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Teacher and Administrator Perspectives on Low Reading Achievement Among Middle School Hispanic Students

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2020

Abstract

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Erica M. Criswell

MA, Wichita State University, 2008

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Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Hispanic middle school students in Southeast Texas were scoring below their peers on the Texas standardized reading exam, and the study site was placed on the Texas Education Agency needs improvement list. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to identify the perceptions of reading teachers and administrators regarding Hispanic students' low reading achievement. Cummins' empowerment of minority students formed the conceptual framework that guided this study. The research question focused on the teacher and administrator perceptions about low reading achievement of Hispanic students in grades 7-8. A basic qualitative design was used to capture the insights of 3 middle school teachers and 3 middle school administrators through semi-structured interviews; a purposeful sampling process was used to select the participants. Emergent themes were identified through open coding, and the findings were developed and checked for trustworthiness through member checking, rich descriptions, and triangulation. The findings revealed that administrators and teachers recognize a gap in reading performance between limited English proficient Hispanic students and non-English as a second language Hispanic students, that language barriers are prevalent, and that instructional interventions are needed. A professional development project was created to provide teachers with strategies and approaches for working with Hispanic students. This study has implications for positive social change by creating a structure to provide teachers with strategies to improve reading performance of Hispanic students.

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Dedication

First, I want to dedicate this accomplishment to my mother, Shirley Criswell. She is my biggest motivator and always believes in me. She has always been my biggest supporter. She is the strongest, most faith-having woman I know and she is my hero. I always tell her that she is the wind beneath my wings. Mom, I love you!

In addition, I want to dedicate this study to my loving, inspiring, patient, supportive, and beautiful wife, Holly Robinson Criswell. Thank you for not letting me quit when I wanted to give up. Also, thank you for being a good sport when I or we could not do things because I was reading and/or writing. I love you!

To my brothers, Eric and Jamar, thank you for your support. I love you!

To my late grandparents, Oliver and Maseline Criswell, and my Aunt Jessie Boykins, thank you for being instrumental in my educational pursuits. I love and miss you!

Finally, this accomplishment is dedicated to my nieces and nephews. I hope that I have been a good role model for you, and I want you to remember that you can do anything that you put your mind to. Philippians 4:13

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I want to thank God! Because of him, I was granted the strength, power, and knowledge to complete this journey.

I want to thank the participants who chose to be a part of my study and the school personnel who granted me permission to conduct my study.

I want to thank my doctoral committee: Dr. Kim Nisbett, my chairperson, and Dr. Donald Poplau, my committee member. They spent an invaluable amount of time checking drafts and offering suggestions to help me complete this project.

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Finally, an acknowledgement to soon-to-be Dr. Candace Southall for her kind words of motivation when I was frustrated with the process and my lack of progress.

Thank you all for any part that you played in helping me become Dr. Erica Criswell.

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Section 1: The Problem

The Local Problem

Hispanic students in Grades 7-8 at Middle School X (MSX) in Southeast Texas were achieving below their White peers on the Texas Standardized Reading Exam (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2014). MSX was placed on the needs improvement list by the state agency because achievement gaps existed in reading between Hispanic students and their White peers (TEA, 2013). This gap in student achievement between Hispanic and White students had been noted in a variety of studies (Hemphill & Vanneman, 2011; B. A. Rodriguez, 2014). According to the TEA Report Card in 2013, only 60% of the school's Hispanic students met the satisfactory standard on the standardized reading exam while 74% of White students and 76% of African American students met the satisfactory standard, as shown in Figure 2. In 2014, only 61% of Hispanic students met the satisfactory standard while 74% of White students and 60% of African American students met the satisfactory standard (TEA, 2014). On the reading exam, only 9% of the Hispanic students met the postsecondary readiness standard while White students were at 23% and African American students were at 8% (TEA, 2014). Improvements in the achievement gap had been made in the past, but the Hispanic students at MSX continued to lag behind. In 2015, Hispanic students scored 68% satisfactory, White students scored 84% satisfactory, and African American students scored 61% satisfactory (TEA, 2015). Hispanic students made up the largest population of students at MSX, as shown in Figure 1.
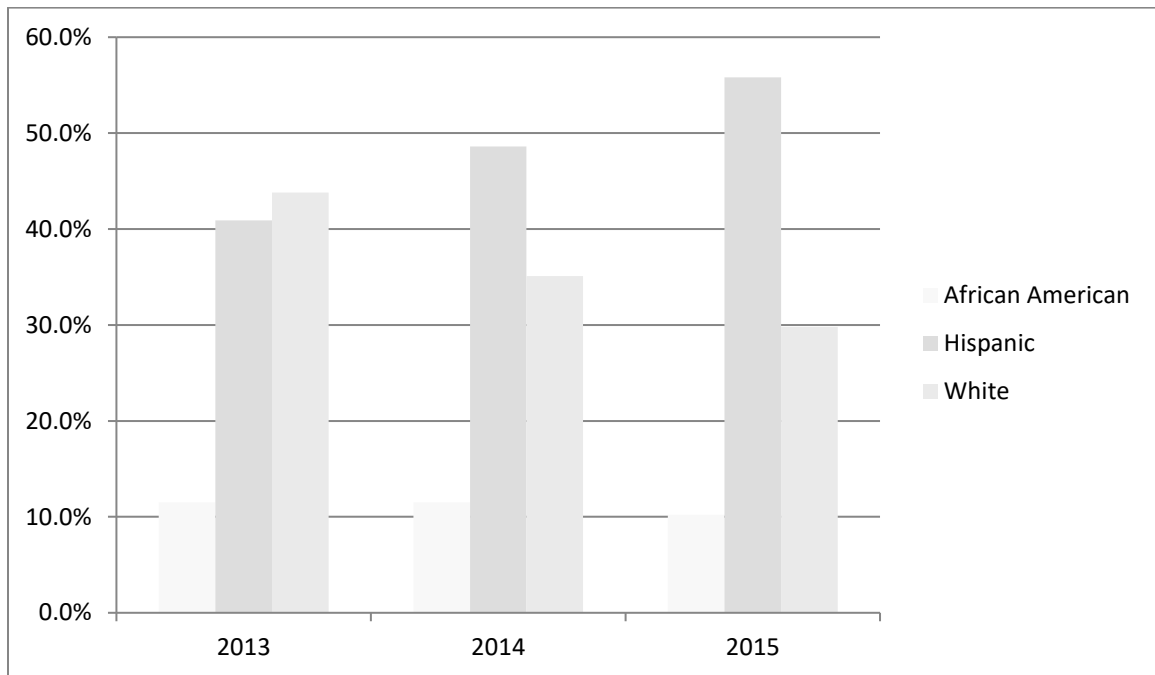
Figure 1. MSX student body population. This figure illustrates the percent of each ethnicity that makes up MSX. Data from Texas Education Agency (2013, 2014, 2015).

Figure 2. MSX reading test satisfactory met. This figure illustrates the percentage of each population that met the satisfactory standard on the standardized reading exam. Data from Texas Education Agency (2013, 2014, 2015).

Gaps in student achievement are an ongoing concern in U.S. educational systems, especially among Hispanic students (Chang & Le, 2010; Larke, Webb-Hasan, Jimarez, & Li, 2014). With a consistently growing population of Hispanics in the United Sates, it is critical to address the achievement gap in schools (Allen, 2011; U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). According to an administrator and an interventionist at MSX, the subject of reading at the school had been the focus of interventions to address the lack of achievement (personal communications, August 20, 2014). As an intervention, Accelerated Reader (AR) was put into place. AR is a reading program from Renaissance Learning that is data driven and personalizes reading practice to help students become inspired to be successful readers (Renaissance Accelerated Reader 360, 2016). At MSX, there had been improvements in reading scores, but the achievement gap was still a

concern. The reading achievement gap was also a concern in MSX's school district (Administrator, personal communication, August15, 2016; Interventionist, personal communication, August15, 2016).

