggested dividing coding into two stages, first cycle coding and second cycle coding. Once the codes were in the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, I filtered the codes to find the words and phrases that were used most frequently to create the first open code. Words that were only mentioned once were removed and those that were mentioned frequently were placed at the top. Next, I further analyzed the data to create a second open code to compile the words and develop a theme. This helped me to disassemble the data and gain a better understanding of the perceptions of the teachers and center coordinators. Lastly, I sorted the words into the Herzberg motivational and hygiene factors.

In the fourth phase, I started interpreting the data. I identified the common themes and patterns, reviewed the research questions, and found statements that related to the research questions. I read through the data over and over to try to identify any data that helped me to gain an understanding of the perceptions of teachers and administrators on teacher turnover.

In the final stage, explaining the data, I focused on analyzing what the participants actually said. I compared the perceptions of the teachers and the center coordinators on the reasons for teacher turnover. The interview questions gave the teachers and center coordinators an opportunity to share in-depth their feelings about the reasons for teacher turnover. For the final analysis, I compared the findings to current literature and my views.

Results

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore Head Start teachers' and administrators' perceptions of the reasons for elevated teacher turnover rates in a multicenter Head Start program in a Southeastern state. For this study, I interviewed 12 Head Start teachers and four Head Start center coordinators. The four center coordinators (coded as Cs) were from different Head Start centers within the same Head Start program. The teachers (coded as Ts) were from these four different Head Start centers: I interviewed three teachers from each center.

I used content analysis and the five-phase process for data analysis adapted from Bingham (2023) to perform the data analysis. I used coding to sort the data into categories with common words or phrases representing inductive codes that emerged from the data and deductive coding with Herzberg's (1968) motivational and hygiene factors, which were the conceptual lens used to frame this study. The RQs addressed by this study were:

RQ1: What are administrators' perceptions of the reasons that teachers leave Head Start?

RQ2: What are current teachers' perceptions of the reasons that teachers leave Head Start?

RQ3: What are exiting teachers' reported reasons for leaving Head Start?

Findings for RQ1: What Are Administrators' Perceptions of the Reasons Teachers Leave Head Start?

Hygiene Factor Theme 1: Salary

Salary was the first theme that emerged from the data. Salary is a hygiene factor in Herzberg's (1968) two-factor theory. All four of the center coordinators interviewed mentioned pay as a reason for teacher turnover. When I asked C4 why teachers leave Head Start, she stated,

First and foremost, it's pay by far. We can't expect to ask a teacher that's in poverty level to not be so stressed out and to be nice to the kids, when she may be losing her home, and she can't afford to pay her rent.

C2 expressed that working at Head Start is extremely hard and not being paid adequately has a huge impact on staff turnover.

Hygiene Factor Theme 2: Work Conditions

Work conditions is also a hygiene factor. There were many factors affecting work conditions that the center coordinators expressed during their interviews such as inappropriate child behaviors, rules, stress, and lack of support. The center coordinators also noted that teachers often feel stressed because they have to deal with difficult families, a high number of children with disabilities, inappropriate child behaviors, and disrespectful parents. The teachers have a very demanding job.

Hygiene Factor Theme 3: Company Policies and Administration

Company policies and administration is also hygiene factor. A lack of delegation of authority, vague policies and procedures, and communication may lead to job

dissatisfaction. One of the center coordinators expressed that there are too many rules in Head Start. Head Start teachers must eat what the children eat and are not allowed to bring in their own food for mealtimes. Teachers are not allowed to have celebrations for the children or decorate their doors. When the center coordinators have asked why they cannot do certain things, there is no explanation; it is simply stated, “because I said so.”

Head Start often loses teachers to the public school system. When the center coordinators were asked what the public schools offer that Head Start does not, one mentioned freedom. Public school teachers are allowed to decorate their rooms how they would like, they have fun at work, and if they want to do something special for their children, they can. Public school teachers also go on field trips and do other things that Head Start teachers do not do.

One of the center coordinators felt that the rules for Head Start teachers change too often. She stated, “For Head Start, it’s whoever gets in the positions interpret the rules differently.” Every time there is a new leader, the rules change for the teachers. Two of the center coordinators discussed lack of support from the central office administration as one of the reasons teachers leave Head Start. The center coordinators shared that there are many times when the teachers have questions, and they ask the center coordinator. The center coordinator reaches out to the administrators in the central office and never receives a response. The teachers become frustrated due to not getting their questions answered. The center coordinators feel like there is a lack of support from the top (central office administrative staff) to the bottom (center staff).

Hygiene Factor Theme 4: Interpersonal Relationships

One of the center coordinators shared that she not only builds relationships with the team but also individually through personal connections. The center coordinator explained that getting to know the teachers and understanding what is going on in their lives makes a difference. One of the center coordinators expressed that she does not make any decisions without including her staff. She feels that any decision that is made will affect the whole group. C2 specifically stated,

If I make a decision, it's 'cause we've talked about it and we've worked out the details of why we're going to do this, even if it's a simple event. We talk about it. So, I think just really including them in, in every aspect of my job helps them understand why we're doing what we're doing.

One of the center coordinators discussed that smiling and being positive has a huge effect on her teachers.

When the center coordinators were asked what they feel motivates the teachers to do their best, C1 stated, "I believe that building relationships and giving them full support. If you have happy staff, then they seem to last longer and want to come to work." C2 stated, "I think my relationship and their relationship with each other plays a huge role in the success that I've had as a center coordinator."

One of the center coordinators explained how she works hard to get the teachers what they need. Ensuring teachers have the supplies and materials needed to teach makes a huge difference. She also offers in-classroom support for children with disabilities and children with behavioral issues. Calling to check on teachers when they are sick is

another method of support that one center coordinator offered. She stated that the teachers appreciate her calling to check on them. C3 stated,

The encouragement that my teachers receive and the feedback that they get from me and the parents and just knowing that they are doing the best that they can for the children in the center and the families that we serve is what motivates them.

