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Leadership for the Implementation of Standards-Based Grading in Asian Expatriate High Schools

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Walden University

College of Education

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Virginia L. Prairie

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2020

Abstract

Leadership for the Implementation of Standards-Based Grading in Asian Expatriate High Schools

by

Virginia L. Prairie

MS, Nova Southeastern University, 2010

BS, Appalachian State University, 1999

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

May 2020

Abstract

Expatriate high schools in Asia needed to explore administrative practices used in securing teacher buy-in of standards-based grading and reporting (SBGR). School leaders in this region needed help addressing the challenges of change and securing teacher buy-in of SBGR to successfully transform grading practices in their schools to improve learning for all students. The purpose of the study was to explore the reasons described by administrators for SBGR implementation, administrative practices used to facilitate teacher implementation of SBGR, and the mechanisms put in place to support successful implementation. The exploration of administrators' perceptions and strategies provided insight into the planning needed to successfully implement strategic change. The conceptual framework for this qualitative multicase study design was the expectancy-value theory. Administrative leaders from 3 expatriate high schools of similar size and programming in East Asia provided the data through semistructured interviews. The interviews were transcribed and coded into words, phrases, or topics before being organized into categories of emergent themes or patterns aligned to each research question. The resulting themes were (a) knowing the why, (b) hiring and retaining the right teachers, (c) effective communication with all stakeholders, (d) professional development, (e) a focus on assessment and feedback, (f) the use of teachers as leaders, and (g) leaders as empathetic learners. The presentation of these practices can be used by school leaders to build the climate necessary to implement successful change to build a better school culture and climate to improve student learning.

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Dedication

I dedicate this doctoral study to my husband, Shane Prairie; my son, Satchel Prairie; and my daughter, Ella-Rae Prairie, all of whom supported me throughout this entire journey. I would like to thank my parents who taught me to persevere and never stop smiling. I want to thank my brother for his support and patience. I also thank my friends and colleagues who are my international family. Working and living overseas is not for everyone. I am lucky to have met, worked with, and played with many fascinating, wonderful people over the years and over the continents.

Acknowledgments

This has not been an easy journey. Setbacks, work schedules, and travel were competing with the timeline of this degree. I would not have been able to achieve this milestone without the support and encouragement of my committee chair, Dr. Anastasia D'Angelo. I would also like to thank my second committee chair, Dr. Andrew Alexson, for his reassurance and kindness. This support system never let me give up and I am forever grateful.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The function of high school could be described as the transition from the foundational learning of elementary and middle school to college and career readiness. While foundational education leaders and teachers have embraced school reform that reflects proficiency of content and skill-based standards, high school leaders have been careful to include strategic changes that would shift from traditional learning to proficiency or standards-based learning (Pollio & Hochbein, 2015; Townsley, Buckmiller, & Cooper, 2019). High school teachers are known to be significantly more content-based and traditional in their teaching practices than elementary and middle school teachers; therefore, teachers often meet reform in high schools with frustration and apathy because it is considered a *second order change* (Wiles, 2013). Second order changes challenge longstanding, traditional practices that require teachers to adopt and implement a very different practice or approach to learning and grading (Carter, 2016; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2006). Transformational changes like this are "extremely difficult to successfully lead, implement, and thus, have to be managed delicately in order to succeed" (Carter, 2016, p. 2).

The findings from this study provide information regarding the barriers and attitudes perceived by teachers as well as the strategies used to create buy-in for the transition from traditional to standards-based grading and reporting (SBGR). I conducted this study because recent research indicated that there was a discrepancy between achievement as reported by teachers and achievement as evidenced on external testing,

such as Advanced Placement (AP) assessments and similar standards-based, criterion-reference assessments (Brookhart et al., 2016; Guskey, 2002a). The implications of the study could lead to positive social change by creating a more reliable system to indicate actual student learning and validity in grades.

Chapter 1 includes the background information necessary to understand the history of the problem. Supported by current research, the problem, the purpose of the study, and the research questions are aligned with the conceptual framework. Definitions relevant to the study follow a discussion of the nature of the study. Furthermore, assumptions, scope and delimitations, and limitations are all identified in Chapter 1. Finally, the significance and potential for positive social change are stated.

Background

Standards-based reform has been steadily growing as a prominent feature throughout schools worldwide since the 1990s after the seminal report for this reform from the Reagan administration, *A Nation at Risk* was published in 1983. This report concluded that the U.S. education system was failing to properly educate students. Recommendations for new standards, more rigor, and better teacher preparation were made (Wixson, Dutro, & Athan, 2003). Throughout the next 10 years, states and districts worked to reform curriculum and learning in a variety of unsuccessful ways: A systemic approach to reform was needed. A movement began in the United States with the Improving America’s Schools Act of 1994, which forced schools to show evidence of a focus on learning for all students (Wixon et al., 2003).

Diane Ravitch, former Assistant Secretary of Education, may have been the strongest advocate of the standards movement. Ravitch argued that, in order to improve practice, educators should have similar common standards as other fields, such as construction workers. With the support of Ravitch, developers from the National Council of Teachers of English and the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics used the curricula from various countries as a guide to ensure rigorous outcomes that could be defined as “world class” (Ravitch, 1992). As such, standards that addressed mastery of content at particular developmental stages were introduced as the Common Core State Standards.

Chapter 2 of this study includes a review of research related to traits and roles of high school leaders in international schools, traditional schooling and the standards-based movement, leadership while transitioning to SBGR, and teacher buy-in during change. The gap in practice that I addressed in this study was the shared experiences of administrators of international schools in Asia as they began implementing initiatives to not only align learning to standards but to grade and report on the proficiency of those standards. This study was needed because international schools need to better understand how similar schools have attempted to implement change that will improve learning for all students.

Problem Statement

School leaders are responsible for guiding the teachers, students, and parents toward the shared vision while managing staff, conflicts, and a budget. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015) surveyed primary and secondary educators in the United States and found that teachers depend on their principals to be personable and trustworthy instructional leaders who are committed to improving student learning. Browning (2014) stated that transformational change, such as standards-based grading and reporting, occurs when "leaders and followers are united in their pursuit of higher-level goals" (p. 390).

The problem that drove this study was the need to explore administrative practices used in securing teacher buy-in of SBGR at expatriate high schools in Asia. During the 2017 Curriculum Leaders Conference in Bangkok, Thailand, directors of learning at various East Asian Regional Council of Schools (EARCOS) schools indicated there was inadequate understanding of administrative practices to address buy-in of SBGR (Cook, Madani, O'Neill, & Stephens, 2017). While there is significant research focused on primary teachers' implementation of standards, there remains a gap in the literature around how school leaders promote and support the successful implementation of SBGR in high schools. Briggs, Russell, and Wanless (2017) found that school leaders should acknowledge teachers' professional identity as well as the context of the initiative, such as agency and control over decision-making. Furthermore, Townsley et al. (2019) concluded that high school leaders are continuously "weighing the odds" (p. 282) of

change when parents feel that the status quo is fine and when teachers express anxiety, fear, and mistrust in the perceived change. Although recent researchers have released strategies that help the migration from the traditional to a standards-based approach, school leaders in expatriate schools in the EARCOS region are still struggling to successfully implement these strategies in schools that admit a large majority of high-achieving students who further matriculate to Ivy League and similar schools in the United States. A gap in the literature exists regarding strategies that school leaders use to address the challenges of changes related to SBGR and promote teacher buy-in of SBGR in high-achieving high schools.

High schools moving toward a SBGR model have based their initiatives on research by experts who agree that grading should reflect proficiency toward achievement of standards rather than behaviors, such as completion and memorization (Townsley, 2017). Ajayi (2015), for example, found that high school English teachers were not against the adoption of standards but did not feel that they had been given adequate professional learning and understanding of the standards. Recent research indicates that most New England states as well as several midwestern states in the United States have created initiatives to move toward proficiency-based grading and reporting to ensure student readiness for college and careers (Blauth & Hadjian, 2016). School leaders in expatriate high schools in Asia need help addressing the challenges of change and securing teacher buy-in of SBGR in order to successfully transform grading practices in their schools to improve learning for all students (Gray & Summers, 2016).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative, multiple case study was to explore administrative practices used to facilitate teacher implementation of SBGR at expatriate high schools in the EARCOS region. I conducted the case studies in three high-achieving, expatriate high schools in East Asia by gathering the perceptions and strategies of three school leaders from each of the schools studied. The exploration of administrators' perceptions and strategies provided insight into the planning needed to successfully implement strategic change. High school administrators' experiences with the challenges of implementation of SBGR surfaced through formal qualitative interviews (see Appendix B).

The results of the study provided a greater understanding of the experiences and strategies of administrators when addressing the implementation of change initiatives, such as SBGR. Through this greater understanding, I identified specific themes as beneficial strategies shared by the participants in this study. These strategies could be valuable to school leaders interested in transitioning their school from traditional grading to a standards-based approach. Furthermore, the findings could help school leaders identify strategies needed to implement any successful change initiative.

Research Questions

As stated previously, many high school leaders in the EARCOS region are unsure of how to lead an initiative from traditional to standards-based grading; however, there are leaders in the region who have had success in this transformational change. Therefore, I interviewed leaders from three EARCOS region schools that are successfully

transitioning from traditional grading and reporting to SBGR. The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: What administrative practices are used to address the need for change related to the implementation of SBGR?

RQ2: How do administrators support teachers in the implementation of SBGR?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was the expectancy-value theory. First modeled by Eccles and Wigfield (2002), I used this theory to consider how leaders can create the climate that supports SBGR as improved practice in this study. According to Loh (2019), Eccles and Wigfield described expectancy for success as belief in self-competence about achieving new learning in specific areas, such as a change initiative, either immediately or in the future.

Priniski, Hecht, and Harackiewicz (2017) stated that a significant predictor of success includes the teachers' expectancies of success as well as their values related to intrinsic motivation, attainment, and utility. Intrinsic value refers to teachers' enjoyment and interest in learning and implementing a practice that is very different from their current practice (Priniski et al., 2017). Attainment or achievement value refers to the importance of doing well as a new learner and implementer of this new practice and not just giving the allusion of change, whether knowingly or unknowingly (Priniski et al., 2017). Utility value refers to the whether the teacher believes that this new practice is useful for themselves, their career, and their students (Priniski et al., 2017). Teachers

must also determine their value of cost, which is the amount of time, effort, and emotions that it will take to learn and implement a new practice (Priniski et al., 2017). If teachers fail to see the values of change then buy-in, and ultimately, the success of the initiative will also fail.

The expectancy-value theory provided me with a framework through which to view the administrators' beliefs and attitudes of teachers to identify teacher buy-in toward the implementation practices that will improve student learning based on the values that teachers may hold regarding mandated initiatives. I used this theory to help identify teachers' motivations toward the reform initiative and describe the barriers and attitudes that prevented them from implementing SBGR in their classrooms. Finally, the theory provided a framework that could be focused on how administrators can apply strategies that can help intrinsically motivate teachers to implement practices that will improve student learning.

Nature of the Study

In this study, I employed a qualitative, multisite case study design. According to Gustafson (2017), a multiple case study requires a researcher to collect similar data in order to compare and contrast the problem in multiple environments. Each school implementing SBGR has a unique story behind its purpose to shift away from traditional grading and reporting; using a narrative research approach in this multisite case study helped tell those stories. The case study method uncovers the *how*, the *why*, and the results of an implemented phenomenon and allows for in-depth exploration (Creswell,

2014; Schramm, 1971; Yin, 2014). Other qualitative and quantitative methods did not align with the purpose and research questions of this study.