The TEA provides academic accountability ratings to public school districts that are based on student performance on state standardized tests, graduation rates, student achievement, student progress, closing performance gaps, and postsecondary readiness (TEA, 2014). MSX had been placed on the needs improvement list as mandated by the governing school agency due to low performance on the state standardized tests (TEA, 2014). In 2015, MSX met standard on the governing agency list, but there were still achievement gaps in reading for Hispanic students (TEA, 2015a). In the school districts surrounding MSX, there were also gaps in reading achievement between Hispanic and White students (TEA, 2015b). In 2013, 75% of Hispanic students performed satisfactorily, 87% of White students performed satisfactorily, and 65% of African American students performed satisfactorily, as shown in Figure 3. At the state level, Hispanic students were at 74% satisfactory reading achievement, White students were at 89% satisfactory reading achievement, and African American students were at 72% satisfactory reading achievement, as shown in Figure 4 (TEA, 2013). In 2015, national average reading scores for White, Black, and Hispanic eighth-grade students declined from 2013. The national average reading score for Hispanic students was 253, the average score for White students was 274, and the average score African American students was 248 on a 0-500 scale (Nation's Report Card, 2015).
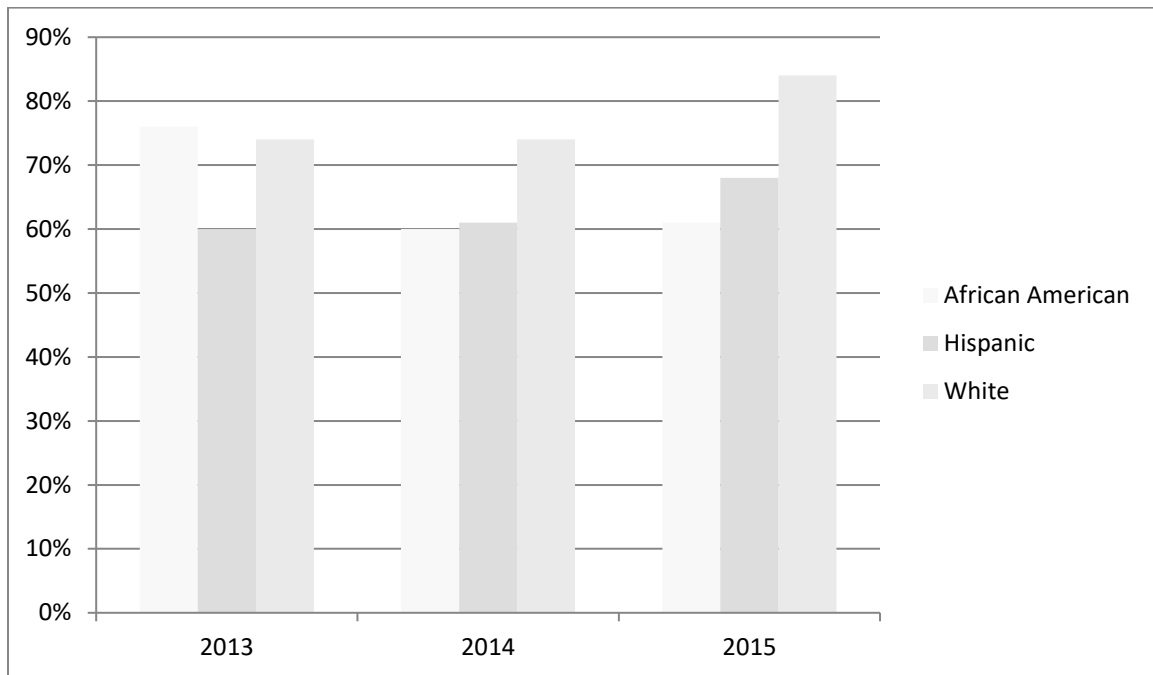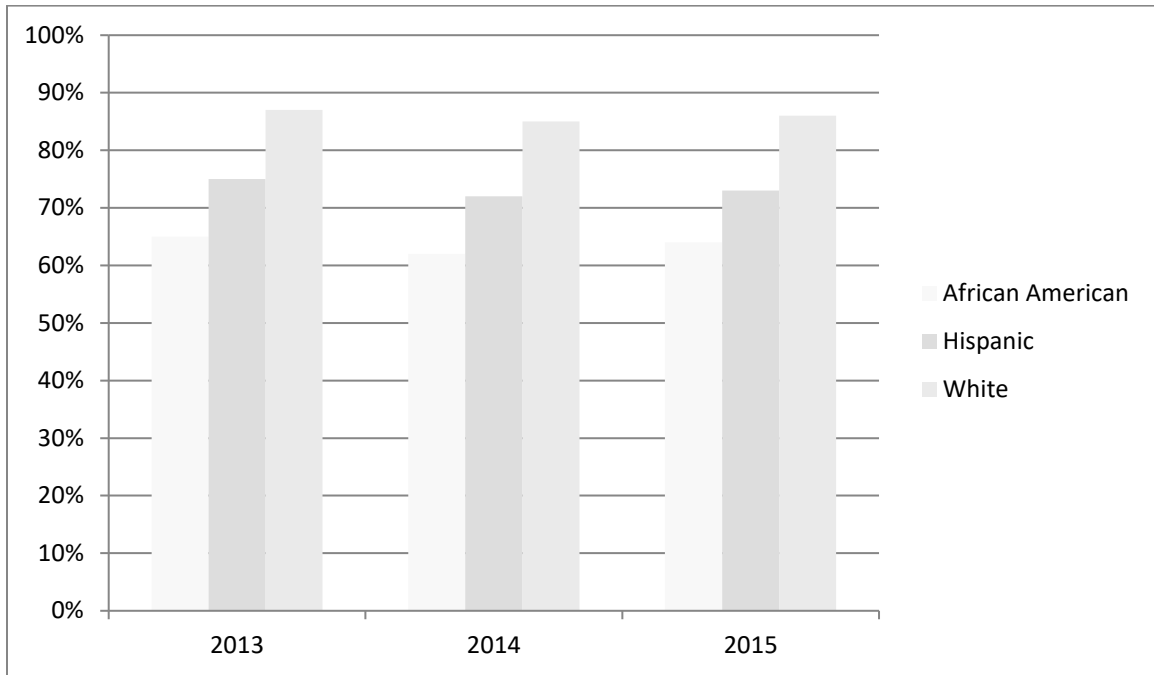
Figure 3. Region reading test satisfactory met. This figure illustrates the percentage of each population that met the satisfactory standard on the standardized reading exam at the state region level. Date from Texas Education Agency (2013, 2014, 2015).
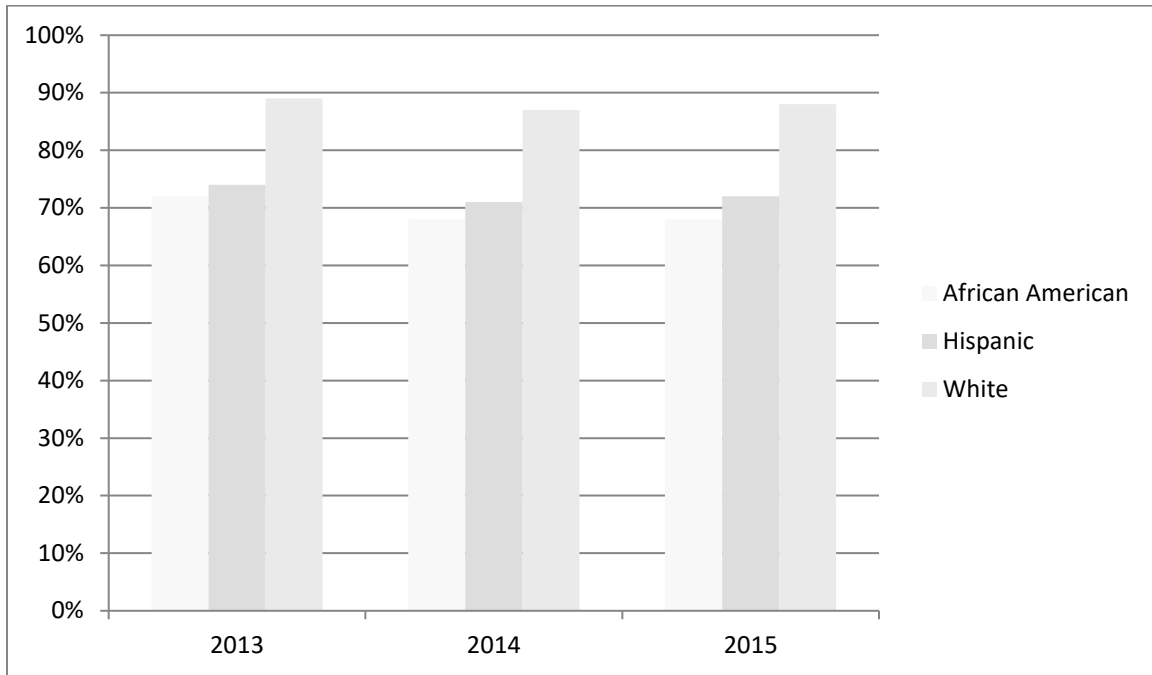
Figure 4. State reading test satisfactory met. This figure illustrates the percentage of each population that met the satisfactory standard on the standardized reading exam at the state level. Data from Texas Education Agency (2013, 2014, 2015c).

Rationale

The rationale for choosing the local problem was an attempt to discover the perceptions of MSX reading teachers and administrators regarding MSX Hispanic students' low reading achievement. Hispanic students made up a large percentage of students in MSX (40.9%), and this population of students will continue to grow. The school report card indicated that this group of students was achieving lower than their White peers (TEA, 2014). The administrator and interventionist at MSX mentioned that the subject of reading at MSX and the achievement gap were issues that were concerning and that interventions needed to be incorporated into the curriculum (personal communications, August 20, 2014). With a high number of Hispanic students at MSX scoring low and the population continuing to grow, it was important to focus on reading

achievement with this group (Administrator, personal communication, May 19, 2016).

Hosts of reading teachers and other subject teachers who required reading at MSX

mentioned that lack of high reading performance negatively affected learning.

    The purpose of this study was to identify the perceptions of MSX reading

teachers and administrators regarding MSX Hispanic students' low reading achievement.

"Reading is arguably the most important subject area for academic success" (T. C.

Howard, 2010, p. 13). Therefore, to best support academic success for MSX students, the

perceptions of low reading achievement and of working with the Hispanic students were

identified (see Craft & Slate, 2012; Lesaux & Rangel, 2013).

Definition of Terms

The following key terms are defined as they were used in this study.

Achievement gap: A phenomenon in which when one group of students grouped

by race/ethnicity or gender outperforms another group and the difference in average

scores for the two groups is statistically significant (Nation's Report Card, 2015).

Hispanic: Students of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American,

or other Spanish culture origin, regardless of race (TEA, 2013).

Limited English proficiency: A situation in which the student speaks a primary

language at home that is not English. The English language proficiency of a student is

determined to be limited by a language proficiency assessment committee or as indicated

by a test of English proficiency (TEA, 2013).

Needs improvement list: A designation that indicates unacceptable performance

that is assigned to districts and campuses, including charter districts and alternative

education campuses evaluated under alternative education accountability provisions, that do not meet the targets on all required indexes for which performance data exists (TEA, 2014).

Texas Education Agency: An agency that provides accountability ratings to public school districts that are based on student performance on state standardized tests, graduation rates, student achievement, student progress, closing performance gaps, and postsecondary readiness (TEA, 2014).

Socioeconomic status: The combination of a family's income, education, and occupation (Chiu & Chow, 2015).

Significance of the Study

Findings from this study may lead to positive change in Hispanic students' reading achievement. At the local level, the results of this study may benefit reading instructional practices and may help narrow the existing achievement gap. This study focused on identifying the perceptions of MSX reading teachers and administrators about MSX Hispanic students' low reading achievement. The problem at MSX was the low reading achievement among Hispanic students. This group of students makes up nearly half of the population at MSX (TEA, 2015b). Year after year, MSX Hispanic students have been lagging behind their peers in reading.

This study addressed a local problem and may raise awareness among administrators, teachers, parents, and the community regarding the perceptions of MSX teachers and administrators about MSX Hispanic students' low reading achievement. Administrator awareness may provide insight into helping teachers prepare for the

diversity in the school and may provide knowledge regarding what strategies need to be in place to offer effective instruction for students (M. A. Rodriguez, Mullen, & Allen, 2015). Teachers' awareness is much the same as administrators; except, teachers provide insights into appropriate instructional strategies (DeMatthews & Izquierdo, 2016). Parents' awareness may include learning what roles they can play at home and school to promote students' educational attainment (DeMatthews & Izquierdo, 2016). Community awareness may include increasing community members' involvement and engagement in promoting students' educational attainment (DeMatthews & Izquierdo, 2016). Identifying the factors leading to low achievement is a starting point toward improving reading achievement of MSX Hispanic students. The results of this study may lead to insights concerning the problem and strategies for the improvement of reading achievement. The insights and strategies could positively affect social change by encouraging teachers to utilize best practices to help their students reach higher academic achievement in reading.

Research Questions

The problem in this study was Hispanic students in Grades 7-8 at MSX in Southeast Texas were achieving below their White peers on the Texas Standardized Reading Exam (TEA, 2014). Although there had been improvements, there was still an achievement gap in reading among Hispanic students and students of other cultures (TEA, 2016). Many educators have researched the issue, but it has not yet been determined how to rectify the issue (Hemphill & Vanneman, 2011). A study of this nature had not been conducted at MSX. This study proposed solutions to close the existing achievement gaps by addressing the following research questions:

1. What are reading teachers' perceptions of low reading achievement among Hispanic students in Grades 7-8?

2. What are administrators' perceptions of low reading achievement among Hispanic students in Grades 7-8?

Review of the Literature

Reading is a part of everyday life and is a valuable source of information (Bradley, 2016; Kamalova & Koletvinova, 2016). Successful readers are better problem solvers, have great memory and imagination, converse better, have a rich vocabulary, write better, and are more critical than nonsuccessful readers (Kamalova & Koletvinova, 2016). Reading is a skill that is critical for academic success (Kamalova & Koletvinova, 2016). Reading proficiency will afford students more opportunities for being competitive in the workforce (Josephs & Jolivette, 2016). The skill of reading is utilized by most people daily (Bradley, 2016; Wallot, 2016). However, not every student manages to become a proficient reader.

Reading entails many things. Reading is a multidimensional and complex process (Cain & Parrilla, 2014; Wallot, 2016). Successful readers possess a good vocabulary, comprehend the text they are looking at, are fluent, and are motivated (Frankel, Becker, Rowe, & Pearson, 2016). Some students have difficulties with comprehension, word recognition, language comprehension, vocabulary, and reading fluency (Cain & Parrilla, 2014; Frankel et al., 2016). The difficulties in reading predominantly hinder Hispanic students (Allen, 2011; C. E. Baker, 2016).

Reading struggles for Hispanic students are not new topics in education. Hispanic students and their struggles in reading are common topics in many middle schools (Moreau, 2014). A struggling reader in earlier grades usually continues to have reading problems into adulthood (Moreau, 2014). The purpose of this study was to identify the perceptions of MSX reading teachers and administrators regarding MSX Hispanic students' barriers to high academic achievement in reading. This section includes a comprehensive review of the conceptual framework and relevant literature on factors that impede reading achievement among Hispanic students.