All four center coordinators responded in detail about ways they show their teachers they appreciate them. The center coordinators discussed many methods of showing appreciation from allowing their staff to leave early, cooking for the staff, having food delivered to the center, or purchasing small gifts or trinkets. C1 stated, "I do anything to make their day." C4 discussed that she requests merit increases for her staff. She feels like a merit increase lets the staff know they are doing a good job, and the pay increase is a way of showing she appreciates them.

Motivational Factor Theme 1: Recognition and Appreciation

According to one of the center coordinators, teachers leave because they do not feel valued, and they are not recognized for their hard work. When they become overwhelmed at work, they cannot say it is too much for them. They have to continue to work in the environment with little or no support.

All the center coordinators discussed ways that they recognize their staff in the centers. They felt recognition motivated the teachers and made them want to stay at Head Start. Several of the center coordinators take time celebrate staff birthdays with cakes and gifts. One of the center coordinators leaves little notes in the classrooms to recognize a job well done. Another center coordinator mentioned that she recognizes her staff

publicly and nominates them for agency-wide recognition. Recognizing holidays and celebrating those dates with the teachers is another method one of the center coordinators uses in her center.

Motivational Factor Theme 2: The Work Itself

The center coordinators noted that a motivational factor for teachers is the work itself. One center coordinator stated, “The program itself is wonderful, and you’ve got some teachers that are staying because of what we do, what we stand for, and because they are warm hearted, wanting to make these children’s and families’ lives better.”

Additional Findings

During the interviews, the center coordinators shared many of the reasons they feel teachers stay at Head Start. They discussed some of the factors that motivate the teachers. I detail each of the things the center coordinators do in their centers to motivate teachers, categorizing into Herzberg’s motivational and hygiene factors. All four of the center coordinators interviewed had a different perspective on the most important factors that retain teachers. The hygiene factors that were mentioned were interpersonal relations, benefits, and salary. C1 shared that hours, paid holidays, summers off, benefits, and schedules had the greatest influence on teachers. C2 discussed the importance of relationships, supporting, and showing the teachers you care. C3 felt the job itself was the most important factor to retaining teachers. C4 shared that merit increases and pay are the two most important factors. One teacher noted her reason for staying was that her center coordinator made her feel like she mattered.

Findings for RQ2: What Are Current Teachers' Perceptions of the Reasons

Teachers Leave Head Start?

To answer RQ2, I interviewed 12 teachers and asked if they had ever wanted to leave Head Start and if so, what made them consider leaving. From the interviews, several major themes emerged. The hygiene factors that were identified were similar to those noted by the center coordinators: salary, work conditions, company policies and administration, interpersonal relationships, and benefits.

Hygiene Theme 1: Salary

Salary is a hygiene factor. Four of the teachers mentioned salary as a reason for wanting to leave Head Start. One teacher mentioned that she felt that she was underpaid. The remaining three felt that the public school system would offer them a higher salary and have considered going to the public school system. T11 stated that Head Start no longer offers merit increases.

Hygiene Theme 2: Work Conditions

Ten of the teachers noted work conditions as a reason for wanting to leave. Work conditions is also a hygiene factor. When teachers' work conditions are negative, they often start looking for a different job. T1 explained that the parents can do whatever they want to do. For example, they are allowed to curse at the teachers, and nothing happens to them. T2 was forced to move into another position because she had not been informed that she would have children with disabilities. She had been placed in an environment where she felt unsupported, unprepared, and treated unfairly. T6 had a similar

experience; she was told that she could no longer be in her position and that she had to move to another position.

T3 discussed having issues with children's behavior and no support was being offered. She was, in effect, told that she had to deal with it. T6 also had a similar experience to T3; a student who had severe behavioral issues including kicking and throwing chairs. When the teacher sought help, almost an entire school year elapsed before she received the support she needed. T7 had a similar lack of support for a student suffering from extreme behavior issues. She repeatedly asked for help which was not received until she decided to leave her position. Once she threatened to quit, she finally obtained the assistance she needed.

T5 expressed a lack of support and insufficient information shared with teachers. She felt that the administration was trying to get the teachers in trouble instead of helping them. T10 expressed that when she has an issue at the center, the administration never helps and they never even step foot in her classroom. T2 stated,

Just stepping in sometimes and just like being an extra hand, being an extra ear just to come in and be like, just to observe, just to see if there's pointers that you can give. Because realistically, I mean, you don't really see administrative really come into the classroom that often.

Teachers felt unsupported, unprepared, and felt they were treated unfairly. T6 believed that having an in-house therapist to deal with students' behaviors would help. T12 felt that having more consequences for the students' behaviors would create a better work

environment. Overall, the work environment was the number one reason for teachers wanting to leave Head Start.

Hygiene Factor 3: Company Policies and Administration

There were several teachers who felt that the Head Start program has too many rules. One of the teachers stated, “You have Quality Rated (QR) rules, licensing, Head Start, Office of Head Start, and Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS). Our policies and procedures are not clear most of the time.” Another teacher stated that the rules and regulations were the reason she has considered leaving. T9 felt not being able to take the students on field trips, not having as many hands-on experiences for the students, and not having the resources needed could make teachers want to leave Head Start.

Hygiene Factor 4: Interpersonal Relationships

The teachers mentioned issues with their coworkers and their supervisors as being reasons for wanting to leave. T2 felt that her center coordinator “made it her mission to make her life miserable” and she did not have any support from her. T4 expressed that her coworker continually discussed her home life at work which caused the classroom to be chaotic. She also shared that one of her center coordinators was very negative and made her feel like she could not do anything right. T8 shared that a teacher assistant she had worked with for a number of years left and was replaced with a teacher assistant that she didn’t get along with. The new teacher assistant was not a team player, did not listen to her, and did not take any direction from her. Although she tried to share her concerns with administration, she felt her concerns were not heard. T11 felt her center coordinator

talked down to her and told lies to intimidate her. T12 had a similar issue; her center coordinator was dishonest and constantly made excuses.

Hygiene Factor 5: Benefits

Six of the teachers mentioned individual medical, dental, and vision insurance as a reason for staying at Head Start. Two teachers felt that the schedule was family friendly because it allowed them to be with their children during the summer. Two teachers mentioned the retirement plan as a reason for staying at Head Start. Other teachers discussed job security, personal and sick leave, holidays, and summers off. One teacher felt the opportunity to travel was important in retaining teachers. Two teachers mentioned scholarships and incentives as reasons to stay at Head Start.