The methods used in this study provided ample data from a combination of individual interviews of leaders and document reviews of strategic plans related to SBGR at three high-performing expatriate high schools in Asia. Semistructured interviews with leaders allowed for greater understanding of their perceptions of change initiatives and the strategies used that resulted in the success or challenges of the initiative. I used the purposeful sampling of nine participants as well as document reviews to collect and analyze data to identify and document themes. Using multiple data sources contributed to a more reliable study by ensuring that results of the interviews and corresponding document reviews matched.

Definitions

For the purposes of this study, I identified the following terms as necessary for a complete understanding of the various components of the study:

East Asia Regional Council of Overseas Schools (EARCOS): An international organization of 179 full member schools and 154 associate members in the East Asia region that offer English as the primary language of instruction and serve over 148,000 students from pre-Kindergarten through Grade 12 (The East Asia Regional Council of Schools, 2020).

Grading: The way teachers report academic performance in a subject area (Schneider & Hutt, 2014).

International school: A school that adopts and maintains an accredited national curriculum from another country to provide education for expatriate and host country students (Roberts & Mancuso, 2014).

Standards-based grading and reporting (SBGR): The use of current data to communicate proficiency of content or skills that are based on a set of learning standards (Carter, 2016).

Traditional grading and reporting: The use of a set of symbols, words, or numbers to designate different levels of performance (Guskey, 2009).

Assumptions

Several assumptions guided the design and purpose of this study. First, I assumed that a list of strategies to promote teacher buy-in of SBGR would benefit school leaders who may decide to lead a transition from traditional grading to standards-based grading. Another assumption was that the sample from the EARCOS region of schools represented a larger body of the EARCOS schools as well as the schools that are considered in the top tier of EARCOS member schools (see Table 1). Watts (2018) defined top tier international schools as those with an association with the U.S. State Department Office of Overseas Schools, with over 150 employed faculty. In the EARCOS region, 10 schools currently fit these criteria. Finally, I assumed that the participants would give honest responses during the interviews.

Table 1

Demographic Information of Schools Represented in this Study

School	Location of School	Number of Years in Existence	Number of Students in the High School Division
A	EARCOS Region	Between 50–55	More than 500
B	EARCOS Region	Between 65–70	More than 500
C	EARCOS Region	Between 50–55	More than 500

Note. The EARCOS region of schools consists of 179 schools in East Asia (The East Asia Regional Council of Schools, 2020).

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of the study was focused on high school leaders. High school leaders can be represented as principals, assistant principals, superintendents, curriculum coordinators, or directors of learning. Each leader who participated in the study was in their role during the implementation of the transition from traditional to standards-based grading. Delimitations are features determined by the researcher's decisions when designing the study (Simon & Goes, 2018). Therefore, one delimitation was all participants were high school administrators. High schools in the EARCOS region that only provide International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum were excluded from this study. Schools offering AP courses were included as possible participants. The transition from traditional grading to the IB Diploma Programme could be considered different since the IB already has the processes and resources needed to successfully transition as a school.

Limitations

The limitations for this study included the lack of EARCOS region high schools that have fully transitioned their grading system from traditional to standards based. Several schools are beginning the transition, and many are curious about the process; therefore, there was a small pool of schools to recruit from for participation in interviews.

Another limitation was proximity. East Asia is a rather large region of the world, and the participating schools were located in different countries. Interviews had to take place on weekends and holidays due to the need to video conference across time zones.

Significance

School leaders might benefit from the findings of this study by using the results to inform transformational change and build acceptance by teachers for mandated initiatives. This study could lead to social change by presenting the practices of leaders of expatriate high schools to build the climate necessary to implement successful change. Furthermore, as expatriate high schools are preparing students for an unknown future, school leaders need to identify barriers that could block trust and acceptance between teachers and leaders to build a better school culture and climate to improve student learning.

Summary

In Chapter 1 of this study, I provided an overview of the challenges of high school leadership as they consider transitioning from traditional to SBGR in expatriate schools in the East Asia region. The problem and purpose of this study was identified and

research questions were presented to explore the perceptions and experiences of administrators as they revisit the successes and challenges of strategic change. In this chapter, I also introduced the conceptual framework of the expectancy-value theory.

The study includes five chapters that align to the problem, purpose, research questions, and conceptual framework located in Chapter 1. In the next chapter, I will review the historical background of international schools and grading as well as current research around grading and creating a culture that embraces transformational change such as SBGR.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In Chapter 2, I focus on the elements of the problem addressed in the study: The need to explore administrative practices used in gaining teacher buy-in of SBGR at expatriate high schools in Asia. The purpose was to help administrators address teacher implementation of strategic change and, more specifically, SBGR at their schools. The literature review is organized into the following sections: (a) traits and roles of high school leaders, (b) leadership in international high schools, (c) traditional schooling and the standards-based movement, (d) leadership while transitioning from traditional to SBGR, (e) teacher buy-in during change, and (f) an overview of the conceptual framework for understanding whether teachers know what is expected of SBGR and value the practice.

Literature Search Strategy

I conducted research related to the role of leadership as an indicator for reform in international, expatriate high schools through accessing the Walden University Library databases, specifically Education Source, ERIC, SAGE Journals, Taylor and Francis Online, and Google Scholar. Filters were selected to include only peer-reviewed publications published after 2015. Keyword search terms used to locate literature included *leadership traits, high school leaders, high school administrators, international school leadership, traditional grading, traditional reporting, standards-based grading, standards-based reporting, implementing change, professional development models, qualitative,* and *expectancy-value*. These key words and phrases were selected and used

interchangeably during the search process to ensure saturation of literature. I also used other strategies, such as searching references cited in recent dissertations and peer-reviewed articles as well as reading educational books and other relevant publications from the last 5 years.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study consisted of the expectancy-value theory. First modeled by Eccles in 1983, this theory was developed for understanding performance and achievement of adolescent math students (Wigfield & Eccles, 1992). Eccles et al. (1983) suggested that "children's achievement performance, persistence, and choice of achievement tasks are most directly predicted by their expectancies for success on those tasks and the subjective value they attach to success on those tasks" (Wigfield, 1994, p. 50). One important aspect of the Eccles et al.'s model is the proposed four major components of subjective values: attainment value, intrinsic value, utility value, and cost (Loh, 2019; Wigfield & Eccles, 1992). Attainment value refers to the importance of doing well on a task. Intrinsic value is the enjoyment people have doing a task or their interest in the content. Utility value refers to the usefulness of the task for future goals, and the cost is the perceived negative aspects of engaging in the task.

Expectancy beliefs refer to cognitive engagement that asks how engaged learners in the content or task are as well as how mentally involved learners are in a task (Wigfield & Eccles, 1992). Furthermore, they refer to what the past achievement outcomes were and what a learner's self-perception or self-concept of ability is. There are

also developmental differences in expectancy and value. Eccles et al. (1983) found students with positive self-perceptions of their proficiency and positive beliefs of achievement are more likely to perform better, learn more, and participate in academic tasks through determination, persistence, and cognitive engagement. Therefore, students who are interested in academic tasks are more likely to choose similar tasks in the future as well as perform better, learn more, and be more engaged learners.

The expectancy-value theoretical framework focuses on the adolescent learner. Priniski et al. (2017) stated that a significant predictor of success includes the teachers' expectancies of success as well as their values related to intrinsic motivation, attainment, and utility. This theory has already been applied to research about teacher motivation, and I used it to consider how leaders can create the climate that supports SBGR as improved practice in this study.

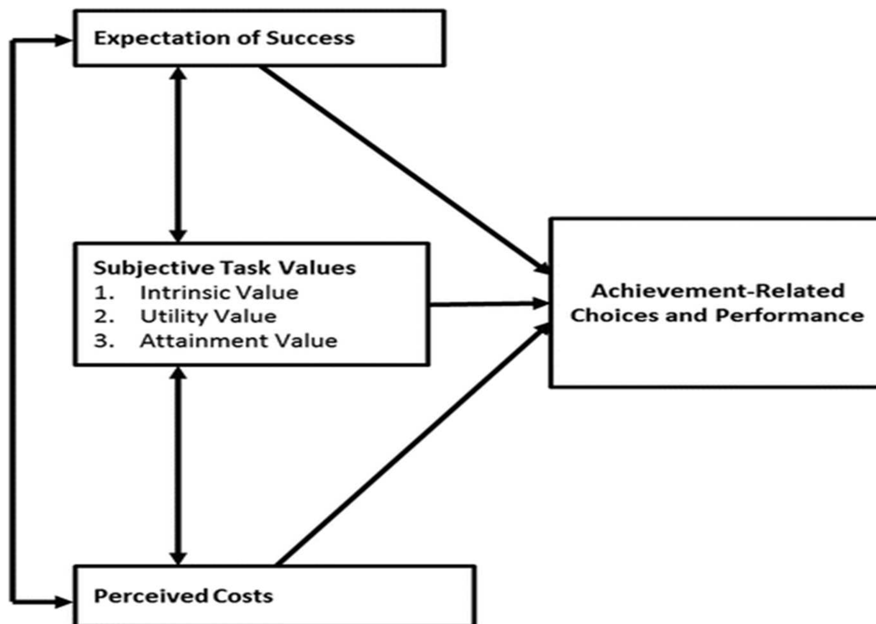

Figure 1: *Expected-value theory model*

Used with permission from Student Motivation: Current theories, constructs, and interventions within an expectancy-value framework by C. S. Hulleman, K. E. Barron, J. J. Kosovich, & R. A. Lazowski, in A. Lipnevich, F. Preckel, & R. Roberts (eds.), *Psychosocial skills and school systems in the 21st century*, 2016, The Springer Series on Human Exceptionality. Springer, Cham.

This framework provided me with a context based on the administrators' beliefs and attitudes of teachers toward the implementation practices that will improve student learning. I used this theory to help identify teachers' motivations toward the reform initiative and describe the barriers and attitudes that prevented them from implementing SBGR in their classrooms. Finally, the theory provided a framework that was able to be focused on how administrators applied strategies that helped intrinsically motivate teachers to implement practices that will improve student learning.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variable

High school teachers are known to be significantly more content-based and traditional in their teaching practices than elementary and middle school teachers; therefore, transformational change in high schools is met with frustration and apathy by teachers who may not see the value in change, especially in schools with historically high-achieving students. Leaders who make decisions that lead to transformational change should be aware of perceptions and misconceptions among their teachers prior to making decisions.

Traits and Roles of High School Leaders

Effective school leaders stay abreast of current research and trends that build the skills necessary to lead a successful school. Tatlah, Iqbal, Amin, and Quraishi (2014) stated that the knowledge around learning and how students learn best has multiplied due to technological and scientific advancements, which has led educators to practice and refine strategies that meet the diverse needs of learners. As such, school leaders need to be effective instructional leaders in promoting continuous improvement for all learners (Townsley et al., 2019). Many researchers have agreed that leadership behaviors influence the climate and culture of a school and can increase teacher as well as student efficacy (Gray & Summers, 2016; Rivera-McCutchen & Watson, 2014; Sutherland & Yoshida, 2015; Townsley et al., 2019; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). Furthermore, principals with remarkable affective and personal traits, including a passion for social

justice, a strong notion of care, ethics and responsibility, resiliency and persistence, and courage, are considered successful in effectively promoting change (Garza Jr., Drysdale, Gurr, Jacobson, & Merchant, 2014). In fact, Townsley et al. (2019) stated that successful leaders must "overcommunicate, seek input continually from stakeholders, ensure that day-to-day operations are managed in an orderly way" as well as be an instructional leader (p. 283). Principals with these traits are able to build trust with their employees and the community because they feel listened to and valued.