Conceptual Framework

Discussions involving the topic of reading problems for Hispanic students are consequential. A substantial amount of research has been conducted on Hispanic students and their lack of achievement in reading (Chiu & Chow, 2015; Craft & Slate, 2012; Hemphill & Vanneman, 2011). In 1986, Cummins conducted research in response to this issue. This research led Cummins to introduce a conceptual framework called Cummins's conceptual framework for the empowerment of minority students (Cummins, 1986). Cummins's framework offered ideas and approaches that educators could use to reduce the achievement gaps associated with minority students (Cummins, 2001). The basis of Cummins's framework includes exploring school environment, society, teachers, and self-motivation (Cummins, 2001). These factors influence student achievement (Cummins, 2001). Cummins's framework for the empowerment of minority students was applied in my study. To reduce the achievement gap at MSX, certain aspects of

Cummins's framework, such as school environment and teachers' attitudes and actions, needed to be investigated as they related to MSX.

School environment involves the makeup of the school, including facilities, management of classrooms, overall discipline, and school-based supports. The environment needs to incorporate different cultural and language aspects of minority students (Cummins, 2001). By incorporating these aspects, the school environment can empower the students and positively impact student achievement. Society and parents can empower schools through their positive interactions with schools (Cummins, 2001). When these interactions are welcomed, society and parents can feel a sense of acceptance and of being needed, which can ignite them to be actively involved in the educational process (Cummins, 2001). Teachers empower students and parents through their positive relationships (Cummins, 2001). Teachers can collaborate with parents to influence them to be actively engaged in their child's education (Cummins, 2001). Active parent engagement in home and at school can boost students' academic achievement (Cummins, 2001). Students' self-motivation is boosted by a combination of school environment, society, parents, and teachers (Cummins, 2001). These combined factors also play a role in student achievement (Cummins, 2001).

Review of the Broader Problem

Several researchers have addressed the topic of reading (Allen, 2011; C. E. Baker, 2016; Bradley, 2016; Cain & Parrila, 2014; Gandara, 2010). Many of these studies addressed similar factors that were found to influence Hispanic students' difficulties in reading. I searched the following electronic databases: ERIC, SAGE, EBSCO, PsychInfo,

Education Full Text, and ProQuest. Search terms that were valuable in finding the research articles were *Hispanic students*, *achievement gaps*, *reading*, *middle school*, and *literacy.* By searching these terms, I found numerous articles that were useful in gaining a better understanding of the Hispanic student's difficulties in reading achievement. Factors related to the lack of Hispanic students' achievement in reading were socioeconomic status (SES), limited English proficiency (LEP), culture/family background, parental involvement, and instructional practices/teachers. It is possible that MSX students experience some or all of these factors that have been found to lead to low reading achievement among Hispanic students.

Socioeconomic Status

There is a history of Hispanic students being associated with groups who are considered to be from a lower SES (Chiu & Chow, 2015; Hemphill & Vanneman, 2011). Students from low SES backgrounds often experience low achievement or difficulties in reading classes (Puccioni, 2015). Students of low SES often lack the resources (use of childcare, library visits, reading, computer use, television in the home, books, and literature-rich environments) that students of higher SES have (Samson & Lesaux, 2015). Without these resources, students are at a disadvantage for building language and vocabulary, which are the building blocks for reading knowledge (Samson & Lesaux, 2015).

SES is determined by family income, parents' education level, and parents' employment (Waldfogel, 2012). These factors equate to how much money the family has for essential and nonessential items. Because Hispanic students are more than likely to be

from a low-income family, they often lack resources such as the best educational tools, books to read at home, and exposure to reading, which leaves these students at a disadvantage when it comes to reading achievement (Hemphill & Vanneman, 2011).

Low SES students often attend under resourced schools that have low funding (Cramer, Pellegrini-Lafont, & Gonzalez, 2014). The quality of education in these under resourced schools is inferior to well-resourced schools, and academic achievement is lower (Cramer et al., 2014; Park & Yau, 2014; Puccioni, 2015). These schools are usually referred to as Title I schools (Cramer et al., 2014). Due to the underfunding of Title I schools, the Department of Education provides billions of dollars to these schools to increase student achievement (Troppe, Milanowski, Heid, Gill, & Ross, 2017).

From 2005 to 2015 there were slight increases in reading for all grades at the national level because of Title I funding (Troppe et al., 2017). There were also increases in reading at the national level for economically-disadvantaged students and Hispanic students (Troppe et al., 2017). Although Title I funding has helped with slight increases, there are still achievement gaps in reading for Hispanic students.

Some researchers claim that SES is the most important factor that affects the differences in academic achievement (T. C. Howard, 2010). A high SES often means that a child's speech, vocabulary, and literacy/reading skills are higher (Zhang et al., 2013). A child's reading development is highly influenced by SES (Kieffer, 2012). SES is a significant factor in English comprehension skills and reading (E. R. Howard et al., 2014). Students of a higher SES are more exposed to language that can be beneficial to reading literacy (E. R. Howard et al., 2014).

Limited English Proficiency

Being identified as LEP is a high probability for Hispanic students. Most LEP students are born in the United States (Jimenez-Castellanos & Garcia, 2017). If a student is classified as LEP, they are at a disadvantage in language development, which will also present a challenge for them when it comes to academic languages (Heppt, Haag, Bohme, & Stanat, 2014; Perez & Kennedy, 2014). Academic language is the language that is spoken in school or other academic settings and is used to instruct and obtain knowledge (Heppt et al., 2014). Reading fluency problems arise from lack of knowledge of academic language (Grasparil & Hernandez, 2015). For most students, hearing or speaking academic language occurs in the context of school (Heppt et al., 2014).

Most schools offer classes that are taught only in English, and the class materials are in English as well. This presents difficulties for the LEP student to achieve due to their barriers in English proficiency. It is difficult for the student to read materials in the language in which they are having difficulties (Allen, 2011). Reading is the most difficult subject for LEP students (Landa & Barbetta, 2017). When LEP students struggle with reading content, they miss out on background knowledge that is needed to progress through school (Allen, 2011). Comprehending or understanding what is being read requires background knowledge (Hinde, Osborn Popp, Jimenez-Silva, & Dorn, 2011). Without the background knowledge, students lack interest in the topics, and they do no stimulate an interest in reading (Hinde et al., 2011).

American-born and foreign-born LEP students have been found to have low levels of academic proficiency when they enter high school (Hwang, Lawerence, Mo, &

Snow, 2015). Being LEP has also been identified as a risk factor for dropping out of

school (Jimerson, Patterson, Stein, & Babcock, 2016). Low levels of proficiency entering

high school could result from the LEP student's low achievement in middle school and

previous grades. Due to the low levels of academic proficiency, LEP students have

unique challenges in academics, particularly anything involving reading (Ward, Gibbs,

Buttar, Gaither, & Burraston, 2015).

There do not appear to be systems of supports in place to assist LEP students

(Jimenez-Castellanos & Garcia, 2017). Recent research on LEP students has not focused

on the complexity of their student experiences. The main focus has been on linguistic

factors (Jimenez-Castellanos & Garcia, 2017). There needs to be more focus on the

factors that affect the overall development of the students inside and outside of school,

such as culture, language development, and learning in general (Jimenez-Castellanos &

Garcia, 2017).

Teachers need to be prepared to proactively help LEP students and not view them

as language deficient (Alfaro & Bartolome, 2017). The use of a student's native language

along with their second language can proactively help LEP students, but many schools

have gone to English-only programs for LEP students (Butvilofsky, Hopewell, Escamilla,

& Sparrow, 2016; Kerchner & Ozerk, 2014; Montemayor, Kupczynski, & Mundy, 2015).

There are disagreements among researchers about whether English only, bilingual, or

Spanish dominant is the best program for LEP students (Kerchner & Ozerk, 2014).

Researchers have found that bilingual programs have helped increase achievement

(Butvilofsky et al., 2016; A. M. Lopez-Velasquez & Garcia, 2017).

Culture/Family Background

A student's culture/family background influences their overall education and their reading achievement because they are able to more willingly grasp the meaning of something when they can relate to it (Fletcher, Grimley, Greenwood, & Parkhill, 2013). A student's family background predicts their success in educational settings and is associated with child development (C. E. Baker, 2016; Rojas-Lebouef & Slate, 2011). A culturally significant environment within a school is an environment that includes a teaching and learning approach that combines the home/community culture and the culture of the school (Kelley, Siwatu, & Tost, 2015). Based on cultural assumptions, Hispanic students have been found to be less educated and perform lower than their counterparts (Gandara, 2010; B. A. Rodriguez, 2014). These students can embrace the negative stereotypes of their culture, which can affect their academics (B. A. Rodriguez, 2014). Cultural differences can make students feel isolated, and those feeling can lead to them being unmotivated toward academics (Cramer et al., 2014).

Cultural values differ and can affect a child's academic achievements in either a positive or negative way (Chiu & Chow, 2010). A child's cultural values are linked to their reading achievement (Chiu & Chow, 2010). Cultural discussions with family members lead students to have greater interest in reading (Chiu & Chow, 2010; Loebick & Estrella-Torrez, 2015). If a child lacks the cultural values and discussions, this will negatively affect their academic achievement (Chiu & Chow, 2010).

Parental Involvement

A study of the literature indicated the lack of parental involvement as a factor impacting Hispanic students' reading achievement. One factor that impacts a Hispanic student's reading is the limited education of their parents, and another is the limited English language skills of their parents (Gandara, 2010; Vega, Moore, & Miranda, 2015). Also, SES factors impact parental involvement (Johnson et al., 2016; Ndebele, 2015). The higher the SES of the parents, the more likely they are to participate and be involved in their children's education (Johnson et al., 2016; Ndebele, 2015). SES is usually predicted by the parent's education level, work level, and income level (E. R. Howard et al., 2014).

One of the prominent predictors of academic achievement of students is their parent's education level (Gandara, 2010). If the parent has a low education level, it is difficult to share educational experiences and knowledge that are lacking or nonexistent (Gandara, 2010). Parents are important in early childhood development; if a child's parents are disadvantaged, they often do not see learning resources as important (Waldfogel, 2012). Also, if the parents are limited in their English proficiency, they inhibit their students from development in reading (Waldfogel, 2012). A student's literacy experiences can impact their academic success, particularly in reading (Query, Ceglowski, Clark, & Li, 2011).

Parental involvement in education includes school-based and home-based involvement (Inoa, 2017). Parental involvement tends to decrease after elementary school (Inoa, 2017). If the parent lacks confidence in their English proficiency, they will shy

away from being involved in their children's education (Johnson et al., 2016). These

parents will generally not be involved in their children's education due to work

responsibilities (Orosco & Adulrahim, 2017).

Increasing parental involvement is something that schools strive to accomplish

because it helps improve school effectiveness (Strier & Katz, 2016). Building trust is a

predictor in increasing parental involvement (Strier & Katz, 2016). Argentin, Barbetta,

and Maci (2016) tested the use of family group conferences to see if they had any impact

on increasing parental involvement. These conferences include a participatory approach

that helps families find solutions to problems that affect their lives (Argentin et al., 2016).

A meeting happens between family members, professionals, and other significant people,

and the purpose is to build relationships with families to help the child (Argentin et al.,

2016). Study findings showed the conferences increased parental involvement but did not

impact students' academic achievement (Argentin et al., 2016).

Instructional Practices

Many teachers lack knowledge of instructional practices that support LEP

students (Grasparil & Hernandez, 2015; Samson & Lesaux, 2015). With approximately

20% of people aged five and older speaking a language other than English, English as a

second language in schools is a pressing issue (Hinde et al., 2011). Teaching reading and

writing to Hispanic students is a challenge in grade school (Pu, 2010). Schools often lack

services to help eliminate the language barriers in instructional practices. Instructional

practices should serve all students, but a high percentage of students do not receive

instruction that they can understand (Grasparil & Hernandez, 2015; Perez & Kennedy,

2014). A teacher's instructional practices can help in academic achievement if the student finds interest in the practices (Riconscente, 2014). The practices have been failing because they tend to ignore or not explore the reason that students struggle, and some teachers simply lack the knowledge about instructional practices that support low achieving Hispanic students (Pu, 2010; Samson & Lesaux, 2015).