Motivational Factor 1: Recognition and Appreciation

T2 stated the most important thing to retain teachers is:

Feeling valued and feeling appreciated. When you're surrounded by people that support you, you want to put your best foot forward and do your best work and give everything you can. But when you don't feel those things, you're not motivated to try your best because you don't feel like anybody's going to appreciate it.

Similarly, T3 stated,

I was invited to the annual meeting and that made me feel good. That made me feel special because it makes you feel like you're doing a great job, and you are being recognized. I have gotten a merit increase and little incentives like cost-of-living increases.

T6 stated that having a director or center coordinator that really understands and appreciates what you do and supports you helps.

Motivational Factor 2: Advancement

One of the teachers shared that she really would like to move up in the agency. Unfortunately, she is not able to because other people will not retire. She feels they are no longer qualified for their position and are not doing their job. Yet, they are remaining in the positions, keeping others from advancing.

Motivational Factor 3: Possibility for Growth

T9 explained that she feels she cannot help the special needs children because she is not trained. She does not have enough hands-on experience to deal with the children with disabilities and the children with behavior problems.

Motivational Factor 4: The Work Itself

T2 discussed the work itself as a motivator, saying “I love kids and I just love my job. It motivates me when a concept clicks in their head because just watching their eyes light up.” T3 stated, “I want to do my best for the children that I’m in care of because I want to make an impact because one day, they’re going to remember me for making that good impression on them.”

Behaviors of Center Coordinators that Motivate Teachers

After discussing the reasons teachers leave Head Start, I asked the teachers if there were certain things that the center coordinators did to motivate them. The teachers provided valuable insights into what the center coordinators did in their centers to motivate teachers to do their best and want to continue working at Head Start.

Understanding what center coordinators do in centers to make their staff feel special, appreciated, and how relationships are built, may lead to changes resulting in Head Start retaining more teachers. T1 described how the center coordinator went above and beyond to build relationships with all the teachers when she first started at the Head Start center. She shared the ways the center coordinator shows appreciation and pushes the staff to do their best. As noted by T1,

She does a lot. I think whenever she first came, she made it her business to get to know everyone, for herself, and personally. It's just the little things. Like staff appreciation. Talking with her. If you are wanting to go back to school or wanting a change, she's all for it. I love her because even if it's not with our agency, she wants to see you excel. She will push you out of your comfort zone, which I think that's a good quality of a leader. Whatever we do, she will do. Like if it's something that needs to be done, she's going to do it. Any support that we need, she's going to go find it. She's fearless. She's very organized. That's one thing I like about her. We talk often. She doesn't sugar coat anything, but she doesn't hide anything. For us, she can make anything sound great, but she doesn't hide anything from us. If there's something we need to discuss as a center, we're coming together like a family and we're discussing it and we're going to fix it. And I like the fact that she's always happy. But she can get serious.

T2 had similar feelings about the center coordinator. T2 shared that the center coordinator also took a special interest in the people at the center.

Building personal relationships makes a difference in the Head Start centers. Staff retention may be improved when center coordinators take the time to talk to the teachers and build genuine relationships. T2 discussed in detail the way the center coordinator formed relationships with the staff:

She's not just here to run the center and do timecards and stuff like that. She takes an interest in the people that work there, like in their lives, in their children's lives and she cares about what we're going through. And like if she notices that you're acting differently or down, she'll ask you, 'Are you okay? Do you need anything? If you need to talk, I'm here.' And whether you use it or not, it makes you feel good to know that it's there if you do, or that is even an option, that she cares enough to check on you, that she cares enough to notice that, hey, she's not acting right, or she's acting differently. Something might be wrong with her. She makes it a point to speak to everyone every morning. Just so I know that 'Hey, I see you. I know you're here. I appreciate you.' We just had staff appreciation week and she did something for us every day just to show that she appreciates us. And she tells us on whether it's Facebook Messenger or a text message to our phones. Or just, 'Hey, I appreciate y'all and what you do.' And she makes working here fun. Like when we come back at the beginning of the year, she'll give little packets for us usually, and she lets us know what's going on, and she takes time to go over everything with us to make sure we're informed. She goes to bat for us. She's not afraid to stand up for us. I mean, granted, the parents come first, and the children come first. But she also knows that without the teachers in the classroom, there

wouldn't be a Head Start and she is not afraid to stand up for her teachers. And it makes you feel good. It makes you feel understood. Feeling that, it's worth getting up every morning.

T7 shared some of the same insights about the importance of having a personal relationship with the center coordinator, saying

Being personable. Talking genuinely on things of their interest and things of my interest. Talk about being mothers. Talk about our families sometime. We might talk about our husbands. But we talked about personal things, but not personal enough that it dragged us down at work or that we got involved in each other's life. A center coordinator that lets you know they love you and I'm here for you. One that picks you up when you're not feeling good."

T12 talked about the importance of having a center coordinator who listens and is honest. The teacher stated,

She really listened. She listened like she heard us. She didn't just blow us off. We always knew whatever was coming from her was the truth. If she didn't know the answer, then she went to central office and she came back with the answer. I never felt uncomfortable to go to her and say I don't agree with this. We got (sic) to come up with a solution. She was never negative about other coworkers. That's the thing I want out of a coordinator. I want someone to hear me. Do not lie to me. For someone to keep me motivated.

Teachers consistently discussed their need to have a positive relationship with their center coordinator. One teacher shared that the center coordinator not only had positive relationships with the teachers, but also provided emotional support to them. T8 stated,

I've had a good relationship with all of my bosses. I called my center coordinator crying one time because I was sick. I felt like she cared about us. I would go and confide in her with a lot of stuff. It didn't feel like I was inconveniencing her by talking to her. And she never, like, brushed me off or anything. Very confident in doing her job. She would come in and relieve us and interact with the kids.

Other teachers also noted that positive support was important, for example, T10 said,

Being there when we need them. Coming in, showing us what they expect from us. My center coordinator, she is awesome. She does a good job. She's supportive. She always has a great attitude. And that's what you need in the center. She has fun with us. She'll come out there and play on the playground or in the classroom with the kids.