Employees who feel valued, trusted, and cared for are most likely to perform at a higher level according to Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015). These researchers explored the relationships between teachers and administrators and found that a healthier climate was visible in schools where principals were seen as collegial and instructional leaders. However, instructional leadership can be direct or indirect, according to Bendikson, Robinson, and Hattie (2012). Bendikson et al. stated many high school administrators are indirect instructional leaders, creating the conditions for learning and school improvement; however, they may not be directly involved in the quality of instruction in their school. Townsley et al. (2019) concluded that the more direct an administrator is, the more likely actual improvement of instructional practices and student learning will occur. Moreover, leaders who seek feedback in the form of perceptions of their leadership behaviors, including trust, openness, and competence, will have data to improve their leadership and management skills based on their faculty's needs (Drysdale, Gurr, & Goode, 2016). Trust is not necessarily the result of a relationship between a

leader and a follower but the perception of trust in the leader by the follower (Gray & Summers, 2016; Sutherland & Yoshida, 2015). Whether the trust is the result of an actual personal relationship or the perception of the teachers, this trait is necessary to build a positive school climate.

Teachers who are promoted to school leadership positions within their own school struggle with faculty perceptions even though their colleagues were supportive of their move to administration according to Rivera-McCutchen and Watson (2014). Further, Rivera-McCutchen and Watson found colleagues were expecting the former teacher to continue to act like a peer, but when she did not, their perceptions of her changed and they no longer felt that she could be trusted. In interviews from the study, her colleagues stated that she possessed the right qualities for leadership but then criticized her for those same qualities as the principal. Schools with a culture of nontrust in leadership struggle to shift the perception from “us versus them” to a shared goal or vision (Rivera-McCutchen & Watson, 2014). This perception remains even when a colleague is promoted to an administrator; they may have been an “us,” but they are now a “them.”

Successful school administrators must be able to promote a long-term vision while dealing with the day-to-day issues and concerns that arise. Marinova, Van Dyne, and Moon (2015) synthesized the research around transformational leadership and found that there are six characteristics that these leaders may exhibit: high performance expectations, interpersonal skills, collaborative goal setting, role modeling, norm-challenging, and vision casting. Furthermore, Roberts and Mancuso (2014) used the

transformational leadership scales from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire to group the qualities needed of leaders in international schools in their recent study of 84 job advertisements for superintendents around the world (see Table 2). These scales included "inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and idealized influence" (p. 95). They found that leaders who present these similar characteristics are more likely to make decisions that will be supported by faculty.

Table 2

Frequency and Percent of Job Ads Specifying Each Personal Quality

Personal Quality	Frequency	Percentage
Communication skill	78	93
Embraces diversity/can work with diverse groups	70	83
Inspirational motivator	56	67
Interpersonal skills	56	67
Sense of humor, approachable, friendly	52	62
Visionary	49	58
Ethical, inspires trust	49	58
Enthusiastic/optimistic	42	50
Visible on campus	41	49
Energetic	41	49
Strong and/or courageous	38	45
Flexible	38	45
Listening skills	37	44
Technologically savvy	36	43
Emotional intelligence	34	40
Current with research	31	37
Conflict resolution/negotiation skills	22	26
Challenges others	19	23
Building project experience	19	23
Gentle, kind, patient	13	15
Humility	12	14
Mentor/role model	10	12

Creative	9	11

From What Kind of International School Leaders are in Demand Around the World? A test of differences by region and stability over time, by L. Roberts, S. V. Mancuso, 2014, *Journal of Research in International Education*, *13*(2), 91-105.

Empirical studies on data-driven decision-making by school leaders are virtually nonexistent. Shen, Ma, Cooley, and Burt (2016) found methodological issues are the reason for the absence of research. These researchers collected various instruments that have been used to measure teachers' perceptions of their principals' attitudes, behaviors, decision-making, and performance. From this research, Shen et al. developed a tool that measures a principal's data-informed decision-making related to higher student achievement. This instrument was developed as part of an evaluation for school leaders and was based on Marzano's 11 high-impact strategies. This instrument has been used in schools in the United States, but there is no information about international use. Data-informed decision-making that includes the voice of teachers will build trust between a leader and their followers (Shen et al., 2013).

Marzano et al. (2006) further identified the distinction of responsibilities of effective leadership during first-order and second-order change (see Table 3). They reported that leadership for first-order change requires the following responsibilities in order of importance:

1. Monitoring/evaluating.
2. Culture.
3. Ideals/beliefs.

4. Knowledge of curriculum, assessment, and instruction.

5. Involvement in curriculum, assessment, and instruction.

6. Focus.

7. Order.

8. & 9. Affirmation and intellectual stimulation (i.e., a tie in rank order).

10. Communication.

11. Input.

12. Relationships.

13. Optimizer.

14. Flexibility.

15. Resources.

16. Contingent rewards.

17. Situational awareness.

18. Outreach.

19. Visibility.

20. Discipline.

21. Change agent (p. 69).

Second-order change, though, is related to only the following seven of the responsibilities of the factor analysis by Marzano et al. (2006):

1. Knowledge of curriculum, assessment, and instruction.

2. Optimizer.

3. Intellectual stimulation.
4. Change agent.
5. Monitoring/evaluating.
6. Flexibility.
7. Ideals/beliefs (p. 70).

SBGR is a second-order change. It requires school leaders to be knowledgeable about how the change will impact and affect current instructional and assessment practices and be able to guide faculty in these areas. Effective leaders also understand their role in nurturing the belief that this initiative will produce improved learning if all faculty apply themselves. Principals must know the why of this initiative and be knowledgeable of the research behind the change, knowing there is no guarantee of success. During second-order change, there must be consistent monitoring of and evaluation of current and perceived impact of the change as well as direct and indirect involvement when needed. Finally, this leader would need to completely believe in the initiative so as not to undermine the change.

Table 3

Characteristics of Technical and Adaptive Change

Technical (or first-order) change	Adaptive (or second-order) change
An extension of the past.	A break from the past
Within existing paradigms	Outside existing paradigms
Consistent with prevailing values and norms	Conflicting with prevailing values and norms
Focused, bounded, incremental, linear	Emergent, unbounded, complex, non-linear
Marginal	A disturbance to all elements of a system
Implemented with existing knowledge and skills	Requires new knowledge and skills to implement
Problem and solution oriented	Neither problem nor solution oriented
Implemented by experts	Implemented by stakeholders

From *School Leadership that Works* by R. Marzano, T. Waters, and B. McNulty, 2006. Heatherton, Australia: Hawker Brownlow Education.

International Schools Leadership

Although international schools have been in existence for over 100 years, research regarding effectiveness of teachers and school leaders as well as student achievement is insufficient. Keller (2015) collected information about international schools and concluded that an international school can be for profit, nonprofit, or not-for-profit. International schools are identified based on two factors: language and curriculum. The language of instruction must be different from the host country's language and the

curriculum must be different from the host country's government curriculum. While there are seldom requirements associated with being called "international," most international schools that graduate college-bound students are accredited, require faculty to be certified, and follow a certain curriculum (Bunnell, Fertig, & James, 2016; Keller, 2015). Globalization since the 2000s has led to expansion of the international school industry with an annual growth of 10% throughout the world (Keller, 2015). The population of students attending international schools has doubled in the last five years and is expected to double again, to over 8 million students, by 2025 (Bunnell et al., 2016). International schools are comparable to U.S. public and private schools in physical structure, teacher requirements, and curriculum. The leadership model also has many similarities.

A head of school or a superintendent leads most international schools with other leadership roles defined depending on the organizational structure, student population, and need. Keller (2015) studied the struggles noted by international school leaders and concluded that two unique dualities, spatial and temporal, should be considered. Spatial dualities include the relationships between local and expatriate staff and students, physical space on a shared campus, bridging the cultures of the host country, the school culture, and the home cultures of all stakeholders. Temporal dualities include the relationships between the veteran staff and new staff, older students and younger students, and, finally, traditional learning versus innovative learning. Historically, international schools have remained traditional because student achievement has not been an issue. Schools did not need to be cutting edge due to admissions policies that did not

include students with special needs or less than average percentiles on standardized assessments. However, recent research regarding brain science and how children learn has challenged international teachers and leaders to reconsider the best strategies for all learners.

Traditional Grading and Reporting and the Standards-based Movement

Grades serve multiple purposes for different stakeholders. While elementary and middle school grades mainly function as the communication of student achievement to students and parents, high school grades are often the only consideration when determining class rank and credits toward graduation. A student's final high school grade point average (GPA) is a major factor used by college and university admissions officers when determining a student's potential for success in their institution (Peters, Kruse, Buckmiller, & Townsley, 2017; Yu, Sackett, & Kuncel, 2016). While teachers strive to be objective and report mastery of content and skills, other factors are added that may obscure the actual GPA.

Traditionally, grades are determined by proficiency of content knowledge and skills, aptitude, effort, and behavior. Guskey (2009) referred to these categories as process, progress, and product. Process criteria include the behaviors toward learning such as timeliness, participation, and completion. Progress criteria include the evidence of growth in learning. Finally, product criteria include the demonstration of what a student actually knows or can do at a particular moment. Grades in all categories are then

averaged to determine a final grade. Extra credit and curving are options that are sometimes used in the traditional system to allow students the opportunity to add points to their final percentage in the hopes of moving from a B grade range to an A grade range, as one example (Peters et al., 2017). Traditional grading policies have been the prevalent model in most schools because it is most similar to how teachers were graded when they were students. Including process and progress criteria in the final grade only helps to raise the final GPA of conscientious students, which is used to determine university acceptance. Students and teachers report that they are satisfied with this practice despite knowing that their grade is not based on achievement alone.

This interpretation has made the shift from traditional to standards-based grading practices more difficult. Most researchers agree that product criteria should be the only criteria used to determine a grade (O'Connor, Jung, & Reeves, 2018; Peters et al., 2017). However, researchers do believe that the other criteria are important and worth separate distinction. In O'Connor's (2012) book *15 Fixes for Grades*, the differences and steps toward separating process and progress from grading were described. O'Connor showed the approaches of the traditional grading system with process and progress combined as well as the standards-based system, which separates progress from the process (see Appendix A).

Traditional grading practices, as stated in Appendix A, focus on what a student earns in a particular course, while standards-based practices focus on how well a student learns (Battistone, Buckmiller, & Peters, 2019; Brookhart, 2011; Knight & Cooper, 2019;

Townsley & Varga, 2018). Therefore, GPAs based on the traditional approach may not effectively show what a student learns. Furthermore, the traditional approach to grading is less time-consuming for teachers, according to Blount (2016). The standards-based approach requires a shift in pedagogy, assessments and feedback, both of which take time as well as put more accountability on teachers to help students take ownership of their learning (Battistone et al., 2019; Knight & Cooper, 2019). University admissions officers would have better information to determine if a student would be successful in their school if the GPA was based on the standards-based approach.

Teacher Buy-in to Change

Research has shown that teachers' past experience and belief in their own expertise may lead to their resistance to change, furthermore it has also shown that teacher buy-in is the key factor in the success of an initiative (Battistone et al., 2019; Feldman, 2019; Fullan, 2002; Silin & Schwartz, 2003; Yoon, 2016; Zimmerman, 2006). Turnbull (2002) defined teacher buy-in as

> teachers' perceptions of five related issues: (1) whether teachers believed that they had a good model for their school; (2) whether the model helped them to become better teachers; (3) whether they were personally motivated to make the model work; (4) if they believed that they were able to make the model work in their classroom; and (5) if they understood how the model was supposed to work to improve student learning (p. 243).

Support from administrators also plays a critical role in enhancing teacher buy-in by creating a culture of compliance as well as an effective and transparent strategic plan (Kerr, Marsh, Ikemoto, Darilek, & Barney, 2006; Silin & Schwartz, 2003; Turnbull, 2002). Therefore, it is important for school leaders to identify both organizational strengths and weaknesses in order to better understand the current culture and the probability of successful change (Fullan, 2002; Zimmerman, 2006).