Interventions for reading are important but are often lacking due to faulty instructional strategies (Richards-Tutor, Baker, Gersten, Baker, & Smith, 2015). A teacher's lack of skills working with differentiated instructional practices is a barrier in implementing appropriate interventions (Madrid, 2011). The lack of teacher skills has been found to be prominent in the neediest schools (high populations of low SES and minority students) because these schools tend to have teachers whose students test lower on standardized exams scores and have less experience (Battey, 2013). These needy schools have a higher percentage of beginning teachers because of the bad facilities, low support from administration, and bad personnel decisions (Alexander, Jang, & Kankane, 2017; Gagnon & Mattingly, 2015). Although there is no true research on if teacher qualifications will address achievement gaps, schools still try to prevent having low qualified teachers (Palardy, 2015). Teacher performance is gauged by assessments of student performance. These assessments are used as accountability measures to help increase academic achievement, but there are no clear guidelines on how teachers should help to increase academic achievement (Alexander et al., 2017).

The lack of instruction tailored to meet the needs of Hispanic students is impacting the achievement gap (Kelley et al., 2015). Instructional strategies geared

towards helping Hispanic students need to be implemented early in a student's education and taught to educators (Hurford et al., 2016). Schools cannot change a student's home life but can control the development of teachers and quality of the schools which could help boost achievement (Samson & Lesaux, 2015).

An idea from research to help teachers would be to familiarize preservice teachers with students like the ones they will eventually teach (Brown & Rodriguez, 2017). This will help to increase critical awareness for the teacher (F. A. Lopez, 2017). Asset-based pedagogy (ABP) is a means that educators have favored to meet the needs of their students and become familiarized (F. A. Lopez, 2017). ABP pushes teachers to understand their student's prior knowledge by learning the student's identity and knowing their experiences (F. A. Lopez, 2017).

While doing research I found instructional strategies noted such as differentiated instruction, culturally responsive teaching, extended reading, after school projects, and research-based programs that can improve reading achievement. One strategy was to make sure that teachers are using differentiated instruction in the classroom to serve all students (Madrid, 2011). The lack of instruction tailored to meet the needs of Hispanic students is one reason why the achievement gap continues to exist (Kelley et al., 2015).

Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) is another instructional strategy that was noted in the literature. CRT builds on unique strengths of students' culture and helps the teacher be aware of cultural traits (Cramer et al., 2014; Stevenson & Beck, 2017). If CRT is to be effective, teachers must engage in instruction that combines the curriculum with aspects of the student's lived experiences (Kelley et al., 2015). When a teacher includes

the student's culture to demonstrate the context of the curriculum, this inclusion can help improve academic success (Cramer et al., 2014; Kelley et al., 2015). Research done by Stevenson and Beck (2017) concluded that the use of CRT helps improve academic success.

Extended reading, after school programs, and research-based programs such as word generation were all noted as a means of intervention. All of these are based on providing additional time for students to read. In order for reading instruction to be effective, the learner must actively spend time practicing the skills needed for reading (Lin, 2012). In teaching reading, the instruction should include quantity and quality. Quantity is the amount of reading and quality is the appropriate material based on the reader (Lin, 2012).

Instructional practices play an essential role in teaching, especially when it comes to Hispanic students. Faulty instructional practices lead to low academic achievement (Richards-Tutor et al., 2015). Therefore, the focus of instructional practices should be to serve all students, especially the ones with low academic achievement (Perez & Kennedy, 2014). Without proper instructional practices, not only will Hispanic students struggle, the overall student body could experience low academic achievement.

Public Data

Between 2014 and 2015, the average reading scores for the nation decreased (National Assessment of Educational Progress [NAEP], 2016). In 2015, the percentage of Hispanic students in 8th grade who were at or above proficient in reading was 21%, while 44% of White students were reading at or above proficiency levels (NAEP, 2016). The

NAEP population of students taking the assessment decreased among White and Black students but increased for Hispanic students. The Hispanic population taking the assessment will continue to increase and based on current statistics that will lead to a higher percentage of students scoring in the below proficient range.

Average reading scores for the nation decreased within the last couple of years. The Hispanic student population is continuing to grow, but the achievement gap is not closing. The most recent scores from 2015 revealed that Hispanic students were at 72% reading achievement and White students were at 88% reading achievement (TEA, 2015b). Scores from early 2016 showed that Hispanic students reading achievement was at 68% and White students reading achievement was at 84% (TEA, 2016). These statistics are relevant because as the Hispanic student population continues to grow, they are still achieving below their peers.

Implications

I used a qualitative research approach to interview reading teachers and administrators regarding their perceptions of low reading achievement among middle school Hispanic students at MSX. Based on the answers to the research questions, I designed a project that could help boost reading achievement and promote overall positive social change for MSX teachers and students and for others with similar problems. The project for my study is a 3-day professional development workshop for MSX teachers.

Summary

At the national, state, and local levels, a reading achievement gap exists between Hispanic students and their peers. SES, LEP, culture and family background, parental involvement, and quality of a teachers' instructional practices are factors that educators have found to be related to the achievement gap.

Section 1 introduced the topic of this research which was: reading teacher and administrator perspectives of middle school Hispanic student's low reading achievement. My study addressed a local problem and identified the perceptions of MSX reading teachers and administrators about MSX Hispanic low academic achievement in reading. In Section 2, the methodology of this qualitative study and the justification for it is discussed. Section 2 also discusses the selection of the participants, data collection, and data analysis. Section 3 provides a description of the project study and a review of literature related to the project study genre. Section 4 presents reflections and conclusions of this study.

Section 2: The Methodology

This qualitative study addressed MSX's reading teachers' and administrators' perceptions of low academic achievement in reading of MSX Hispanic students. A basic qualitative design was used. Data were collected through interviews to understand participants' perceptions.

Research Design and Approach

To satisfy the purpose of this study, I used a basic qualitative design. Qualitative studies focus on understanding the experiences of the study participants and are a strong part of educational research (J. S. Brooks & Normore, 2015; Merriam, 2009; Randles, 2012). Qualitative research provides holistic views of what takes place with participants (Fletcher & Nicholas, 2016; Yin, 2009).

Qualitative studies focus on multiple perspectives and explanations, and they provide insight into the perceptions and feelings of the study participants (Harry & Fenton, 2016; Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2006). This type of research includes verbal data (Gill, 2014). By using the basic qualitative design, I collected rich, detailed data to answer the following research questions:

1. What are reading teachers' perceptions of low reading achievement among Hispanic students in Grades 7-8?

2. What are administrators' perceptions of low reading achievement among Hispanic students in Grades 7-8?

A basic qualitative design was the best choice to accomplish the goals of this study. In qualitative research, the goal is to obtain a detailed understanding of a problem

or phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). Through this study, I hoped to gain a detailed

understanding of the perceptions of middle school teachers and administrators regarding

working with Hispanic students in the area of reading instruction. Merriam and Tisdell

(2016) identified four characteristics of qualitative studies: (a) They are focused on

understanding, (b) the researcher is the primary instrument, (c) they use an inductive

process, and (d) they involve gathering rich descriptions. This study incorporated all four

characteristics.

Lodico et al. (2006) described four types of qualitative research: case study,

ethnographic, grounded theory, and phenomenological. Case study research focuses on

groups or individuals to obtain information about their experiences (Lodico et al., 2006).

Ethnographic studies address interactions within cultural groups (Lodico et al., 2006).

Grounded theory studies are conducted to generate a theory (Lodico et al., 2006).

Phenomenological researchers collect data that involves a particular event or experience

(Lodico et al., 2006).

The basic qualitative design was the best choice for this study because it allowed

me to understand what the reading teachers' and administrators' perceptions are of the

low reading achievement of Hispanic students at MSX (see Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). This

understanding came from interview questions that required in-depth responses (see Yin,

2009). Qualitative research is often used in education and allows for the researcher to

investigate school performance (Yin, 2009).

Initially, I chose the phenomenological approach to conduct this study. This

approach was not a good fit because the purpose of the study was not to learn the

important meaning of something such as a particular incident or experience (see Nazir, 2016). Also, phenomenological research is based on studying the everyday experiences of the participant, and that was not the focus of this study (see Schwandt, 2015).

A quantitative approach was not the best choice for this study because it focuses on numerical data (Merriam, 2009). Also, the goal of quantitative research is different because it is based on predictions and hypothesis testing. The final reason the quantitative approach was not the best method for this study was because the data collections procedures are different. Quantitative researchers use "inanimate instruments" and qualitative researchers use interviews (Merriam, 2009, p. 18). The interviews used in qualitative research best aligned with the purpose of gathering pertinent information from individuals who have the most detailed information about working with MSX Hispanic students (see Laura, 2016).

Participants

To satisfy the purpose of this study, I used a purposeful sampling technique. The teachers and administrators were purposefully selected because they offered the most in-depth information (see Creswell, 2012). Purposeful sampling is "based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight" from the participants (Merriam, 2009, p. 77). When using purposeful sampling, participants are chosen based on the assumption that they can provide the most in-depth accounts of their experiences or perspectives related to the topic of interest (Koch, Niesz, & McCarthy, 2014).

The study was conducted at a middle school in Southeast Texas. Three certified reading teachers with at least 1 year of teaching experience and three administrators were

interviewed. This number of participants yielded in-depth information of the

phenomenon. In qualitative studies, the sample size is based on the purpose of the study

(Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009). The qualitative approach to data collection will lead to

a richly descriptive analysis of the participant's personal experiences, as well as answers

to the research questions (Creswell, 2012). The criteria for selecting the teacher

participants included the following: (a) taught seventh- or eighth- grade reading for at

least 1 year at MSX and (b) had at least 1 year of teaching experience with MSX

Hispanic students. The criteria for selecting the administrator participants included the

following: (a) served as an administrator for at least 2 years at MSX and (b) had

knowledge of the reading scores and reading initiatives at MSX. Three administrators and

six teachers met the study criteria.

To gain access to the study participants, I sought approval from Walden's

Institutional Review Board (# 07-24-18-0391823). The purpose of this approval was to

determine whether there were any risks to the participants and to seek approval of the

informed consent process (see Schwandt, 2015). Approval from the superintendent or

designee and the principal was granted. I sent a letter via email to the superintendent and

principal that included the study topic, study purpose, data collection procedures, and

interview process. Also included was information regarding participants' rights,

confidentiality, and protection from harm. I asked the principal to provide me with a list

of teachers and administrators who met the study criteria. After all approvals were

granted via email, I sent the informed consent letter of invitation to prospective

participants and asked for it to be returned to me. I selected three administrators and three

teachers who responded to my invitation and were willing to participate. By signing the consent form, the participants indicated that they were voluntarily agreeing to participate in the study and that they understood any obligations and dangers involved (see Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). As the researcher, I was straightforward and clear in explaining all aspects of the study, and I complied with the ethics of research.

To establish a researcher-participant working relationship, I first made the participant feel comfortable (see Lodico et al., 2006; Merriam, 2009). The next thing I did in building the relationship was be respectful, "nonjudgmental, and non-threatening" from the beginning (Merriam, 2009, p. 107). The last thing was to establish and maintain positive interaction with the participants (see Merriam, 2009). The working relationship between the researcher and participants is of major importance (Lodico et al., 2006). At the time of the study, I did not work at MSX. However, I knew some of the potential participants from when I worked there 3 years prior to the study as a physical education teacher. I gained participants' trust by demonstrating that I was not there to judge or evaluate them in any way, but to simply explore their perceptions regarding MSX Hispanic students' low reading achievement.