As with a personal relationship, most teachers considered receiving emotional support as being important in their relationship with their center coordinator.

In addition, teachers need to feel supported and heard. As T11 stated, "Center coordinators need to have our backs." Teachers need to know their center coordinator is willing to step in the classroom and help. T3 explained, "Just stepping in sometimes and just like being an extra hand, being an extra ear just to come in and be like, just to observe, just to see if there's pointers that you can give." Teachers did not express the need for extensive support; sometimes it can be as simple as a listening ear or extra hand.

Teachers also thrived on receiving professional development and opportunities for growth. As described by T4,

My center coordinators have been able to help me grow as a teacher with their experiences as a teacher. They were able to be like, well, this didn't work well, but this is what I've done, and was able to guide me on how they did certain things so I can do it my own way. I was always excited to learn new things or be able to implement what I know and what they have, they know, and what they have taught me to make. They didn't judge me if I did it wrong. They were able to say, 'Hey, this is what I would do.'

One teacher discussed the importance of center coordinators having a positive attitude. When teachers are promoted to center coordinators, it is important not to forget what it was like being a teacher. T5 explained,

Attitude from leaders is the number one thing that motivates teachers. Because some people get in that position, and it changes their whole mindset. They forget where they came from and in the classroom and they become more authoritative instead of like we're a team.

Teachers also want to receive monetary recognition when they are doing a good job. As T6 stated, "My center coordinator recognized what I was doing, and I got a little bit of a raise for that." Monetary recognition was seen as one means of being acknowledged by the center coordinator. Better understanding of what motivates teachers and what teachers admire in leaders such as center coordinators may lead to increased retention of teachers. Table 2 lists various ways teachers reported center coordinators motivate their teachers.

Table 2*Ways Teachers Feel Motivated by Center Coordinators*

Motivators		Participant
Knows everyone personally Staff appreciation Listening Wants to see staff excel Supportive	Fearless Organized Straightforward Fun	T1
Takes an interest in people (personally) Notices feelings Speaks every morning Shows appreciation	Notices staff every day Informative Stands up for staff Goes the extra mile	T2
Assists in the classroom Observes	Listens	T3
Offers expertise	Nonjudgmental	T4
Good attitude	Team player	T5
Talks to teachers (interests, personal) Gives food and drinks Being on the staff's level	Not rude or snide Showing love and concern Friendly, civil	T6
Gives merit increases Recognition of teachers Open-minded	Understanding Not criticizing	T7
Personal support Encouraging Good relationship Organized Plans with staff	Confident Has teacher experience Fills in the classroom Caring	T8
Qualified with experience	Communication	T9
Qualified Classroom experience Communication Assists in the classroom	Support Great attitude Fun Positive	T10
Has our back	Shows appreciation	T11
Listens, understands Truthful Helpful	Coaches Gets the answers we need Feeling of comfort	T12

Teachers' Reports of the Most Important Motivating Factors

The teachers discussed what is most important to them in their positions with Head Start. Addressing these perceived needs of teachers may improve teacher turnover in Head Start programs. T1 noted that there are too many rules at Head Start. T2 and T3 included offering support, valuing, and appreciating teachers as being important factors. T3 discussed the importance of support by saying, "I mean, just stepping in sometimes and just like being an extra hand, being an extra ear just to come in and be like, just to observe, just to see if there's pointers that you can give." In addition to support, resources were perceived as important. T4 stated, "I feel like sometimes the resources are limited of what you may have. You may have to come out your own pocket just to be able to keep your classroom running." As mentioned in the interviews, salary is a concern for Head Start teachers. If Head Start teachers are needing to use their own money to purchase resources and materials, this could be another reason for teacher turnover.

Several of the teachers mentioned the benefits as being an important factor. T5 stated, "incentives and insurance is really good." T6 noted, "I think the retirement that they offer is good. A lot of places don't offer retirement." T7 suggested, "Their benefits are okay, the health benefits and dental and vision. The holiday pay all that is great. T10 and T11 also felt benefits were a plus. T10 stated, "The hours and insurance." T11 said, "I love the schedule and they offer some good insurance. I love the hours. And you get off early enough in the afternoon if your kids got (sic) ball practice or something, you can go to the game. The holidays." T12 also discussed benefits and schedules by saying,

I love having holidays off, my summer's off. The benefits are amazing. The personal time and sick time that we accrue over the year. I don't have to worry about not getting paid if I'm sick for 3 days, as long as I have enough coverage.

While most of the teachers stayed at Head Start for benefits, feeling appreciated and valued, T8 stayed at Head Start due to the "convenience and comfort."

Findings for RQ3: What Are Exiting Teachers' Reported Reasons for Leaving Head Start?

I reviewed five exiting teachers' (coded as Es) interviews. The five teachers reported different reasons for leaving. E1 left to work in the public schools, and she noted the hygiene factor, salary, as a reason for leaving because salary was lower at Head Start than in the public school. E2 had another job opportunity (motivational factor of growth) and left Head Start due to needing more income (hygiene factor of salary). E3 experienced health issues. E4 left for professional growth (motivational factor of growth), and E5 retired.

There were two changes that were suggested by the exiting teachers. One suggested that the student behavior policy needed to be changed and student behavior issues needed to be handled differently. These were both within work conditions, a hygiene factor.

Exiting teachers indicated the most satisfying parts of their jobs were interacting and working with the children, seeing child growth and development, working in a fun and safe environment, and showing love to children and parents. Four of the five exiting teachers noted the children as the most satisfying part of their job.

Comparison of Teachers' and Administrators' Perceptions

The exiting teachers mentioned two hygiene factors, salary and work conditions, as reasons for leaving. These were also two of the reasons current teachers considered leaving Head Start. One exiting teacher mentioned leaving for professional growth, which was a motivational factor also mentioned by current teachers.

The current teachers and administrators (center coordinators) shared similar motivational and hygiene factors as reasons teachers leave Head Start. The teachers and center coordinators indicated salary, work conditions, company policies and procedures, and interpersonal relationships were reasons that Head Start teachers leave their positions. Lack of support was mentioned most frequently by teachers and center coordinators as the reason teachers want to leave Head Start. All four center coordinators mentioned salary as a reason for teachers wanting to leave but, only one current teacher and two exiting teachers mentioned pay as a reason for wanting to leave.