Teachers have become accustomed to new colleagues and leaders coming in with new ideas and methods that may improve student learning. Internationally, 17% to 30% of schoolteachers and leaders transition to new jobs in new schools every year (Mancuso, Roberts, & White, 2010; Tkachyk, 2017). Therefore, remaining veteran teachers have had to endure an influx of new colleagues and administrators bringing in new ideas that may or may not suit the culture or climate of the school environment. These veteran teachers feel they can wait out these newcomers as they count on them staying only a few years or they can jump onto the bandwagon only to then hop onto the next one with the next new hire. Both of these options can be tiresome and lead to a divisive faculty over time.

With each innovative idea, veteran faculty feels that their teaching practices are being questioned. Wormeli (2018) stated the way one teaches is an expression of who they are; it is their identity. If teachers are being told to change, then the perceptions of what they knew as truth could be false, and if so, everything else is now uncertain. Therefore, teachers feel vulnerable and need to actually grieve over the loss of that truth. Teachers struggle to admit they are wrong when they considered themselves to be

masters and are now being asked to be novices (Evans, 1996; Gleick, 1987; Kaufman, 1971; Wormeli, 2018). These feelings need to be acknowledged and addressed prior to professional development on transformational change.

Strategic Change in High Schools

High school is the final step toward college or a career. Little has changed of graduation requirements as well as the physical and cultural environment of high school over the last 50 years. However, there has been a push to reform the traditional model to prepare students for the future economic, social, and political landscape (Battistone et al., 2019; Smith, Cannata, Cohen-Vogel, & Rutledge, 2016). Examples of reform initiatives in secondary schools in the United States as well as internationally include cohort models or “academies,” mentorships and entrepreneurships, student-led learning, and mastery-based learning. While it is too early to have evidence of the success of these initiatives, current studies reveal that high school reform is necessary to prepare students with the skills for success in college or a career.

Implementing strategic change at the secondary level can be difficult. Studies spanning four decades have shown evidence that teachers were “programmed” to disregard any new information that was different than their current practices and knowledge about their subject (Argyris, 1974; Louis & Lee, 2016). Furthermore, Hallinger and Heck’s (2011) longitudinal study found that sustained change focused on academic improvement does have long-term positive effects, but faculty members give

up when there are no short-term positive effects of the initiative. Therefore, a firm understanding of the school's culture of grit and resilience as well as the capacity of faculty to learn and try practices that was different than their own is essential for successful strategic change.

In recent years, data-based decision-making (DBDM) and organizational learning (OL) have been two of the research-based strategies used to lead strategic change. Each can be described as a way to solve a problem or make a decision or a new way of thinking (Beyer & Trice, 1982; Louis & Lee, 2016; Weiss, 1979). A quantitative approach is used in DBDM where data is collected that indicates specific strengths and weaknesses of students that teachers will then use to improve instructional practices. In organizational learning, shared experiences and informal inquiry is used to collect information. Continuous improvement that allows frequent adjustments based on current need is manageable in an OL culture since short-term positive effects are not always evident in DBDM.

While a high school may decide on the strategy that will be used to implement strategic change, the culture of the organization itself will be the reason for success or failure. Collective efficacy requires more than simply bringing teachers together in a group and presenting data, a problem, or a decision to be made. Cultural norms that include collaboration, risk-taking, and reflection play a significant role in the success of strategic change (Alavi, Kayworth, & Leidner, 2005; Louis, 2008; Louis & Lee, 2016; Tyre & von Hippel, 1997). Further studies have shown these cultural norms to be more

evident in primary teaching teams than in secondary teaching teams or departments (Smith et al., 2016). Elementary systems seem to center around growth in learning while traditional high school systems are based on average student achievement. Furthermore, teachers of primary grades tend to teach many subjects and collaborate on pedagogy rather than content. Secondary teachers converse with their team or department on content over practice. Quantitative and qualitative studies have shown that teams who are able to reflect on practices are more likely to experiment with their pedagogy in order to improve student learning (Louis & Lee, 2016; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). Team collaboration includes a shared responsibility for course outcomes as well as being a highly effective team. One aspect that further impacts openness to change is *deprivatizing* practice. Although still rare in high school classrooms, opportunities to observe instruction and learning in other classrooms has been proven to improve student achievement (Lomos, Hofman, Bosker, 2011; Louis & Lee, 2016). Allowing peers to observe teaching and learning requires vulnerability. In order for teachers to open their doors and be vulnerable, trust must be built.

Professional Learning Models

Since the 1990s, schools around the world have been trying to perfect a successful professional development (PD) model. Numerous books, articles, and studies have revealed qualitative data through case studies and indicated ideas to improve professional learning in schools. Historically, PD has been one-size-fits-all, with kindergarten teachers

receiving the same information as high school calculus teachers, both of which have different professional needs (Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2008; Miller, Motter, & Sral, 2018). Várela (2012) argued that this approach goes against the concept of individualization as a best practice for all learners. Teachers have unique needs and strengths similarly to their students. Miller et al. (2018) reported that according to Learning Forward, teachers participate in an average of 8 hours of professional development each year. Furthermore, Learning Forward estimated that between 49-100 hours of focused PD is needed to affect student achievement (2018). These statistics mean that either more PD time is needed each year or impact that truly affects students learning may take 6 to 12 years if nothing changes. With this in mind, educational researchers have reimagined professional learning to be more self-directed, job-embedded, relevant to day-to-day teaching and learning.

Adult learning should reflect best practices of student learning. Hase and Kenyon (2013) defined why the education world is unlikely to ever revert to an era of a teacher lecturing students. They stated students are now equipped with the motivation and skills to seek out information on their own. Through advancements in personal technology, students can utilize the Internet to search for, read, listen to, and watch media to become informed learners. Experts are a mouse click away if a simple search is inadequate. Finally, these researchers reasoned colleagues or friends, a major source of learning for people, would act as alternative resources for further information. Therefore, if teachers

understand the new ways in which their students are learning, collaborating, and retaining knowledge, then that should be reflected in the PD models and actions of schools.

In fact, teachers and teaching teams would benefit in mirroring the learning and collaboration expected of their students. Guskey and Link (2019) stated the importance of combining peer collaboration with the knowledge from research and student data to enhance the success of an initiative such as moving from traditional to a standards-based grading approach. Using common planning time to not only collaborate on curriculum, lessons, and assessment, but to also discuss grading issues will lead to better consistency of grading practices (Guskey & Link, 2019). This, in turn, is beneficial for students because it will lessen the confusion around learning and grades.

Successful professional learning and development models have expectations that are tight and expectations that are loose. However, adequate time, support, and structure from administrators is needed for all expectations (Knight & Cooper, 2019). This requires a shift in culture and practice, as well as flexibility and reflection from teachers and school leaders.

Summary and Conclusions

Expatriate high school leaders in the EARCOS region are faced with the same struggles toward school reform as their U.S. counterparts. Earning teacher buy-in prior to and during the implementation of strategic change such as SBGR requires knowledge, trust, and support. The culture of the school must be healthy and open to change for implementation to be successful.

The review of the literature began with an overview of the conceptual framework for understanding whether teachers know what is expected of SBGR and value the practice. The review then focused on traits and roles of high school leaders and the importance of being a leader who builds a trusting culture and community. Consequently, leaders in international high schools have similar responsibilities and issues as leaders in U.S. high schools. One difference between U.S.-based and international high school leaders is the clientele or stakeholders. This study compared U.S. public school research, which factors in low-income student data, while international schools in the EARCOS region are private schools with a substantial yearly tuition and admission requirements.

The models of traditional schooling compared with standards-based were described as well as the history of the transition from the former to the latter. Reform or strategic change that requires this significant shift in thinking and learning is not possible without teacher buy-in and support prior to and during implementation. Teacher buy-in involves transparency of the purpose for the change and trust in the leadership and faculty.

In Chapter 3, I will focus on the methodology used to identify patterns in the high school leaders' practices to address the need for change. In the Participant Selection section I will provide information about the participants and their schools. Furthermore, in the Instrumentation section I will outline the interview and focus group questions. Finally, I will discuss the research questions and provide details about data collection and analysis.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The problem addressed in this study is the need to explore administrative practices used in teacher buy-in of SBGR at expatriate high schools in Asia. Existing research has focused on primary teachers' implementation of standards, so there is a gap in the literature around how school leaders promote and support the implementation of SBGR in high schools as well as regarding strategies that school leaders use to address the challenges of changes related to SBGR and promote teacher buy-in of SBGR in high schools. School leaders in expatriate high schools in Asia need help addressing the challenges of change and securing teacher buy-in of SBGR to successfully transform grading practices in their schools to improve learning for all students.

The purpose of this multisite case study was to identify administrative practices used to facilitate teacher implementation of SBGR at expatriate high schools in the EARCOS region. I used a qualitative design to give participants the opportunity to express their experiences with the challenges of implementation of SBGR. Data were gathered from individual, in-depth interviews with high school leaders to obtain the participants' perceptions of their experiences of implementing SBGR. Data from these sources were analyzed to identify patterns and themes.

I addressed the following research questions in this study:

RQ1: What administrative practices are used to address the need for change related to the implementation of SBGR?

RQ2: How do administrators support teachers in the implementation of SBGR?

This section also includes an in-depth review and justification of the qualitative research design, descriptions of the settings and sample, and a review of the data collection and analysis procedures.

Research Design and Rationale

I chose a qualitative case study design for this study because I needed to collect similar data in order to compare and contrast the experiences of administrators in similar schools. Merriam and Tisdell (2009) defined qualitative research as the act of "understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of the world and the experiences they have in the world" (p. 13). This method provided ample data from a combination of individual interviews of leaders and document reviews of strategic plans related to SBGR at three high-performing expatriate high schools in Asia. Using multiple data sources contributed to a more reliable study by ensuring that the results of the interviews and corresponding document reviews matched. I used the purposeful sampling of nine participants and document reviews to collect and analyze data to identify and document themes.

According to Burkholder, Cox, and Crawford (2016), there are five approaches to qualitative research to consider: case study, ethnography, phenomenology, narrative, and grounded theory. Ethnographic approaches focus on the relationship of a cultural group and the phenomenon being explored, which did not match the purpose of this study (see Burkholder et al., 2016). A phenomenological approach was considered as a way to seek understanding of the phenomenon through the experiences of the participants; however,

this approach required a hypothesis while the research questions of this study did not (see Creswell, 2007). A narrative research approach was not appropriate for this study because the study was not about each participant's story of the problem but about the organizational environment as a whole (see Burkholder et al., 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Furthermore, a grounded theory approach was not considered since a theory did not need to be identified for the phenomenon.

I employed a multisite case study design in this study. Case studies are used when it is difficult to pinpoint an exact solution (see Creswell, 2007). A single-site case study was not appropriate for this study because that particular site may not have used strategies that would be helpful to others. A multisite case study allowed analysis of data within each site as well as across sites (see Yin, 2014). Therefore, the strategies of participants from multiple sites allowed me to better understand the contexts that may have contributed to the successes and challenges of the implementation of strategic change and, specifically, the move toward SBGR.

Role of the Researcher

My role as the researcher involved deep participation in this study. I collected data through interviews and document reviews. Qualitative researchers gather and assemble data themselves by examining and reviewing documents and conducting interviews (Creswell, 2007). I was careful not to let personal biases around values, ethics, or assumptions influence my study. Establishing interpersonal trust with the participants by being transparent about my purpose for this study was important prior to conducting

interviews with and gathering documents from them. This study was not conducted at the school I work at, and I had no direct working relationship with any participants in the study.

At the time of this study, I was the director of professional learning and the middle school and high school curriculum coordinator at an EARCOS school in Asia. As the professional learning and curriculum specialist in a school of almost 1,700 students, I provided support to teachers and school leaders ranging from early learning to Grade 12 subject areas. Prior to working at this school, I worked in similar positions in South Korea and Saudi Arabia. My teaching career consisted mostly of middle school humanities, with a few years of experience in high school as well as upper elementary school in the United States and the Middle East.