Data Collection

Data are a means of answering the research questions. "Data can become the evidence a researcher uses in support of hypotheses, assertions, claims, and findings" (Schwandt, 2015, p. 57). "In all forms of qualitative research, some and occasionally all of the data are collected through interviews" (Merriam, 2009, p. 87). Interviews are one of the three basic types of qualitative data (J. S. Brooks & Normore, 2015). By using

interviews in this study, I was able to answer the research questions from those directly affected. Interviews produced the best data from the participants' perceptions (Merriam, 2009).

The interview format was semistructured. Semistructured interviews are less structured and involve the use of open-ended questions (Merriam, 2009). This format helps to keep flexibility in what and how questions are asked (J. S. Brooks & Normore, 2015). I used an interview protocol that included the questions relating to the focus of the study (see Appendix C). This guide assisted me in staying on topic during the interview (see Merriam, 2009).

This study was qualitative, and the data collected were from the personal experiences of the participants by means of interviews. This was a beneficial way to develop an understanding of the reading teachers' and administrators' perceptions and experiences at MSX regarding the teaching of reading (see Koch et al., 2014). I collected the data through conducting audiotaped interviews. To schedule the interviews with the participants who agreed to the study, I called them. The interviews took place at a convenient time and place for participants. During the face-to-face interviews, I asked participants questions about their perceptions regarding Grade 7-8 Hispanic students' low reading achievement.

I created interview questions that would elicit data to answer my research questions. I was the primary instrument for collecting and analyzing the data. During the interviews, I took handwritten notes. At the conclusion of the audiotaped interviews, I transcribed and analyzed the data. At the conclusion of all interviews, I made note of any

key words that were recurring. To keep the data confidential, I locked the flash drive and

hard copies of data notes in a file cabinet. All participant information was kept

confidential. Each audiotaped interview was deleted after I verified the information with

the participant.

Role of the Researcher

I was the primary instrument for collecting data. As a former employee at the

study location, I suspected there may have been issues that could have affected data

collection. I had kept in contact with some of the participants, which could have affected

the data collection. These relationships could have brought bias to the study if I had not

been careful to practice objectivity. This bias could have led to obtaining data that were

not accurate (see Schwandt, 2015). The participants could have felt pressured to

participate because they knew me. The participants also could have felt hesitant to freely

share their perceptions out of fear of looking bad (see J. S. Brooks & Normore, 2015). It

was my duty to build trust and make the participants comfortable so they could freely

share their honest perceptions. I built trust by first letting the participants know that my

role was not to evaluate or judge them in any way.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data were collected through audiotaped interviews and were coded

to identify themes that were beneficial to the study. I took handwritten notes throughout

the interviews and used these as I started to code. The handwritten interview notes

assisted me in remembering any nonverbal cues, speculations, identifying characteristics,

or pressing information that I may have forgotten that could have affected data analysis

(see Merriam, 2009). After completing the interviews, I transcribed the recorded interviews in the same order in which they took place. There was no software used for this process.

Open coding was used. I read the transcripts and typed notes to generate codes that were used to identify themes or categories that related to my research questions (see Creswell, 2012; Liu, 2016). During the process, I transcribed the interview data into Microsoft Word and made notes to use when going back through the data to see if any new codes appeared (see Creswell, 2012; Liu, 2016). By going back through the data, I was able to gather detailed information about the similar themes (Creswell, 2012; Liu, 2016).

During data analysis, I ensured accuracy and credibility of the findings. One of the well-known ways to ensure credibility in qualitative studies is through member checks. Through member checks, feedback is solicited from the participants about the accuracy of the interviews (Liu, 2016). This is the most important way to avoid misinterpretation of the participants' responses and to identify any researcher bias. Member checks were used in this study to ensure accuracy and credibility (see Creswell, 2012). I shared a summary of all responses with each individual participant, so that they could inform me if any of my interpretations of data were incorrect.

Triangulation is another way to ensure credibility. Triangulation was used in the study by collecting data from different individuals such as teachers and principals (see Creswell, 2012). Triangulating the different perspectives helped me validate the themes

that were generated (see Liu, 2016). Collecting similar data from different people can

lead to varied information that supports the themes that arise (Creswell, 2012).

There were no discrepant cases found in my study. Discrepant cases are pieces of

data that do not fit into the grouped themes during data analysis or data that were listed

incorrectly (Waite, 2011). These cases would have been handled by discussing the

information with the participant and making changes if necessary. Discrepant cases

should not be ignored because they could potentially lead to another study or help to

better understand the grouped themes (Waite, 2011). In the case that a participant

requested revisions to the findings, we would have discussed the information and made

changes accordingly. Any discrepant case would have been included as part of my

findings.

Data Analysis Results

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify the perceptions of MSX

reading teachers and administrators regarding MSX's Hispanic students' low reading

achievement. The research questions were the following:

1. What are reading teachers' perceptions of low reading achievement among

   Hispanic students in Grades 7-8?

2. What are administrators' perceptions of low reading achievement among

   Hispanic students in Grades 7-8?

Six certified reading teachers and three administrators were invited to participate in the

study. Three reading teachers and three administrators participated in the semistructured

interviews.

Findings

Previous literature revealed an academic achievement gap in reading among Hispanic students and students of other cultures (TEA, 2016). Although Hemphill and Vanneman (2011) noted that the achievement gap between Hispanics and students of other cultures had not been addressed, the findings of this study revealed that a bigger achievement gap may exist between ESL/LEP students and non-ESL students. Both the teachers and the administrators from this study perceived that being Hispanic was not the factor affecting the students' achievement gap in reading; rather, the gap may be due to whether the student was ESL/LEP or non-ESL. The assumption that all Hispanic students experience difficultly in reading may be due to the classification of Hispanic students as LEP (Jimenez-Castellanos & Garcia, 2017). The participants' perceptions of the gap between Hispanic ESL/LEP students and other students may be related to a language barrier. Both teachers and administrators in this study perceived that a language barrier may be a contributing factor to Hispanic students' low reading achievement. Lastly, the teachers perceived that students' lack of interest in reading resulted in low reading achievement.

To address the gap in reading achievement, teachers and administrators in this study revealed interventions provided for low achievers. Teachers generally engaged students' interest through providing a variety of genres and authors. Teachers also allowed students to practice in small groups so that students could receive help from their peers. Decoding skills and reading comprehension were two skills that teachers focused on as interventions. The administrators perceived that Hispanic ESL students needed

additional support for English language acquisition, therefore, a language acquisition intervention was provided for such students.

The findings are aligned with the conceptual framework of my study. Cummins's conceptual framework for the empowerment of minority students provides a model on how to address the achievement gap of minority students (Cummins, 1986). Emphasis was placed on the influence of school environment and teachers' attitudes in addressing the gap (Cummins, 2001). In my study, teachers and administrators appeared to show concern for the achievement gap experienced by Hispanic students, particularly Hispanic ESL/LEP students. Teachers and administrators recognized that the problem was not in Hispanic students, but in the language barrier experienced by Hispanic students. Apart from showing concern and being aware, teachers and administrators also appeared to foster a supportive learning environment for Hispanic students through encouraging their inclusion in the mainstream classes, and through providing additional classes so that ESL/LEP students may be able to catch up with their non-ESL peers. Some teachers also recognized the struggle Hispanic students may experience in terms of culture. Teachers attempted to support Hispanic students through incorporating their culture in the reading requirements.

Teacher Theme 1: Gap Differences Between Hispanic ESL/LEP Students and Other Students

One of the interview questions asked teachers to describe their perceptions of the reading achievement gap between Hispanic students and students of other cultures. All of the reading teachers believe that the gap in reading for Hispanic students is larger

between the Hispanic students who are native English speakers and those who are not. Teacher 1 stated, "I feel there is a bigger gap between Hispanic students who are not native English speakers and their reading achievement than students who are native English speakers." Although not stated the exact way, Teacher 1, Teacher 2 and Teacher 3 shared how they believe that native English-speaking Hispanic students were not at a disadvantage when it comes to the gap in reading. Teacher 3 referenced:

There is a difference in the reading performance of my students. Those [students] who were born here [in the U.S.] and spoke English usually have no problem with reading, regardless of their culture. Some English-speaking Hispanic students have the same or better reading performance as their [non-Hispanic] classmates.

Teacher 2 expressed similar ideas and explained, "Hispanic students who were raised in an English-speaking household are mostly reading at the level they are supposed to be reading. It's the Spanish-speaking students that tend to have issues." The teachers believed the gap is more prevalent between nonnative English-speaking Hispanic students and native speaking Hispanic students. Teacher 2 also stated, "The ESL students have more difficulties with reading comprehension, and it is mainly because of their low proficiency in English." Teacher 1 added that students' native language generally contributed to their achievement in school and that grouping students according to their cultural background may not be ideal. Teacher 1 shared:

Any student who is a native English speaker tends to have better understanding of the lessons and could pick up quicker. Non-native speakers often have a hard time especially when grouped with native English-speaking classmates. It is hard for

them to keep up with the pace of their classmates. The language barrier makes it hard for them. They need to translate the English texts into Spanish then to English again to produce an output, and sometimes, something is lost in translation.

Due to the findings in this theme, it is important to note that not all Hispanic students should be grouped together or included when achievement gaps in reading are discussed. This also means that not all nonnative speakers should be included when achievement gaps in reading are discussed. The findings derived from Teachers 1 and 2 also suggest that ESL/LEP students, regardless of their culture, might read slower and might have poorer reading comprehension than native English-speaking students due to the language used in learning resources. In addition, the excerpt from the data collected from Teacher 1 suggested that the process involved in reading and comprehension might differ between ESL/LEP students and native English-speakers, again regardless of their culture. However, the phrase "lost in translation" might suggest that culture could make a difference in reading performance. A term in English, the medium of instruction in school, may not have a direct translation or the same meaning in the students' native language, which could create a gap in the reading performance of students from different cultures.

Teacher Theme 2: Language Barriers

In Theme 1, the teachers felt that the gap difference is larger between non-native speaking and native speaking English Hispanic students. When I asked what the teachers thought was responsible for the gap, the teachers mentioned different factors that they

thought contributed to the gap. The lack of support at home with help on reading skills, lack of education, language barriers, and lack of motivation were mentioned.

Language barriers were a common theme mentioned by all teachers involved in this study. Teacher 2 stated, "Students may lack confidence in their reading abilities due to the language barrier." Teacher 2 narrated that ESL/LEP students often did not volunteer to read aloud or give their answers out loud. Teacher 1 and Teacher 3 mentioned that it is difficult for the LEP students to translate what they are reading in English to Spanish and then back to English again. Teacher 1 shared:

Non-native [English] speakers take longer time with the activities that we do in class [than native English speakers]. Tests and activities are in English, of course. Non-English-speaking students take time to translate the tests in their heads to understand the question and think of an answer, then translate it back to English to write it down.

Teacher 3 also stated, "An inadequate understanding of the language and little background knowledge most times are factors." Teacher 3 added:

In my opinion, the lack of being proficient in the English language, especially among Hispanic students who are new to the country is the cause for the gap in reading achievement. It is difficult to see my students struggle to be successful in class due to a language barrier." As teachers, we must find an instruction that will help all of our students.

The difficulty with the language barrier makes reading comprehension difficult for these particular students. Theme 2 further supports the need to strive for effective

instructional practices for nonnative speaking Hispanic students. Language barriers may not just be difficult for ESL/LEP students in terms of the medium of instruction but may also be associated with students' self-efficacy in learning, as Teacher 2 cited that ESL/LEP students "lacked confidence." Language barriers may also be impacting the time ESL/LEP students need to complete school-related tasks. Therefore, the findings may suggest that ESL/LEP students might need a different pedagogy than their native English-speaking cohorts, regardless of their culture of origin.

Teacher Theme 3: Lack of Interest

In their experiences with working with LEP students, the teachers voiced similar concerns of their students not being interested in reading. Teacher 1 stated, "My students lack interest in reading because the topics may not relate to them well." Teacher 1 also stated, "I have seen frustrations in the classroom when they receive another piece of literature that they are not able to relate to." Teacher 3 stated, "Because many of our ELL students have very low reading levels, levels at an elementary level, as an eighth grader, they lack interest in reading and writing." A student's lack of interest was a shared concern between the participants.