Three out of four of the center coordinators felt that lack of support and children's inappropriate behaviors were two of the reasons for teachers leaving Head Start. Salary was mentioned as a factor by all four center coordinators. One center coordinator felt that too many rules had an influence on teachers leaving.

Three of the teachers mentioned that they considered leaving Head Start due to negative center coordinators. Lack of support from central office administration was named as a reason for wanting to leave by 8 out of 12 teachers. Two teachers were forced to move into positions they did not want to be in, and this caused them to consider leaving Head Start. Four of the teachers mentioned children's inappropriate behaviors as

the reason for wanting to leave their positions. Two of the teachers mentioned their coworkers as a reason for wanting to leave Head Start.

The center coordinators' and teachers' views on the reasons teachers stay at Head Start varied. The center coordinators felt that teachers stay at Head Start due to relationships, feeling that they matter, and the Head Start leadership. The majority of the teachers' reasons for staying at Head Start focused on the benefits, schedule, retirement, and paid days off. One teacher mentioned that feeling valued, appreciated, and supported was important.

Overall, the teachers and center coordinators mentioned many of the same reasons for teachers wanting to leave Head Start. Center coordinators noted that salary was the primary reason, followed by lack of support, and children's behavior problems. Other reasons mentioned by center coordinators were not feeling valued, too many rules, and stressful work environments. However, teachers mentioned lack of support most often as the reason for leaving, followed by children with behavior problems, negative coworkers and negative center coordinators. One teacher mentioned being underpaid and two were forced to work in undesirable positions.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research ensures the study is credible, transferable, confirmable, and dependable (Stahl & King, 2020). Trustworthiness is the extent to which one can have confidence in the study's findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Qualitative researchers simplify the meaning of trustworthiness as, "can the findings be trusted" (Korstjens & Moser, 2018, p. 121). The trustworthiness of this study was

established by describing the data collection method used, with detailed descriptions of how the interviews were conducted, and interview protocols that were reviewed by three-person teams of Head Start administrators and teachers. The interview questions were specifically designed to answer the research questions and to seek motivational and hygiene factors related to Head Start teacher turnover. The data analysis process was reviewed in detail.

Credibility

Credibility means the findings and interpretations are plausible to the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility of the study was established through triangulation and member checking. Triangulation was used to compare responses of current teachers with exit interview data of former teachers which provided an indication of the credibility, or internal validity, of the study. Triangulation of sources was used to compare and contrast the perceptions of administrators and teachers, which identified that they have some similar and some different perceptions.

Member checking was used to ensure the data that I recorded was accurate and approved by the participant. After conducting the interviews, I emailed the participants a summary of their interview to review for accuracy. The participants could respond back to my email if any changes were needed, although no changes were requested. This process provided for credibility and accuracy of the interview data.

Transferability

Transferability is the applicability of findings based on comparability of contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To facilitate transferability, the research setting was described

in detail while protecting confidentiality of the setting and the participants. The interviews were conducted through Zoom, a virtual platform, to provide privacy for the participants. The participants were described using minimal demographic data; participant's identities were protected throughout the study. Readers will be able to review the site information and demographic data to determine if the findings of my study can be transferred to their setting.

Dependability

Dependability accounts for factors of instability and change within the natural context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Dependability was ensured by using an audit trail, maintaining a reflexive journal, and triangulation of data among the four Head Start centers. Data were collected through interviews within a short timeframe to reduce the possibility of environmental changes affecting the findings. Dependability was also facilitated by aligning the study with the IRB procedures.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the capacity to authenticate the internal coherence of data, findings, interpretations, and recommendations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Confirmability was facilitated by checking the data routinely to ensure the codes were repeated for more than one participant and by maintaining a reflexive journal. Researchers use reflexive journals to assist in neutralizing the influence of their subjectivity, acknowledging it, explaining it, or capitalizing on it (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023). I also asked all interview participants the same questions within their group of center coordinators or teachers.

Summary

In this chapter, the research setting and procedures used were explained. I discussed the process used to interview 12 teachers and four administrators to explore their perceptions of Head Start teacher turnover. The three RQs were addressed based on the interview data from the current teachers and administrators, as well as archival interviews of exiting teachers. The data were sorted into themes based on Herzberg's (1968) two-factor theory and were compared and contrasted to determine trends. Hygiene themes identified by both center coordinators and teachers were salary, work conditions, company policy and administration, and interpersonal relationships. Center coordinators noted motivational themes of recognition and the work itself. Teachers also listed benefits as a hygiene factor and advancement and possibility of growth as motivational factors but did not include the work itself.

The four center coordinators who participated in the study had different perspectives on why teachers leave Head Start (RQ1). The hygiene factors the center coordinators mentioned were interpersonal relations, benefits, and salary. The factors that were mentioned the most were hours, paid holidays, summers off, benefits, and schedules. In addition, relationships, teachers feeling supported, and teachers feeling they are cared for were suggested as the reasons teachers stay. Center coordinators also felt the job itself was the reason some teachers stayed. Merit increases and pay were two of the most important factors mentioned.

Twelve current teachers noted hygiene factors of salary, work conditions, company policies and administration, interpersonal relationships, and benefits. Archival

data from five exiting teacher interviews suggested that teachers left to work in the public schools or other jobs due to higher pay. One teacher left due to professional growth and another for health reasons. Exiting teachers noted that interacting and working with the children, seeing child growth and development, working in a fun and safe environment, and showing love to children and parents were all positive aspects of Head Start.

In Chapter 5, I discuss my interpretations of the findings, limitations of the study, as well as the recommendations, implications, and conclusions to be drawn from the findings.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

Guided by Herzberg's (1968) two-factor theory, this qualitative study was conducted to explore Head Start teachers' and administrators' perceptions of the reasons for the elevated teacher turnover rates in Head Start programs. The teacher and administrator interviews aligned with the conceptual framework, Herzberg's (1968) two-factor theory. The questions gave the participants an opportunity to share valuable insights on their perceptions of why teachers leave Head Start. The semistructured interviews created an environment that allowed the participants to comfortably discuss their positive and negative experiences in Head Start. When the participants did not give me enough information, I used probing questions to encourage more discussion.