Methodology

Participant Selection

The participants in this study were nine school leaders from three high-performing, expatriate high schools in Asia. The leaders consisted of assistant principals, principals, curriculum leaders, and heads of school who were present during the implementation of standards-based grading in the high schools. The sample was small to guarantee greater depth and knowledge. I purposefully chose participants from these three high schools because they had presented their experiences with SBGR in conferences, during meetings, and through online networks.

Purposeful sampling is commonly used in qualitative research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I sought permission to contact the participants from the head of each participating school once IRB approval (02-14-20-0646573) was obtained. Once permission was granted, I e-mailed the participants to explain the study and the procedures of data collection and analysis. I agreed upon a time for an interview held through videoconferencing with each participant, and they had multiple opportunities to review and revise their individual transcripts after completing the interview.

Table 4
Demographic Information of School A Participants

School A	Total Years in Education	Total Years as Administrators	Total Years as Administrator at School A
Administrator 1	More than 21	Between 11–15	Between 6–10
Administrator 2	More than 21	Between 1–5	Between 1–5
Administrator 3	More than 21	Between 16–20	Between 1–5

Note. For confidentiality purposes, the participants' answers were banded in 5 year increments up to 20 years. Then, they could choose "More than 21" as the final option.

Table 5
Demographic Information of School B Participants

School B	Total Years in Education	Total Years as Administrators	Total Years as Administrator at School B
Administrator 1	More than 21	More than 21	Between 6–10
Administrator 2	More than 21	Between 11–15	Between 6–10
Administrator 3	More than 21	Between 6–10	Between 6–10

Note. For confidentiality purposes, the participants' answers were banded in 5 year increments up to 20 years. Then, they could choose "More than 21" as the final option.

Table 6

Demographic Information of School C Participants

School C	Total Years in Education	Total Years as Administrators	Total Years as Administrator at School C
Administrator 1	Between 16–20	Between 16–20	Between 1–5
Administrator 2	More than 21	Between 1–5	Between 1–5
Administrator 3	More than 21	Between 6–10	Between 1–5

Note. For confidentiality purposes, the participants' answers were banded in 5 year increments up to 20 years. Then, they could choose "More than 21" as the final option.

Instrumentation

For this study, I collected data from two different sources: strategic planning documentation and action plans from the participants' schools as well as semistructured interviews with the participants. Strategic planning documentation included self-studies for accreditation or annual reports. Action plans and further documentation outlining implementation strategies were also collected. Most of the documentation was available on the public website of each school. Several participants shared further documentation either before or after the interview process.

By reading the documents and using a Document Summary Form (see Appendix C), I was able to examine the intended implementation strategies for each school. Knowledge of these strategies provided me with a clear direction for follow-up questions during the interview process. A deeper understanding of the documents also provided me with a big picture overview of the initiatives as well as a shared vocabulary to use with the participants during interviews. The second data source was the data collected during

the semistructured interviews with participants. The interviews allowed me to delve more deeply into the strategies and experiences used in the implementation of SBGR.

I conducted the semistructured interviews with participants through videoconferencing using Skype. The screen video recorder, Screencastify, which records both audio and video, was used in the virtual interview environment. Videoconferencing ensured uniformity in the interviewing process and allowed me to notice facial expressions and other behaviors during the interviews.

I developed an interview protocol to keep me focused on the purpose of the interviews and the research questions. Two peers reviewed the interview protocol for alignment to the study. They are current professional colleagues who have successfully completed an EdD or PhD in Education. The purpose of the protocol was to allow for me to take notes, providing a backup if the recording devices failed, as well as provide a guide for me to stay on topic and organized during the interview process (see Creswell, 2007).

The semistructured interview format allowed me to ask follow-up questions specific to the responses of the participant. To ensure an accurate record was maintained, I recorded the interviews on two devices: my laptop, through Screencastify, and my phone. Following the initial transcription of the interview, a copy of the transcript was supplied to each of the participants to review for accuracy (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Participants were offered the opportunity to clarify, correct, and share additional perceptions and experiences through e-mail communication. Once I analyzed the data, I

shared the results with the participants to provide them with a further opportunity to clarify, correct, and corroborate the results. A copy of the final study was also made available to all participants.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

I identified participants from the list of EARCOS "top tier" schools as defined by Watts (2018). This list consists of 10 schools in the East Asia region with an association with the U.S. State Department Office of Overseas Schools and with over 150 employed faculty. Schools that offer only an IB Diploma were not considered. Furthermore, I did not consider the school where I am employed. I requested permission from the remaining schools to conduct the study once Institutional Review Board approval was obtained. In the letter, the purpose of this study and the procedures for participants as well as the collection of documents were clearly outlined. After receiving approval from the head of school, I contacted the high school administrators through e-mail with a letter of invitation, explaining the purpose of the study and the data collection process.

I asked the high school administrators selected to send documents via e-mail pertaining to their school's shift in grading prior to participating in one interview lasting 45 to 60 minutes. Strategic planning documents provided an additional source of data for the implementation of each site's shift to SBGR. These documents also helped me develop a common vocabulary with each participant when conducting interviews. In interviews, I asked the participants for clarification of any terms or processes in the documents that I did not fully understand. Finally, these documents provided me with an

opportunity for developing follow-up questions to ask during the semistructured interviews (see Appendix B). A summary document form (see Appendix C) was used to summarize the contents and code any information that was needed during analysis (see Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014).

The interviews took place through Skype, while using Screencastify to record the video and audio of the interviews. At the start of each interview, permission to record was sought and I explained how I was collecting the recordings and transcribing them. The transcripts from the interviews were verified by the participants, along with the opportunity to revise their responses, and used during the data analysis process. Each participant was sent a copy of the results once data analysis was completed for a further opportunity to revise any statements used in the study.

Data Analysis Plan

The interviews were transcribed within 48 hours of their completion using the captioning component of Screencastify. Each participant was given a pseudonym. Data analysis actually begins with multiple readings of the transcripts and noting initial thoughts (Creswell, 2014). Participants were e-mailed a copy of a summary of their interview from my Walden University e-mail account to their preferred e-mail account to check for accuracy and correct intent. Necessary revisions were completed to accurately reflect their statements. I then reviewed the data from the interviews and the document review to begin a two-cycle coding process for each research question. For the first cycle, descriptive coding was used by summarizing chunks of data into words, phrases, or

topics to assign simple labels to the data. NVivo coding was used to ensure the accuracy of actual statement made by the participants. The second cycle further organized the data into categories then themes based on similarities and patterns (Saldana, 2016). Using the identified themes, I prepared a detailed summary of the findings from the interviews and document reviews.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is a critical element of a study and is based on credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In qualitative research, credibility is determined by accuracy of findings from the perspective of those involved in the study, the researcher, the participants, and the potential readers (Creswell, 2014). To ensure the credibility of this study, I used member checking to allow participants every opportunity to check the accuracy of their responses to the interview questions as well as clarify or add to their responses (Creswell, 2014; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Participants had the opportunity to check for accuracy of their transcripts as well as the results of the data analysis.

Transferability refers to the ability of the findings of a qualitative study to be transferred to different contexts (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To ensure the study has transferability, I provided in-depth descriptions of the data and the context for other researchers to use as a resource in similar situations. This study could be generalized for other schools around the world that are questioning not only grading and reporting practices but also other paradigm shifts.

The third standard for trustworthiness is dependability of the quality of methodology including data collection and data analysis (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Dependability was provided through detailing data collection and analysis procedures throughout the study as well as getting the view of an outside researcher, a peer with experience in data review, to examine and challenge the analysis and interpretation of the data.

Finally, confirmability relates to objectivity in qualitative research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To ensure confirmability for this study, I needed to completely clarify my biases, how they may influence the interpretation of data, and the steps I took to eliminate my personal perceptions of the problem of the study (Creswell, 2014; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I was continuously reflective regarding my own biases to keep them from influencing the study.

Ethical Procedures

Ensuring the security of the participants and the schools was crucial to the ethical conduct of the study. All participants expected protection of their rights to privacy and confidentiality as researchers have the responsibility to protect the integrity of their research at all levels (Creswell, 2014). I submitted this study to Walden University's Institutional Review Board for approval prior to initiating contact with any participants who chose to volunteer for this research.

I did not use the participants' names in the study, and they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Participants were e-mailed a

consent form to be completed and signed prior to scheduling interviews. Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed and then shared with individual participants for their review. Each participant was assigned a number to maintain confidentiality and anonymity (Burkholder et al., 2016). Data are stored in a password-protected file on my computer and all hard copies are kept in a locked file cabinet. Data from interviews and document reviews were used only for the purpose of this study.

Summary

In Chapter 3, I provided a detailed description of the research design, the role of the researcher, the methodology, trustworthiness, and ethical procedures. In each section a justification was provided for the decisions and procedures of the study to ensure quality. I described the steps to ensure the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the study. Finally, explanations of the procedures to follow to the ethical responsibilities of the researcher were included. In Chapter 4, I will provide reflections and conclusions based on the analysis of data into emergent themes. Chapter 5 will consist of interpretations of the findings, recommendations for further study, and implications for social change.

Chapter 4: Reflections and Conclusions

The problem I addressed in this multisite case study was the need to explore administrative practices used in securing teacher buy-in of SBGR. I used a case study design, which is recommended when researchers are attempting to describe perceptions of participants (see Creswell, 2009). The purpose of this study was to find patterns of insight and strategies used by high school administrators in three expatriate high schools in East Asia who were successful in the transition from traditional grading and reporting to SBGR. The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: What administrative practices are used to address the need for change related to the implementation of SBGR?

RQ2: How do administrators support teachers in the implementation of SBGR?

Chapter 4 includes discussions of the setting, data collection, data analysis, results, and evidence of trustworthiness.

Setting

In this study, I documented the successful practices and strategies that leaders used to implement change from traditional grading and reporting to SBGR. The setting of this study was East Asian expatriate schools that are current members of the EARCOS organization and considered top tier international schools that use U.S. standards. Participants were purposefully chosen for their impact on the initiative and included nine high school administrators from three schools who were present during the implementation of a standards-based grading approach.

Data Collection

I first contacted the heads of each of the three schools to ask for permission to include their administrators in this study. Each head of school granted me permission to contact current and former high school administrators who were present during the rollout of the initiative to transition from traditional grading practices to standards-based grading practices. I contacted the administrators and obtained their signed consent to join the study as participants. Data were collected from individual interviews via videoconferencing. Each interview lasted for approximately 1 hour. Pertinent documents, such as annual reports and strategic planning documentation, were found on each school's public website. When available, participants shared further documentation that provided me with a deeper look into the process of the initiative.

Data Analysis

Following each interview, I transcribed the recordings. The participants were e-mailed a copy of their interview with the request that they review the accuracy of the transcriptions. The participants reviewed the transcriptions electronically and responded with any further comments as well as a final approval of the transcription. I then reviewed the data and used NVivo coding as a descriptive code approach to code the text of the transcribed interviews into a single word, sentence, or short phrase that captured the actual responses of the participants (see Saldaña, 2009). These coded data were then organized into categories of emergent themes or patterns aligned to each research question.

Three themes emerged from the responses relating to Research Question 1: knowing the why, hiring and retaining the right teachers, and effective communication with all stakeholders. From Research Question 2, four themes emerged: PD, a focus on assessment and feedback, the use of teachers as leaders, and leaders as empathetic learners.

In the next step, I reviewed the Document Summary Forms, which included the summaries of information shared by the participants as well as the documents located on each school's website. I compared the summary forms with the categories of themes and patterns to ensure that my analysis was accurate, consistent, and complete. Another round of member checking was performed electronically with all participants to check for accuracy of the complete results of the analysis.