Theme 3 findings suggest that ELL Hispanic students demonstrate a lack of interest in reading, which could impact their reading and writing performance. The students' lack of interest may be associated with the students' poor reading performance and the content of the reading material. ESL/LEP students tend to consistently be reading below their supposed reading level, as referenced by Teacher 3, which may demotivate them to accomplish not just reading tasks, but also writing tasks. The students' disinterest

may also be linked back to the medium of instruction used in school, English, in which the content may be culturally irrelevant to Hispanic ESL/LEP students.

Teacher Theme 4: Interventions

Although a reading achievement gap still exists, all three of the teachers who participated in the study discussed a few instructional strategies/interventions that are currently used in their school. For instance, Teacher 1 stated, "I provide a variety of genres and authors in my lessons. I also allow time for my students to process their reading, as well as let students talk about their books in their native language if it helps them with comprehension." Teacher 1 cited strategies in attempting to engage the interest of Hispanic ESL/LEP students. The participant believed that the variety in reading materials could provide all the students with at least one chance to choose to do well. Teacher 1 also believed in making her students comfortable to speak in class by allowing the students to use their native language to discuss the books. Teachers 2 and 3 have similar strategies in that they allow peer learning in small groups or pairs. Teacher 2 stated, "I use small group interventions, word walls, and reading out loud for fluency. I also go over practicing decoding skills." Teacher 3 stated, "I do a lot of cooperative learning in my class, especially if they struggle with reading. They will pair up with a partner on a reading passage and take turns reading while they are completing their tap and think strategies together."

At the school-wide level, there is a college readiness class (AR-Accelerated Reader) that is 45 minutes long daily. Teacher 2 described AR:

Students are able to check out two books at a time from the library based on their reading level. It is suggested that they choose what interests them and take an AR test after the read each book. Each day that they are reading, there are comprehension questions that we ask each student and they are to verbally answer based on their book.

The three teachers liked the idea of this intervention.

The findings in Theme 4 show that interventions are provided by the teachers to provide students with alternatives to be engaged in the lessons. The interventions mainly appeared to address the students' need to have their interest engaged. In addition, the interventions were focused on addressing the needs that could make the students become interested in reading. Working in pair or small groups was a common intervention shared by Teachers 2 and 3 in order to help ESL/LEP students become comfortable to participate in reading activities.

Administrator Theme 1: ESL/LEP or Non-ESL

The first interview question for administrators explored their perceptions of the reading gap between Hispanic students and students of other cultures on their campus. The main theme among the administrators was the difference between ESL/LEP and non-ESL students. Administrator 1 stated, "Reading achievement gaps between Hispanic students versus students of other cultures vary depending on two factors, ESL/LEP or non-ESL." Administrator 1 went on to say, "Hispanic students who have English as their first language score at or above those of other cultures, thus there is no achievement gap.

ESL/LEP students struggle with reading based on data from Common Assessments,

TELPAS, and STAAR results."

Administrator 2 stated, "There is a misperception of the Hispanic student reading

gap as it relates to other students, because we tend to group all Hispanic students

together." Administrator 2 also stated, "A student identified as an ELL has a larger

reading gap than a student identified as Hispanic, even though ELL students can also be

Hispanic. When you start to separate the students based on their length of time in

American schools and first language surveys, you start to see the gap exist based on

students experience with English." Administrator 3 stated, "I see there is a strong

language barrier in Hispanic students who are new to country in terms of reading in the

English language. The ELL students seem to be able to read and are avid readers in the

Spanish language."

This theme is a repeat of what the data revealed for the teacher's first theme.

Hispanic students who are ESL/LEP struggle more in reading than non-ESL Hispanic

students. Students who possess more experience with the English language seem to do

well in reading.

Administrator Theme 2: Language Barriers

During the interviews, I was interested to find out what the administrators

perceived to be responsible for the reading achievement gap. Overall, the administrators

believed that language barriers are a dominant factor of why there is a reading

achievement gap. Administrator 1 stated, "The gap occurs based on their vocabulary,

knowledge and command of the English language. Limited vocabulary delays the

advancement of both spoken and written communication thus increasing the gap as their peers accelerate." Administrator 1 also stated, "Lack of knowledge and command of the English language delays students from being able to comprehend not only lecture type lessons, but written ones as well. ESL/LEP students vary in their command of the English language. Newcomers or beginners, non-English speaking require the most support."

Administrator 3 stated, "I think the largest factor in regard to there being an achievement gap is the language barrier." This administrator commented that students with language barriers come to new schools and are expected to be able to read in both languages, which is not a realistic goal right away. Administrator 2 expresses similar thoughts and mentioned that the struggling students' lack of exposure to quality instruction in English language acquisition is negative for the ESL/LEP students.

Although the interviewed administrators had a common belief that language barriers were the dominant factor responsible for the reading achievement gap, they also mentioned that a student's prior education plays a role. When speaking of prior education, Administrator 2 stated, "a lot of these students are also new to the country and lacked prior education, if any in their native country." Administrator 2 stated, "ESL/LEP students vary in their command of the English language, from being educated in their Spanish language. If these students have been educated in their native language, the English learning transition is accelerated compared to students who have no formal education in Spanish."

Theme 2 was also a shared them among the teachers and administrators. Language barriers effect the reading achievement of ESL/LEP students. In addition, language barriers delay the advancement of spoken and written communication.

Administrator Theme 3: Interventions

The school in this study is experiencing a steady increase in ESL students according to the administrators. Administrators shared their perceptions on the interventions that they have in place to try and assist these students to be successful. They do not exclude their struggling students from general education classrooms. Administrator 1 stated, "ESL/LEP students are not excluded from the regular classroom setting, but instead are offered additional support through ESL classes in which they can graduate from one level to the next with the end result being regular classroom support only." Administrator 2 explained the intervention as "if it's an ELL student then additional instruction in language acquisition is needed. We are trying to double block those students in English acquisition classes as well as regular English Language Arts and Reading classes (ELAR)." Administrator 3 explained the intervention as a 3tiered program for their ESL students. "All level 1 students (meaning level one on Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS)- our new to country students) are served in three ways; Students are paired with an ESL reading teacher for their ELAR class, paired with and ESL teacher for the college readiness class, and they are placed in an additional ESL elective class (level 1 class). Students who are consistently meeting progress with weekly check points each Friday are able to graduate

from the level 1 class and then enter the level 2 class and are placed with TELPAS level 2 students."

Theme 3 findings revealed that there are already campus-wide interventions in place for ESL students. The interventions are tiered and they are in place to help increase reading achievement of struggling ESL students.

Summary

Similar to existing literature, the findings of my study revealed that teachers and administrators at MSX generally perceived an achievement gap in reading between Hispanic students, particularly ESL/LEP students, and their non-ESL peers. While previous literature focused on the gap between Hispanics and other cultures (TEA, 2016), findings of my study showed that the issue perceived by teachers and administrators was a language barrier. The students' inability to comprehend the language used in reading requirements may be the reason for their low achievement in reading. Existing literature revealed that the majority of LEP students are born in the United States, and that a high number of LEP students were Hispanics (Jimenez-Castellanos & Garcia, 2017). The literature may be contrary to the study findings; however, literature also revealed that Hispanic students' parents tend to use their native languages at home instead of English (Gandara, 2010; Vega, Moore, & Miranda, 2015). Culture may also be associated with the teachers' perceived lack of interest of Hispanic students in reading, as they may not be able to relate to the required reading (Fletcher, Grimley, Greenwood, & Parkhill, 2013), and/or they may be influenced by the negative stereotypes of their culture affecting their academics (B. A. Rodriguez, 2014).

Nonetheless, teachers and administrators perceived that through providing interventions, they were providing a supportive learning environment for Hispanic students. A teachers' attitude and the school environment were two elements described in Cummins's conceptual framework for the empowerment of minority students (Cummins, 1986). Further discussion of the findings will be presented in the next section.

Conclusion

In this section, I discussed the methodology for my qualitative study. I explained the criteria for selecting participants and how I gained access to the participants. I explained the data collection process that I used. I also explained the process of data analysis and the data analysis results. The results of my study provide an in-depth understanding of what the participant's perceptions are in regard to the Hispanic students that they work with.

In section 3, I will describe a professional development plan that I created based on the data analysis outcomes in section 2. The plan will address the major themes that the study participants shared about their students. The professional development plan will include information from the literature that may strengthen instructional practices, which can possibly assist with narrowing the reading achievement gap. The focus will be on language barriers, ESL/LEP, student motivation, and interventions.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

This section focuses on the research-based professional development project that I created. After completing the data analysis, I found relevant professional development literature that could address the issues that are prevalent when working with Hispanic students. The participants in this study shared challenges of working with Hispanic students that included gap differences between Hispanics and ESL Hispanics, lack of student motivation/interest, language barriers, and interventions. I researched the literature for professional development ideas to support teachers of ESL/LEP students.

Rationale

The purpose of my project was to address the issues that were part of the research findings, as well as the problem statement from Section 1. The findings suggested that the teachers need additional support teaching ESL/LEP students with language barriers. Therefore, I created a professional development presentation. Professional development is one way to support teachers (Zerey, 2018). Professional development should help teachers learn to teach in new ways that support their diverse student body (Stosich, Bocala, & Forman, 2018; Teras & Kartoglu, 2017). Professional development may also help bridge the achievement gap and help teachers be better prepared to teach their limited language students (Porras, Diaz, & Nieves, 2018).

Professional development (PD) was chosen out of four basic project genres. The project genres are evaluation report, curriculum plan, PD/training, and policy recommendation. PD was chosen because it is a research-based, effective way to boost

educational systems (Pharis, Wu, Sullivan, & Moore, 2019). When PD is implemented

correctly, it can help teachers increase their learning (Nguyen, 2019; Pricope, 2018). PD

can also help foster changes in teachers' beliefs and changes in their attitudes toward

teaching (Nguyen, 2019; Pricope, 2018). If these changes take place, they could lead to

improved student learning (Nguyen, 2019; Porras et al., 2018). Improved student learning

is one of the main goals of education. The following literature review highlights research

on professional development.

Review of the Literature

There are large volumes of studies addressing the topic of professional

development for reading teachers who teach ESL/LEP students. To conduct the literature

review, I used the Walden University library databases, including ERIC, Education

Search Complete, ProQuest, SAGE, and EBSCO. The following key words were used:

professional development, *professional development* and *ESL teacher*, *professional*

development and *Hispanic students*, *professional development* and *reading*, *professional*

development and *administrators*, and *professional development* and *principals*. The

search was conducted to address the purpose of this study, which was to identify the

perceptions of MSX reading teachers and administrators about MSX Hispanic students'

barriers to high academic achievement in reading. This review of the literature covers

how the themes described in the previous section related to existing literature on

professional development so that the purpose of the study would be addressed. This

literature review is organized into the following sections: Hispanic ESL/LEP students vs.

native English speakers, language barrier, students' interest, interventions, and professional development.

Hispanic ESL/LEP Students vs. Native English Speakers

One of the major themes revealed in this study was the distinction between native and nonnative English speakers, not the differences between Hispanic students and other students. Raufman, Brathwaite, and Kalamkarian (2019) used the term *English learner identity* to differentiate nonnative English speakers from English speakers and concluded in their literature review that the learning needs of English learners (ELs) are varied. Native English speakers from minority groups tend to have different learning needs than other Native English speakers and nonnative speakers. Raufman et al. emphasized that whatever language was spoken by the students was bounded by culture, encompassing historical, social, and political circumstances; therefore, whatever needs the students may have tend to be contextual. In the current study, the context of English-speaking Hispanic students and non-English speaking Hispanic students differed. Hence, the learning needs of the two groups of Hispanic students, as identified by most of the participants in this study, differed. Raufman et al. recommended further investigation to address the learning needs of nonnative English speakers or ELs. Two of the recommendations Raufman et al. made were assessment and placement, and instructional delivery. Both recommendations required some form of professional development for teachers and administrators (Raufman et al., 2019).