A qualitative approach (Creswell, 2009) with use of qualitative comparisons (Mello, 2022) was used for this study. Qualitative research is an iterative process to gain a better understanding of the phenomena being studied (Aspers & Corte, 2019). The qualitative approach was the most appropriate method to use to address the study topic and RQs because interviews allowed me to explore the perceptions of Head Start administrators and teachers regarding reasons for the high level of teacher turnover within Head Start programs.

Semistructured interviews were conducted to address three research questions about the perceptions of administrators (center coordinators), current teachers, and exiting teachers on Head Start teacher turnover and to identify motivational and hygiene factors leading to high teacher turnover. Center coordinators mentioned four hygiene

factors, including salary, work conditions, company policies and procedures, and interpersonal relationships. The work itself and recognition were the two motivational factors mentioned by the center coordinators. The current teachers mentioned five hygiene factors including salary, work conditions, company policies and procedures, interpersonal relationships, and benefits. Three motivational factors, recognition, advancement, and possibility of growth were mentioned by the current teachers. The exiting teachers mentioned salary and work conditions as hygiene factors and professional growth as a motivational factor influencing them to leave their positions. In this chapter, I will discuss my interpretations of these findings, the limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, implications of the study, and a conclusion.

I used Herzberg's (1968) two-factor theory, which indicates motivation and hygiene factors are related to overall job satisfaction, as the conceptual framework for this study. Improving the motivation factors increases job satisfaction while improving the hygiene factors decreases job dissatisfaction. Thus, in Herzberg's two-factor theory, job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction are viewed as being on different continua.

Herzberg's two-factor theory focuses on the fact that employees are not motivated based on pay or working conditions alone, although that may be the perception of their supervisors and administrators. Sense of importance, achievement, and recognition are motivators that increase job satisfaction whereas job security, fringe benefits, working conditions, and vacations are hygiene factors that decrease job dissatisfaction.

Interpretation of the Findings

This study was designed to explore Head Start teachers' and administrators' perceptions of the reasons for elevated teacher turnover rates in Head Start programs. The teachers also shared valuable insights on their perceptions of the characteristics of effective leadership and what they are looking for in a center coordinator. All 12 teachers interviewed had considered leaving at least once, and most of them had considered leaving multiple times. The teachers and administrators had similar perceptions on the reasons teachers leave, but there were some differences. The following hygiene and motivational factors were mentioned during the center coordinator and teacher interviews.

Center Coordinators: Hygiene and Motivational Themes

Hygiene Theme 1: Salary

Head Start teachers are paid less than teachers in public schools; therefore, some of the teachers leave Head Start to work in the public school system. Others leave to find better paying jobs in other fields. Many of the teachers are at poverty level and cannot afford to support their families.

Hygiene Theme 2: Work Conditions

Teachers are not provided with adequate support in their classrooms. The classrooms have a high number of students with disabilities and children with extreme behavioral problems. When teachers request assistance, they do not receive the help they need. This leaves the teachers feeling unsupported, and they often start looking for other jobs.

Hygiene Theme 3: Company Policies and Administration

Head Start has many policies and procedures that other agencies do not have. These policies and procedures cause undue stress on the teachers. The program does not have just one set of policies and procedures, they have several from different sources such as Quality Rated, Classroom Assessment Scoring System, Office of Head Start, and licensing. The policies and procedures are more strenuous when compared to the public school system. Teachers often leave Head Start because they want freedom and want to have the opportunity to participate in activities similar to the public schools and other educational entities.

Hygiene Theme 4: Interpersonal Relationships

When teachers have positive relationships with their center coordinators, they often stay longer. Center coordinators have to work hard to take a special interest in each of their teachers. They have to do more than supervise; they have to get to know the teachers personally and try to make them feel special.

Motivational Theme 1: Recognition

Teachers like to be recognized on their birthdays. They enjoy little things like the center coordinators cooking for them; giving them small gifts, certificates, and merit increases; and doing anything they can to make the teachers' day. Teachers enjoy being recognized for perfect attendance and for going above and beyond. It is also important for center coordinators to recognize the teachers on their performance appraisals. Recognizing teachers and acknowledging their hard work makes them want to stay at Head Start. There are many ways teachers can be recognized such as birthday

celebrations, little notes, perfect attendance recognition, awards, merit increases, and publicly acknowledging their efforts.

Motivational Theme 2: The Work Itself

Teachers often stay with Head Start because they love the children. Watching the children growing and learning gives them a sense of accomplishment. Teachers want to make a difference in the lives of the children and families in their community.

Current Teachers: Hygiene and Motivational Themes

Hygiene Theme 1: Salary

Teachers often leave Head Start because they are underpaid, and their pay does not compare to that of public school teachers. Head Start teachers are no longer receiving merit increases for their hard work. When teachers do not receive merit increases, they do not feel appreciated and feel they are underpaid for their efforts.

Hygiene Theme 2: Work Conditions

Teachers need support in their classrooms to be able to provide adequate care for the children. When teachers request support, it should be made a priority to ensure they do not become overwhelmed and make the decision to leave Head Start. Head Start teachers need more in-classroom support along with additional supports such as in-house counselors, therapists, and behavior management supports.

Hygiene Theme 3: Interpersonal Relationships

Teachers need positive relationships with their coworkers and administrators. When teachers have strong relationships with their administrators and coworkers, they

will be more likely to stay in their positions longer. When teachers do not have positive relationships with their coworkers and administrators, they will often leave Head Start.

Hygiene Theme 4: Company Policies and Administration

Teachers often leave Head Start because they feel overwhelmed with all the policies and procedures. When they notice other educational entities that serve children do not have as many rules and regulations, they often consider leaving to seek employment elsewhere. Head Start has many different sets of rules and regulations. When the rules and regulations do not coincide, it creates stress for the teachers who must learn many different sets of rules and regulations.