Results

The findings for this study are based on the analysis of the collected data. I gathered the data from document reviews and semistructured participant interviews. The high school leaders who participated in this study responded to my questions with their experiences and strategies that led to a successful transition from traditional grading to standards-based grading.

Research Question 1

All nine high school administrators interviewed articulated similar responses to the subquestions that answered Research Question 1. Three themes emerged from their

responses: knowing the why, effective communication with all stakeholders, and hiring and retaining the right teachers. The themes are discussed in detail in the following subsections.

Theme 1: Know the why. All nine high school leaders interviewed mentioned the importance of having a narrative that explained the problem of traditional grading and the purpose of standards-based grading. Teachers need to be able to tell the story of the initiative to get behind it and believe in it. Each participant identified a focus on learning rather than grades as the "why." A2 stated,

> We recognized the hyper-focus that our students had on grades. We recognized the stress and pressure of performance over growth. We recognized that so many classroom practices were driven by achievement and we were fostering a sort of strategic compliance in our students and we were not really allowing for any kind of growth mindset or authentic engagement with the learning.

A3 reiterated the focus on standards-based learning before changing to a standards-based grading approach and stated, "Learning does not need grading."

Administrators from School B had similar responses concerning building a learning-based rationale for this initiative in the community. B1 stated, "… you don't want to alienate anyone or disrespect the past or the traditions that people are familiar with. It is a delicate balance between what's best for students rather than what is inconvenient for adults." B2 added that the rationale for change came from three catalysts: an accreditation study "calling for the need for a comprehensive school-wide

assessment policy, the need to separate performance from effort, and the need to shift students from being graded-focused to being learning-focused."

While each of the three administrators from School C reiterated the same rationale, C2 also mentioned that the school was "in the process of aligning report cards across all divisions and the high school was the only division that was using traditional reporting." The school-wide leadership team believed that the report card needed to send a consistent message throughout the entire school. C1 mentioned that at the beginning of the research and data collection phase of moving towards a standards-based grading approach, it was clear that, in grading practices across the high school, "there was not alignment from course teams either." Similarly, inconsistency of grading practices was reported as a concern and reason for change by at least one administrator from each of the three schools in this study.

Theme 2: Effective communication with all stakeholders. Communicating change to all stakeholders was a theme that was discussed by each of the participants. Stakeholders include the board, the teachers, the parents, and the students. While each administrator felt effective and consistent communication with stakeholders was a key to successful change, most also admitted this was an aspect of the initiative that could have been improved.

School A learned from the mistakes of the middle school administration when they implemented a standards-based grading approach without enough parent sessions to prepare families for the change. A1 further explained,

> So, we've done many parent sessions at the high school level for parents- a lot of information over an extended period of time. We collected data from universities and created a website that has resources for our community and board members to access to read more about the literature and advantages of standards-based assessment, grading, and reporting.

A2, along with A3, stated that the leadership team spent 6 months researching this approach and participating in deep discussions. Once they formulated their common message for their rationale for change, they began engaging other stakeholders, including the heads of each department and the college counselors. Though these administrators felt that the initiative was communicated well, A2 reflected that, "we could have involved students more. I think we also needed clearer communication with the technology department." The learning management system is the school's communication tool with students and parents, and if it does not support the vision of the grading approach, then there will be a communication breakdown.

A3 mentioned a misstep early on. "We were a little bit too negative, and empowering teachers to change doesn't mean making them feel poorly about their current practice or their past practice." This leader further revealed that using a "positive growth practice" would have been more successful than some of the negative language used towards the beginning of the change process.

The administrators from School B spoke about communication with early adopters and resistors. B1 and B2 mentioned that administrators gravitate toward the

early adopters and innovators. B1 stated, "they are thinking the same way you are thinking, and they'll tell you you're thinking right." This administrator further reflected, "I could have done a better job appreciating their work and articulating and honoring the resistors rather than alienating them." B3 concluded,

> The stakes, real or perceived by the community, feel higher for high school teachers. I wouldn't say that that is real in the sense of learning. We value learning at all ages, and so from a learning perspective, the stakes are always high.

Errors in effective parent communication were also mentioned by School B leaders. Even though written communication was abundant for months leading up to the actual change in reporting, B3 stated,

> When we made the change the community went ballistic, and that was because they didn't read it. If they read it before, it was never real to them, and until we actually implemented it, none of that communication really meant anything to the parent community.

Therefore, town halls were planned to better inform the parents.

School C approached their strategy for effective communication with stakeholders with the use of weekly newsletters and surveys. C1 mentioned that weekly newsletters to faculty that include short, relevant articles has helped shift the mindset of faculty, saying, "It gives more direction to where we are heading because the themes are aligned, and they are hearing it from experts from the field." Throughout the year, this administrator

collects and sometimes reuses around 40 articles and has noticed the language of learning shifting in the school. Each leader from School C noted that teachers, parents, and students are surveyed anonymously to help leaders better understand the frustrations and successes of this change initiative. The data are used to help determine next steps and continue to plan for effective communication moving forward.

Theme 3: Hiring and retaining the right people. Each of the three schools represented in this study had at least one participant who spoke about hiring and retaining faculty and leadership with the organization's vision in mind. These leaders mentioned recently hired faculty and veteran faculty. Veteran faculty was defined in this study as teachers or leaders in the same role at the same school for more than 10 years.

Leaders from School A noted that recently hired faculty who were "in a standards-based grading environment before joining the school were waiting for this initiative to become a reality. Some of our veteran faculty were also on-board with this new practice," reflected A1. This leader also noticed a few faculty members who "thought they got it, but we don't believe they did." A1 believed it had to do with "empathy and to what extent they (the teacher) can see it from a student's perspective." They went on to further state,

> When addressing the concerns of a teacher who lacks empathy, many times they feel they are following the process. So, it's easy for the teacher to show concrete evidence, but it's harder for the administration to explain the lack of empathy and how that would impact culture and the quality of learning for students.

According to A3, their leaders built a philosophy around what they thought were growth-focused practices that effective teachers should ask themselves. Based on their research of Tom Schimmer's work, the questions were:

1. Do your practices build confidence in learners?
2. Do your practices encourage students to continue to try and be persistent and resilient and continue to want to learn?
3. Are your practices accurate and consistent?

With these questions, teachers had a better understanding of what a growth mindset looked like and a clear vision of learning and assessment that were required to continue to work in this environment.

A leader from School B reflected that in their experience in international schools worldwide, Asian schools seem to have more teachers who stay in one school for more than 10 years. Whereas teacher tenure in Latin America, for instance, is much shorter. Having fewer experiences may make teachers more risk averse. B1 stated,

> If people really are not buying into the system I would personally relay that although they have been successful in the past, this school is heading in a different direction to the direction they want to be in and we would encourage them to look for a different school.

Finally, this learning leader compared high school teachers in a larger school to those in a smaller school. B1 stated,

> Those in a larger school might imagine that what they do is slightly more difficult than others, especially if they are an IB or AP school, and are change averse. In smaller schools, where all teachers are far more aware of the intricacies of the different divisions, I think you have this ability to embrace change and debate in a far more open manner.

Each of the leaders from School C discussed the mindset of the more veteran teachers. Those who have been at the school for a long tenure believed that they would outlast this initiative by waiting for leadership positions to change and new leaders to come in with different initiatives. C1 made it clear from the beginning that although the previous leader initiated this process, this approach to learning, grading, and reporting was not going away. "At the end of any 2-year contract, if the expectations were not being met, we would release them," stated C1. C3 further stated the importance of safety for those who need support while trying to meet those expectations.

> Those late adopters or never-doers need a place where they can speak openly and feel safe and have a support that can help them slowly start to move, or if they are not going to move, they will need help finding a new school.

C2 added,

> With transition and turnover, we are hiring people who have knowledge in standards-based assessment, but we still give them training. Helping them understand how we do it at our school, that brings value to where we are and

> helps keep all of our people focused on what we're hoping to accomplish as a school.

Also noted by C3 was the realization that teacher leaders were some of the biggest resistors and choosing the right teacher leader was crucial for the success of this strategic change in each subject area. Furthermore, C2 and C3 reiterated the need to hire the right support in the form of learning coaches and curriculum leaders. C2 reflected,

> We have realized that those support people we put in place have helped us move forward at a very quick pace. When we've talked to people at other schools that don't have those support positions, it's a much slower journey, and it gives importance to any kind of change that we do.

Research Question 2

The learning leaders interviewed expressed similar responses to the sub-questions that answered Research Question 2. Four themes emerged from the responses: PD, a focus on assessment and feedback, the use of teachers as leaders, and leaders as empathetic learners. The themes are discussed in detail below.

Theme 1: Professional development. All participants spoke of the importance of effective PD to support teachers during the implementation of SBGR. Each commented on the need for time, money, and expert consultants as part of successful PD.

School A leaders all mentioned that the leadership team did not rush into this initiative. "We spent a long time talking, outlining a process, reading, debating the

reading, and talking to knowledgeable people and consultants," A1 said. Books from authors such as Guskey, Schimmer, and Vatterott were read as a leadership team. This team also implemented their version of professional learning communities (PLCs) where teachers could "talk about their practice in mixed teams or small groups." A1 went further by stating teachers' conversations within these PLCs would focus around SBGR questions such as, "How did you evolve? What did you learn? What did you learn from each other? What did you learn from master teachers on your team?" A1 reflected that these conversations have shifted from six years ago when teachers were focused on "housekeeping" rather than having learning-focused conversations. "The shift of the narrative and the quality and the type of interactions between teachers over time was possibly the most profound example of professional learning because it was ongoing and embedded in their practice," stated A1.

Two leaders from School B also stated that the first step was to immerse themselves and their faculty in the research. They mentioned the books and articles of Wiggins, O'Connor, and Wiliam, who are examples of experts in assessment and best practice. "By sharing books, research, and articles, some teachers were able to see, maybe logically if not emotionally, that there were some flaws in the traditional grading system," stated B3. Once teachers understood the rationale, their expectations of support centered around who was going to help them and how was this going to move forward in their classroom. B2 noted that a successful strategy included school-wide departmental meetings. "Bringing all of the student work together and looking at what kids are actually

doing and what goals we are gathering data on has really helped support the assessment piece," stated B2. This leader further quipped, "As Grant Wiggins would say, *get assessment right and the grading and reporting will follow*."

Bringing in subject-area experts was the most successful strategy to support the faculty of School C after they spent a year and a half on whole-faculty education around why SBGR was important. The leaders of this school would release teachers within the subject area to work closely with the consultant and get practical help focused on their subject. C1 stated, "You don't start any initiative without giving proper time to it." C3 added, "Having an outside expert come in and speak their same language is massive, because then the teachers start to believe it." School C also brought in an assessment specialist from the States to work with teams on best practices and high-quality design for assessments. With each outside consultant brought in, according to C2, "we also have put in place positions to help support that learning as we go on, go forward." C2 further stated, "We have curricular leaders, instructional coaches, and some content area coaches who work closely with teacher leaders and teams and ensure that faculty have access to the information learned from the outside experts."

Abundant time and money are spent on PD in order for change to be successful. School C leaders felt that training in both Adaptive Schools and Cognitive Coaching were effective for their administrators and teacher leaders. These trainings have helped our "ability to facilitate difficult conversations and given those who struggle the words to

participate in ways that are meaningful for everyone," said C2. They plan to have more faculty go through these trainings over the next few years.

Theme 2: Focus on assessment and feedback. Each school leader interviewed agreed that assessments must change when shifting from traditional grading and reporting to a standards-based approach. Whereas traditionally, assessments were given a percentage score based on the number correct total, in the standards-based approach assessments are scored according to the proficiency of the answer in relation to the standard. The proficiency scale differs by school and can be represented with any symbol chosen including a number, a letter, a word, or a phrase.