Another perspective on differentiating the students based on their English language skills rather than their culture of origin involved academic self-efficacy,

acculturation, biculturalism, and bilingualism (Polanco & Luft de Baker, 2018).

Manzano-Sanchez, Outley, Gonzalez, and Matarrita-Cascante (2018) found that

academic self-efficacy may be a stronger predictor of reading achievement and academic

performance than demographic factors. In addition, biculturalism was considered as a

strong predictor of academic achievement among Hispanic students (Polanco & Luft de

Baker, 2018). Biculturalism was considered as the desired acculturation outcome among

minority groups, and evidence indicated that Hispanic students who perceived they were

bicultural had higher academic achievement than Hispanic students who did not identify

as bicultural (Lopez, Ehly, & Garcia-Vasquez, 2002). However, no recent studies

addressed the proposition or self-efficacy and perceived bicultural identity as predictors

of reading achievement. Given the identification of different English learner identities

and different learning needs of ELs in the current study, future studies may focus on these

factors to further the knowledge on Hispanic students' reading achievement.

Language Barrier

Several Hispanic students have been identified as limited English proficient

(LEP), and most LEP Hispanic students were born in the United States (Jimenez-

Castellanos & Garcia, 2017). Difficulty with the English language may also lead to

difficulty with academic language and reading fluency, as the language generally used in

school is English (Grasparil & Hernandez, 2015; Heppt et al., 2014; Perez & Kennedy,

2014). Reading was identified as the most difficult subject for LEP students (Landa &

Barbetta, 2017). The findings of the current study revealed that reading may be difficult

for ESL/LEP students due to the translation occurring repeatedly and internally when

trying to read a required material. Teachers 1 and 3 shared their observation that ESL/LEP students tend to translate reading materials from English to Spanish and then back to English again. Translation may sometimes impact the meaning of the text, and students may miss out on relevant information, affecting reading comprehension.

Issues with reading comprehension among ESL/LEP students, rather than issues with reading ability, may be an outcome of language barrier (Jimenez-Castellanos & Garcia, 2017). Existing literature revealed that Native English-speaking Hispanic students and ESL/LEP Hispanic students have been found to have low levels of academic proficiency when they enter high school (Hwang et al., 2015); however, these findings were contrary to the findings of the current study. Hwang et al. (2015) argued that American born and foreign-born LEP students tend to have poor academic proficiency in high school due to poor academic proficiency in lower levels. Difficulty with academics was suggested to be related to issues with reading. In the current study, teachers and administrators reported that native English-speaking Hispanic students tend to do better in terms of reading and academic achievement than nonnative English-speaking Hispanic students. As evidenced in the statement of Administrator 1, "The gap occurs based on their vocabulary, knowledge, and command of the English language. Limited vocabulary delays the advancement of both spoken and written communication, thus increasing the gap as their peers accelerate."

M. D. Brooks (2018) recommended differentiated instruction in teaching students with different levels of English proficiency. M. D. Brooks emphasized the importance of assessment to determine the extent of language barrier that needed to be addressed. The

use of local standardized assessment tools in electronic format was recommended by M. D. Brooks. Local tools may indicate local contexts applicable to the specific school district, which may contribute to addressing the needs of students in the area (M. D. Brooks, 2018). One need identified by M. D. Brooks was addressing language barriers.

The contribution of an electronic format was mainly for the convenience needed by the teachers to provide immediate solutions to learning needs. The results of the assessment would be generated quicker, which may provide a quicker turnaround of identifying the issues experienced by students; hence, identification of solutions to address the issues may be quicker (M. D. Brooks, 2018). Additionally, M. D. Brooks (2018) recommended for teachers to use pedagogy that is responsive to the needs of the students. The pedagogy involves creating a space for students to be able to express themselves in class regardless of their cultural/racial background so that they do not feel judged. Similar to the perceptions of most of the participants in the current study, M. D. Brooks (2018) recommended that teachers need to be proactive in searching for reading materials involving different cultures to promote cultural sensitivity in class. Inclusion of culture in readings may promote students' comfort levels in speaking up during class, which may provide opportunity for discussion, thereby increasing comprehension of the reading assignment.

Students' Interest

Li (2016) suggested that students' interest in reading may be influenced by three components: cognitive, affective, and conative. The cognitive component refers to attitude toward reading, the affective component refers to feelings about reading, and the

conative component refers to the intention to read. Li explained that the student's attitude toward reading may be influenced by formative assessment experience and student-teacher relationships. Having a formative assessment and positive student-teacher relationship may be related to positive attitude, feeling, and intention toward reading, and in turn may be associated with higher reading achievement (Li, 2016). Woods and Gabas (2017) noted that high school students' attitude toward reading may be influenced by their reading abilities. Among Spanish-speaking students, Woods and Gabas suggested engaging student interest through encouraging recreational reading. EL students with positive recreational reading perceptions tend to have positive academic reading perceptions. Woods and Gabas also mentioned language barriers did not appear to hinder EL students' academic reading perceptions.

EL students' interest in reading may be influenced by parental involvement (Johnson, et al., 2016). Parents who are more involved in their children's education tend to have children with better attitude toward reading (Johnson et al., 2016). Parents who have higher education achievement and English proficiency also tend to influence their children to have more interest in reading (Jeynes, 2017).

This finding was reported by the teachers in the current study, but not by the administrators. Although the subject of teachers' and administrators' roles was not examined in this study, the roles may have contributed to the participants' perceptions regarding Hispanic students' reading achievement. Teachers are considered as having firsthand experience of interacting with students and are more equipped to identify

student needs; however, administrators tend to be the decision- and policymakers (Golden, 2018).

Interventions

Teachers and administrators in the current study revealed the efforts made to provide interventions for ELs who struggle with reading. The teachers reported that a universal intervention was not applicable for all ELs, and that trial and error was needed to determine which method would address the learning needs of ELs. All three teachers recommended providing different training and professional development for teachers to become familiar with helpful pedagogy such as small group instructions an peer learning.

In young first grade Spanish-speaking ELs, small group instructions appeared to significantly improve reading outcomes based on pretest and posttest scores (D. L. Baker, Burns, Kame'enui, Smolkowski, & Baker, 2016). Although Brooks (2018) recommended localized tools to aid ELs, D. L. Baker et al. (2016) found that commercially available supplemental English programs focused on developing lower-order thinking skills and a specifically developed supplemental program focused on developing higher-order thinking skills did not yield different results in terms of improving first grade ELs reading skills. Both small group programs significantly improved reading skills, but the reading skills scores of students from both programs did not differ significantly (Baker et al., 2016).

Peer learning may also be helpful pedagogy in increasing reading skills among ELs (McIlwain, Burns, & White, 2016). Apart from being cost-effective for schools, peer-based instruction was also established to improve reading, math, and social skills

through student-centered pedagogy (Ahn, White, Monroy, & Tronske, 2018). Peer-based

instruction may require additional professional development for teachers to have proper

implementation (Lee & Davis, 2018). Peer-based instruction involves informal

instruction and collaboration among students, which teachers may use as basis for

formative assessments (Lee & Davis, 2018). In adult ELs, peer-led learning improved

student autonomy in learning along with improving English proficiency; however, the

results were only for oral language fluency (Lee & Davis, 2018).

Professional Development

Research on professional development efforts has shown that professional

development activities and other training methods are developed regularly in education

(Sysko, 2018). Professional development (PD) is valuable in education, especially with

the consistent changes that occur (Attebury, 2018; Phothongsanan, 2018). Not only does

the education system have constant changes, the needs of learners and their learning

styles constantly change (Pricope, 2018; Yesilcinar & Cakir, 2018). To keep up with

these changes, educators need to continuously learn (Pricope, 2018; Yurtseven & Altun,

2017). The continuous learning of educators comes from active participation in PD

activities.

PD helps to improve teachers' teaching practices (Porras et al., 2018; Shaha,

Glassett, Copas, & Huddleston, 2016). PD helps teachers grow professionally by self-

reflection and exchanging ideas and knowledge with other teachers (J. Baker, Chaseling,

Boyd, & Shipway, 2018; Porras et al., 2018). PD can benefit the teachers, their

colleagues, and the educational system at a school (Sysko, 2018). PD also helps teachers

expand their knowledge and skills so that they can have a successful impact on the students they teach (Shaha et al., 2016; Zareie, Nasar, Mirshahjafari, & Liaghatdar, 2016).

PD is designed to keep professionals up to date and knowledgeable of new trends and skills in their field (Nasreen & Odhiambo, 2018; Nguyen, 2019). PD can increase a teacher's knowledge, but it might not change their practice (Bartlett, 2017; Lokita Purnamika Utami & Prestridge, 2018; Matherson & Windle, 2017). Although PD may not change an educator's practice, it has the ability to if it is implemented correctly, and the teachers have a choice in the PD that they are participating in (Matherson & Windle, 2017; Zerey, 2018). If PD does not change an educator's practice, then the intended changes will likely not take effect (Matherson & Windle, 2017; Zerey, 2018). For PD to change a teacher's knowledge or instructional strategies, the PD needs to factor in what teachers already know, what their personal experiences and attitudes are about PD, what the school administrator wants, the opportunity for follow-up regarding student achievement, and whether the PD proves to be effective (Lavigne, Shakman, Zweig, & Greller, 2016; McKeown, Abrams, Slattum, & Kirk, 2016; Scarparolo & Hammond, 2018). Principals play an integral role in PD regarding instructional improvements and student achievement (Lavigne et al., 2016; Stosich et al., 2018). Therefore, principals need to stay up to date on the needs of their campus and PD initiatives.

PD consists of formal and informal experiences (Nasreen & Odhiambo, 2018; Sysko, 2018). Formal PD activities include training programs, conferences, and seminars. Informal PD includes debates, discussions, and research (Nasreen & Odhiambo, 2018).

PD activities also include workshops, training courses, research, and professional networks (Nasreen & Odhiambo, 2018). Whether formal or informal, the most effective PD is kept in place over time (Attebury, 2018; Glover et al., 2016; Nasreen & Odhiambo, 2018). PD cannot be implemented for a short amount of time and expected to work. It takes time for the effects to start appearing (Attebury, 2018; Glover et al., 2016; Nasreen & Odhiambo, 2018). There are also reform-type PD activities that include mentoring and coaching (Razak, Dalwinder, Halili, & Ramlan, 2016). Reform-type activities are preferred because they are reviewed to see if they are effective and that the activities engage teachers; whereas sometimes with traditional PD, the teachers are not engaged or the context is irrelevant (Razak et al., 2016).

PD is a valuable, research-based tool that can help educators continuously enhance their attitudes, their knowledge, and their skills (Buendia & Macias, 2019; Nasreen & Odhiambo, 2018; Nooruddin & Bhamani, 2019). The learning that can occur during PD can positively impact student learning. Significant improvements in education have been found to be the result of successful PD (Pharis et al., 2019).

Project Description

After approval is received from the Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction to conduct PD training, I will present a 3-day training for MSX educators and administrators. The training will take place in the commons area of the school during professional development days prior to the beginning of the school year (Appendix A). The PD will focus on effective research-based ways to teach reading to native English-speaking ELL students and nonnative ELL students.

My primary role in the PD will be facilitator. I will be responsible for preparing all presentation materials. The materials will include sheets of paper to sign in, extra writing utensils, post-it-notes, evaluation/feedback forms, needed technology, poster boards, butcher paper, and tape.

One potential barrier to this PD could be the teachers' lack of interest and active engagement. Sometimes teachers are automatically disengaged because they view PD as a waste of time or feel it will not help improve their teaching practices (Baird & Clark, 2018). Another potential barrier could be that the technology I plan to use is not working on the day of the presentation.

As a potential solution to engage teachers, I could meet with administrators and other presenters to discuss what presentation types have been successful in the past for engaging the participants. I will do a mock presentation and get feedback. I will also take note of the feedback that participants share throughout the PD days so that changes can be incorporated as needed.

As a potential solution to technology not working, I will check the technology equipment the day before and the morning of the presentation. In advance, I will print several copies of notes pages of the PowerPoint presentation so that the participants will have a visual of the material. I will also make sure to print several copies of the other handouts that will be passed out.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

After receiving approval to conduct the PD training, I will contact the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction who approved me to conduct my study at

MSX. We will discuss the current findings from this study, and I will explain the goals and objectives of the PD. The process of implementing this PD will be ongoing as issues or changes may arise. I will need to plan and organize the structure of the 3-day training, as well as discuss which days I could conduct the PD. On day 1 of the training, I will focus on sharing the findings from my study (Appendix A). I will also share what I found in the current literature regarding ELL/LEP students. On day 2 of the training, I will focus on research-based strategies (Appendix A). On day 3 of the training, I will focus on research-based teaching practices (Appendix A). I would also need to speak with the building administrator to discuss reservations for a training location and equipment. Once the details are finalized and approved, the building principal and I will send the date, time, and place details out to the staff of MSX.

Project Evaluation Plan

At the conclusion of each day of training, I will provide all participants an evaluation form (Appendix A) so that they can share their feedback. The feedback is a type of formative assessment that will serve to let me know how the teachers felt about the session, if they gained new knowledge, and to generate ideas about what needs to be improved upon. Formative assessments are an important part of the learning process (van der Nest, Long, & Engelbrecht, 2018). The assessments provide important feedback in a timely manner (Garcia & Lang, 2018; van der Nest et al., 2018). The feedback could help me determine what adjustments need to be made (see Garcia & Lang, 2018). I will use the evaluations as a guide when planning to conduct future presentations.

There will be a follow up meeting during district professional learning community days. The teachers will discuss in detail relevant data collected from evaluations and collaborate how to proceed with the strategies they have implemented. The follow up meeting can provide feedback that will be used to determine each of the teacher's strengths and struggles with implementation, as well as determine the focus of future PD.

Project Implications

This project has potential social change implications that could improve the academic achievement of ELL/LEP students. This project could also increase the knowledge and instructional practices of the teachers and administrators regarding the teaching of ELL/LEP students. The strategies discussed in the PD (Appendix A) are considered best teaching practices. If the use of these practices are successful, academic success could be improved and achievement gaps could be narrowed (see Powell, Cantrell, Malo-Juvera, & Correll, 2016; Stevenson & Beck, 2017). If the PD is successful at MSX and academic achievement approves, then district personnel could recommend that the PD be facilitated on other campuses. In addition, schools with similar demographics and issues could tailor the PD to meet the needs of their learners and educators. The teachers who experienced significant improvement in student achievement could work collaboratively with struggling teachers so that they too may have a greater impact on student achievement.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

This project study addressed the perceptions of reading teachers and administrators concerning Hispanic students' low reading achievement at a local school identified as MSX. The responses to the research questions led to the creation of my project. This section includes the strengths and limitations of the project study; recommendations for alternative approaches; what I learned about the research process; my self-reflection of learning and growth as a scholar, practitioner, and project developer; my reflection on the importance of the work overall; and implications, applications, and directions for future research.

Project Strengths and Limitations

One of the strengths of this project study design was that I was able to meet face-to-face with the participants and explore their perceptions of the Hispanic student reading achievement gap. Conducting face-to-face interviews allowed me to observe the emotions of the participants as they shared information. The face-to-face interviews also allowed me to guide the questioning and ask for clarification as the interviews were conducted. By conducting the interviews, I was able to collect pertinent data that can potentially be addressed by professional development (PD).

Another strength was that the cost associated with this PD will be minimal. The PD will be held at the school in the commons area; therefore, teachers will not have to pay for out-of-district travel costs. All equipment needed will be furnished by the school.

Anything that is not furnished by the school, such as writing utensils, and sticky notes, will be purchased by me and will be low cost.

A limitation to the project could be teachers not endorsing the PD. Some teachers approach PD with a negative attitude and do not fully participate (Baird & Clark, 2018; Razak et al., 2016). Once the assessment results from their students are shown, it is my hope that the teachers will take an interest in the PD and its focus on current ELL/LEP research. In addition, the PD may spark interest when research-based strategies are introduced that have helped struggling students who possess similar characteristics to those on their campus.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

My study was focused on gathering perceptions from reading teachers and administrators regarding a reading achievement gap in Grades 7-8. Because reading class is not the only class that requires reading, the study could be broadened to obtain input from other subject area teachers such as math, science, and social studies. Findings may be used to answer the question of whether the ELL/LEP students are doing well in other classes that require grade-level reading skills. The PD could be tailored to include all subject area teachers.

An alternative approach to the PD suggested in this study would be for me to conduct additional research on methods to improve ELL/LEP teachers' teaching strategies. There are other practical ways to improve teaching strategies that do not involve traditional models of PD, such as online PD, instructional coaches, and classroom

learning labs (peer-to-peer learning; (Kuhlmann, 2018). I could discover that there are alternative ways that are beneficial, time efficient, and financially efficient.

Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change

Scholarship was the driving force behind the completion of this study. I had to ask questions of more experienced researchers, particularly my committee members, to gain the needed knowledge and hone my research skills that were required to complete this study. I learned that the process of research is rigorous and requires persistence.

I also learned how to be a more proficient writer throughout this process. Prior to this project, I thought I was a strong writer. This level of writing exposed my weaknesses. I feel I gained a wealth of knowledge about writing at the doctoral level.

I have always considered myself analytical, and I believe that trait helped me while conducting this research. I was able to analyze data and use those results to create a project. By using the results of data analysis to create the project, I feel this was a beneficial way to begin thinking of research-based interventions that could help to impact educators and their students.

During the research process I knew that I had to guard against bias and not assume that I knew the answers to the research questions. By doing this, I was able to find out what the teachers and administrators thought concerning the Hispanic student achievement gap. I was able to obtain in-depth answers that addressed the research questions. The in-depth answers led to this project. After the data analysis, I was able to create a PD plan that was research-based and could help with increasing academic

achievement for the LEP/ELL Hispanic students by improving their teachers'
instructional strategies.

Learning how to develop a PD plan was thought provoking. I had to consider
which strategies and information were the most relevant according to the problem
statement and the findings in my research. I had to consult with my committee members
to learn how to gather beneficial information for the PD.

Although I am not currently in a leadership role, this journey has helped me
acquire leadership skills that will be beneficial as I pursue leadership roles in education.
Leaders have to consider what is needed by their schools, including the teachers and the
students. A leader has to have a collaborative mentality. In addition, a leader must be
accepting of change because changes constantly occur in education. Completing this
study forced me to view things from a leadership perspective.

Reflection on Importance of the Work

Data prior to and after my research indicated that an achievement gap exists
between Hispanic students and their counterparts. Because of the achievement gap, I
wanted to explore what teachers and administrators perceived to be the issue so that
changes could take place to close or narrow the gap. As an educator, I hope that all
learners will achieve at or above state standards in reading and other subject areas. For
me to assist in academic changes, I needed to learn how to conduct research and analyze
current literature on the topic of education. By learning how to be a researcher, I am able
to make a positive contribution to education, including finding and generate solutions to

problems that may arise, developing or supplementing teachers' knowledge, and improving practices in education.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

My goal for this project study was to explore the perceptions of teachers and administrators concerning the Hispanic student achievement gap on their campus. I concluded from data collection and analysis that the issue does not affect all Hispanic students; it mainly affects those students who are identified as LEP/ELL. In response to that revelation, I searched the literature for interventions that have been used to assist this particular group of learners. The research, along with the answers to my research questions, led to the creation of my PD project. My research efforts could help familiarize teachers and administrators with new research-based strategies that can influence positive social change at MSX and other campuses with similar demographics.

A recommendation for future research could involve lower grade levels and participants from different campuses. Research concerning lower grade levels could reveal different issues than those that were discovered at the middle-school level. Future research could also include exploring what teachers are taught concerning educating LEP/ELL students during their teacher preparation programs. By exploring what the teachers are being taught, researchers can offer suggestions to improve weaknesses that exist when teaching and preparing new LEP/ELL educators. With the growing number of Hispanic students in the United States, research on educating students who are also LEP/ELL should continue.

Conclusion

This study was conducted to explore reading teachers' and administrators' perceptions of Hispanic students' low reading achievement. After the data were analyzed and the research questions were answered, the literature was reviewed and a PD project was created. Throughout this journey, I grew as a scholar, writer, researcher, practitioner, and leader. I feel better prepared to research and offer solutions on other educational topics that may arise in my role as an educator. I consider myself a lifelong learner, and I hope that I will be able to positively impact social change for years to come.

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Appendix A: The Project

Professional Development Agendas for Day 1, Day 2, and Day 3

Day 1 Agenda:

8:00-8:15 Sign-In

8:15-8:30 Welcome/Create Session Norms

8:30-8:45 Get to know you activity

8:45-9:25 ELL Reflections

9:25-9:40 Break

9:40-11:00 Study Findings/Current Research

11:00-12:15 Lunch (on your own)

12:15-12:45 Refection on morning

12:45-1:00 Questions, comments, concerns, evaluation

Day 2 Agenda:

8:00-8:15 Sign-In

8:15-8:30 Welcome/Review Norms

8:30-8:45 Review from Day 1

8:45-9:25 Best Teaching Practices

9:25-9:40 Break

9:40-11:00 Teaching Practices

11:00-12:15 Lunch (on your own)

12:15-12:45 Refection on morning

12:45-1:00 Questions, comments, concerns, evaluation

Day 3 Agenda:

8:00-8:15 Sign-In

8:15-8:30 Welcome/Review Norms

8:30-8:45 Review from Day 2

8:45-9:25 Best Teaching Practices

9:25-9:40 Break

9:40-11:00 Teaching Practices

11:00-12:15 Lunch (on your own)

12:15-12:45 Refection on morning

12:45-1:00 Questions, comments, concerns, evaluation

Appendix B: Professional Development Presentation Evaluation

Title of this Session:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
This session was well planned and organized.				
The facilitator demonstrated knowledge and understanding of the topic.				
The session deepened my understanding of ELLs and/or I learned something new.				
This session/workshop was relevant to my needs.				
I will be able to apply the content and/or strategies of the session in my classroom.				
Please add additional comments below:				
What will you take back to your campus or implement in your classroom in the coming weeks? 1. 2. 3.				
What suggestions do you have to make the content of the presentation more effective?				

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Thank you for volunteering your time today. You have been asked to participate in this interview session because of your experience as a certified teacher who has knowledge of teaching Hispanic students. You have signed the informed consent and e-mailed it to me.

Do I have your permission to record this interview?

Teacher RQs

1. What general difficulties do you think students experience in reading?

2. How do you deal with difficulties?

3. Describe your experiences of teaching reading to Hispanic students.

4. Have you identified any differences in reading performance between Hispanic students and students of other cultures? If yes, please explain what the differences are.

5. What instructional strategies do you use in your classroom to help with reading?

6. What instructional strategies do you think would help improve reading achievement?

7. Is there anything else that you would like to add before ending this interview?

Administrator RQs

1. Have you identified any differences in reading performance between Hispanic students and students of other cultures? If yes, please explain what the differences are.

2. What do you think is responsible for the existing achievement gap?

3. What is being done to close the reading achievement gap?

4. Is there anything else that you would like to add before ending this interview?