Hygiene Theme 5: Benefits

Head Start currently offers an excellent benefits package. Benefits is one of the strongest incentives for teachers to remain in their positions.

Motivational Theme 1: Recognition

Recognizing teachers for their hard work is important to retain teachers. When administrators notice teachers going above and beyond, having perfect attendance, or meeting expectations, they should be recognized. Recognizing teachers makes them want to continue in their positions and to do well.

Motivational Theme 2: Advancement

Teachers may look for another job when they feel they are not able to advance in an agency. When teachers feel they have reached a level in their career when they should be advancing and are not able to, they start looking for employment elsewhere. It is important for Head Start programs to offer opportunities for advancement.

Motivational Theme 3: Possibility of Growth

Teachers need to have the proper training and resources to be able to do their job. When teachers are not offered professional development opportunities, it leads them to feel that they are not properly trained for the job.

Exiting Teachers: Hygiene and Motivational Themes***Hygiene Theme 1: Salary***

Head Start should have comparable salaries to other educational entities. When a teacher is doing similar work to a teacher in another agency, they should be paid the same.

Hygiene Theme 2: Work Conditions

Head Start programs should have the proper supports, resources, and trainings to address children's inappropriate behaviors in classrooms.

Motivational Theme 1: Professional Growth

Head Start should offer professional growth opportunities to help retain teachers.

Findings Related to Previous Research

The findings supported the literature that was presented in Chapter 2. Teachers' salary was the first hygiene factor found in the literature. According to the National Institute for Early Education Research (2022), in the state of Georgia, Head Start teacher salaries in 2022 averaged \$30,172 compared to public school teachers' average salaries of \$60,408, representing more than a \$30,000 difference in salaries between Head Start teachers and public school teachers. Salary was mentioned as a factor by four center coordinators, one current teacher, and one exiting teacher who stated that she was leaving

to work in the public schools. Three of the current teachers also considered leaving Head Start to work in the public school system due to the pay differential.

Teacher work expectations and conditions was the second hygiene factor found in the literature, which discussed CLASS and triennial federal reviews and their negative effects on Head Start staff. Only one teacher mentioned being observed by multiple entities as a reason for wanting to leave Head Start. Other factors reported in the literature that may affect teachers' decisions to leave their positions included workloads (Gagnon et al., 2019), need to use personal time for planning (Stahl & King, 2020), teaching being perceived as a "take home" job (Buetel et al., 2019), and negative effects on teachers' family lives (Gupta & Lucia, 2019). Workloads and using personal time for planning were not mentioned by any of the center coordinators, current teachers, or exiting teachers. Instead, the teachers focused on lack of support for children with disabilities and behavior problems, which were the main reasons for a negative work environment.

Challenging student behaviors were discussed in the current literature; however, the reports were not consistent. Although issues related to student discipline were the reasons for teacher turnover least mentioned by Head Start teachers in the research by Jeon and Wells (2018), others found that addressing challenging student behaviors in classrooms was one of the most difficult tasks teachers faced (Garwood et al., 2018), and teachers in lower grades dealt with more discipline problems than teachers in higher grade levels (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017) which added to teachers' stress (Uchegbu, 2020). Many of the teachers in this study discussed the challenges they faced in the classroom due to extreme behavior issues with students. One teacher stated that she

walked out of work one day and did not have any plans for returning due to a child with a severe behavioral problem.

Researchers have found that teaching is a stressful profession (Newberry & Allsop, 2017) and early childhood teachers have among the highest levels of stress (McCartney, 2018). One center coordinator mentioned stress as a reason for teachers leaving and only one teacher mentioned stress. Chen and Phillips (2018) discussed several stressors for Head Start teachers including workload, lack of support, and teacher-parent conflict. Two of the center coordinators discussed lack of support from the administrative office as a reason for teachers leaving, and several of the teachers reported repeated stress over the lack of the support they received in the center. Although workload was not mentioned, teacher-parent conflicts was an issue noted by one teacher and one center coordinator who stated, “teachers leave because of the pure disrespect of the children’s families and parents’ lack of support.”

Lack of administrative leadership and support was discussed in the literature and found in my research as a factor in teachers leaving. According to Garrow-Oliver (2017), many teachers in early childhood education go unheard and they are often undervalued, bullied, and silenced. The teachers reported this in their interviews, and a center coordinator stated, “teachers leave Head Start because they are not valued.” Similarly, Reitman and Karge (2019) found that support provided within the first years of a teacher’s career is important to retention, but teachers are often placed in the classroom with little or no support. Many of the Head Start teachers discussed the consistent lack of support from administration in the central office.

Recognition was a motivational factor discussed in the literature. Mallah (2018) found that teachers exerted more effort when they were incentivized for their hard work, and the quality of their teaching also improved. The positive effects of recognition were confirmed by the teachers who were interviewed. All the center coordinators discussed ways they recognize their staff because they felt recognition motivated the teachers and made them want to stay at Head Start.

Another motivational factor discussed in the literature was meaningfulness of work. Herman et al. (2023) found that if staff felt their work was a calling to teach, as related to religious roots, they had less intent to leave. Two teachers noted that their work was meaningful, which also led to these teachers feeling a sense of achievement.

Limitations of the Study

There were several limitations to this study that may affect transferability. The first limitation is that the findings may differ in another state because the teachers and administrators selected as participants were from a rural area within one Southeastern state. Head Start employees in other states may have different perceptions of why teachers leave Head Start. There may be various environmental issues in certain states that lead to Head Start teacher turnover. Studies in urban areas may indicate different factors affecting teacher turnover and allow for larger sample sizes. The small sample sizes in this study may limit transferability of the findings to centers in the same geographic region or similar regions. Another limitation is there were no males who participated in the study, and racial composition of the sample was limited. A similar study conducted in an urban area may provide a more diverse sample of participants.

Lastly, the teacher exit interview data were based on standard questions used by the local human resources department and were not the same as interview questions asked of currently employed teachers in the study. Although the exit interviews provided some insight into the reasons the exiting teachers left, these data were not directly comparable to the data obtained in interviews of the current teachers and center coordinators.

An inherent concern in conducting qualitative research, particularly interviews, is the possibility of researcher bias being introduced into the data. Although I am not presently employed by Head Start, I worked in Head Start for 18 years and served as a center director for 10 years. To avoid having my experience affect the data, I did not interview any persons with whom I worked directly. Interviews were recorded and transcribed; reports of the study will reflect the content of these interviews with my own analysis of these data clearly denoted. I also maintained a reflexive journal to record my thoughts and feelings throughout the study processes as a means of keeping them separate from the data.

Recommendations

Findings of this study imply that future research to strengthen the literature in this area might compare the perceptions of teacher turnover in an urban area versus a rural area. Teachers in urban areas may report different motivational and hygiene factors affecting their work than teachers in a rural area. Future research could be conducted to compare the perceptions of male and female teachers. In addition, a comparison of the reasons teachers from various demographic groups leave Head Start is recommended.

These studies would provide Head Start administrators a better understanding of what teachers are facing in the classrooms today.

Implications

This qualitative study focused on the perceptions of teachers and administrators on reasons for the elevated level of Head Start teacher turnover. In this study, I identified differences in the perceptions of teachers and administrators about which factors affect attrition and motivational factors to improve retention of Head Start teachers. Use of qualitative methodology and qualitative comparisons, in particular, expands upon the methods previously used by researchers in this area. The findings may assist Head Start program administrators to gain a better understanding of the reasons Head Start teachers leave the profession and could result in program modifications to improve teacher retention.

The themes outlined in this study reflect a clear understanding of factors that influence teachers to leave their positions and the factors that motivate teachers to remain in Head Start. There is a need to better support Head Start teachers especially in dealing with children with severe behavior problems and children with disabilities. In addition, teacher pay should be consistently reviewed and increased, if possible. Leaders should value and recognize teachers for their hard work and dedication. Building strong relationships with teachers will help to retain them in the Head Start program. To reduce the turnover in Head Start programs, it is important for Head Start administrators to understand the issues teachers face, address those issues, and work to create a positive, supportive work environment. Creating these positive changes in practice within Head

Start programs is very likely to result in reduced teacher turnover. Reducing teacher turnover will enhance Head Start programs and facilitate positive social changes in society because retaining teachers in Head Start supports the most vulnerable children in our communities. Instead of losing childcare services, the children would continue to be provided quality care and education. Not only does teacher retention create positive social change for communities and individuals, it also affects families. Teacher retention allows Head Start programs to remain open to serve children, which allows family members to work. When children do not have adequate childcare, their parents are not able to work to support their family.

Conclusion

Retaining Head Start teachers is important to ensure continuity of care for our communities' most vulnerable children. This basic qualitative study focused on gaining a better understanding of Head Start teacher turnover by exploring the perceptions of current Head Start teachers, exiting Head Start teachers, and center coordinators. The findings outline the reasons teachers leave Head Start and the motivational and hygiene factors that help retain teachers in Head Start.

When reviewing the findings, it is clear that teachers need more pay, more support, and better work environments. It was noted multiple times that teachers feel there needs to be a better plan for addressing children's behavior problems. Head Start teachers are critical to ensuring our youngest children are ready and prepared for public schools. If administrators review the motivational and hygiene factors related to Head Start teacher turnover, develop and implement a plan to increase the motivational factors

and address the negative factors, elevated Head Start teacher turnover could be relegated to the past.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol for Teachers

- 1) What factors motivate you to do your best at work?
 - a) Possible Prompt: Are there certain things in the program that you believe make you work harder?
 - b) Possible Prompt: Are there certain things that your administrator does to make you want to work harder? (Examples, only if needed: recognition, merit increase)
- 2) Has there ever been a time when you wanted to leave Head Start? If so, what was the reason? What made you decide not to leave Head Start?
 - a) Possible Prompt: On the day that you decided, I'm looking for another job, what happened?
- 3) What motivates you to continue to work at Head Start as a teacher?
 - a) Possible Prompt: What does Head Start offer that other places of employment do not offer?
- 4) What is the most important thing a Head Start program could offer to retain you?
 - a) Possible Prompt: Is there one benefit that Head Start could offer that would make you not consider other employment?
 - b) What does Head Start not offer that other employers do offer?
- 5) Have you ever considered working for a school other than Head Start? If so, what did the public school system offer that made you want to consider leaving your current job?
 - a) Possible Prompt: If Head Start offered this same benefit would you still leave Head Start to work in the public school system if you had the opportunity?

- 6) If you have never considered leaving the Head Start program, what would be one reason that would make you start looking for another job?
 - a) Possible Prompt: What is one thing that would make you want to leave your current job?
- 7) What types of things motivate, or encourage you to do the best you can on your job?

Appendix B: Interview Protocol for Administrators

- 1) What factors motivate teachers to do their best in your Head Start program?
 - a) Possible Prompt: Are there certain things in the program that you believe make teachers work harder?
 - b) Possible Prompt: Are there certain things you do as an administrator that you believe make teachers work harder? (Examples, only if needed: recognition, merit increase)
- 2) What are the top three reasons you feel teachers leave Head Start?
 - a) Possible Prompt: Has a teacher left and given you a reason for leaving, if so, what was it?
- 3) What do you think would motivate teachers to continue to want to work at Head Start?
 - a) Possible Prompt: Are there teachers who have been with your agency for many years? If so, what motivates them to stay?
- 4) What is the single most important thing a Head Start program could offer to teachers to retain them?
 - a) Possible Prompt: If you were a teacher, what would be most important to you?
- 5) Why do you feel Head Start teachers leave to work in the same position in the public school system?
 - a) Possible Prompt: What is the public school system offering that Head Start is not?
What is Head Start offering that the public school system is not?
- 6) What do you think is one thing that would make a teacher look for another job?

- 7) What do you feel you do to motivate your teachers to do the best they can on their job?

Appendix C: Standard Head Start Human Resources Exit Interview Questions

1. What aspects of your job were most satisfying?
2. Suggest any specific changes that would have kept you at the agency.
3. Is there a point of uncertainty or disagreement that you have been unable to settle satisfactorily that you would like to discuss?
4. Please comment on your reason for leaving the agency.
5. Please comment on the employee benefit plan. Did it meet your needs sufficiently?