Each school in this study began the shift by separating behavior from achievement in grading and reporting. Then, each of these schools began aligning assessments with the chosen standards. A2 noted that the leadership was more concerned with keeping the conversation on "growth and growth for students in a growth mindset." Therefore, they felt it was necessary to make a distinction between standards-based grading, standards-based assessment, standards-based reporting, and then also standards informed of all of those things.

School A created a set of descriptors based on Bloom's Taxonomy to inform the learner of their understanding of the chosen standards. Prior to this work, A2 noticed "inconsistencies in grading practices across classes." This leader further stated how difficult and confusing that must be for students. "A lot of focus was on assessment, to ensure they are created in a way that meet the standards and allow for different levels of

complexities to be demonstrated; and on rubrics that give appropriate feedback on student work," said A1. In fact, A3 stated, "90% of our time was spent on the focus of learning and how to help students move from one spot of achievement or acquisition of knowledge or skill to a more advanced position of acquisition of knowledge or skill." Teacher teams in School A modified every assessment and then asked if the new assessment built confidence in the learner, helped the learner grow, and was accurate in assessing whether a child learned or not," stated A3. Now, according to these leaders, there are more consistent and accurate assessments within subject areas and between course-level classes.

According to B2, School B is still working on their assessment conversations. "There are still some deep misunderstandings from the students and parents about what good assessment actually looks like," iterated B2. The accrediting organization recommended a school-wide assessment and grading policy and the high school leadership realized that "the policy did not match the practice," noted B2. "The emphasis was on types of assessments rather than types of learning," reflected B3. "We've asked every department to determine the three to five categories of learning that showed what it meant to be a good scientist, or historian, or mathematician." These became "broad reporting categories," B3 further explained. This seems to be a similar position of School C.

C1 stated, "We are now using the surgical lens with each subject area. Case by care, there are differences that are unique to this subject with assessment and reporting."

C2 explained that with improved assessments, “we had to design new units along with learning targets for kids to track their learning and ways for kids to reassess.” Students shared feedback on surveys about the “different way teachers approached learning and the fact that they really knew what they needed to learn,” according to C2. The journey is not complete at School C. They feel the need to frequently revisit the assessment policies and take time to “continue to educate teachers, students, and parents,” said C3.

Theme 3: The use of teachers as leaders. Each school represented in this study had at least one leader who spoke of the importance of teacher leaders as being important pieces of the success of this initiative. Teacher leaders can be defined as heads of departments or subject area leaders within high schools. Each of the schools represented have teacher leaders who receive one extra paid prep period than others in their department and receive a stipend for their teacher leadership position.

Department head meetings at School A included the head of counseling, the head of the outdoor education program, the head of the learning resource team, the head of the English as a Second Language team, the division administrators, the division curriculum team, as well as the subject area departments. These meetings took place at least twice a month during the rollout of the SBGR initiative. A2 commented,

> Having all of those voices in the room meant that we could really engage them in dialogue and dig deep into the teacher perspective and get a deeper understanding of what might be the pushback, the questions, the concerns, the worries, and the anxieties.

For more than a year, "we were really able to flesh out the full picture of both the need, the mandate, and the challenges that would be presented to us." A2 further stated,

> These experts became foot soldiers in each department. They were an ally, but not administrators, who could be more empathetic with a body of knowledge to be able to answer the questions of their department and allay their fears a little bit.

B3 mentioned that their department head position was more than managerial, there was a "learning leader component to the role." With the extra paid time in their schedule as well as the stipend, these teacher leaders were expected to lead the work and their team. Whereas before this initiative could be successful, School C leaders realized they needed to shift the position of department head from managerial to those "who have that vision of what this can look like in the future," stated C3. Therefore, instead of choosing "who is willing to step up," they now nominate teachers for the position as well as give those learning leaders PD around team facilitation through Adaptive Schools training.

Theme 4: Leaders as empathetic learners. All of the participants in this study mentioned the need for school leaders to be model learners. A model learner has many attributes. A few attributes could include flexibility, vulnerability, and humility. The leaders interviewed in this study mentioned leader qualities at their school that helped the success of the implementation of this strategic change.

A1 felt that their process of leading this change was "responsive, not rigid." A2 recognized, "a willingness to listen openly with an open heart, and a willingness to

acknowledge mistakes." Both leaders mentioned the importance of being vulnerable and truly empathizing with the faculty. B2 spoke about an experience with "a principal who was an incredible leader and able to have those conversations with people in a way that they still feel appreciated and competent."

C2 also reflected on others who have led change. "There is a humbleness about them; that they don't have all the answers and they are good listeners." This leader further stated, "when you share your struggles with new learning, that validates other people, too- to see that you're on the journey together. It's valuable to honor the fact that you also struggle with change and that it is difficult."

The high school leadership at School C, along with the curriculum department, model their expectations during faculty meetings. Each meeting has learning targets, formative assessments, and resources for further learning. "We want to model for them what we want them to do in the classrooms," stated C2. This is not easy for many administrators. C3 reflected,

> A lot of school leaders who are leading this change haven't lived it as a teacher. It is a massive change. It is going to be messy. It's not going to be perfect, but we're going to get there together.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Ravitch and Carl (2016) stressed the significance of trustworthiness as a critical element of the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of a study. In qualitative research, these are determined by the accuracy of findings from the

viewpoints of researchers and participants (Creswell, 2014). In this study, I used the data from the interviews with participants as well as the information from document reviews collected from participants and those located on each school's public website to ensure the accuracy of the analyzed data.

To ensure the credibility and dependability, I used member checking to allow participants an opportunity to check the accuracy of their responses to the interview questions as well as clarify or add to their responses (Creswell, 2014; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Each of the nine participants responded that they had read the transcript and two of the nine chose to add to their responses. I then triangulated the findings by comparing the interview responses given by each of the three leaders from School A along with the document review and public documentation from the school's website. The same process was completed with the findings from the leaders of School B, and finally, School C. Each participant was shown a transcript of their interview as well as the draft of the results from the data analysis. Finally, I shared the data analysis with an outside researcher, a peer with experience in data review, to examine the interpretation of the data collected.

The results of this study are not limited to only expatriate high schools in Asia. The themes found could be generalized for leaders of schools in similar situations of determining how to transition from traditional grading and reporting to a standards-based approach. Furthermore, the results could also be used to assist in the transition of many paradigm shifts or strategic changes in a school.

To ensure confirmability for this study, I needed to consider the steps I took to eliminate my personal perceptions of the problem of the study (Creswell, 2014; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). After the coding process, I had to ensure that my rationale for an emerging theme was completely based on the data from the interview transcripts and not my own biases. Therefore, each participant had an opportunity to review the data analysis to confirm the results and respond as necessary.

Summary

In Chapter 4, I summarized the findings from the analysis of interview responses and document reviews. The purpose of this study was to explore administrative practices used to facilitate teacher implementation of standards-based grading and reporting at expatriate high schools in the EARCOS region. Three themes emerged from Research Question 1 regarding the administrative practices used to address the need for change related to the implementation of SBGR: knowing the why, hiring and retaining the right teachers, and effective communication with all stakeholders. Four themes emerged from Research Question 2 concerning how administrators support teachers in the implementation of SBGR: PD, a focus on assessment and feedback, the use of teachers as leaders, and leaders as empathetic learners. No discrepant cases were identified. Through member checking, all participants validated that the identified themes correctly reflected their responses. Chapter 5 will consist of the interpretations of the findings, the limitations of the study, recommendations for action and continued research, as well as implications for social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The problem I addressed in this case study was the need to explore administrative practices used to help high school teachers at expatriate schools in the EARCOS region understand and buy-in to the shift from traditional grading and reporting to SBGR. I used a case study design to attempt to describe the perceptions of the participants interviewed in this study (see Creswell, 2009). The purpose of this study was to explore the practices used by administrators and find patterns of successful strategies and insight that other leaders could use when planning for strategic change.

The conceptual framework of the expectancy-value theory was appropriate for this study because it provided a framework for creating interview questions based on research questions that focused on creating a culture for buy-in regarding strategic change. During any strategic change, it is important for school leaders to explore and address the barriers and attitudes that may make teachers hesitate to shift to a research-based better practice (Knight & Cooper, 2019). According to Priniski et al. (2017), knowing that a teacher has a positive, accurate self-perception of their proficiency of the initiative and the expectations of them during the implementation as well as the value they see in the change will be useful for leaders. Therefore, having an understanding of teachers' mindsets around the importance of doing well during the shift (i.e., the attainment value), enjoying the learning and practicing during the shift (i.e., the intrinsic value), whether the shift is useful in their classroom (i.e., the utility value), and if the cost of engaging in the shift is worth it in the end (i.e., the cost value) can determine whether

change will be successful for faculty and the school (Eccles et al., 1983; Wigfield & Eccles, 1992). The expectancy-value theory provided a framework that helped me identify the strategies used by leaders that they believed intrinsically motivated faculty to implement practices that improved student learning.

I interviewed nine school leaders from three different schools in the EARCOS region. The interview questions were developed to address the following two research questions:

RQ1: What administrative practices are used to address the need for change related to the implementation of SBGR?

RQ2: How do administrators support teachers in the implementation of SBGR?

Three themes emerged related to Research Question 1 and four themes emerged related to Research Question 2 regarding how leaders in these schools implement successful change.

Interpretation of the Findings

Previously in Chapter 4, I presented the major findings of this study. The following three themes emerged from the individual interviews with nine leaders from three expatriate high schools to address Research Question 1: knowing the why, hiring and retaining the right teachers, and effective communication with all stakeholders. Four themes emerged related to Research Question 2: PD, a focus on assessment and feedback, the use of teachers as leaders, and leaders as empathetic learners. The findings in this study are confirmed by the recent research of experts in this field.

The importance of having a narrative that explained the problem of traditional grading and the purpose of standards-based grading was mentioned by all leaders in this study. If teachers can communicate the purpose and story for the change, then it is more likely to be successful. O'Connor et al. (2018) argued for standards-based grading practices that are fair, accurate, specific, and timely. This could be used as a schema to examine current practices and explain improved grading practices. In this study, the leaders reiterated the importance of recognizing the balance between what is best for students and the traditions of the faculty who are most comfortable with traditional approaches to grading. Their rationale for change came from the need for a comprehensive assessment policy, the need to separate achievement from effort, the need to shift students from being graded-focused to being learning-focused, and to become more consistent in grading and reporting practices across classrooms and subject areas. These standards-based practices focus on how well a student learns (Battistone et al., 2019; Brookhart, 2011; Knight & Cooper, 2019; Townsley & Varga, 2018). To be successful, this requires a shift in pedagogy, assessments, and feedback (Battistone et al., 2019; Knight & Cooper, 2019).

Once the leaders from each school formulated their research-based common message for their rationale for change, they began engaging stakeholders, such as department heads, college counselors, faculty, parents, and students. Though most administrators interviewed felt that the initiative was communicated to all stakeholders, upon reflection, most felt that communication could have been more successful on

several fronts. Townsley et al. (2019) also noted that successful leaders must "overcommunicate, seek input continually from stakeholders, ensure that day-to-day operations are managed in an orderly way" as well as be an instructional leader (p. 283). Leaders who communicate well are able to build the trust needed to implement successful change.

The participants felt that students and parents could have been included more from the beginning. The Technology Department could have ensured the learning management system, the school's communication tool with students and parents, supported the vision of the grading approach. Finally, the communication with those faculty perceived as either the early adopters or the resistors could have been handled in a way that did not negatively divide the faculty and impact the climate.

Strategies that were used by leaders in this study to communicate with stakeholders included newsletters, surveys, and town halls. Newsletters were used as a tool to communicate recent research to faculty as well as to communicate with parents. Surveys were used to gather data from faculty, parents, and students regarding the initiative and implementation of the change. Town halls were used to allow stakeholders to hear from school leaders, ask questions, and receive answers. Even with all of these strategies to communicate change, there was room to improve. One leader reflected that no matter how many e-mails you send home, parents will be surprised once a significant change is implemented and impacts their child.

Hiring and retaining faculty and leadership with the organization's vision in mind was an important strategy in place at each of the schools in this study. Battistone et al. (2019) found a significant disconnect between what is learned in a teacher education program and what is expected in a school that uses research-based assessment and grading practices. Therefore, it is up to K–12 schools to support teachers' understanding of practices that are expected in the school. Leaders in School A built a philosophy around what they thought were growth-focused practices that effective teachers should ask themselves. Teachers, therefore, had a better understanding of what a growth mindset looked like as well as a clear vision of the learning and assessment practices that were required to continue to work in that environment.

A leader from School B reflected that in their experience in international schools worldwide, having fewer experiences in a variety of schools may make teachers more risk averse. In recent studies, researchers have concluded that, specifically in international schools with a transition rate of 17% to 30% new faculty per year, some veteran faculty feel they can wait out newcomers with progressive initiatives, which leads to an unhealthy and divisive school culture (Mancuso, Roberts, & White, 2010; Tkachyk, 2017). In the experience of a participant from School B, teachers in smaller schools are more aware of the different divisions and the school as a whole and, therefore, have this ability to embrace change easier than those in larger schools where high school teachers may only be collaborating with other high school teachers with similar beliefs.

Similar to the findings of Knight and Cooper (2019), each of the leaders interviewed in this study who were also evaluators of faculty mentioned the importance of giving all faculty time to understand the strategic change, practice their learning around the change, and have sufficient support to successfully make the change. However, these leaders were also clear on the importance of accountability. These instructional leaders were direct; they made the expectations clear and were upfront about what improvement was needed before signing a continuing contract. Townsley et al. (2019) reiterated the need for principals to be direct instructional leaders who focus on the quality of curriculum, instruction, and assessment and provide specific, constructive feedback to teachers.

Establishing effective PD plans to support teachers during the implementation of SBGR allowed for better retention rates of faculty at each school in this study. Time, money, collaboration, and consulting with experts were themes of a successful PD process. School A leaders all mentioned that the leadership team did not rush into this initiative and ensured that each decision and move forward was supported by research and data. This strategy is supported by the research of Guskey and Link (2019), who stated the importance of combining collaboration with research and student data. School A also implemented their version of PLCs in which teachers could collaborate and share results and next steps for student learning rather than housekeeping items. All leaders further noted that by sharing and discussing recent research as well as data from student

work within PD opportunities, teachers were able to see the flaws in the traditional grading process.

Ample preparation, time, and money need to be spent on PD in order for change to be successful. Each school leader expressed the importance of building effective organizational supports teachers need to change their practices around SBGR. A focus on assessment and feedback practices school-wide and within subject areas was one strategy used by each school leader that helped teachers focus on student growth and proficiency of learning targets rather than an overall grade. Through this focus, leaders and teachers recognized the inconsistencies of grading practices between course-level assessment tasks as well as across departments. Knight and Cooper (2019) found that by aligning assessments to specific standards, teachers were better able to analyze student data and plan more effective instruction strategies based on student needs.

Teacher leaders were noted as being important pieces of the success of this initiative. Teacher leaders at each of the schools that participated in this study receive one extra paid prep period than others in their department and receive a stipend for their teacher leadership position. A common theme expressed by the participants in this study was that the teacher leaders were experts and learning leaders in their content area who were able to answer department members' questions, alleviate their fears, and lead the work as well as the team. The leaders of these departments were important partners not only with their subject-area teams but also with school leaders. Teacher leaders as well as

the school leaders implementing this important change exemplified the qualities needed to implement successful change: empathy, flexibility, vulnerability, and humility.

According to the participants, the leadership qualities listed above required a team of leaders who were responsive and able to listen. Leadership in a school influences the culture as well as the climate of the school and can increase student learning and teacher efficacy (Gray & Summers, 2016; Rivera-McCutchen & Watson, 2014; Sutherland & Yoshida, 2015; Townsley et al., 2019; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). The shift from traditional to standards-based grading is considered a second-order change. Marzano et al. (2006) stated that leadership, department level and divisional, requires the following responsibilities for successful change: "knowledge of curriculum, assessment, and instruction; optimizer; intellectual stimulation; change agent; monitoring/evaluating; flexibility; and ideals/beliefs" (p. 70). The participants in this study reported many aspects of these responsibilities in their interviews as traits possessed by themselves or other administrators leading this initiative.

The themes of this study all fit into the conceptual framework of the expectancy-value theory. In order to motivate teachers to shift their practice, they must first feel that they have the understanding of the need for the shift (i.e., know the why and effective communication with stakeholders), the support of their leaders (i.e., effective teacher leaders and empathetic divisional leaders), and the confidence to be successful in this change (i.e., hiring and retaining the right people). These concepts are considered the expectancy beliefs (Eccles et al., 1983; Loh, 2019; Wigfield & Eccles, 1992). Moreover,

teachers must feel that there is value in shifting practice (i.e., PD and a focus on assessment and feedback) without significant negative cost. School leaders who wish to create a climate that supports SBGR could consider the expectancy and value beliefs of their faculty to determine the strategic planning involved in this paradigm shift.

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited by the number of high schools in the EARCOS region that have shifted grading and reporting practices from the traditional approach to a standards-based approach. A misconception held by some school leaders is that in order to claim that they use standards-based reporting, traditional letter grades cannot be used on the report card. However, any letter, number, or symbol can still be used on a standards-based report card, as long as the final grade is based on fair, accurate, specific, and timely achievement towards standards-based learning targets.

Another limitation for this study was the broad definition of leadership. The participants in this study consisted of leaders in positions that ranged from curriculum coordinators, assistant principals, principals, and heads of school. Although each participant had specific knowledge of and participation in the creation and implementation of the shift from traditional grading to standards-based grading, they held slightly different viewpoints based on their responsibility in recruiting, evaluating, and retaining faculty. For example, the participants who were not direct supervisors of teachers reflected more on the strategies used to promote learning; while the participants who evaluated faculty reflected more on strategies for hiring and retaining teachers.

Although participants had different lenses for answering the interview questions, I believe that saturation was still met.

Recommendations

Findings from this study confirm the need for further research in the areas of effective professional learning on the philosophy and implementation of SBGR for high school leaders as well as high school teachers in international schools. A deeper understanding of the philosophical foundation of SBGR would allow school leaders to better manage and lead this initiative. Further research should also consider the hiring practices of schools implementing SBGR. Recruiting teachers, teacher leaders, and administrators with proven experience of SBGR allows schools to continually move forward rather than start over with each school year's newly hired faculty.

Implications

The findings from this study could be a factor for positive social change in global educational communities. The results could inform school leaders as they plan for significant strategic change. Identifying potential patterns in school leaders' experiences while initiating a shift from traditional grading to standards-based grading provides data that may support the efforts of other school leaders doing similar work. Leaders with this research can consider the themes presented as they create a plan for implementing successful change.

Heads of schools and divisional leaders could refer to these findings as they consider the purpose of change and how strategic change will be effectively

communicated to all stakeholders of the school community. Furthermore, these administrators are entrusted to recruit, hire, and retain faculty with the mindset similar to the vision of the school; the experiences of the participants, along with the current body of recent research, can help discern the qualities needed to support a positive school climate and implement successful change.

Learning leaders, such as curriculum coordinators, instructional coaches, and teacher leaders can apply the results as they plan for professional learning for themselves, the faculty, and subject-area teams. Utilizing the experiences from the participants from this study, learning leaders can create professional learning models that include studies of recent research, outside experts, collaboration with schools doing similar work, and PLCs. Providing an environment where teachers and leaders are working together to improve student learning by focusing on growth and growth mindset rather than grades increases the potential for positive social change within the school, the community, and the region.

Conclusion

The world is changing. It is educators’ moral imperative to prepare students for an unknown and changing future that requires a shift in the traditional mindset and skills of previous generations. What matters now is different than what mattered for earlier generations. Helping students better understand who they are as learners and how to navigate, determine the validity, and make use of the vast amount of information available at their fingertips is now the job of educators.

In high schools, traditional grading and reporting practices are comfortable and known to teachers, students, and parents. However, students are graduating from high school without knowing themselves as learners. High school leaders must help faculty, as well as students and parents, shift their mindset by using strategies to create a climate and culture willing to change.

High school leaders in this study believed that this strategic change was the right direction for their school and their students. The findings showed that implementing SBGR is a systemic shift requiring a research-based understanding that is effectively communicated to all stakeholders, hiring and retaining the right teachers and leaders, and PD focused on curriculum, instruction, assessment, and feedback.

Results of the current study add to the growing body of research on SBGR by adding experiences of high school leaders in high-performing expatriate schools in East Asia. Providing an environment where teachers feel safe and supported to shift their instruction and assessment practices to better prepare students for an unknown future increases the potential for beneficial social change in classrooms and beyond.

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Appendix A: Differences Between Traditional and Standards-Based Grading Systems

Traditional Grading System	Standards-Based Grading System
System is based on assessment methods (quizzes, test, homework, and so on). One grade is given for each subject.	System is based on learning goals and performance standards. One grade is given for each learning goal.
Assessments are norm-referenced and based on a percentage system. Criteria are often unclear or assumed.	Standards are criterion-referenced and proficiency-based (using a limited number of levels to assess performance on a scale). Criteria and targets are known to all.
Use an uncertain mix of assessment and achievement, attitude, effort, and behavior. Use penalties and extra credit. Include group scores.	Measure only achievement. No penalties or bonuses are given. Includes individual evidence only.
Score everything, regardless of purpose.	Use only summative assessments for grading purposes.

Include every score, regardless of when it was collected. Assessments record the average, not the best, work.	Emphasize the most recent evidence of learning when grading.
Calculate grades using the mean.	Use median, mode, and professional judgment to determine grade.
Assessments vary in quality. Some evidence comes from teacher recollection.	Use only quality assessment, and carefully record data.
The teacher makes decisions about grading and announces those decisions to students.	Discuss all aspects of grading with students.

Note. Standards-based grading compared with traditional grading to show the differences in approaches. Adapted from *How to Grade for Learning K-12* by O'Connor, 2009, p. 233. Copyright by Corwin Press.

Appendix B: Research Interview Questions and Subquestions

These questions will give direction to this study.
1. What administrative practices are used to address the need for change related to the implementation of Standards-Based Grading and Reporting (SBGR)?
Possible Subquestions:

a. How is the need for change decided at this school?
b. What is the process once the need for change is decided?
c. How does this school promote stakeholder buy-in for change?
d. Can you walk me through the school's documents and resources that explain the direction toward change?
e. What was the catalyst for the transition from traditional grading practices to standards-based grading practices?
f. What are the strategies used to promote this change?
g. What are the strategies used when there is a lack of support for this change in the school community?
h. How do administrators share these experiences and strategies with each other?

2. How do administrators support teachers in the implementation of SBGR?
Possible Subquestions:

a. What are teachers' expectations of support when change occurs?
b. What are the strategies for deciding timeline for change?
c. What professional learning opportunities have administrators been given around shifting from traditional to standards-based grading?
d. Have those opportunities been sufficient as administrators support teachers in the implementation of SBGR?
e. What strategies are used to identify teachers' beliefs and attitudes of grading and reporting practices?
f. What strategies are used to intrinsically motivate teachers to move from traditional to SBGR?
g. What strategies are used when teachers fail to see the benefit of this mandate?

Appendix C: Document Summary Form

Process for reviewing school documents prior to interviews.

Site:	Name or description of document:
Date received: Date of interview:	Significance or importance of document:
Brief summary of contents:	Alignment to research questions and follow-up questions: