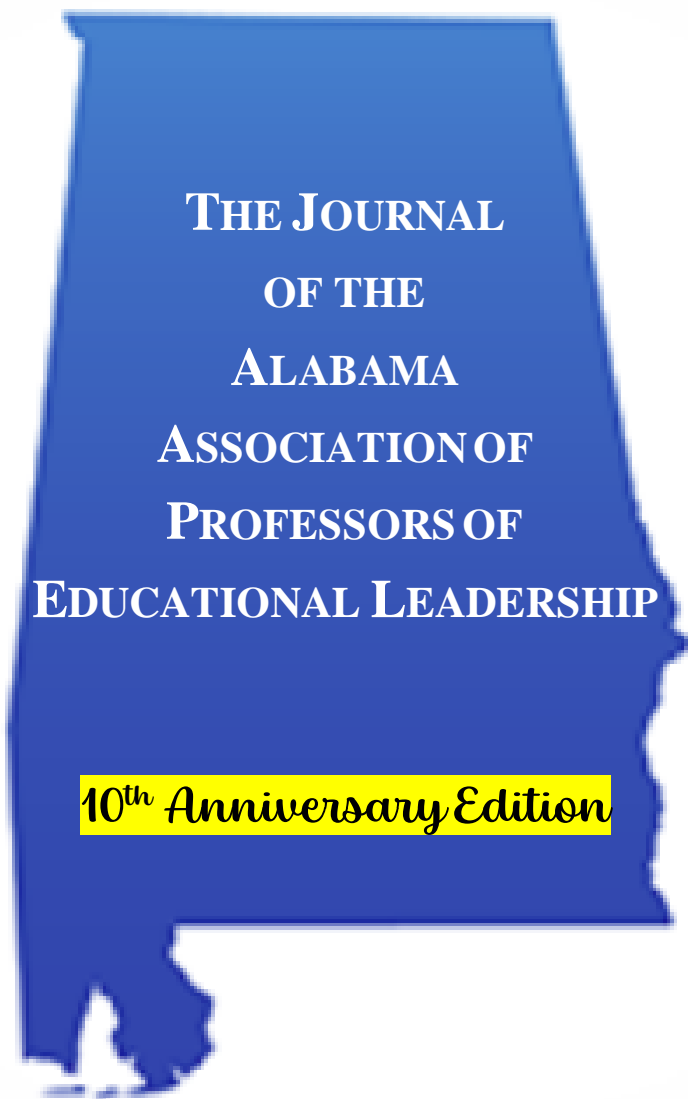# The Alabama Journal of Educational Leadership

THE JOURNAL
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PROFESSORS OF
EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

10th Anniversary Edition

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LEADERSHIP IN A TIME OF CHANGE

Alabama Association of Professors of Educational Leadership

MEMBER INSTITUTIONS

The Alabama Association of Professors of Educational Leadership (AAPEL) is a non-profit professional society organized to establish and maintain a collegial and collaborative organization in the State of Alabama.

Alabama A&M University	University of Alabama
Alabama State University	University of Alabama Birmingham
Auburn University	University of Montevallo
Jacksonville State University	University of North Alabama
Samford University	University of South Alabama
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PURPOSE

This organization exists for:

➢ Promoting continuous dialog among Educational Leadership Professors;
➢ Exploring and promoting research, thus making distinctive contributions to the field;
➢ Recognizing and examining strengths and weaknesses in Educational Leadership Programs;
➢ Establishing informational and professional linkages with the State Department of Education and the Alabama Commission on Higher Education; and,
➢ Perpetuating a positive vision for Alabama Schools and other educational institutions.

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The Alabama Journal of Educational Leadership

LEADERSHIP IN A TIME OF CHANGE

EDITOR

A MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

Wow! This edition of **The Alabama Journal of Educational Leadership (AJEL)** represents our 10th edition. In 2014, we had our first edition with editor Tonya Conner from Troy University - Dothan Campus. About five years later, the editor was Yvette Byrum from The University of Alabama. Each helped steer this journal's development and keep us on the right path. Many others have helped over the years. Most notable are our dedicated volunteers who served on the Editorial Board and offered constructive feedback to the various authors. Moreover, thank you to 25 authors for their willingness to submit the manuscripts and have them peered reviewed. So, we celebrate and acknowledge the many people who, over the years, help us reach this milestone we now celebrate.

You can access the previous nine AJEL issues via the ICPEL website: https://www.icpel.org/state-affiliate-journals.html. This 10th edition will be posted there, too.

ERIC indexes AJEL articles. As of July 2023, we have received 5,799 views and 4,720 downloads of our 50 manuscripts written by 25 authors. This 10th edition will be posted shortly. Please visit the ERIC site featuring our journal: (https://eric.ed.gov/?q=source%3A%22Alabama+Journal+of+Educational+Leadership%22).

For this special 10th AJEL edition focused on the Leadership in a Time of Change theme, we have gathered 9 articles by 17 authors focusing on P-20 education. These articles offer exemplars of leadership in a time of significant change. The authors' inquiry represents the embracement of quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods studies. The literature review article discusses the connections between anti-racism teaching and social-emotional learning (Durm and Roper-Roach). Two research studies focus on mathematics instruction assisted through the pandemic (Pestridge) and therapy dogs (Dudley and Knight). Three studies described stakeholders' perspectives on significant changes. These include veteran teachers on technology (Aldridge and Gardner Witherspoon), counselors and administrators on school counseling programming efforts (Windham and Tuttle), and assistant principals' viewpoints of their role in curriculum and instruction leadership (Furman and Gurley). The final three manuscripts focus on the examination of how to retain non-traditionally-certified teachers (Richards and Gurley); school leaders of color serving in white spaces (Burton); and if practice, feedback, and engagement can help further improve Praxis scores for those in an educator preparation program.

(Crouse, Hildreth, and Jones). We are sure you will find something for everyone in this special edition.

Finally, this 10th issue would not have been possible without the efforts of numerous people, such as:

- ✓ The APPEL membership for sustaining a venue where professionals in the leadership field can openly share their research, including members that mentored students for publishing for the first time.

- ✓ To all the Editorial Board members who judiciously reviewed 2-4 manuscripts promptly.

- ✓ To the authors for developing and sharing their manuscripts and modifying them based on the Editorial Board members' feedback.

- ✓ Dr. Brad Bizzell, director of ICPEL Publications, provided all final formatting.

- ✓ For ICPEL's support toward providing journals that further inform educators.

- ✓ And finally, you, the reader.

Please consider submitting a manuscript next year (2023-2024) as we will celebrate the continuation of this journal dedicated to fostering educational leadership through research-informed decision-making throughout Alabama.

On behalf of the Editorial Board, have a successful 2023-2024 school year. Enjoy reading!

Mary E. Yakimowski, Ph.D.

Samford University

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PASSING THE PRAXIS IS AS EASY AS PIE:
PRACTICAL PRACTICE, IMMEDIATE FEEDBACK, AND ENGAGEMENT WITH PEERS

Tammy Crouse, Debbie Hildreth, and Kevin Jones
The University of West Alabama

Abstract

In today's world, Principal Preparation Programs (PPPs) need to be innovative in helping principal candidates be more prepared to lead in changing times, but first, they must receive certification successfully. Completing the Praxis exam is the final requirement to gain certification as an instructional leader in Alabama and is often a stressful time for many. A mixed-methods study was conducted to investigate the problem of principal candidates struggling with the Praxis exam and find ways to support them by utilizing retrieval practice using the theoretical framework of Transfer Appropriate Processing (TAP). An invitation to participate was sent to all students in their last course in the instructional leadership program at one university. Then 30 participants were randomly placed into one of three cohorts: testing, testing with collaboration, or random. Online practice exams were purchased through a small seed grant. Quantitative data consisted of scores from online practice tests at three testing points. A significant difference was found between the practice testing and random groups. Qualitative data from an open-ended survey at the end of the experience revealed that participants increased their confidence and test-taking strategies and found the experience to be positive in preparing for the exam and their future leadership. The implications for PPPs are many, including the importance of providing students with opportunities for retrieval practice and collaboration. This helps not only with the testing situation but also in increasing their ability to transfer knowledge to novel situations similar to what they will face in the complex field of leadership and be better prepared to lead in changing times. Exploring innovative and virtual options for practice and collaboration is also needed for PPPs to meet the needs of online students today and help ensure they are ready to lead schools in times of change.

Introduction

Research has shown that effective principals are essential in positively impacting the teachers and students in their schools. Principals engaged in exemplary principal preparation programs (PPP) were likelier to be influential leaders, especially during challenging times of change, a part of education today (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022). When a PPP helps candidates understand the complexities of leadership and prepares them to demonstrate knowledge and skills that effective school leaders utilize, they will lead excellently under all circumstances. These skills are also needed to pass the certification exam.

The Praxis Educational Leadership Administration & Supervision (5412) assessment is "designed to measure the extent to which entry-level school leaders demonstrate the standards-relevant knowledge and skills necessary for competent professional practice" (Educational Testing Service, 2022, p. 5). The six content categories of the Praxis (5412) are aligned with the Alabama Standards for Instructional Leaders (ASIL) and the 2015 Professional Standard for Educational Leaders (PSEL).

The Praxis exam is one of the final hurdles for principal candidates seeking Educational/Instructional Leadership certification. For many candidates, the Praxis exam is a routine process, but for others, the challenge is more significant and the process traumatic than the "timed tests" spark fear in their minds. The Praxis exam sometimes stumps those who breezed through coursework with few complications. Therefore, finding effective strategies to aid students in this endeavor is essential. Research studies show that practice exams, as retrieval practice, are one of the best ways to prepare for high-stakes tests (Adesope et al., 2017; Brame & Biel, 2015; Dunlosky et al., 2013; Larsen, 2018; Whiffen & Karpicke, 2017).

Much research exists on the effects of retrieval practice on learning, especially in P12 schools and for undergraduate students in higher education. However, there is a gap in the research on how retrieval practice impacts graduate students, especially those in principal preparation programs preparing specifically for the Praxis exam. This study explores how practice, immediate feedback, and peer engagement impact principal candidates as they prepare for the Praxis exam and become better prepared for *leading in a time of change*.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework guiding this study is Transfer Appropriate Processing (TAP) which explains that memory is determined by the relationship between how information is encoded initially and how it is retrieved later (McDaniel et al., 1978; Morris et al., 1977). TAP is "a theory stating that memory performance is better when the cognitive processes engaged during retrieval match the cognitive processes that were engaged when the material was encoded" (American Psychological Association, n.d.). In this study, TAP is applied by helping students to take their initially encoded information learned in the principal preparation program and to retrieve it through practice tests. In addition, integrating TAP into practical practice, immediate and delayed feedback, and engagement with peers will prepare aspiring leaders to succeed when faced with challenging situations in school leadership, especially as they navigate changing times.

Literature Review

The literature review section of this study explores the theoretical framework of Transfer Appropriate Processing (TAP) and its application to practice testing to improve the retention and transfer of knowledge for principal candidates as they prepare for the Praxis exam. The literature review also delves into the relationship between immediate and delayed feedback and how feedback enhances the testing effect. Additionally, the literature review examines the benefits of collaboration and peer engagement as an effective way to improve learning following retrieval practice. Ultimately, this literature review ties together the theoretical framework of TAP and the practical applications of practice testing, feedback, and collaboration in PPPs and provides the foundation for the study's research questions and methodology.

Practical Practice

Students often view testing as just a part of the educational process and would prefer not; they view it as just a part of the educational process and prefer avoiding them. This is especially true when facing high-stakes summative assessments that have a tremendous impact on their future, such as the Praxis exam, which must be passed to obtain certification to be a school leader. Larsen (2018) argued that educators often give tests to measure knowledge to ensure the learner has achieved at least a minimum level of competency, hoping they will retain this information for the rest of their careers. That is certainly the hope for aspiring leaders in PPPs. Promising evidence has emerged from cognitive psychology and applied education studies that repeated retrieval of information, or practice testing, improves retention significantly (Dunlosky et al., 2013; Larsen, 2018; Tures, 2022). There is some evidence that testing improves student memory of the tested information and related information (Brame & Biel, 2015).

Moreira et al. (2019) suggested that the practice of remembering previously studied information (i.e., retrieval practice) is more advantageous for long-term retention than restudying that same information, a phenomenon often termed "testing effect." When used correctly, retrieval practice techniques help to foster deeper learning and understanding so that the knowledge can be embedded into long-term memory and retrieved to help with future testing and even improve the transfer of knowledge to new contexts, such as the challenges aspiring leaders will face in their role as a school leader (Roediger & Butler, 2011; Roediger et al., 2011; Whiffen & Karpicke, 2017).

Dunlosky et al. (2013) thoroughly synthesized more than 120 studies conducted during a 10-year window. They found that practice testing was a promising technique to help students better regulate their learning and significantly impact the final performance on high-stakes testing. They reported that practice testing improves learning as elaborative retrieval processes are activated when attempting to retrieve information in long-term memory, which helps create multiple, organized pathways to facilitate later access to that information. They rated practice testing as a high-utility technique that has broad applicability. When testing is combined with feedback, learners can use repetition to make corrections and have opportunities to correctly retrieve the information they may have missed before (Larsen, 2018). Effective feedback can be immediately given so students know the rationale for the answers provided after each question. Delayed feedback occurs when students complete the test and then return to see the results and rationales for correct responses.

Immediate and Delayed Feedback

Much research has been conducted on the role of feedback on the testing effect. Feedback provides metacognitive monitoring to ensure accuracy and can lead to shifts from ineffective to effective retrieval strategies (Larsen, 2018). Outcomes of testing with feedback outperformed outcomes of practice testing alone, with one study reporting that student performance was almost double in those who had received feedback following the practice test (Butler & Roediger, 2008; Dunlosky, 2013).

Although retrieval practice increases long-term retention of information, it is enhanced even more when feedback with the correct answer is provided to the test-takers, especially for multiple-choice items, because the incorrect information has also been presented. When a learner gives an incorrect answer but is provided with corrective feedback, researchers have elicited evidence of reconsolidation which reactivates memory and allows it to be updated and more easily accessible in the future (Finn et al., 2012).

Common sense thinking, in addition to studies that have been done in behavioral psychology, indicates that immediate feedback (following each question) after a test is beneficial; however, some research results show delayed feedback (at the end of the test) may be even more helpful (Roediger & Butler, 2011). Wheeler et al. (2003) conducted a study in which students were either given feedback immediately or delayed feedback. Results indicated that students who were provided immediate feedback increased their final performance by 10% compared to those who only took the test with no feedback. The interesting finding was that delayed feedback yielded even better final performance, which has been replicated in other studies (Butler & Roediger, 2007; Smith & Kimball, 2010). Larsen (2018) explained that retrieval practice with feedback provides a path in which learners can more accurately assess their learning and modify their approach to the information as needed. Providing opportunities for engagement with peers in addition to the feedback allows learners to consider alternative ideas and more deeply embed the new information for easier retrieval later.

Engagement with Peers (Collaboration)

Moreira et al. (2019) revealed through their research that collaboration improves learning following retrieval practice. Collaboration following assessments promotes active learning, increasing conceptual understanding, information retention, and problem-solving and critical thinking skills (Gilley & Clarkston, 2014). When students engage in conversations and provide feedback to their peers, they develop their judgment and increase their understanding (Tai et al., 2018). Another benefit of collaboration is reducing anxiety and increasing confidence and motivation, as Pandey and Kaptianoff (2011) reported. Research conducted by Tullis and Goldstone (2020) supported the premise that long-term retention of information was stronger when peers actively discussed and challenged one another. They further argued that peer interactions improved the students' ability to solve novel problems, which will help with testing and work as a school leader.

In summary, practice testing improves retention and memory, especially for high-stakes exams like Praxis, and when combined with feedback, it helps students regulate their learning and make corrections. Immediate and delayed feedback has benefits, with delayed feedback showing even better performance. Collaboration following assessments enhances learning by promoting active engagement, conceptual understanding, and problem-solving skills while

reducing anxiety and increasing confidence and motivation. When learning is enhanced, the candidates are much more prepared to lead in a time of change.

Methods

This study aimed to investigate the use of online practice tests to help principal candidates prepare for the Praxis exam and explore their perceptions of the process. The mixed methods research design was conducted as it offers a more in-depth understanding of smaller cases and methodological flexibility (Maxwell, 2016). Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) point out that this type of design also has breadth and depth.

Participants

A small grant of $1,000 was awarded to cover the practice test costs, so the sample was limited to 30 principal candidates who were at the end of their program in the Alabama PPP. All students in their last course in the instructional leadership program were invited to participate in the study. Thirty were randomly selected and divided into three cohorts: Cohort 1 took the practice tests five times; Cohort 2 took the practice tests five times as well and had opportunities to meet colleagues for collaboration following the five testing experiences; Cohort 3 was randomly selected from all other candidates who agreed to participate in the study. This cohort did not do practice testing, but their final Praxis outcomes were compared to the other two cohorts. The demographics of all three cohorts were consistent, with participants having over five years of teaching experience, 75% having 10+ years of experience, and 75% of participants teaching in rural schools. Two participants dropped out of the process for varying reasons leaving 28 as the final number in the study.

Data Collection

An online practice testing service was selected as it was formatted to resemble the Praxis exam regarding the number of questions and imposed time limits. It also provided detailed, immediate feedback. The various testing modes included no time limit, timed, and immediate or delayed feedback. A timeline was established to complete each of the five practice exams for both cohorts. A synchronous meeting was held following each practice exam for Cohort 2 to allow participants to engage with their peers to share their learning, ask questions and receive further feedback from their peers and instructors.

Quantitative data were collected for Cohorts 1 and 2 following each of the five practice exams, and final scores from the Praxis (5412) exam were collected for Cohorts 1 and 2 and the random group. Qualitative data was gathered from a short survey about perceptions of the practice exams and the process. Data were entered into the Intellectus Statistics software program for analysis.

Results

Research Question 1: Is there a difference in practice test scores for students who participate in Praxis practice exams and those who participate in Praxis practice with collaboration groups? A two-tailed independent samples *t*-test was conducted to examine whether the mean of the scores was significantly different between Cohort 1 (tests only) and

Cohort 2 (tests with collaboration). The Welch's t-test was not significant based on an alpha value of .05, $t(78.64) = 1.63$, p = .106, and are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Two-Tailed Independent Samples t-Test for Score by Cohort

Variable	Cohort 1		Cohort 2		t	p	D
	M	SD	M	SD			
Score	151.40	17.12	146.80	9.62	1.63	.106	0.33

Note. N = 95. Degrees of Freedom for the *t*-statistic = 78.64. *d* represents Cohen's *d*.

Research Question 2: Is there a difference in final Praxis passing scores for students who participate in Praxis testing and those who do not? The observations for the three groups are seen in Table 2. Cohort 1 (Test-Only) had an average mean of 164.30 (SD = 9.26); Cohort 2 (Collaboration) had an average mean of 162.12 (SD = 9.28); and Cohort 3 (Random) had an average mean of 155.70 (SD = 10.08).

Table 2

Summary Statistics Table for Interval and Ratio Variables

Variable	M	SD	N	SE_M	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis
Test Only	164.30	9.26	10	2.93	150.00	179.00	0.006	-1.11
Collaboration	162.12	9.28	8	3.28	150.00	172.00	-0.35	-1.64
Random	155.70	10.08	10	3.19	137.00	169.00	-0.56	-0.80

An ANOVA was examined based on an alpha value of .05 to see if there was a difference between the mean scores of the groups, and the results were not significant, $F(2,25) = 2.16$, p = .136 which indicates the groups were all similar as seen in Table 3.

Table 3

Analysis of Variance Table for Score by Cohort

Term	SS	df	F	p	η_p^2
Group	395.60	2	2.16	.136	0.15
Residuals	2,289.07	25			

An ANOVA was also examined based on an alpha value of .05 to see if there were significant differences between cohorts in passing the Praxis the first time. The results were significant, $F(1, 26) = 5.25$, $p = .030$, which indicates significant differences between those who

had the experience of practice testing and the random group, shown in Table 4. There were no significant effects in the model. As a result, post hoc comparisons were not conducted.

Table 4

Analysis of Variance Table for Cohorts by Passed the First Time

Term	SS	Df	F	P	η_p^2
Passed the First Time	3.36	1	5.25	.030	0.17
Residuals	16.64	26			

Research Question 3: What are principal candidates' perceptions of practice tests, feedback, and peer engagement in preparation for the Praxis exam? This was addressed through open-ended questions participants completed following the practice exams. Since the number of responses was small, responses were hand coded and put into categories. The following themes emerged: content/structure, time, confidence building, collaboration, and discussions, as seen in Table 5.

Table 5

Themes from Open-ended Questions

Questions	Categories
What do you believe were the strengths of the practice exams?	Content/Structure (standards, question format, variety); Time (pacing, pressures); Confidence Building; Feedback (immediate, delayed); Discussions (for those in the collaboration cohort)
What do you believe were the challenges of the practice exams?	Structure (time); Content (Theorists/Theories)
If you were in the collaboration group, describe the benefits you feel the meets had for you.	Feedback; Confidence Building; Discussions (common issues); Test-taking strategies
What were your top three takeaways from this experience?	Confidence Building; Time (pacing and time management); Content; Feedback; Collaboration; Test-taking strategies

Content/Structure

Participants felt it was helpful to practice questions using the ASIL in a format that will be used on the exam. The variety of the questions also helped them to think across the standards. Some responses included: "The way the questions were presented was a major help in learning how to choose the best answer and not look for just the right answer." "It showed me the kinds of questions to expect for the actual Praxis. It gave me a great overview of my strengths and weaknesses regarding the test." "The application questions helped to put things I've learned into real-life situations."

Time

Putting participants under the time constraints of the test helped build stamina and time-management skills, as evidenced in these responses: "It helped being timed and learning to pace

myself to finish the test." "It was very time-consuming considering the time to test and then going back and reading the explanations." "The length of the practice test helped to build my test stamina." "Pacing is important."

Confidence Building

Participants reported an increase in confidence and a decrease in anxiety, as seen in some of the following responses: "It made me less nervous about taking the Praxis." "I learned not to fear the two hours." "I learned it's not about choosing the right answer, but the best one. Just breathe your way through it." "It calmed and relaxed me."

Collaboration and Discussions

Engagement with peers was appreciated. Some responded, "It was helpful to hear others shared my anxiety about the test." "I enjoyed being part of a group to discuss each practice test in depth." "I enjoyed being part of a group so I could discuss each practice test in depth." "It was very encouraging." "It helped to hear from fellow educators and get confirmation of my own reflections." "The discussions helped me to realize we're all in this together."

Test-Taking Strategies

During the collaboration, participants increased their test-taking strategies. Some comments were: "I learned some test-taking strategies as well as some areas of weakness that I needed to focus on as I continue to prepare." "It was nice to hear different study strategies." "It was helpful to hear how others were studying for the exam." "Listening to others and how they studied and interpreted the practice exams was very helpful."

Implications and Future Avenues of Research

Participating in retrieval practice through practice testing when preparing for the Praxis (5412) exam impacted the principal candidates in a PPP in helping them pass the exam the first time. In addition, participants reported gaining confidence and reducing anxiety through practice, feedback, and engagement with their peers, like the results of Tai et al. (2018). Principal candidates were also given opportunities to transfer knowledge of the ASIL standards to novel decision-making situations, which helped them build critical thinking skills that Gilley and Clarkson (2014) found in their research. Developing judgment and decision-making skills will benefit the candidates entering the complex world of school leadership, especially during times of change (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022).

Implications for Principal Preparation Programs

Despite the challenges of helping students retain information long-term, research from cognitive science has emerged that can guide educators to use tools and create systems that promote long-term retention of information. One such tool is retrieval practice (Larsen, 2018). Dunlosky et al. (2013) shared that improving educational outcomes requires efforts to help students better regulate their learning through effective learning techniques such as practice testing. When considering that retrieval practice produces greater long-term retention, improved final performance on assessments, and enhanced transfer of knowledge, principal preparation programs should consider providing opportunities to students for practice testing for the Praxis 5412 exam. Testing should be considered a learning tool and an assessment, especially when it requires thoughtful processing (Roediger & Butler, 2011). Embedding practice questions into the

program courses would be one way to engage students in retrieval practice. Another is to provide opportunities to participate in taking specifically designed Praxis practice exams available online to meet the changing needs of the students. Roediger and Butler (2011) shared that the "integration of retrieval practice into educational practices has the potential to boost performance in schools" (p. 25). Research supports the use of online review quizzes as a tool to help students boost factual knowledge and application (Stanger-Hall et al., 2011; Thomas et al., 2018). Finally, increasing opportunities for candidates to engage with their peers should be considered.

Future Avenues for Research

This study was limited in size due to financial restraints. Future research using a larger sample size may yield different results with the testing data. Another future research endeavor would be to explore how embedding practice questions within the courses of the PPP would impact Praxis exams and students' perceptions. It would also be helpful to explore students' perceptions of collaborating with peers in various group settings to see which may meet their needs best.

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RETAINING NON-TRADITIONALLY CERTIFIED TEACHERS IN THE PROFESSION

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Abstract

Relative to the theme of this journal edition, *Leadership in a Time of Change,* one of the most challenging changes in school leadership recently has been finding qualified teachers to teach in P-12 classrooms. Teacher turnover in P-12 schools has increased significantly (Simon & Johnson, 2015), contributing to the teacher shortage in the United States. This shortage of teachers has necessitated the employment of more teacher candidates from non-traditional teacher certification pathways. Researchers report that teachers from non-traditional certification pathways are more likely to leave teaching than fully prepared teachers. Thus, retention of teachers would help solve the teacher shortage problem. Therefore, it is important to determine what working conditions and support systems in schools will encourage non-traditional certification pathway teachers to stay in the profession. This information is critical to educational leaders trying to maintain a faculty that is well-equipped to utilize best-practice instruction to meet the needs of students. Students also benefit from the stability of relationships with teachers who stay in their teaching positions over time. Qualitative, this grounded study findings indicate that strong, positive relationships that support teachers from all levels of the organization are key to retaining teachers from non-traditional preparation pathways. Initiatives that help to build and maintain strong collective efficacy among teachers can also aid in retaining alternatively certified teachers. This study offers a working, grounded theory of teacher retention and suggests implications for practice and future research.

Introduction

School leadership is a challenging endeavor in the most stable of times. *Leadership in a Time of Change*, such as the current changes we are experiencing in the P-12 school context, is particularly daunting considering the growing shortage of teachers available for P-12 classrooms. Sutcher et al. (2019) defined a teacher shortage as "an inadequate quantity of qualified individuals willing to offer their services under prevailing wages and conditions" (p. 4). Using this definition, a teacher shortage is not merely about the number of new teachers entering the profession, but also the number of those willing to serve in a particular location. Sutcher et al. noted that staffing problems in the field of education are "driven by a myriad of factors, including not only production of new teachers in various fields, but also teacher turnover, changes in educational programs and pupil-teacher ratios, and the attractiveness of teaching generally and in specific locations" (p. 4). Sutcher et al. reported a projected increase in students in the United States by about 3 million students in the next decades. In contrast, the supply of teachers continues to shrink. According to these authors, estimates consistently predict substantial teacher shortfalls by the hundreds of thousands nationwide and report that enrollment in university education programs has declined by over one-third in recent years.

In this study, researchers used a qualitative, grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to explore the experiences of non-traditionally certified teachers in a single, large school district in Alabama. This single district of focus is among 139 districts in the state and employs nearly 200 teachers who have entered the teaching field via a non-traditional certification pathway. Alternatively, certified teachers did not complete a traditional certification process via a four-year institution of higher learning. Instead, they entered the teaching field as emergency certified, or certified individuals, yet work daily in their schools. We used findings from this study to develop a working theory of retaining alternatively certified teachers.

Background of the Study

Over the past 30 years, teacher turnover has increased significantly (Simon & Johnson, 2015), contributing to the teacher shortage in the United States. The Economic Policy Institute reported a shortage of teachers needed to fill 307,000 teaching jobs in 2019 (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). The shortage of teachers has necessitated the employment of more teacher candidates from non-traditional teacher certification pathways. Espinoza et al. (2018) found that teachers from non-traditional certification pathways are "two to three times more likely to leave teaching than fully prepared teachers" (p. 1). Ingersoll (2003) suggested that teacher retention answers the teacher shortage and turnover problem. Comparing the teaching profession to a bucket with holes in the bottom, Ingersoll stated, "Pouring more water into the bucket will not be the answer if the holes are not first patched" (p. 42). It will only be possible to fill the bucket when we stop losing teachers at the current rate.

Statement of the Problem/Purpose of the Study

Given the shortage of qualified teachers nationwide, researchers designed this study to explore what experiences and working conditions could keep teachers from non-traditional educational certification pathways in the teaching profession. Mobra and Hamlin (2020) observed, "Very little is known about the motivations of emergency [and alternatively] certified teachers" (p. 1). Therefore, the study explored the perceptions of alternatively certified teachers

about the conditions that encouraged them to stay in the field of education, as well as those factors that increased the likelihood of their leaving the profession.

Theoretical Framework and Review of Literature

We adopted two conceptual frameworks to guide our thinking. The perspective of *collective efficacy* (Bandura, 2000) was useful in examining teacher shortages and retention strategies. Similarly, *academic optimism* (Hoy et al., 2006) was a helpful framework in analyzing participants' lived experiences and forming a theory of how to retain these teachers. Collective efficacy is achieved when groups of individuals are successful because they believe in the effectiveness of the group and is linked to student achievement (Goddard et al., 2004; Hoy et al., 2006). Hoy et al. (2006) combined theories of collective efficacy, academic emphasis, and faculty trust into a construct called *academic optimism.* According to Hoy et al., "a strong sense of collective efficacy [and academic optimism] in a school creates a powerful set of norms and behavioral expectations that reinforce the self-efficacy beliefs of teachers" (p. 430).

Teacher Shortages

Though circumstances vary from state to state, a teacher shortage exists throughout the United States. In 2017, approximately 80% of states reported teacher shortages, particularly in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) fields and special education (Sutcher et al., 2019). Podolsky et al. (2019) noted that teacher shortages were reaching "crisis proportions in some teaching fields" (p. 1). This statement is corroborated by The Economic Policy Institute, which reported a 307,000-job deficit in education in 2019 (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). Sutcher et al. stated that 82% of the districts sampled hired underprepared teachers, with some of the greatest variations occurring between states and schools within school districts. Teacher shortages often impact high-poverty schools and students with the highest needs (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003; Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Ingersoll, 2001; Simon & Johnson, 2015). According to Darling-Hammond and Sykes (2003), "A much larger challenge than preparing new teachers is retaining existing teachers." These authors stated that the annual outflow of teachers surpassed the annual influx by increasingly large margins, "straining the nation's hiring systems" (p. 15).

Teacher Turnover

Nationally, the annual teacher turnover rate is 16% (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). However, 67% of teachers who left the profession did so voluntarily, not due to retirement. Two decades ago, Ingersoll (2001) wrote that among reasons teachers leave, "retirement is relatively minor when compared to [other] factors, such as teacher job dissatisfaction and teachers pursuing better jobs or other careers" (p. 501). Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond explored reasons teachers leave, which "range from teaching conditions, such as class sizes and salaries; unhappiness with administrative practices such as lack of support, classroom autonomy or input on school decisions; to policy issues such as the effects of testing and accountability" (p. 27). Teachers also leave the profession due to teacher preparation and mentoring, teacher age, experience, and working conditions. Other researchers added that while compensation rates for teachers vary geographically (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2007; Imazeki, 2004; Loeb et al., 2005), increased salaries can affect teacher retention (Imazeki, 2004; Loeb et al., 2005; Nguyen & Springer, 2021; Shen, 1997). Researchers also reported that teachers of color

leave at a rate higher than their white counterparts, as do teachers who are older but not yet of retirement age (Carver-Thomas, 2018).

Some studies have found that student characteristics can also affect teacher turnover. Stinebrickner et al. (2005) reported a higher attrition rate among teachers who began their careers in high-poverty schools with low test scores and large numbers of minority students. Loeb et al. (2005) concurred, stating, "the racial, ethnic, poverty, and language composition of a school's student body influences a school's turnover" (p. 65). Johnson et al. (2012) provided a caveat, "The seeming relationship between student demographics and teacher turnover is driven, not by teachers' responses to their students, but by the conditions in which they must teach, and their students are obliged to learn" (p. 1). Sutcher et al. (2019) added that working conditions (e.g., class size, administrative support, teacher autonomy) were one of the most positive predictors of teacher retention.

Teacher turnover can have negative impacts at multiple levels of the organization. Student achievement and social-emotional health can be affected when students build relationships with teachers and those teachers leave. Students lose advocates and academic mentors. Such an impact is particularly acute in high-poverty settings (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Kini & Podolsky, 2016; Ronfeldt et al., 2011). Teacher turnover also affects teachers who stay, impacting collegiality and trust among faculty members, instructional expertise, and institutional knowledge (Hanushek et al., 2016; Ronfeldt et al., 2011). Turnover can impede school improvement efforts when consistency and expertise are lost (Ingersoll, 2001) and have system-wide impacts on professional development investments, curriculum development, and district improvement efforts (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Espinoza et al., 2018).

Non-Traditional Certification Pathways

Traditionally, teachers attend a four-year college or university, achieve a bachelor's degree, then gain state-level certification (Podolsky et al., 2019). Recently, enrollment in traditional teacher preparation programs has declined sharply, falling by 35% between 2009-2014 (Espinoza et al., 2018). One way that states have responded to the shortage of teachers is to provide alternatives to the traditional certification pathway (Mobra & Hamlin, 2020; Redding & Smith, 2016). Redding and Smith reported, "Nearly a quarter of early career teachers entered the teaching profession outside a traditional teacher preparation program" (p. 1086).

In Alabama, in addition to emergency certification, three alternative or non-traditional certification pathways exist for teachers to gain full certification (Alabama State Department of Education, 2023). These include a *Conditional Certificate in a Teaching Field* (CCTF), a *Provisional Certificate in a Teaching Field*, and an *Interim Employment Certificate* (IEC), including an alternative master's program. Candidates can accept a job teaching while being emergency certified; however, they must begin one of the three non-traditional pathways mentioned before their emergency certification expires. A CCTF requires candidates to pass a content knowledge exam, or Praxis, and complete four self-paced modules. A PCTF requires candidates to pass the Praxis and then complete four education classes at a college or university. An IEC is for teacher candidates who have earned a bachelor's degree in a field outside of education. These candidates must pass the Praxis in the content area they wish to teach and complete a 36-credit master's degree program to earn a master's-level (Class A) teaching certificate.

Preparation of Teachers from Non-Traditional Pathways

Despite the nationwide popularity of non-traditional certification pathways, Laczko-Kerr and Berliner (2002) determined that students from traditional pathways were more prepared than non-traditional ones. Hanushek and Rivkin (2007) highlighted the importance of teacher preparedness on student outcomes and endorsed non-traditional pathways, suggesting that removing barriers preventing candidates from becoming a teacher is the best way to improve instruction. In a 2002 report on teacher quality, the Secretary of Education encouraged restructuring teacher certification systems and changing the emphasis on teacher preparation programs from extensive coursework to fostering content knowledge and the ability to communicate well (United States Department of Education, 2018, p. 19). Considering this, Darling-Hammond et al. (2005) maintained that teacher effectiveness was strongly related to preparation. while acknowledging, however, that teachers from non-traditional certification pathways "may bring different potential strengths with them" (p. 23) and that teacher preparation programs should build on those skills while providing candidates with knowledge of pedagogy. They wrote that content expertise and "knowledge of how to teach content to a wide range of learners, the ability to manage a classroom, design and implement instruction, and work skillfully with [stakeholders]" (p. 20) are critically important.

Attrition Rates of Teachers from Non-Traditional Pathways

There is controversy in the literature about whether teachers from non-traditional certification pathways have higher attrition rates than traditionally trained teachers. Regarding teachers of mathematics and science from non-traditional paths, Clewell and Forcier (2000) found that non-traditionally certified teachers had lower attrition rates than teachers from traditional preparation pathways. Most researchers disagree, however, claiming that non-traditionally certified teachers have a higher attrition rate (sometimes two to three times) and view teaching as a temporary occupation as they look for other employment (Carroll, 2007; Espinoza et al., 2018; Mobra & Hamlin, 2020; National Commission on Teaching and America's Future [NCTAF], 2005). Zhang and Zeller (2016) found that a traditional teacher preparation pathway kept more candidates in the profession because they are better prepared. Podolsky et al. (2019) also claimed that traditionally trained teachers stay in the profession longer. However, they asserted that "it is most helpful to distinguish teacher preparation pathways by the length of clinical experience and amount of coursework, as opposed to whether they are 'traditional' or 'alternative.'" (p. 8). Regardless of this debate, the practical issue for schools is keeping teachers in the profession. Due to the increasing numbers of teachers from the non-traditional certification pathways, it is critically important to find out what conditions would likely keep them in the teaching field (Podolsky et al., 2019).

Teacher Retention

Ingersoll (2003) compared the teaching field to a revolving door and suggested that a solution to that problem would be to focus on the retention of teachers. The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (2005) concurred. "The conventional wisdom is that we lack enough good teachers. But the conventional wisdom is wrong. *The real school staffing problem is teacher retention*" (p. 6). A massive decline in the number of high school students who express interest in teaching (Sutcher et al., 2019) has resulted in fewer teacher candidates applying for open positions. Researchers stated that strategies to retain teachers and improve instructional skills should be a priority for school districts (Darling-Hammond, 2003;

Wiswall, 2013). Constantly replacing teachers who leave through this revolving door results in substantial expenditures in teacher recruitment and induction (Carroll, 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2003). The NCTAF (2005) indicated that the cost of replacing teachers leaving the profession in the United States is over $7 billion annually.

Darling-Hammond (2003) identified four factors that strongly influence teacher retention, including (a) *increasing salaries*, especially for experienced teachers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Imazeki, 2004; Podolsky & Kini, 2016; Wiswall, 2013); (b) improving *working conditions* through administrative support and teacher input and collaboration (Bland et al., 2016; Carver-Thomas, 2018; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Kini & Podolsky, 2016; McGuigan & Hoy, 2006; Waddell, 2010; Wong, 2004); (c) strong *mentoring and induction* including frequent contact with mentors and a focus on improving high-leverage instructional practices (Bland et al., 2016; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Lynch, 2012; Wong, 2004); and (d) *professional development* for teachers that is meaningful and ongoing (Billingsley, 2004; Bland et al., 2016; Wong, 2004).

Methods

This qualitative, grounded theory study was conducted to gain information about retaining teachers pursuing a non-traditional certification pathway. This study used grounded theory focused on the participants' perspectives and lived experiences. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), the researcher's "main goal in developing new theories is their purposeful, systematic generation from the data of social research" (p. 28). The primary method for data collection in this study was an unstructured interview. This allowed participants to tell their stories, providing a glimpse into the world of education as they see it. The use of unstructured interviews encouraged participants to be thoughtful and descriptive. We also used document review as a second data collection strategy. We reviewed transcripts from exit interviews conducted with teachers who left the focus school district in recent years.

The primary research question was: Among teachers from non-traditional certification pathways, what experiences would contribute to their remaining or leaving in the teaching profession? A sub-question was to describe the experiences of teaching from non-traditional pathways.

Setting/Population/Sampling

The sample for this research was purposively drawn from a large county school district in central Alabama. Participants were selected from a pool of secondary teachers who came to education through a non-traditional certification program. Secondary teachers were chosen because secondary school teachers seemed to have higher attrition rates than their elementary co-workers (Keigher, 2010). These secondary teachers have been targeted for retention efforts.

Data Analysis

Coding the data is gathering the essence of the information and translating it into a word or short phrase (Saldaña, 2015). Data were analyzed using open, axial, and selective coding, which is typical for data analysis in grounded theory (Creswell, 2013). We began by coding in large categories. This is the open coding stage and could be repeated as necessary. Axial coding followed open coding, resulting in emergent themes (Creswell, 2013). In the last step, selective

coding, researchers developed hypotheses and a working grounded theory of how best to retain teachers from alternative certification pathways.

Results

The focus school district serves approximately 35,000 students in 57 schools. Study participants worked in eight different middle and high schools. The district's student population is diverse. Approximately 52% of the student population is African American, 44% are European American, and 13% are Hispanic. English Language Learners comprise 7.2% of students, and 52% receive free or reduced lunches. Demographics of the 10 study participants and schools are presented in Table 1. All individuals and schools were assigned pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality.

Table 1

Demographics for Participants and Schools

Name	School	School Enroll.	Years Taught Content	Path	Gender/ Age	Race	Cert. Status
Nicholas Rhodes	Central HS	767	3/Math	CCTF	M/32	EA	In process
John Oliver	McGraw HS	1158	3/Math	CCTF	M/31	AA	In process
Cathy Butler	Clayton HS	1360	16/ELA	PCTF	F/39	EA	Complete, EdS
Sharma Reddy	Hopewell HS	1204	4/Sci	IEC	F/26	A	Complete, MAE
Mark Perez	McGraw MS	852	2/Math	ECert	M/25	H	Emergency
Alisha Everett	Clayton HS	1360	2/CTE	CTE	F/35	EA	Complete
Dwayne Tyler	McGraw MS	852	3/CTE	ECert	M/30	AA	Emergency
Phoebe Hudson	Erie MS	636	1/Sci	IEC	F/24	EA	In process
Robin Milstead	Brigham MS	800	1/Sci	IEC	F/26	EA	In process
Trent Boggins	Grant HS	1047	1/Sci	IEC	M/25	EA	Complete, MAE

Note: ELA=English and Language Arts; CTE=Career Technical Education; ECert=Emergency Certification; EA=European American; AA=African American; A=Asian; H=Hispanic.

Document Review

Previously, the district conducted interviews with existing teachers. We obtained 12 interview transcripts (all available to us), exploring them regarding job satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Most exiting teachers (63%) rated the district as a good or excellent employer, with 42% saying they received strong support and professional development. Of those who rated the district lower, 25% cited a lack of communication and support. Most respondents (63%) rated administrators as good or excellent, citing professional demeanor as the most important

supervisor characteristic, including guidance, leadership, fairness, and trust. Several said that administrators could improve upon communication. All exiting teachers rated their former colleagues as good or excellent. Approximately 25% of teachers said they left the district because their spouse or partner relocated. A similar percentage said they left for personal reasons. Some left for a higher salary or a shorter commute.

Individual Interviews

The following six themes emerged from interviews with study participants: (1) *Anxiety and Stress*, (2) *District Support*, (3) *Mentor and Peer Support*, (4) *Administrator Support*, (5) *Student Relationships*, and (6) *Compensation*. Here we provide details about these six concepts.

Anxiety and Stress

All study participants reported high anxiety and stress levels for their first year of education, particularly for the first semester. Hudson remarked that the first week was scary, "It is a huge learning curve the first nine weeks," and added that she felt the first semester was just about survival. Milstead concurred. "I was absolutely overwhelmed," she said, "I cried every single day." Butler said she felt like a "train wreck" because she lacked the experience and knowledge to do the job. Following are key stressors respondents reported.

Lack of Knowledge. All participants said their lack of knowledge made their jobs more difficult. "I didn't even know what I was supposed to grade or how to even go about looking at a standard," Hudson explained, "I had never made a lesson plan." Perez stated, "Really, that the organization part was overwhelming. Grading took me forever." Tyler felt that teachers from a traditional preparation pathway were more prepared to plan lessons and more knowledgeable in general.

Classroom Management. Classroom management was another stressor. The sheer number of students in secondary classes was intimidating. For Perez, class size was overwhelming. Rhodes figured out he needed to model the behavior that he wanted to see from students. "You have to teach the kids how to behave," he said. Rhodes figured out that building positive relationships with students made classroom management easier.

Parent Relations. Respondents also struggled to deal with their parents. Several participants mentioned that they felt a lack of trust from parents. Oliver said parents did not believe his explanation of an event involving their child. "They're trying to call you a liar about what I said or what their child did." Milstead expressed a similar sentiment and added that she did not know how to deal with the social media problems she faced.

District Support

District instructional coaches and content specialists prioritized assistance to teachers from the non-traditional certification pathways. Hudson mentioned that their support made a significant difference for her. She described the planning and content knowledge support as "awesome" but requested further support with the certification process. Oliver agreed but praised the assistance from the district human resources department in finding the most appropriate certification pathway for him. The district was also engaged in a new teacher *onboarding*. Butler endorsed this focus but shared, "It would have been nice to have more structured onboarding because I didn't know what I didn't know." Butler mentioned that, at first, she would have benefitted from more district support in grading and noted that the district did not provide the

depth of instructional support she needed. She said that often, "There really weren't people in my classroom observing me and giving me feedback."

Boggins stressed the importance of *new teacher orientation,* felt it was "rushed," and encouraged the district to spend more time here. Respondents mentioned that new teacher orientation competed with new teacher mentoring for the time at the beginning of the school year. Boggins said that he sees the importance of teacher mentors but asked that "the district prioritize the process of providing new teachers with detailed information about the resources and tools available to them."

Mentor Support

All teachers mentioned the importance of mentor support. Butler credited her mentor with helping her build connections with other teachers. She also credited her mentor with shaping the educational leader that she would become. "Having her believe in me made me believe in myself." Everett said her mentor taught her "everything that I needed to know about grading; how my labs should go, how my curriculum should go, and what labs were." Her only warning was that she needed more scheduled time for interaction with her mentor. Tyler said his only time with his mentor was in the hall during class changes. Oliver had a very influential mentor, but when his mentor moved to another school, she was not replaced. At the suggestion of his mentor, Rhodes was given time to observe classroom management strategies in other classes. "We got a sub for my class one day, and all I did that day was observe (classroom management) in other classes." Hudson shared that the mentor/mentee relationship is powerful when regular communication is expected. Boggins viewed his mentor as a safety net. They met daily, and he did not hesitate to tell her when he struggled. His mentor would let him struggle to find his way, but said he felt supported by her and explained, "It was almost like she was holding me by the loop on the back of my pants, and when I tripped; she'd catch me and pull me back up."

Peer Support

Study participants also considered peer support extremely valuable, and all of them noted a feeling of family at their schools. Everett said, "The beauty is that the teachers around you want you to succeed." Milstead said that her colleagues were encouraging and were powerful examples. "They really love their jobs. They are here for the kids," she said. Perez said that his co-teacher walked him through teaching techniques. "She was always giving me tips and advice on classroom management and organization," he said, "If it weren't for her, I'd have been fired," Reddy said that her faculty has a very collaborative approach and works to build relationships and cohesiveness through faculty parties and potlucks. Boggins also described his faculty as hospitable to young teachers and said they will "support you with every ounce of their being."

Administrative Support

All but one of the participants in this study mentioned how important they found administrative support and encouragement to be. Rhodes praised his principal's open-door policy and said that having "people that are willing just to take time out and share a short conversation really goes a long way into trying to stay connected with the school." Hudson appreciated that her administrators knew that she was learning and helped in the learning process. The assistant principal at Butler's first school made her feel capable and valued. "She took me under her wing very quickly and gave me many professional development opportunities." Butler's principal at

that same school encouraged her to leave the classroom and become an instructional coach. Reddy's principal identified her as a leader and placed her on his leadership team in her first year. "I don't think that I would be in the position I am in without him identifying (leadership) qualities in me," she explained. "He gave me a voice, and I loved it!" Several study participants mentioned that they feel supported and valued by their administrators. Milstead credited administrative support with keeping her in the field. "If I'd had an administration that didn't really support me, I don't think I'd still be teaching," she said.

Building Student Relationships

Participants agreed that building strong relationships with students was critical and enabled them to influence student lives positively. Even though he left the teaching profession, Perez still said what he loved most about teaching was "the bond and the impact that I made on kids." The most important thing to Rhodes is building strong relationships with students. "It is a joy being able to inspire kids," Oliver said. Butler credited relationship building with much of her first-year success. "I'm a relationship builder," she said, "So most kids stuck with me and let me grow." Student relationships are transformative, according to Hudson. She says her students changed her. "I love them, and I love this." Rhodes said it is about influence, relationships, and being a positive role model.

Compensation

Respondent opinions varied sharply regarding teacher compensation. Some felt teachers were "grossly underpaid," and some said they received highly desirable compensation. Oliver felt that teachers were underpaid, even with recent increases provided for individuals to teach math or science. Reddy agreed that teacher salaries are too low "if you do what you're supposed to do for your students." Perez stated, "You work your eight hours and still have to grade afterward." Rhodes said, "I always feel like I need a little more, especially with a kid on the way." He also noted how teacher pay increases with experience.

Boggins felt teacher salaries were good and mentioned the benefits provided in this state (e.g., retirement). He said, "[Teachers] work for nine months, and then you are off for almost three months, and you get all the holidays." Milstead agreed and said that she thinks the salary is fine. Everett had a different take on teacher salaries, as they are higher than her previous career as a pastry chef. "I'm getting more than I've ever been paid," she remarked.

Nevertheless, all participants mentioned other non-monetary rewards they received from teaching. Rhodes mentioned the reward of seeing student success. "Seeing the students have that 'Ah ha' moment where they start getting the material," he said, "It just puts a smile on my face." Butler said that sharing in student learning is invaluable and, "There's no bigger high that can compare to it." Tyler said, "The kids really make me want to come to work."

Discussion, Implications, and Future Research

One thing that school leaders can always count on is change. The theme of this journal edition is *Leadership in a Time of Change.* Perhaps one of the most profound changes in U.S. schools today lies in an increased inability for schools and districts to find and hire qualified, fully trained teachers to fill all the open teaching positions. Given this challenge, schools and districts have turned to hiring individuals who have gained certification (through their respective states) following non-traditional pathways.

This grounded theory study aimed to explore what experiences and working conditions would keep teachers from non-traditional certification pathways in the teaching profession. We purposively chose 10 study participants to represent the most varied demographics possible. We also reviewed exit interview transcripts from teachers who previously left the district. Here we discuss the implications of study results as they apply to practice and present a working theory of teacher retention for consideration among educational leaders and scholars. We conclude the article by providing recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

We categorized the findings of this study into the following six concepts: (1) Anxiety and Stress, (2) District Support, (3) Mentor and Peer Support, (4) Administrative Support, (5) Building Student Relationships, and (6) Compensation. These findings confirmed much of the professional literature. Study findings about teacher compensation were mixed and differed somewhat from the results of previous studies.

Darling-Hammond (2003) identified four factors influencing teacher retention: working conditions, mentoring and support, teacher preparation and professional development, and teacher salaries. Study findings confirmed that these factors could influence teachers from a non-traditional pathway. Administrative support, part of working conditions, was considered critically important by 80% of study participants. Two study participants indicated they would have left the profession without their strong and supportive relationship with their administrator. This finding confirmed the importance of the professional relationship between teachers and administrators (Waddell, 2010). According to Waddell, teacher retention increases when teachers feel valued. One study participant noted that her administrator's belief in her made her believe in herself.

Peer and Mentor Support

All study participants advocated for peer and mentor support. One even credited her mentors with keeping her in the profession during that difficult first year. These findings support Bland et al. (2016) that peer and mentor support helps teachers stay in the profession. Wong (2004) suggested that close and constant communication with mentors was particularly important for teachers from the non-traditional preparation path. Findings also confirmed Wong (2004), as three participants said they believed they would benefit from extending mentor collaboration. Findings also confirmed the importance of collegial relationships in teacher retention (Bland et al., 2016; Kini & Podolsky, 2016; McGuigan & Hoy, 2006). All study participants said that collaboration with others was critical. The information provided to them by their more experienced colleagues helped, but collegial relationships also imbued them with a sense of belonging. That sense of belonging engenders the belief that one is part of something larger than oneself. Collegial relationships are a crucial component of collective efficacy.

Teacher Compensation

The study findings differed somewhat from previous findings regarding teacher compensation. The findings of both Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2019) and Imazeki (2004) indicated that increases in teacher salaries would lead to higher teacher retention rates. For half of the study participants, those findings were true. However, the other half of the study participants either disagreed that salaries were too low or indicated that other rewards of teaching were more important than salary. One study participant said that teacher salaries were fine.

Another said that salaries in her earlier career as a pastry chef career were much lower and had no benefits such as retirement or insurance. However, another agreed that teacher benefits were attractive but expressed the belief that teacher salaries were comparable to other fields considering the time teachers are required to work.

Gunther (2019) noted that factors other than salary are important to teachers. This study confirmed Gunther's findings. Every study participant said that teaching has rewards other than money. All participants said that they teach for their impact on students. Even the participant who had left the field noted that while teaching is difficult, the interaction with the students made it all worthwhile. Two participants mentioned their feeling of accomplishment when students mastered a concept. One participant said that his interactions with students make him look forward to work. Another valued her involvement in the lives of her students. However, a third participant said that feeling needed by his students is what encourages him to go on.

Revisited Theoretical Framework

Regarding the theoretical frameworks presented previously, collective efficacy theory undergirds much of the work of this study. Bandura (1977) first defined self-efficacy as a person's belief in their ability. Bandura then noted that self-efficacy is related to collective efficacy. Bandura (1977) defined collective efficacy as "a group's shared belief in its conjoint capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given levels of attainments" (p. 447). Goddard et al. (2004) and Hoy et al. (2006) linked teacher collective efficacy to student achievement, making clear that student achievement is tied to teacher beliefs. The findings of this study identified efficacy as a critical component of teacher retention.

For example, the participant who stated the belief that his students needed him would not leave his current school because he would never want to let his students down. All participants said that they teach for their impact on students. Teachers who believe in their capacity to provide integral support for their students are unwilling to leave their schools, despite their personal challenges. Therefore, self-efficacy is a consideration in teacher retention. Additionally, teachers who believe in the collective efficacy of their faculty are equally unwilling to abandon their colleagues and their work when they experience tough times.

Significance and Limitations of the Study

Previous research has documented the teacher shortage well (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Ingersoll, 2001; Podolsky et al., 2019; Simon & Johnson, 2015; Sutcher et al., 2018; Sutcher et al., 2019). The Coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) exacerbated the issue. A RAND survey in January 2021 showed that nearly 25% of teachers polled wanted to leave their jobs at the end of the year, a 9% increase (Steiner & Woo, 2021). With over 200 non-traditional certification pathway teachers in this district alone, clear, information about the experiences that would keep them in the teaching field is invaluable. The research team acknowledges, however, that including teachers who work for a single district in central Alabama limits the generalizability of any findings and the study's external validity.

What We Learned

The intensive stages of the coding process in this study led us to construct a theory regarding what experiences keep teachers from non-traditional pathways in the field. Study findings indicated that strong and positive relationships are key to solving the teacher retention.

problem. These strong and positive relationships can be built with various support structures and a focus on efficacy.

Non-traditional certification pathway teachers who reported strong and positive relationships with their students, colleagues, and administrators seemed more likely to stay at their school and in the teaching profession. Support and efficacy were the keys to building strong and positive relationships with these teachers. Administrators, colleagues, mentors, and district personnel were primary sources of teacher support. Teachers who worked collaboratively with colleagues and whom their colleagues supported were likely to experience self- and collective-efficacy. There also appeared to be a strong reciprocal relationship between teachers and students. Teachers who built strong relationships with students reported positive feedback from their students, which led to increases in teacher self-efficacy. Being well-connected to the school and the district encouraged non-traditional pathway teachers to persevere.

Teachers who participated in this study reported high anxiety and stress, particularly during their first year of practice. Participants talked about how difficult and overwhelming it was; one termed the first year a train wreck. However, they all reported that the encouragement and support of administrators and colleagues helped them get through that challenging time. Several reported feeling overwhelmed, but the encouragement and support they experienced from their colleagues and mentors helped them persevere. One of the implications of this study is that teacher support is a powerful retention strategy.

District support includes onboarding/mentoring, professional development opportunities, professional learning communities, and help from specialists and instructional coaches. All study participants said that mentor support was vital. Several asked that the district schedule more time for mentors to meet with them. One study participant asked about the onboarding process before school begins. Several of the teachers interviewed said that they would have been happy to attend professional development opportunities if they were offered during the summer. Participants suggested that the district should offer professional development in areas that non-traditional certification pathway teachers would not have experience with, such as lesson planning, assessment, and classroom management. District support personnel, content specialists, and instructional coaches could begin building relationships with non-traditional certification pathway teachers while facilitating professional learning.

Several study participants said that the time spent at the beginning of the year in the onboarding process was valuable but noted that before school started, they did not know what they did not know. Several study participants had little knowledge of lesson planning with the course of study standards and the assessment process. They suggested that the onboarding process continues throughout the first year, possibly on days when students do not report to the school building. As students were engaged in online tasks at that time, teachers could work with district support personnel to address any questions they had about pedagogy or their specific content material. District support also needs to include ways to identify leadership capacity in teachers. A pipeline for educational leaders would assist the district in growing its leaders and aid in retention, as it would be one more way to connect with teachers.

Administrative support is a critical piece of retention. Administrators can increase teachers' likelihood of staying by building professional relationships that make teachers feel valued and empowered (Waddell, 2010). Study participants noted the value of principal check-ins. One participant mentioned a conversation with his principal that meant much to him. It was a

short and casual conversation, but it made him feel seen and heard by his principal. Teachers expressed feeling valued when the administrator took the time to talk.

Administrators can also increase retention rates by identifying and communicating leadership potential to teachers. Both study participants, now in leadership roles in the district credited their administrators. One mentioned that her principal saw something in her that she did not see herself. Another said that her former principal identified the leadership qualities in teachers and did an excellent job of providing teachers with opportunities to develop those qualities. Teachers tended to stay in a school when they felt themselves integral to the work.

Administrators should take care to schedule collaborative time for teachers. This is particularly important for non-traditional pathway teachers but good practice for all. Teacher collaboration fosters a sense of unity and connectedness. It is those connections that promote teacher retention. Professional learning communities (PLCs) allow teachers to collaborate on student work, assessment, instruction, and achievement. Administrators who encourage teacher facilitation of professional learning communities empower teachers. This district is implementing Networked Improvement Communities (NIC) along with PLCs. In NICs, teachers collaboratively determine a problem of practice and its root cause. Together they decide on a possible solution or change idea and implement it for a predetermined period. The NIC work empowers and encourages teachers to make instructional decisions together. Teachers who felt they had the autonomy to make instructional decisions were generally less likely to leave. Providing teacher collaboration time encourages the building of relationships and leads to an increase in collective efficacy (McGuigan & Hoy, 2006).

Support from colleagues and mentors was essential. Several teachers said they would not have made it through that challenging first year without their mentors and colleagues. One mentioned how much she valued the culture of support she found in her school. She added that teachers were willing to help one another, not because they had to, but because it was the way they did business in that school. That culture of unity was expressed by another participant who said they have the motto, "We is greater than me," at their school. That belief in one another was crucial in building collective efficacy.

Self-efficacy is also important for teachers from the non-traditional preparation pathway. They must believe themselves capable of the task. Administrators can help teachers build that belief in themselves. One participant mentioned a conversation with his principal when he felt unsuccessful. The principal said that the teacher needed to give himself time. Another participant said her administrators knew she was learning and supported her through the learning process. Facilitating non-traditional certification pathway teachers in self-reflection during that learning process helps make them aware of all that they are doing well and encourages them to focus on improving just one thing at a time.

District support personnel can also assist teachers in seeing their impact on student learning through data dives and examining student work. However, we found that students themselves may be the best tool to build teacher self-efficacy. One participant said she wanted to be the best teacher because her students deserved the best. For many non-traditional certification pathway teachers, knowing that they positively influenced the students they served was enough. When discouraged from the day-to-day struggle, they returned to their *why*. The difference they made in students' lives was rewarding enough for many of them. Those teachers would not leave a culture where they believed they made a difference for their students. The district can also

implement programs that provide student affirmation to teachers. We suggest an initiative like a Most Valuable Teacher program (MVT) wherein students write letters to teachers who have positively impacted them. Anything that illustrates teachers' strong and positive relationships with students serves as a teacher retention strategy.

Grounded Theory of Teacher Retention

Figure 1 coalesces findings from this study into a working theory of best practices for retaining teachers, especially teachers who have entered the field through an alternative certification pathway. The model suggests that teachers are more likely to stay in the field when administrative, district-level, and peer and mentor support work alongside efforts to develop collective efficacy drawn from other teachers and students and through teacher reflection on their efforts and practice. Individual schools and districts could examine this model of teacher retention and implement contextualized interventions to address relationship-building in their organizations. Such initiatives help develop support from various levels of the organization that encourage and help encourage a sense of collective efficacy. Our study suggests that initiatives supporting teachers in building such a belief system can effectively achieve improvement goals and retain teachers from traditional and nontraditional certification pathways.

Figure 1

Visual Model of Teacher Retention Theory
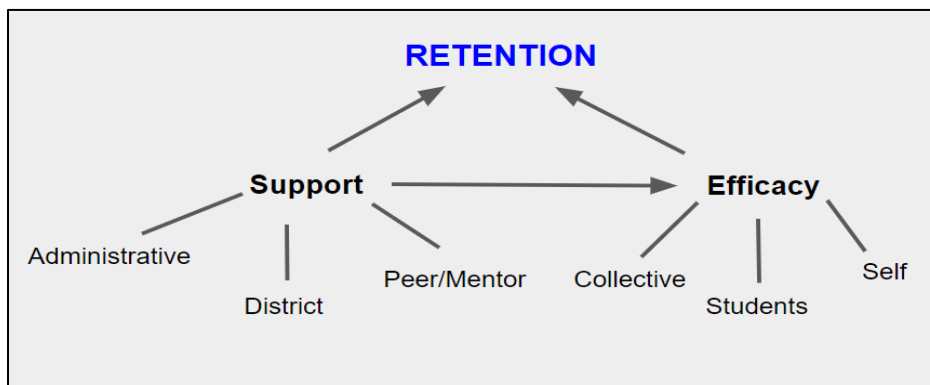
Recommendations for Future Research

This qualitative grounded theory study explored what working conditions and experiences would keep teachers from non-traditional teacher certification pathways in the teaching profession. It only included secondary teachers from one large county school district in central Alabama. Replication of this study in other settings, in rural districts, for example, and with a larger pool of teacher participants, is recommended. For example, research into what working conditions and experiences of elementary teachers would keep them in the profession might be beneficial, as more of them have also begun to choose non-traditional teacher certification pathways. Researchers might also examine the working conditions and experiences of teachers who chose the traditional teacher preparation pathway, comparing results between these populations. Further, a study of educational leaders and what they are doing to recruit and retain teachers might also be interesting as a follow up to these findings.

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PERCEPTIONS OF ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS OF CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION REGARDING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THEIR ROLE

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Abstract

This article describes findings from a qualitative phenomenological study that explored the perceptions of assistant principals of curriculum and instruction (APCIs) regarding the effectiveness of their role. The APCI is an emerging role in school administration. Such nascent change in the role of an AP aptly represents the theme of this journal edition, *Leadership in a Time of Change.* There needs to be more research involving APCIs, including whether the position is effective in practice. Findings from this study explicate the duties of an APCI and a lack of specific training provided to individuals assuming this role. Advantages of the role include increased consistency in messaging and working with teachers to improve practice. Perhaps the most concerning finding is an implication that adding an APCI to a school's administrative team provides a reason for building principals to abdicate or minimize their role in instructional leadership. The article concludes by discussing the findings and implications for future practice.

Introduction

In response to the theme of this journal edition, *Leadership in a Time of Change,* this article describes an important change in thinking about the role of the assistant principal relative to that of the principal and to instructional leadership. Modern principals have a wide range of responsibilities, but their primary task is increasingly focused on improving teaching and learning in their schools (Brazer & Bauer, 2013; Edmonds, 1979; Fink & Resnick, 2001; Gillat & Sulzer-Azaroff, 1994; Grissom & Loeb, 2011; Kafka, 2009; Marks & Printy, 2003; Murphy, 1988; O'Shea & Zuckerman, 2022; Provost et al., 2010; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012). This responsibility has shifted principals' focus from the general management of a school to one centered on improving student learning and instructional capacity building for teachers. The principal's role has shifted to one of the chief instructional leaders. Researchers have developed a sharpened focus on developing principals' ability to lead instruction in response to recently increased accountability for principals as instructional leaders (ESSA, 2015). This task is essential to schoolwide improvement.

This focus is important as new principals are often selected from candidates serving in an assistant principal role. This job traditionally shares different responsibilities than that of the principal. In this study, we explored how school assistant principals (AP), specifically how they perform in a newly defined role as assistant principals for curriculum and instruction (APCI), perceive their roles as APCIs and how they prepare for their future as aspiring school principals.

Very few school principals are full-time instructional leaders. Instead, they are often required to conduct operational tasks such as communicating with parents, managing the school's operations, and attending meetings (Fink & Resnick, 2001). These tasks are necessary, but they take time away from instructional leadership, which, several researchers have demonstrated, can serve to improve student achievement (Brazer & Bauer, 2013; Edmonds, 1979; Fink & Resnick, 2001; Gillat & Sulzer-Azaroff, 1994; Grissom & Loeb, 2011; Kafka, 2009; Marks & Printy, 2003; Murphy, 1988; Provost et al., 2010; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012).

Principals are primarily responsible for leading instruction because they are ultimately responsible for student success. A principal has to ensure that students learn the prescribed curriculum at high levels, graduate, and are prepared for their journey in a postsecondary educational setting or by entering the workforce. However, these learning goals can only be met if the school's operational functions are addressed. Early in the 20th century, the position of Assistant Principal (AP) was created to assist the principal in completing all aspects of building leadership, especially those of a managerial nature (Austin & Brown, 1970; Glanz, 1994).

For this reason, many schools have hired at least one AP, while larger schools may hire several APs to address these responsibilities. The work of most APs focuses on the operational side of the administration, typically fulfilling duties in organizational and management roles such as supervision, student discipline, and attendance (Austin & Brown, 1970; Glanz, 1994; Kwan, 2009; Scoggins & Bishops, 1993) but not on leadership for instruction and learning. Thus, there is a disconnect between the functions of an AP and those of the building principal. This disconnect can be problematic as most building principals are hired by schools and districts drawing from the pool of experienced APs, even though some APs, especially those functioning solely in operational and managerial roles, may not be sufficiently prepared to assume the role of principal and its accompanying expectations for instructional leadership (Austin & Brown,

1970). This reality has caused some researchers to question whether the AP role is a sufficient training ground for the principalship.

This situation became critical when Oleszewski et al. (2012) reported that 70% of principals they surveyed considered retiring within the first 10 years of their appointment to the principalship. With a resultant increase in principal vacancies, it becomes incumbent on schools and districts to locate and hire suitable principal candidates who can inspire and engage teachers toward improving instruction and increasing student learning (Shoho & Barnett, 2010). As stated above, most of these principal positions will be filled from the pool of APs, thus creating a need for APs to expand their traditional roles and become competent instructional leaders during their tenure as assistants to the principal.

Conceptual Framework

Based on their study of effective schools, Hallinger and Murphy (1985) developed a framework and definition for instructional leadership. These researchers asserted that the principal's instructional leadership duties include any function that impacts teaching and learning. Hallinger and Murphy found that effective principals focused their attention and leadership on several categories, including: (a) *defining the school's mission*, which included narrowing learning goals for the school and communicating them to and among stakeholders; (b) *effective instructional leadership* through managing the instructional program, including supervising teachers, giving feedback, and analyzing student achievement data; and (c) *promoting a positive learning environment* in the school, including building relationships, creating professional development opportunities, and protecting instructional time. Our research team adopted Hallinger and Murphy's instructional leadership framework for this study to guide our data collection, findings, analysis, and interpretation.

Purpose Statement

The role of AP is multi-faceted. It consists of various operational and managerial jobs (Gurley et al., 2015). Marshall and Greenfield (1987) reported that when APs spend years doing these roles exclusively, they lose enthusiasm and knowledge for instructional leadership. This may negatively impact those leaders when they assume the principal role. More recently, APs are becoming aware of this disconnect between their chiefly operational job duties and those expected of them in the principal role. Glanz (1994) argued that a conflict exists in the role of AP. Glanz surveyed APs to determine the importance of their daily tasks and the actual use of their time and found a disconnect between what APs believe are valuable roles of their jobs and where their time is spent. Most APs participating in the study reported that, though they perceived time spent in instructional leadership would be more valuable to them, their time is primarily spent supervising students during lunch and addressing student discipline issues. This imbalance and disconnect between what APs valued and what they did daily in their jobs led Glanz to foresee a potential for burnout among APs, among other problems.

Gurley, Anast-May, et al. (2015) discussed how because the roles differ between APs and principals, the skill bases required by APs and principals are also different. Hartzell's (1993) research about first- and second-level managers supports Gurley, Anast-May, et al. (2015) observations). APs must build lateral relationships with other APs. They must also work with those below them in the hierarchy, with one person above them. This life in the middle level requires a different skill set than the principal, who is solely at the top. These researchers found that APs spend a minimum amount of time discussing instruction with other professionals, which

may dull their skills in this area. These instructional skills are central to the principal position and prepare an AP to take that next step as a building principal. Therefore, researchers have suggested a need to rethink and redefine the traditional role of an AP to include work and development in the instructional leadership realm (Gurley et al., 2015; Hartzell, 1993).

Some districts have begun this process by shifting the traditional roles of the AP to focus on instruction. These districts have hired assistant principals of curriculum and instruction (APCIs). These positions are a departure from the traditional division of duties. For this research, we use the term APCI as inclusive of any assistant principal whose title specifically designates their primary duty as instruction. Those holding the position may have other duties, but their title identifies them as curriculum and instruction leaders. In this study, we examined the actual and perceived duties of APs with a defined instructional leader role. Gurley et al. (2015) have identified this as an area for further research.

Literature Review

Traditional Roles and Responsibilities of School Leaders

The role of the principal is to lead efforts to improve the quality of learning, but this is only a fraction of the responsibility. Principals also spend much time scheduling, reporting, handling parents and community members, and handling crises (Fink & Resnick, 2001). Other traditional roles of principals include: "building and resource management, public and community relations, fund-raising, administering buses and meals, managing discipline, while tending to school finances" (Lemoine et al., 2014, p. 17). The most profound change in the role of the principal has been from management to instructional leadership (Hallinger, 2003; Horng & Loeb, 2010; Lemoine et al., 2014). These managerial or operational tasks include those necessary to operate an organization. By contrast, instructional functions directly involve instruction, such as leading professional development and coaching teachers on classroom strategies.

Instructional Roles of the Principal

Petrides et al. (2014) described school leaders' responsibilities as complex and varied. They explained that school leadership is expected to involve school employees in the quest for constant improvement. Teachers should be engaged in creating a vision to strengthen teaching and learning. Sebastian and Allensworth (2013) wrote that school leaders' responsibility is to "support and develop a strong school organization where students are engaged and learning" (p. 1). This organization encompasses everything that affects learning in the classroom, albeit indirectly. The principal affects instruction by creating an atmosphere of protection and respect for instructional time. This includes communicating an effective mission and vision, having a strong school-parent relationship, and creating a set of transparent discipline guidelines. These leadership behaviors lay the foundation for a school where academics and learning are priorities. Researchers have found that school leadership duties tend to fall into two categories: operational and instructional (Cotton, 2003; Marzano et al., 2005; Oleszewski et al., 2012). The operational functions of a school principal or leader are more managerial. These tasks are critical to an effective school and may indirectly affect culture and learning but do not directly impact the primary outcome of a school. Instructional functions are tasks directly related to learning, such as providing professional development for teachers and instructional observations and coaching.

Significance of the Study

There is a need for more research on the role of the AP (Petrides et al., 2014; Oleszewski et al., 2012), particularly the AP's involvement with instruction. Gurley et al. (2015) suggested that it is time to redefine the role of APs "due to the excessive workload demands placed on APs and the substantial challenges these leaders experience in managing their time and completing the multitude of tasks assigned to the job" (p. 144). These scholars suggested that new research should more clearly define this important role in schools and improve educational leadership programs to prepare candidates. The current study furthered the research base by understanding how some schools have started to rethink the role of AP.

Method

In conducting this study, we sought to understand the perceptions and experiences of APCIs. We seek to contribute to the gap in the literature pertaining specifically to APCIs, and, more specifically, their role as instructional leaders. There has been an abundance of literature surrounding the principle. However, the literature addressing APs and their job duties need to be developed more. Researchers have called for a more robust study of the AP role (Gurley et al., 2015; Oleszewski et al., 2012).

To explore APCI perceptions, we used qualitative research methods, including interviewing those currently holding the position. Creswell (2013) described the qualitative phenomenology approach as exploring a group's lived experiences of a particular situation. This approach focuses on those perceptions of individuals in the role and provides information regarding what individuals who share a similar life experience perceive to be reality (Creswell, 2013). The following research questions guided this study:

1.   What are the duties of assistant principals of curriculum and instruction, and what are their perceptions regarding the effectiveness of the role?

2.   What experiences helped prepare APCIs for the role?

3.   What are the advantages of having an assistant curriculum and instruction principal?

4.   What are the disadvantages of having an assistant principal of curriculum and instruction?

Sample Selection and Data Collection

Participants were selected from a large metropolitan area in central Alabama. We compiled a list of the public schools in the area with an AP over curriculum and instruction. We selected participants to include secondary and elementary school APCIs in the area. Twelve APCIs agreed to participate in the study. The authors acknowledge the limitations represented by the sampling for this study. Only larger, more affluent districts can afford to add a position of APCI to their administrative roles. Such a limitation may exclude smaller and more rural districts than any of those represented by this sample.

Individual Interviews

We conducted 12 semi-structured. Individual interviews to explore perceptions of the effectiveness of the role of APCIs. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. To protect the

confidentiality of the interviewees, we assigned each participant a pseudonym consisting of a numeral to represent the school district in which the ACPI was employed and a letter to represent the individual ACPI participant. The researchers recorded and transcribed each interview verbatim and analyzed using initial and axial coding (Saldaña, 2009; Yin, 2011). Our team used member checking (Miles et al., 2014) to validate the interviews transcribed interview content.

Document Review

We also reviewed the written job descriptions for each study participant obtained through participants' district human resource departments. Job descriptions were reviewed to inform and deepen our understanding of the phenomenon under study and served to triangulate study findings.

Findings

This section reports the study's findings, organized by research question. We turn first to report the demographics of the school districts and individual study participants. Next, we turn to findings that provided insight relative to each research question.

Demographics

The State of Alabama has 139 school districts. Of these city and county school districts, 15 reside within the county where this research was conducted or in the county immediately adjacent. All 15 school districts lie within a 30-mile radius of the major metropolitan area and can be considered urban, suburban, or rural. We began by searching for all school districts in the area that employed APCIs. We identified only four districts with at least one APCI in their building-level administrative staff in P-12 schools.

We invited all APCIs to participate in the study as interviewees from these four districts. Out of 20 APCIs identified, we identified 12 APCIs who agreed to participate. These 12 APCIs represented elementary and secondary schools. Table 1 summarizes the demographics of the four participating school districts represented by the 12 participants. Table 2 presents some demographics of individual APCIs.

Four P-12 school districts were represented in the study (see Table 1). All districts represented in the study are classified as large suburban districts. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2023), a large suburban school district is defined as a territory outside a principal city and an urbanized area with a population of 250,000 or more. All participating districts were relatively affluent, with median home values ranging from $280,400 to $602,200 (U. S. Census, 2023). Socioeconomic status among district students ranged from .32% to 23.8% of students identified as economically disadvantaged (ALSDE, 2019). Districts varied, with student enrollment ranging from 4,500 to 14,000 (ALSDE, 2019). All school districts represented enrolled predominantly Caucasian students. A partial breakdown of ethnicity is provided for each district in Table 1, along with information regarding how many schools at each level (i.e., high school, middle school, and elementary) are included within the individual school districts.

Table 1

Demographic Profile of School Districts Represented by Study Participants

District	K-12 Enrollment	Schools/Levels	% Race/Ethnicity	% Low SES	Mdn Property Value
1	4,244	1 – High	72 – Caucasian	23.8	$333,600
		1 – Middle	17 – African American		
		3 – Elementary	11 – Other		
2	14,000	2 – High	59 – Caucasian	25.67	$280,400
		0 – Middle	25 – African American		
		1 - Elementary	16 – Other		
3	4,500	1 – High	97 – Caucasian	.32	$602,200
		1 – Middle	3 – Other		
		0 - Elementary			
4	7,164	2 – High	84 – Caucasian	7.82	$364,000
		1 – Middle	6 – African American		
		0 - Elementary	10 – Other		

Table 2 provides information about each study participant, the district represented, and the school level where the participant served as APCI. Individual school enrollment and the total number of assistant principals on staff at each school are also presented. All 12 of the APCIs participating in the study were female. Regarding the number of years of prior administrative experience before assuming the role of APCI, years of experience ranged from two to nine years. We also asked the APCI to estimate the percentage of time they spend dedicated specifically to instructional leadership in their daily roles as APCIs. These percentages also ranged widely from 50-100%.

Table 2

Demographics of APCI Participants

District	Participant	School Level	School Enrollment	Total APs in School	Years of Prior Adm Exp	% Time in Instruction
1	A	High	1210	5	8	70
1	B	Elementary	789	1	5	75
1	C	Elementary	680	1	5	80
1	D	Elementary	544	1	4	50
2	A	Elementary	742	1	3	100
2	B	High	2841	7	9	85
2	C	High	1589	3	2	70
3	A	Middle	1004	2	5	75
3	B	High	1054	2	6	100
4	A	High	2001	5	4	50
4	B	High	2001	5	3	90
4	C	Middle	1163	2	7	85

Duties of the Assistant Principal for Curriculum and Instruction

Our first research question posed, "What are the duties of the role of assistant principals of curriculum and instruction, and what are APCIs' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of the role?" We address these findings first from the review of documents (i.e., job descriptions) and then from the words of the participating APCIs from interview data.

Document Review

We initially explored duties enacted by APCIs by reviewing job descriptions provided by district human resources divisions—all four districts provided job descriptions for the Assistant Principal role. However, only District 1 provided a job description developed specifically for an APCI. District 1 titled this position "Assistant Principal for Instruction." This job description for an Assistant Principal for Instruction began with a list of 14 performance responsibilities that were identical to the job descriptions of any Assistant Principal in the district. Following this, the document included 20 additional duties assigned to the APCI. These duties are listed in their entirety in Table 3.

Table 3

Job Description for Assistant Principal for Instruction Responsibilities from District 1

Assists with curriculum development, implementation, and assessment
Utilizes assessment data, specifies strengths and weaknesses, and develops growth plans
Works with teachers and media specialists to provide and develop instructional resources
Facilitates peer observations, peer collaboration, and focused observations to help teachers with specific needs
Helps plan engaging, authentic delivery of instruction
Assists in accommodations for students and modification of instruction
Assists teachers in using a variety of instructional strategies and accommodates a variety of learning styles and student needs
Assists teachers with using a variety of assessments
Assists with the integration of technology into the curriculum
Helps plan and implement professional growth opportunities
Locates exemplary programs for benchmark/visits
Assists in interpreting and enforcing federal and state laws and state and local board policies
Assists the principal in personnel functions
Assists in preparing and administering the school budget and supervising school finances
Assists the principal in assuming responsibility for scheduling
Plans and accomplishes personal and professional growth and demonstrates professional ethics
Demonstrates proficiency in written and oral communication
Assists in communicating and clarifying the school's mission to students, staff, and community
Assists in providing a safe, orderly environment that facilitates teaching and learning
Assists in providing a climate of high expectations for staff and students

Job descriptions for Assistant Principals in District 2 were differentiated by school level (i.e., elementary, middle, high). However, the job qualifications and list of responsibilities in the

different descriptions were virtually identical. None of the job duties in these generic descriptions addressed instructional leadership functions. Rather, all the 19 duties listed are related to school operations and management, including student discipline, scheduling, personnel management, supervision, handling logistical matters, safety/crisis management, and professional development activities. One item from the list stated that APs were assigned responsibilities for instructional and/or extracurricular activities but did not provide further explication of such duties.

District 3 job description for Assistant Principals included some language relative to instructional leadership. Included in this list were expectations for AP leadership in "planning, developing, implementing, and evaluating the instructional program." Further, APs were expected to assist the principal with curriculum development and implementation and with the selection, supervision, and evaluation of certified and support staff. Some instructional management duties were delineated, including textbook management, budget management, and provision of professional development for staff members. All other AP duties listed involved general (and traditional) management and operational functions. An important difference in the description was that APs in District 3 report to the principal and work with the Director and Assistant Director of Instruction.

Job descriptions provided by District 4 were differentiated by level (i.e., elementary and secondary). However, they needed to be more relaxed in outlining any instructional leadership duties to be performed by the AP. Such duties for APs, at the elementary level only, included coordinating professional development for teachers, providing curriculum and instruction orientation for new teachers, and ongoing provision of updated information relative to curriculum and instruction to teachers. Secondary-level APs in District 4 had only one responsibility listed related to instructional leadership. This duty was to "assist the principal with performance assessment of instructional personnel in the school and make recommendations for performance improvement of the staff to the principal." All other duties described traditional operations and management functions.

Individual Interviews

APCIs listed their most frequent tasks as classroom observations and instructional coaching functions. Nearly all APCI participants said that instructional supervision duties were shared with the principal. Most participants mentioned observing classrooms as being a priority for them. However, Participant 1B described this process as more than simply observing classes. She stated,

> People think that [APCIs are] in the classroom providing teacher observations and feedback. That's a part of it, but it's so much more than just that. Assistant principals of curriculum and instruction should be in the classroom, observing teachers, providing feedback, and helping develop plans for more effective teaching. I would say that's a small part of what I do…I also organize those supports to put in place and make sure that everything is running the way it should in their classrooms before a kid ever walks into their door.

This APCI spent time observing the classroom alongside her principal, but she also helped support teachers by providing resources needed for meaningful lessons for students.

Participant 3A suggested that she and her principal worked together to create a vision for instruction in their building. She stated that the staff development specialist carries out their vision: "I work with her on our goals and things that we're doing as well as our principal, so she facilitates all that professional development."

Participant 1C explained that her principal was responsible for building a positive culture in the school. This participant described shared instructional leadership in her elementary school. She said they had a team approach to instruction and other functions of administration.

Participant 1A described instructional leadership in District 1. She said the vision for the instructional program came down from the district level. She shared,

> In our district…we have monthly meetings where the five assistant principals for curriculum and instruction, our director of student services, and then our director of instruction--we all get together. We troubleshoot. We talked about the district's beliefs, and our assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction [now retired] was the keeper of the vision for what we believe here in [our district]. She made sure that the people in these positions know what that vision is, and know what our core beliefs are, and then entrusts us to make the decisions that align with those core beliefs.

In this case, the district created and monitored the vision for instruction, and the school intends to communicate that vision and carry it out.

Preparing for the Role of Assistant Principal of Curriculum and Instruction

In interviews with participants regarding their preparation to become APCIs, we found that 7 of the 12 interviewees assumed an administrative role in the school where they had been teaching. Many mentioned entering an assistant principal role at the urging of their principal. For example, participant 4B recalled, "I was in the classroom for about six years, and then got pulled out of the classroom by that principal to assistant principal." After hiring her principal in a new district, he contacted her to join him at his new school. Another participant who did not get hired as an AP where she had taught mentioned that her principal served as a mentor to her. Participant 2C said her principal saw something in her and encouraged her to go into administration. Several interviewees reported that someone saw their leadership potential while teaching and encouraged them to enter instructional leadership.

Several participants spoke about their passion for teaching and learning from early in their careers. They felt that this passion alone prepared them to become APCI. Participant 2A said:

> I want students to learn more than they ever thought they could learn, and I'm eager to learn about how teachers can facilitate student learning. I want to know what works best, and I want to equip teachers on how to successfully implement instructional strategies.

Some teachers have a real drive to learn about what makes learning work for students. These teachers are genuinely interested in instruction and seek opportunities to learn more about instruction. Participant 4B stated, "I was always looking for ways to make instruction better in my own classroom. As an [assistant principal] that continued, the more I read and learned, the more I could help guide others. It just fit right for me." She expressed that instruction came naturally to her and chose a professional learning path centered on instruction.

Participant 4A(1) spoke about being a teacher and planning engaging daily lessons that prepared her to become an APCI. "I feel like teaching prepared me to be a great assistant principal." This APCI, who recently won a state teaching award, expressed a natural love of teaching and learning more about being a great teacher. She said being a great teacher prepared her for this role at APCI. Participant 3A also attributed her preparation to be APCI to her experience in teaching and leadership. She said,

> The greatest preparation for me as an APCI has been experience – first as a teacher and then as the 12th grade assistant principal in a very large high school. I have much to learn still but exposing myself to all of the state courses of study, course adoption schedules, etc., is also necessary.

Many APCIs attributed their instructional knowledge to their own love of teaching and learning and concluded that this teaching experience was the source of preparation for their current roles as APCIs. Other participants credited a building principal for helping prepare them for the APCI role. Participant 3B said that working directly with her principal helped her understand her principal's vision of instruction and his job. She claimed that her principal was a strong instructional leader and mentor to her. She felt that working with him made her better prepared to enter the principal role in the future. Participant 2B also spoke about her principal preparing her for the APCI role:

> The principal helped to develop me into a school leader. That's when she planted the seeds for school administration. I worked side-by-side with her for many years, filling several different roles. I was [assisting] in [the] curriculum whenever she needed me to [while I was in the counselor role]. I was helping her with school leadership.

Participants in our study did not credit preparation to assume the role of APCI to taking classes or obtaining degrees in curriculum and instruction. They should have explicitly stated that their prior experience as a school administrator prepared them to assume the role of APCI and as an instructional leader. Rather these school leaders felt that the best preparation they had to assume a role of instructional leadership stemmed from their experience as classroom teachers, their passion for teaching and learning, and from the encouragement, and sometimes direct mentoring, from principals with whom they worked.

Advantages of Assistant Principal of Curriculum and Instruction Role

Study participants identified three advantages to a school employing an assistant principal whose primary role is the support of curriculum and instruction. These advantages included *consistency* relative to the communication of expectations, *rapport-building* between instructional leaders and instructional staff, and the ability of the APCI to *share instructional expertise* with teachers on a regular basis.

Consistency. A total of 7 of 12 participants cited consistency as the primary advantage of having an APCI. Participant 4B said this:

> There is a level of consistency over time with how course selection is done...with how you handle recommendations for levels of classes, [and] how we do scheduling, with how we answer to parents who are angry about a grade situation, things like this, with how we conduct meetings between parents and teachers, or even between teachers and Special Education who aren't seeing eye to eye on things. To me, having someone devoted to that role brings a level of consistency with how those issues are handled.

When questions about instruction are addressed by a single assistant principal, responses will be consistent. Participant 2A(1) explained that, with six APs in her building, she felt there had to be a leader of instruction to maintain consistency. APCIs mentioned that the same was true with messaging about the school's mission, especially the instructional vision.

Building Rapport. Five participants said that the primary advantage of having an APCI is building rapport with teachers, facilitating communication regarding improving instruction. Interviewees believed that teachers felt more comfortable going to an assistant principal with questions and tended to trust their opinions. Several participants stated that the APCI, being a step closer to the teacher role, felt more accessible to teachers. Participant 1B made the connection to her previous role as a teacher. She talked about rapport in terms of building a climate that values learning. She said that teachers see her working by their side on improving instruction instead of with operational tasks, which helps build rapport with them. Several APCIs talked about walking next to teachers, so they feel comfortable taking their advice for classroom activities and strategies. In this sense, assistant principals were closer to teachers than the building principals. This might give APCIs an advantage in building rapport with and coaching teachers for improvement.

Sharing Instructional Expertise. Part of building rapport with teachers comes from trusting that the APCI has a breadth of knowledge that can help the teacher. Participant 2B discussed the large size of her school and said that having the APCI role gave her time and focus on building expertise in improving instruction, which helped the teachers respect her ideas. She explained that because of her focus on improving instruction, "It creates a depth of knowledge. That person [APCI] can learn how not just to give the information to teachers, but also help teachers understand, take ownership, and pull that information out of teachers."

Five participants discussed having the time to focus on instruction as an important benefit of having an APCI. Others said it gave them time to focus on instruction, which often gets pushed aside in schools.

Disadvantages of Assistant Principal of Curriculum and Instruction Role

Three themes emerged as we explored what study participants perceived to be disadvantages of the role of APCI. Participants expressed concerns about *time constraints, loss of interaction with students*, and *a diminished role of the principal* that they experienced as APCIs.

Time Constraints. Participant 1D shared, "I would say the disadvantage is that there are so many other things, day-to-day things, to do as well. It's overwhelming." This leader was the only AP in her building because it is a smaller campus. However, she said she spent about 50% of her time working on curriculum and instruction and described the other 50% as operational tasks. Other APCIs mentioned time as being a disadvantage. Participant 1B spoke of the responsibilities that were management tasks related to curriculum and instruction, but that took her away from spending time in the classrooms helping teachers. Several other participants shared similar concerns about their ability to address the many responsibilities of the role.

Loss of Interaction with Students. Finally, several participants shared that they were disappointed with the loss of connection they felt they had with students. The role of APCI requires administrators to work closely with teachers, preventing them from working directly with students. That connection can be lost because APCIs are removed from discipline,

attendance, and other duties that give administrators the ability to connect with kids. For example, participant 1A who works in a high school, said, "I spend probably 95% of my time dealing with adults. And they are truly not as fun as the children."

Diminished Role of Principal. Three APCIs said that they created the vision for instruction in their schools. Participant 1A said, "I am truly the leader of curriculum and instruction in this building." She stated that she is the leader of professional development and that the principal knows what she is doing but does not deviate from what she has planned. She works with an instructional coach, but her vision guides instruction. She elaborated,

> I go to him and tell him what's going on and we talk it out, and then I'm kind of the face of that, which really frees him up to deal with the plethora of things that he has to deal with.

Participant 1A is the APCI at a high school. She works with four other APs in her school. When asked about her role versus her principal's role as an instructional leader, Participant 1A shared,

> The way that [my principal] sees it, I'm the first line of defense. I'm the first in line to work with teachers and doing this. And he knows what I'm doing, and we share a lot of the same beliefs. But it's almost like I do it, and then if there's an issue with what I did or what I said, then [teachers] can go to him. And I'll also say I'm the leader of [instruction] in this building because I have that time face-to-face with the teachers.

Participant 1A described the instructional leadership at her school as being tiered. She is the person supporting teachers in their classroom instruction. She makes decisions, and because the principal trusts her judgment, the principal believes he does not have to be involved.

Participant 1C also stated that she is the sole instructional leader in her elementary school. She expressed that she is "over instruction and all professional development that we do, as well as meeting with teachers once weekly." When asked to explain the difference between her role as an instructional leader and the principal, she said that the principal handles discipline, safety, and student incentives.

Participant 2A described her role as spending most of her time with teachers in curricular areas and professional development. She explained that she spent almost all her time working on matters of curriculum and instruction. She said her principal is focused on discipline and getting the reports filled out correctly more than on instruction.

> [The principal is] dependable and wants good things for our school, but in terms of setting a vision, setting expectations for teaching and learning, empowering others, and helping them to learn more about curriculum instruction...that's not really there. [Our principal is not adept at] digging into data, looking at trends. He would not be against that, but there's no time made for that.

Discussion and Implications

For this study, and in keeping with the edition theme *Leadership in a Time of Change,* we looked at APCI's perceptions of their duties, their preparation for the role of APCI, and the advantages and disadvantages of the inclusion of an APCI in the administration of their individual P-12 schools. Here we discuss each of these categories of findings.

Duties of the Assistant Principal for Curriculum and Instruction

First, we found that only a very minimal number of districts in the area have taken steps to include an APCI in the administrative personnel of their schools. Only 4 of the 15 districts examined in this study included such a role. A review of the job descriptions from these four districts indicated, however, that only one district has given much attention to specifically describing the duties of an APCI. However, those duties seem to have been merely added to the duties of a traditional AP in their district. The implication is that an APCI is expected to perform all the traditional functions of an AP while also focusing on instructional leadership functions.

Individual APCIs interviewed listed many duties for which they are responsible. These duties were generally expected from this role, including establishing and communicating a vision for instruction, observing and providing feedback to teachers, preparing and delivering professional development, and facilitating specific plans for improving instruction. Our findings indicate that the task of school districts creating job descriptions specific to the duties of the APCI is only in the very beginning stages. Districts must do much work to be intentional with what they want from the APCI role. School district personnel must begin to wrestle with whether an APCI is to focus exclusively or primarily on instructional matters or if the APCI is expected to be a "jack of all trades," performing all traditional AP roles and merely adding the instructional leadership roles on top of that. So far, it appears that little attention has been paid to clearly defining this emergent role in P-12 school leadership.

Preparation for the Role

Regarding how APCIs were prepared to assume a role as instructional leaders, we find that explicit preparation has yet to be provided. Rather, APCIs in our study pointed to their individual personal interest, expertise, and success in instruction as their only source of preparation. Our belief is that individual APCIs would greatly benefit from focused professional development on performing the role's duties. Whether that training is pre-service, or in-service after assuming the role, would also be an important consideration. APCIs reported that their interest in accepting a leadership role as an assistant principal resulted from the prompting of an individual leader, such as a principal or someone else in a leadership position. This finding points to the importance of mentorship from school leaders to identify and nurture potential leadership in others along the way.

We also note that all APCIs included in this study were female. In fact, no male APCIs were identified. Additionally, APCIs were found only in predominantly White, and relatively affluent school districts, suggesting that more work is needed to encourage more districts with more diverse populations of students and teachers to explore the possibilities and advantages of developing APCIs in their districts.

Advantages of the Role

The advantages of having an APCI on the administrative staff were robust. Such advantages as consistency in messaging and support, rapport-building with teachers, and a focus on sharing the expertise of a highly skilled instructional leader to improve teacher practice are strong reasons why schools and districts might consider including such a role in their school leadership initiatives. It appears that nurturing such strengths and advantages as these could have a positive and important impact on instructional practice in a school building.

Disadvantages of the Role

Identifying the disadvantages of including an APCI on a building administrative team raised the most concern. While disadvantages of time constraints and distancing from direct contact with students seem typical of any move away from the classroom and into administration, the third disadvantage is that of a diminished role of the principal in instructional leadership that raised the most concern.

Despite the presence of an APCI, it remains of utmost importance that the principal of a school retains the role of chief instructional leader. Principals cannot "hand over" instructional leadership duties to someone else on their administrative team, even if that individual is designated primarily as an instructional leader in the building. Educational scholars widely agree that principals are expected to promote best practices in instruction so that all students achieve high levels of academic success (Brazer & Bauer, 2013; Edmonds, 1979; Fink & Resnick, 2001; Gillat & Sulzer-Azaroff, 1994; Grissom & Loeb, 2011; Kafka, 2009; Marks & Printy, 2003; Murphy, 1988; Provost et al., 2010; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012).

Recently, Shaked (2018) examined principal instructional leadership and why principals "sidestep" instructional leadership duties. Shaked identified several reasons principals do not seriously invest their time in instructional leadership tasks, including lack of time, curricular or instructional expertise, and deep-seated organizational norms that see instruction as the primary domain of teachers, not principals. Shaked added a fourth potential reason, stating that principals often do not see instructional leadership and improvement as the primary goal of schools, citing social and emotional factors as more important.

APCIs interviewed in this study have pointed to a need for more involvement from some of their principals in the daily practice of instructional leadership in their schools. Our research team asserts that it will be critical for school districts and other school leaders interested in expanding the role of APs into instructional leadership not inadvertently provide yet another reason the building principal should have little or no part in leading the instructional environment of their school by creating the expectation that the APCI assume all the functions of leading instructional improvement. In other words, even an APCI, explicitly charged with instructional leadership, should only shoulder part of the load while the principal of the school ignores the role, or focuses exclusively on other functions of leadership. Participants in our study suggested similar responses from principals. It is imperative that the principal maintains primary instructional leadership and provides necessary mentoring, oversight, and vision-setting for the work of their assistants, especially an APCI.

Implications for Further Research

Because the role of APCI is nascent, further research is needed to determine the best duties to assign, their impact on improving teaching and learning, and how individuals within that role interface with building principals. More research on how districts define the role of APCIs would also contribute to the knowledge base by comparing the roles in which the APCI is the only AP in a building with APCIs who work daily among multiple APs. Another area for further research is the study of the effectiveness of the APCI role from other perspectives (e.g., principals, teachers, and other stakeholder groups).

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ANTI-RACISM TEACHING IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS AND
THE SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL CONNECTION: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

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Abstract

Teaching requires careful attention to the needs of all learners. How do we ensure we consistently meet them holistically? Though we live in what is considered a post-racial society, several injustices are suffered by minority groups. To combat this, many have adopted anti-racist pedagogy. Research suggests, however, that anti-racist teaching should be combined with social-emotional learning to combat negative stereotypes about various minority groups fully. This review of the literature provides insight into how to best combine anti-racist teaching and social-emotional learning for sustained academic success in elementary classrooms.

Introduction

Teaching requires careful attention to the needs of all learners. How do we ensure we consistently meet them holistically? Though we live in what is considered a post-racial society, several injustices are suffered by minority groups. To combat this, many have adopted anti-racist pedagogy (Abi-Hanna et al., 2022; King & Chandler, 2016). Research suggests, however, that anti-racist teaching should be combined with social-emotional learning to combat negative stereotypes about various minority groups fully (Caven, 2020; Jagers et al., 2018). How can we combine anti-racist teaching and social-emotional learning for sustained academic success in elementary classrooms? As we provide Leadership in a Time of Change, this literature review provides insight into some anti-racism and social-emotional learning research that can be embedded into our practice.

The Origins of Need

The US Education system has experienced many changes over the years as it relates to diversity. From its origin, US schools, known as normal schools, were designed to meet the needs of one demographic: elite White men. In these early education environments, emphasis was placed on teaching the Three Rs – "Reading, Writing and 'Rithmatic'" to their all-White students.

As we currently reside in a post-Plessy vs. Ferguson society, racially integrated classrooms have become the norm in most places. While the faces of the classrooms have changed over the years, the traditional teaching of reading, writing, and arithmetic remains static. Though most school systems adequately address the academic needs of the students they are charged to serve, most fail to address the social-emotional needs of these students (NCES, 2022). While some may not necessarily view anti-racist teaching as part of the social-emotional teaching domain, a growing body of research suggests that an intertwined approach allows educators to take "a view that recognizes and values the diverse social and emotional skills students bring to the classroom. Further, it relates students' individual social and emotional struggles to their lived experience with racial injustice and social inequity" (Caven, 2020, para 4.).

Though some educators believe their roles are solely to address the dynamics of social-emotional learning in the classroom, not connecting the social-emotional needs with the lived experiences of children of color may be detrimental to their classroom success (Caven, 2020; Ford, 2020). In some instances, "when Social Emotional Learning professionals and others intentionally or unintentionally adopt a culture-blind philosophy and framework, people of color are being woefully failed and marginalized" (Ford, 2020, para. 6)

How Omission Affects Teachers and Students

As reported in their stance on The Importance of Diversity & Multicultural Awareness in Education, Drexel University School of Education reports that in 2014, "US public schools hit a minority-majority milestone, with Latino, African American, and Asian students surpassing White students" (2021, para. 1). Though this statistic surrounding student demographics indicates a nation progressively moving towards a true mosaic instead of a melting pot, its population of teachers remains unchanged.

The most recent inventory of teachers in US classrooms found that approximately 79% are middle-class and White (Schaeffer, 2021). Moreover, the U.S. Census predicts that over half the nation's population will be people of color by 2024 (Drexel University, 2021). As a result, today's educators should earnestly endeavor to create racially and culturally pluralistic classrooms which affirm students' unique identities.

Confronting and conquering bias and encouraging appreciation for students' differences represent steps towards anti-racism and teaching students the concepts of acceptance and tolerance. Current research indicates that parents' racial socialization, classroom environments, and school curriculums play critical roles in fighting racism, hate, and biases in American Students (Aspen Institute, 2018).

Racism is the belief that groups of humans possess different behavioral traits corresponding to inherited attributes and can be divided based on the superiority of one race over another. Racism and cultural intolerance in American society are prevalent. Beverly Daniel Tatum (2017), a renowned authority on the psychology of racism, in her book *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria*, paints a striking example of racial divides in American public schools as she purports, "Walk into any racially mixed high school, and you will see Black, White, and Latino youth clustered in their groups." Is this self-division reflecting what we see in our workplaces, churches, and communities?

While most educators can attest that children are color-blind in pre-elementary and early elementary grades, research by Margaret Hagerman (2018) published in *White Kids:* Growing *Up with Privilege in a Racially Divided America* suggests children's unintentional social belief systems and values about themselves and others that affect students' attitudes, actions, and choices unconsciously begin to emerge during puberty. However, the onset of racial self-identification, or identifying with a particular aspect of one's racial ancestry, such as skin color, develops between the ages of three and four.

Hagerman (2018) states that limited research exists on racial socialization or how parents communicate racism to their children. This specifically speaks to how White parents talk to their children about race or how parents of children of color prepare their children to thrive within a white supremacist society. As there is a growing hesitancy in some households to address the issues of race, teachers increasingly face the task of addressing stereotype threats, injustices, related trauma, etc.

Drawing on ethnographic interviews with eight affluent White fathers, Hagerman's (2017) subsequent study, *White Racial Socialization: Progressive Fathers on Raising Antiracist Children*, explores White fathers' participation in White racial socialization processes. The article focuses on fathers who identify as *progressive* and examines the relationship between fathers' understandings of what it means to raise an anti-racist child, the explicit and implicit lessons of racial socialization that follow from these understandings, and hegemonic whiteness. Findings illustrate that these men understand their roles as White fathers, how their attempts to raise antiracist children challenge and reinforce hegemonic whiteness, and what role race and class privilege play in this process. In addition to the role of parents in combating racism, Hagerman identifies school and educational institutions as the main drivers of equities and their role in teaching values such as leadership, empathy, social responsibility, democracy, and fairness.

Role as Educators

Losinski (2019) in *Schools as Change Agents in Reducing Bias and Discrimination: Shaping Behaviors and Attitudes* affirms Hagerman's beliefs. Losinski suggests, "Schools can act as change agents to curb youth's negative experiences with discrimination, hateful speech and actions, and harassment." Many schools successfully address these issues by using positive behavioral interventions and supports, social and emotional learning programs, bullying prevention programs, and interventions designed to positively influence discriminatory behavior and biased attitudes. As schools typically are viewed as agents of change, the following: equality, and change policy, emphasizing leadership, empathy, social responsibility, democracy, and fairness should be paramount in the curriculum.

Escayg (2019), author of *Who's Got the Power: A Critical Examination of the Anti-bias Curriculum,* is an anti-racist and anti-colonial scholar committed to fostering Pan-African unity and racial equity in the early years. Escayg—via pedagogy and research—challenges racial and economic injustices affecting Black children and families in the US, Canada, and the Caribbean. Her work defines the anti-bias curriculum as the basis for her comprehensive critique.

Derman-Sparks and the A.B.C. Task Force (1989) and Derman-Sparks and Edwards (2016) have been widely cited as the pioneers of the anti-bias curriculum. The goals of anti-bias education include the following tenants:

1. Each child will demonstrate self-awareness, confidence, family pride, and positive social identities.

2. Each child will express comfort and joy with human diversity, accurate language for human differences, and deep, caring human connections.

3. Each child will increasingly recognize unfairness, have the language to describe fairness, and understand that unfairness hurts.

4. Each child will demonstrate empowerment and the skills to act, with others or alone, against and/or discriminatory actions. (p. 14)

Educators implement an anti-bias curriculum by creating lesson plans specific to the anti-bias program while also ensuring the curriculum is designed for the early years' classroom. The document contains practical pedagogical advice on implementing all four goals with children between the ages of two and five. However, it is important to note that all learning activities are tailored to the child's cognitive, social, and emotional developmental capabilities (Escayg, 2019). One of the main advantages of the anti-bias curriculum is that it acknowledges children's ability to construct and engage in racialized discourse.

Critics, such as Escayg, of the anti-bias curriculum believe limited attention is paid to the mechanism of White supremacy and a lack of pedagogical strategies to recognize constructive elements of power and privilege in constructing racial differences, including that of whiteness. Additionally, while recognizing class, race, gender, and pluralism on which an anti-bias curriculum is based, it eludes the role of structured and institutional practices in maintaining sharp and inequitable distinctions along racial, gender, and class lines. Furthermore, critics believe the anti-bias curriculum does not provide opportunities for young children to deconstruct the meaning of whiteness.

Albeit parents, school administrators, teachers, and curriculum strategies may not be perfect, they each play a critical role in teaching anti-racism and other forms of bias in elementary classrooms. Fostering inclusion and multicultural and racial awareness in education benefits all students to succeed, encourages acceptance, and helps prepare students to thrive in a diverse world.

Conclusion

To holistically meet the needs of our students, we must be able to employ an arsenal of support for them. Schools and classrooms are more diverse today than ever (Bey, 2019). As such, we must be ready to embrace them on diversity, equity, and inclusion levels. We, as educators, can start by increasing our knowledge in anti-racist teaching and social-emotional learning.

Some ways we can increase our anti-racist and social-emotional pedagogy include confronting and conquering bias and encouraging appreciation for students' differences representing steps towards anti-racism, and teaching students the concepts of acceptance and tolerance. This includes getting to know your students, their families, and their communities. One simple way to gain some knowledge is by having students and their families complete a survey at the beginning of the year that allows them to tell you more about their likes and embed those things into the teaching and learning processes. This will minimize the risk of making stereotypical assumptions and beliefs of a whole group based on limited knowledge.

Another way to increase our anti-racist and social-emotional pedagogy is by educating ourselves on best research-based practices that employ positive behavioral interventions and supports, social and emotional learning programs, bullying prevention programs, and interventions designed to positively influence discriminatory behavior and biased attitudes. The Southern Poverty Law Center provides a starting point for those seeking peer-reviewed, research-based support. One of their publications, *Learning for Justice,* formerly *Teaching Tolerance*, provides "robust, ready-to-use classroom lessons" and professional development opportunities on immigration, bullying, bias, rights and activism, gender and sexual identity, race and ethnicity, religion, etc.

The thought of anti-racist racist teaching alone can be a difficult topic for some to approach. Nonetheless, through tough conversations—that begin with us—we may be able to effect social-emotional change in the learners we serve. By embedding anti-racist teaching with social-emotional learning techniques, we may provide leadership in a time of change. This may resemble what the late Dr. King, Jr. referred to as a "complete education": one that not only provides students with "power of concentration but [one that provides] worthy objectives upon which to concentrate." This type of "education will, therefore, transmit to one not only the accumulated knowledge of the race but also the accumulated experience of social living" (King, Jr., 1947).

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IMPACT OF THERAPY DOGS ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT IN RURAL MATH CLASSROOMS

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Abstract

Therapy dogs positively impact students mental and emotional well-being, which can improve the student's academic performance. Therapy dogs can reduce stress and anxiety levels, which leads to better concentration and improved learning outcomes. Canines can also help improve social skills and behavior, which fosters a more productive classroom environment. School accountability becomes more critical each year. Student performance on state assessments determines accountability ratings. This study investigated therapy dogs' impact on academic achievement in a rural middle school math classroom. By addressing this issue through learning motivational theory, the quantitative research sheds light on how incorporating canine animal-assisted interventions into the daily classroom routine can increase student achievement.

Introduction

The use of therapy dogs received traction in the 1960s through the work of Boris Levinson. In his counseling practice, he noted that when his dog Jingles was present, children opened up and began progressing toward goals (Friesen, 2010; Levinson et al., 2017). Jingles was Levinson's pet, simply a companion dog, revolutionizing how dogs are used in therapeutic settings. Canines gradually appeared in school counseling sessions, then in reading interventions. The literature focuses on reading or counseling; however, a need exists to determine if therapy dogs can positively impact math achievement. The current study found no published literature examining the impact of dogs in math. If canine therapy can positively impact reading achievement, can canine therapy impact math achievement?

Over 2.7 million students take the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) each year. In 2022, 49% of Texas 8th graders did not perform on grade level on the 8th-grade math STAAR test (Texas Education Agency, 2022). In 2019, 69% of 8th-grade students scored basic on the National Assessment of Educational Preparedness Assessment, or the NAEP test (NCES, 2022). There is a problem nationwide in the math performance of 8th-grade students. With school accountability on the line, a need exists to determine if therapy dogs may be an alternative way to impact math student achievement positively.

Problem Statement

The specific problem is the struggle for students to achieve the STAAR's passing standards in middle school math. The researcher sought to determine the impact of therapy dogs on rural student achievement in 8th-grade STAAR math scores at Centerville Independent School District (CISD). CISD is considered a rural-remote school, as classified by the National Center for Education Statistics in 2022. The census defines rural remote as more than 25 miles from an urban center (NECS, 2022). The effects of animal-assisted interventions (AAI) in the math classroom of the eighth grade were evaluated holistically, then assessed by examining gender and socioeconomic status.

Significance of the Study

Research shows a 60% reduction in stress when therapy dogs are present (Anderson et al., 2017). Students perform better on assessments when they feel less stressed (Sadowski & Gulgos, 1995). Bringing therapy dogs into the rural classroom lowers stress and increases student performance on state assessments (Jenkins et al., 2004). Research also suggests that canines can provide students with things teachers cannot, such as a sense of belonging and a nonjudgmental presence (Zents et al., 2017). When students feel at ease and safe, the information they retain significantly improves (López-Cepero, 2020). Schools will receive higher accountability ratings with improved performance on the STAAR, as academic performance accounts for 60% of a school's rating calculations (Lead4ward, 2022). Better accountability ratings lead to designation distinctions, and districts can avoid sanctions by the Texas Education Agency. Positive or improved outcomes in accountability are significant for many reasons.

Purpose of the Study

The current study employed a quantitative approach to determine the impact of therapy dogs on 8th-grade math achievement in a rural middle school classroom. The investigator sought to add a new facet to the existing body of literature regarding the use of canines in education.

Current literature supports the impact of canines on reading and behavior; however, there is limited literature on animal-assisted interventions (AAI) in rural middle school classrooms. There needs to be more literature on the use of therapy dogs in rural math classrooms, and this research will add to the existing body of literature. A three-way repeated measures ANOVA was conducted between gender and then between socioeconomic statuses to determine if the therapy dogs had a more significant impact on males versus females or students in different socioeconomic groups. The results from this study provided more data on the effectiveness (or lack thereof) of therapy dogs in classrooms while providing specific information on the efficacy of 8th-grade math classrooms. This study provided insight into the broader use of therapy dogs in schools, added to the overall literature that describes the impact of AAI in classrooms, and provided specifics of the effects in a math classroom.

Background and Justification

The literature revealed three primary uses of dogs across three areas: counseling, reading interventions, and special education settings. The utilization of canines commonly falls into one of four categories, including animal-assisted therapy (AAT), animal-assisted interventions (AAI), animal-assisted activities (AAA), and animal-assisted education (AAE). For this study, animal-assisted interventions with a therapy dog best supported the goals of CISD.

There are three primary categories for interactions with canines. Animal-assisted therapy uses trained dogs to meet intervention goals (Zents et al., 2017). These animals have been shown to have a positive impact on people in a variety of settings. Mims and Waddell (2016) further specify that AAT reduces isolation, improves self-esteem, and decreases anxiety. AAT is usually part of a goal-directed therapeutic setting in which the dogs meet specific criteria of the healing process (Kropp & Schupp, 2020). Some examples of AAT in school involve using dogs in speech and occupational therapy (Friesen, 2009). Geist (2011) reports that AAT decreased distractibility, improved eye contact, and improved student self-efficacy. Research further supports the benefits of AAT. It lowers the stress of the setting and allows the children to feel a "reduced fear of criticism from a non-judgmental source" (Friesen, 2009, p. 265).

Animal-assisted education (AAE) involves using an animal in an intervention to educate the student on a particular subject (Chitic et al., 2020). The most common type of AAE consists of students reading to dogs in various reading programs. AAEs directed by a general education teacher usually aim to improve reading fluency or comprehension (Kroop & Schupp, 2020). Animal-assisted interventions (AAI) is a broader term encompassing any intervention where humans and animals interact (Lopez-Cepero, 2020). AAI can include components of AAT or AAE. Lopez-Cepero suggests the phrase AAI is most appropriate for activities involving canines because it can be difficult to distinguish between true AAT and AAE. A benefit is provided to a human being regardless; therefore, AAI is more appropriate.

Another all-encompassing term used in the literature is animal-assisted activity (AAA). AAAs "provide opportunities for motivational, educational, recreational, and therapeutic benefits for optimal recovery and functioning, positive development and enhance the quality of life" (Walsh, 2009, p. 470). AAA is much less formal than AAT, as AAT has specific goals toward which the student works. In contrast, AAA is not specific and does not require a certified person to ensure the intervention occurs. Sokal and Kahl (2019) noted that AAA releases oxytocin, the chemical in the brain responsible for happiness and calmness. Schaffer (2009) backed up the claims that AAAs are beneficial because of the emotional, psychological, and physical responses

when humans and animals interact. Within all the animal-assisted types, there are also a variety of dogs. Kropp and Shupp (2020) delineate between a certified therapy dog, an assistance dog, an emotional support dog, and a facility dog. Each dog has a set of parameters or qualifications that must be met to be legally able to meet the needs of its area. Pet Partners (formerly known as The Delta Society), Therapy Dogs International, Intermountain Therapy Animals, and the American Kennel Club are the leaders in providing canine certifications. Animal-assisted therapy has been documented to reduce anxiety; this is also true of students in a special education setting for trauma. Bonding with a dog showed a decrease in depression symptoms and emotional dysregulation. Memory and overall attitude were improved when interacting with the dogs (Maoz et al., 2021).

Research Questions

This study had one primary research question and two sub-research questions. RQ 1 – What impact do therapy dogs have on rural math achievement? Sub RQ1 – What difference is realized in math academic achievement by gender in rural middle schools when therapy dogs are present? Sub RQ2 – What difference is realized in math academic achievement by SES in rural middle schools when therapy dogs are present?

Scope

The scope of this study included students attending Centerville Junior High and enrolled in the eighth-grade math course. CISD is a school classified as rural-remote. This particular focus was selected because the eighth-grade math teacher consistently utilizes a therapy dog in all aspects of her classroom. When measuring the impact of therapy dogs, dogs must be on the class basis routinely. All students taking the STAAR math were examined. Scores were analyzed across the grade level, then by gender and socioeconomic status. The literature is quite detailed on the success of reading programs with therapy dogs. The researcher believed incorporating therapy dogs into math has the potential to have a similar positive impact as reading and could be generalized across school settings if there is fidelity in implementing the therapy dog program.

The subjects for this study were students at Centerville ISD, a rural-remote school in east Texas. CISD covers 260 square miles, where the East Texas post-oak savannah meets the piney woods. Centerville ISD implemented K9U in 2018, which differs from the typical therapy dog program. In K9U, teachers serve as doggie fosters. The puppies usually begin their service at school between 12 and 16 weeks of age (Davis, 2020). The teacher fosters, with the help of students and under the guidance of a trainer, provides the necessary training for the dogs. The canines that graduate from the K9U program are gifted to other schools or veteran homes. Students of all ethnicities, genders, socioeconomic statuses (SES), and learning abilities have equal opportunities to be involved with training therapy dogs. Because CISD is predominantly Caucasian (76%), ethnicity was not selected as a variable for comparison in the data. Instead, the researcher chose gender and SES status as variables for analysis. Delimitations of the study result from the setting.

Literature Review and Theoretical Foundation

According to the National Educational Statistics Center, rural math performance does not meet the level of proficiency determined by the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) test (NCES Blog Editor, 2019). Proficiency deficiencies in math performance plague rural schools countrywide (Nations Report Card, 2020); Texas is no exception. The federal

education requirements pale compared to the expectations placed on students by the STAAR. Walking the halls of any rural Texas school and the anxiety around testing is intense (Segool et al., 2013). This study aimed to determine the impact of therapy dogs on student math academic achievement in a rural middle school classroom. The researcher examined literature about the current use of canine therapy in schools and the impacts on students' reading, physical stress, brain chemistry, and emotional/behavioral needs. A review of the literature revealed insightful information relating to canines in classrooms. The existence and use of animal-assisted therapies and interventions are vast. It is essential to understand that the canine does not provide therapy. The canine acts as a facilitator to engage students in the desired therapy. The dogs offer emotional support and companionship to individuals across schools, hospitals, and the community (Grové et al., 2021).

Learning motivation theory provided the theoretical foundation for this study. Learning motivation theory can be traced back to Plato and Aristotle. The works of Alkabbi et al. (2017) agree that motivation "is a persuasive feeling that always provides positivism to students to accomplish a task or activity to the end and succeed in it no matter how tough it is" (Gopalan et al., 2017, p.2). The presence of a student in a classroom means something other than the student will or wants to learn. Within the theory of learning motivation, student goals are essential in their desire to learn. Some students need social relationships. In this scenario, students are concerned about peer perception, which can positively or negatively impact student achievement (Seifert & Sutton, 2019).

Human-Animal Interactions (HAI) have been around for centuries. HAIs are reciprocal, dynamic relationships between people and animals. These relationships impact physical and mental health (Hill et al., 2020) and deepen spiritual connections (Newtown Kindness, 2014). To fully understand the depth and historical significance, one must begin with the Native Americans over 30,000 years ago, when the Native American people domesticated wild dogs for companionship (Brodie & Biley, 1999). Mims & Waddell (2016) reveal that dogs have played an integral part in the lives of humans for thousands of years. Under the Chinese zodiac, people are believed to be born with specific characteristics of animals depending on their year (the year of the dog, the year of the dragon) (Walsh, 2009). In Peru, archeologists discovered burial grounds with canines entombed with humans, who wrapped the dogs in blankets with bowls of food and water beside them (Walsh, 2009). Lapdogs were used in Asia in the 1700s to help the human companion and serve as an alarm during the night should an invader attempt to break in (Walsh, 2009).

Furthermore, there is a preponderance of evidence that indicates animals have been used in a therapeutic sense for centuries. In Belgium, as early as the ninth century, there is documentation that animals were used as a therapy for people with disabilities (Morrison, 2007). The York Retreat in England used rabbits, chickens, and other farm animals in 1792. Their primary goal was to enrich the compassion of the emotionally ill (Chitic et al., 2020; Jenkins et al., 2014). In the 1800s, the British began encouraging mental institutions to use animals as a means of helping patients cope (Morrison, 2007). Domestic canines were used in mental institutions as far back as the 18th century—the utilization of dogs in treating chronically ill patients. Dogs help with socialization and those with cognitive impairments (Mims & Waddell, 2016). In 1878, farm animals, specifically horses, were used to treat epilepsy. Military members receiving treatment in the US Army Air Corps Convalescent Hospital found respite and comfort after interacting with animals in 1942 (Morrison, 2007). Perhaps the most famous early adopter

of animal-assisted therapy was Florence Nightingale. She carried small, friendly animals when she nursed patients with various illnesses. The patients experienced comfort and support when the animals assisted Nurse Nightingale on her rounds (Mims & Waddell, 2016). Walsh (2009) concluded that time spent with animals "positively impacts well-being, influences greater health, and decreases recovery time from serious health conditions" (p. 468). A life with improved quality and enhanced communication is attributed to the joy humans receive from canines (Jenkins et al., 2014). In the 1960s, Boris Levinson discovered that his dog, Jingles, helped his patients during therapy sessions. Dr. Levinson referred to Jingles as the social lubricant that assisted his patients to be more relaxed, thus able to make progress in the therapy sessions (le Roux et al., 2014; Walsh, 2009). The relationships forged between humans and canines have occurred for centuries and deserve further examination.

Types of Dogs

Within the animal-assisted community, several types of dogs exist. Before dogs can begin training, the canines must be tested. Evaluation of puppies includes temperament testing and their willingness to walk across varied surfaces (grates, tile, concrete, grass.). The social side of the dog is also appraised. Dogs must desire to engage with others and demonstrate confidence in new settings yet remain calm and steadfast (Davis, 2020). Basic commands for therapy dogs include sitting, staying, dropping, walking, heeling, and going home (Hill et al., 2020). The Delta Society encourages canines and handlers to be trained for specific environments (Geist, 2011).

Facility dogs are a constant in residential and clinical settings, such as assisted living facilities, veteran homes, or hospitals. The facility dog lives with the handler, an employee of the facility. The dog goes to work with the employee and provides an assortment of animal-assisted activities, interventions, or therapies (Kropp & Shupp, 2017). These facility dogs receive training specific to the environment they will serve to ensure the *fit* will be successful (Davis, 2022).

Emotional Support Animals (ESA) include dogs that help support people with emotional difficulties. ESA support includes anxiety, depression, and phobias (Service Dog Express, 2018). Krupp and Schupp (2017) insist that a mental health professional must prescribe emotional support dogs. Emotional support dogs are guaranteed other public access than service dogs. Service dogs are trained to help people with a disability and are considered working dogs (Walsh, 2009). Service dogs are permitted under the Americans with Disabilities Act and are legally classified (Mims & Waddell, 2016). Service dogs are specially trained to perform tasks to enhance the lives of their handlers. Examples include serving as a brace for people struggling with mobility, as *eyes* for a person with blindness, and as opening doors for people who cannot. The critical feature of service dogs is that the dog must perform a service for a disability. While the vests worn by emotional support and service dogs are similar, their functions differ vastly (Davis, 2022).

Therapy dogs are classified as working dogs. Working dogs are trained to perform tasks designated for the type of job the dog will perform. Therapy dogs work with groups and individuals in various settings to provide therapeutic relief (Chandler, 2001). Therapy and service dogs are not interchangeable, as each type serves different functions (Mims & Waddell, 2016). Dogs do not have to be a specific breed to qualify as therapy dogs. A therapy dog must have a temperament and obedience level that will allow them to obtain the Canine Good Citizen certification. The Canine Good Citizen distinction means the dog has proven an even temperament and is well-mannered in all settings. The Canine Good Citizen ensures that dogs

are calm in all environments (Callahan, 2017). In an educational setting, therapy dogs are used to help calm students, teach empathy, improve self-confidence, improve social skills, help positive psychological development, improve communication abilities, provide friendship, teach responsibility, foster independence, and improve overall attitudes toward school (Callahan, 2017; Friesen, 2010; Newtown Kindness, 2014).

Friesen (2009) noted that anecdotes relating to therapy dogs in an educational setting are becoming more frequent as new programs are launched to meet the ever-growing needs of students. The utilization of dogs by teachers and principals is increasing. Schools use dogs to increase student psychological development, improve confidence, teach empathy, relieve stress, improve communication, and improve social skills. Traditional avenues cannot duplicate the sense of calm therapy dogs provide (Newtown Kindness, 2014; Callahan, 2017). Pechacek (2020) describes the immense benefit dogs offer to middle school students. Middle school students taught the dogs tricks, learned to feed and water the dogs properly, and how to approach animals. All of these steps led to a demonstrated increase in self-responsibility for middle school students. Furthermore, the effects of these activities on children have been empirically supported (Jenkins et al., 2014). The belief behind the success lies in the attachment bond children develop with the animals. Humans have an innate desire to form an attachment bond with other humans. Research suggests that dogs can fill the same role as humans in attachment, thus providing children with a sense of stability (Sokal & Kahl, 2019). Understanding the individual's needs when determining the type of dog is essential for success and positive outcomes for the handler and the dog. Payne et al. (2015) inform that the canine ability to understand and respond to humans far surpasses the capacity of other mammals. The handler and the canine relationship are emotional, from working with livestock to security to public access assistance. The emotional capacity of our four-legged friends makes them ideal for therapy and school involvement (Payne et al., 2015).

The Brain

Before understanding how canines help with interventions and behaviors, it is crucial to understand what happens in the brain when a person pets a dog. Walsh (2009) stated that petting animals release neurochemicals in the brain, resulting in relaxation and bonding. Simply put, oxytocin is released in the human brain when a dog is touched. Oxytocin is one of the four *feel-good* hormones. These hormones help people feel happy, calm, and at peace (Sokal & Kahl, 2019). There are indications that the human/dog bond is mutually beneficial in releasing oxytocin, and the human receives the benefit of having their mood improve (Levinson et al., 2017). Oxytocin is produced in the hypothalamus and released by the pituitary gland as part of the brain's limbic area and endocrine control. This area of the brain is responsible for how we develop relationships and attach to others, helps create memories, and controls the release of feel-good and stress hormones (Payne, 2018). The brain's right hemisphere is closely connected to the limbic region, where human attachment develops. These brain areas are central to processing human emotion (Geist, 2011).

Cortisol is released when stress is sensed, putting the entire body on edge (Callahan, 2017; Payne, 2018). Research indicates that simply stroking the dog's fur reduces cortisol levels. Seven to twelve-year-old boys responded better in a stressful situation with a dog beside them than a friend (Beetz et al., 2011; le Roux et al., 2014). In 2012 Beetz et al. conducted a study to measure cortisol levels in children. These measurements occurred pre/post a stressful situation. Cortisol levels were noticeably lower when the children interacted with a dog during the stress.

The article further stated, "The presence of a dog in an educational setting would help reduce anxiety levels caused by pressures existing in the classroom" (p. 7). When oxytocin is produced in the brain, cortisol cannot be synthesized in the body, resulting in children feeling at ease (Beetz et al., 2012) and reduced signs of depression (Pechacek, 2020). Another impact noted in the literature is reducing a patient's blood pressure when reading to dogs. Cortisol causes blood pressure to increase. They read aloud to the canine to reduce blood pressure because of the connection to oxytocin and cortisol (le Roux et al., 2014). The recommendation for maximizing the benefit of reducing cortisol is to pet the dog as it aids in lowering pressure. Along with a decrease in blood pressure, reading to a dog decreases heart rate, anxiety, depression, and fear (Lane & Zavada, 2013; Pechacek, 2020; Zents et al., 2016).

Emotional and Behavior Support

A growing body of literature supports canines to support students' emotional and behavioral needs. Canine therapy provides numerous benefits, from helping regulate behaviors, increasing positive social interactions, and assisting a student's emotional state. The literature suggests that behaviors improve, and emotions stabilize because the dog is not afraid of being judged. When students feel out of place, there is a notable increase in the student's stress level, leading to more absences and poor academic performance (le Roux et al., 2014; Stevenson et al., 2015). Like best friends, dogs proved to be great listeners, provide physical comfort, and demonstrate empathy (Geist, 2011; Von Lintel & Bruneau, 2014). This warmth of the dogs allowed children to exhibit more social interactions because dogs serve as enablers of social interactions (Kirnan et al., 2018; Wilson, 2017). As children became more comfortable in social situations, researchers saw an increase in positive emotions and behaviors and a decrease in anxiety, depression, and other behavior issues (Kropp & Shupp, 2017; López-Cepero, 2020b). While dogs cannot heal from all traumatic experiences, canines can provide a sense of safety that can start the healing process (Kropp & Shupp, 2017).

Pechacek (2020) found a calming effect on students after the therapy session. The study further noted that hyperactive students were more responsive to classroom instruction after spending time with a dog. Therapy sessions involve teaching students how to groom and feed the dog. Careful attention to ensuring students know how to approach animals safely emphasizes that safety is essential (Brodie & Biley, 1999). Students with less social support demonstrate more significant responses to AAT (Ward-Griffin et al., 2018). Students who struggle to converse often do not struggle to talk to a canine. Dogs are part of a reciprocal conversation social skills lesson to help students gain confidence in casual conversations. Not only does conversation improve, but social behaviors also demonstrate enhancement. Students show more positive peer relationships after spending time with a therapy dog. Anxious students calm down in the presence of a dog because the canine helps regulate emotions. Time with canines helps children learn sympathy, perseverance, and determination (Brodie & Biley, 1999; Friesen, 2010; Ward-Griffin et al., 2018). Therapy dogs have positive impacts on behavior and emotional regulation. AAT increases motivation, leading to more on-task behavior and positive social interactions (Bassette & Taber-Doughty, 2016; Jenkins et al., 2014; Kirnan et al., 2020; Von Lintel & Bruneau, 2014).

In practice, AAT takes on many forms. One school provided a dog in the classroom that helped increase emotional well-being and overall attitude toward academics. The dog taught the students about empathy and respect (Beetz et al., 2012; Chitic et al., 2020; Kropp & Shupp, 2017; Von Lintel & Bruneau, 2014). Students demonstrated less aggressive and off-task

behaviors and listened to the teacher better with a canine present. Teachers documented improved student motivation and on-task behavior after sessions with a therapy dog (Jenkins et al., 2014; le Roux et al., 2014). Zents et al. (2016) noted: "less negative comments between students, increased use of praise, decreased distractibility, improved relationships, eye control, more appropriate voice or tone with others, decreased tantrums, and decreased learned helplessness" (p. 88). The results ultimately led to more autonomy and empathy with the student body (Zents et al., 2016).

Special Education Settings

Animal-assisted interventions provide many benefits in a special education setting, with students with autism and behavioral difficulties the most documented. Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a family of neurodevelopmental disabilities characterized by difficulties in socialization and communication. Students with ASD exhibit restrictive and repetitive behaviors and stereotyped behavior patterns, interests, and activities (Hill et al., 2020; Stevenson et al., 2015). ASD manifests differently in each child; however, engaging with others is a common difficulty among many. AAT provides an approach for students to experience positive engagement with others (Fung, 2016; le Roux et al., 2014; Stevenson et al., 2015). In a randomized control study, animal-assisted therapy with canines allowed students on the spectrum to achieve more time on task, meeting more goals than traditional goal-directed therapies (Hill et al., 2020).

A study reported that AAT helps improve social and communication skills (Chitic et al., 2020). Counseling sessions with dogs document increased communication and positive relationships with others (teachers and peers). The improved abilities transfer to the home and parents report an increased quality of life (Zents et al., 2016). Dogs in therapy sessions for children with ASD increased the student motivation to participate, resulting in better communication and increased social interaction. Non-verbal children with high sensory needs enjoy AAT. The dog provides tactile stimulation while providing a calming effect. Teachers report rocking and other stemming behaviors from autism decline significantly after a session of AAT (Pechacek, 2020). Another benefit canines have on children on the spectrum is the ability of the dog to help the child become less socially withdrawn and minimize repetitive behaviors. Using canines in all aspects of the education of students with autism could provide an avenue for students to achieve goals and increase social interactions (Stevenson et al., 2015).

Students with emotional or behavior disorders (EBD) is another group of students that benefit from AAT in the special education setting. This particular population of students has unique classroom management needs. Students identified as EBD are often off task, aggressive, disruptive, and will not obey basic classroom rules. AAT used with students with EBD documented a pattern of increases in positive behaviors and compliance with teachers and parents (Kirnan et al., 2018). Canines provide a calming effect, allowing for more positive social interactions and relationships with teachers (Friesen, 2010; Kirnan et al., 2018). Specific behaviors include positively initiating interactions, using appropriate voice volume and tone, making eye contact, and smiling. Students appeared less nervous and had fewer behavioral outbursts with the dog. Students improved on-task academic and overall behavior (Kirnan et al., 2018).

Student motivation is a commonly documented need for students identified as EBD (Bassette & Taber-Doughty, 2016; Friesen, 2010; Kirnan et al., 2018; Wilson, 2017). After sessions with a therapy dog, students felt better about their behavior and ability to perform

academically. Students began to advocate for themselves positively and demonstrated improved attitudes toward school. Teachers noted a decline in negative behaviors and an increase in positive behaviors after the dog visited. Students with EBD discussed their time with dogs in AAT. The students overwhelmingly identified more motivation, better ability to complete academic tasks, and improved self-confidence due to AAT (Kirnan et al., 2020).

Middle school teachers working with students with EBD identified increased reading difficulties in this population. Due to motivation, the reading difficulty creates more behavior problems for the student and the teacher. The nonjudgmental nature of canines provides a safe place for students to practice reading via AAI. After AAI, students self-report feeling calmer, less anxious, and more confident in their reading abilities. Furthermore, the presence of a therapy dog helped teach empathy, foster responsibility and encourage respect. Middle school teachers reported that AAI improved students' motivation and overall behaviors with EBD (Bassette & Taber-Doughty, 2016).

Concerns

The documented positive impacts of AAI are overwhelming. However, there are concerns with AAI that must be addressed. Canine vaccines are the primary concern mentioned. Other considerations include the children's handwashing before and after handling the dogs and protecting the safety of the dog and the children (Friesen, 2010; Kropp & Shupp, 2017). Ensuring children know how to approach dogs properly takes time, which can be a limiting factor during a school day (Friesen, 2010). The dog's sanitation, allergy, and ethical considerations must be addressed before implementing an AAT (Friesen, 2010; Zents et al., 2016). Safety concerns for the dogs also exist. The handler must be trained to recognize signs of distress in the dog. Signs include the ears laid back, shaking, tail between legs, or excessive licking (Friesen, 2010). Obtaining the American Kennel Club Canine Good Citizen certificate encourages the best practices of properly trained handlers (Levinson et al., 2017). The AKC Canine Good Citizen ensures that the dog is well-mannered, another concern mentioned in the literature (Fung, 2016). An excellent canine handler will have liability insurance to quell the fears of those with poor attitudes toward dogs (Lane & Zavada, 2013; Sokal & Kahl, 2019). Specifically related to schools, the expense and the time of training a dog can be overwhelming. School personnel who choose to be canine handlers need total administrative support, the right dog, clear school guidelines, and cooperative parents. Aligning the variables is challenging; however, a dedicated handler must know the potential roadblocks (Callahan, 2017; Friesen, 2010; Zents et al., 2016).

Method

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) dictates that students must complete annual statewide testing in math during grades 3-8 (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). In the state of Texas, school accountability equals high stakes. School accountability ratings are based on domain ratings in academic performance, student growth on state assessments, attendance, closing the gap, and college, career, and military readiness (Lead4ward, 2022). The Texas School Accountability system rates schools on a letter scale of A-F. Anything lower than a C on school accountability results in sanctions by the Texas Education Agency (TEA). A Targeted Improvement Plan is the first line of sanctions across the board. Writing a Targeted Improvement Plan is a long, arduous process that involves a committee, multiple meetings, and a professional

school service provider that serves as the liaison between the district and the Texas Education Agency.

Over the last ten years, Centerville Independent School District (CISD) has written multiple Targeted Intervention Plans for a campus not rating high enough or having a letter of D in one of the three domains. CISD has also written Equity Plans. Equity Plans are state-mandated plans to address how the district will decrease gaps related to low-income students and students of color who are being taught at higher rates than other students by inexperienced, out-of-field, and ineffective teachers. This sanction is implemented because the domain on closing the gap did not meet the minimum score determined by the Texas Education Agency. Closing the gap measures up to fourteen student subpopulations and compares them to forty other districts with similar demographics. District scores falling below the state-determined mark in the closing the gaps domain result in an Equity Plan to show how the district will ensure that education is equitable across all student populations. CISD decided to address student achievement unorthodoxly and started K9U.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research Question 1 (RQ1) – What impact do therapy dogs have on rural math achievement?

Ho = There is no impact on student math achievement in rural classrooms where AAI was used.

Sub Research Question 1 (Sub RQ1) – What difference is realized in math academic achievement by gender in rural middle schools when therapy dogs are present?

Ho = There is no impact on math achievement by gender in rural classrooms where animal-assisted interventions were used.

Sub Research Question 2 (Sub RQ2) – What difference is realized in math academic achievement by socioeconomic status in rural middle schools when therapy dogs are present?

Ho = There is no impact on math achievement by socioeconomic status in rural classrooms where AAI was used.

The proposed research study is unique because the researcher could not find a single study using therapy dogs in a math classroom. Furthermore, every study identified included using therapy dogs to provide reading, emotional, or behavioral support. CISD used students to help train the dog, creating a higher level of engagement among student participants.

Research Design

Descriptive research focuses on the *what* of a subject rather than the *why* (Manjunatha, 2019). Creswell (2011) states, "The basic intent of an experimental design is to test the impact of a treatment (or an intervention) on an outcome" (p. 137). This exploratory, descriptive research seeks to determine what impact therapy dogs have on math academic achievement and employs an interventional approach. In this study, canine therapy was the intervention between the pre/post-test. Criswell further identified four critical characteristics of exploratory research: participants, materials, procedures, and measures. The rationale for this study came to be because there is a significant body of research on using canines to assist in reading. The researcher located no information regarding the use of canine therapy in math classrooms. The scores from state

assessments were the metric for measurement. The researcher did not influence the behaviors of the subjects. The study analyzed the group (all 8th grade) and examined scores categorized by gender and socioeconomic status. This study was centered on one primary research question, two sub-research questions, and research hypotheses.

Setting

This study occurred in a rural junior high in Texas. The school district is located in the city that serves as the county seat. There is no industry to support the tax base in the district, and the school is a Title I district. A Title I school has many students identified as having low socioeconomic status, meaning those students qualify for free and reduced lunch. In Texas, schools with 40% or more low socioeconomic students receive the Title I designation. In the school district in the current study, 77% of the student population is Caucasian, 12% Hispanic, and 11% African American. The K9U program began in CISD in the fall of 2017 as district leadership sought to reach students through non-traditional means. In the spring of 2016, 45% of the district's 8th graders passed the STAAR math assessment, compared to 81% passing the STAAR reading assessment (Texas Education Agency, 2016). The passing percentage in math, based on preliminary data from the district, Texas Education Agency (TEA) data, and the information provided by the NAEP, clearly indicated that change must occur. CISD tried multiple means of addressing the issue, and CISD did not see the growth necessary to keep TEA sanctions at bay. At that point, CISD decided that something radically different must occur.

District leadership researched options, and the campus was already doing the most recommended interventions (Istation, StemScopes, and a master teacher). The curriculum director read an article highlighting therapy dogs' impact on reading achievement. The article read by the curriculum director article led to the creation of K9U. The school district partnered with a local, reputable breeder that already had a trainer on staff. Together, these organizations spent the 2016-2017 school year drafting what the K9U program would look like, how it would operate, and outlining key goals. In the fall of 2017, four teachers agreed to foster therapy dogs and train the dogs by incorporating them into daily classroom activities. Most foster dogs stay in place for one semester. Many teachers realized the commitment was steep and opted to foster for only one semester during the school year, leaving the 8th-grade math teacher as the lone participant having a canine in the classroom all year. STAAR math scores in the spring of 2018 rose to 71%, spurring the district to ensure a canine was available in the classroom as much as possible.

Additional Study Information

The goal of this research study was to determine if therapy dogs have an impact on math achievement in rural students at CISD. This descriptive study utilized quantitative methods. Pre and post-canine intervention scores were examined to determine the impact therapy dogs had on students in a rural middle school math classroom. Creswell (2011) states that pre and post-testing was an acceptable method of obtaining statistical data. The State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) is given to students across Texas each spring. The STAAR test is the Texas version of the ESSA annually mandated tests for reading and math in grades 3-8. The STAAR comprised questions based on each course's student learning expectations (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, TEKS). Students who pass the STAAR are considered proficient in grade-level content. Students failing the STAAR are considered not proficient. Texas school accountability ratings are based on how well the students perform on the STAAR

test. Failing STAAR scores will equate to a poor letter grade in accountability. Schools strive to obtain a letter grade of A, B, or C to avoid the sanctions the Texas Education Agency mandate. This study compared the percentage of questions correct (math scores) from the 7th-grade STAAR math assessment to scores obtained in 8th grade. More questions correct on the state assessment equates to a higher percentage score, especially since the 7th and 8th-grade tests have the same number of questions. There may be an expectation of natural growth between 7th and 8th grade; therefore, the researcher used a control group. The control group was one period when the dog was off-duty and not in the classroom.

In this quantitative study, the researcher used descriptive and ANOVA (analysis of variance) analysis to draw precise conclusions about the research questions and hypotheses. A repeated measures ANOVA is a type of analysis of variance (ANOVA) in which the same subjects are used in all conditions or groups being compared. It is a within-subjects design in which the same subjects participate in each condition or group (Buidiu, 2018). A repeated measures ANOVA was implemented to determine whether a significant difference existed between the means of the groups being compared. It also decided whether the difference was due to the treatment or the condition applied to the subjects.

STAAR is administered each spring to students in grades 3-8 in reading and math. The participants were selected based on convenience because the 8th-grade math teacher consistently had a K9U-selected and trained dog in her room. The study participants were all 8th-grade students enrolled in her math course. The only caveat was that participants for this study had to have taken the 7th-grade STAAR math test at CISD. The targeted audience for this study had no canine exposure in 7th-grade classes. However, in 8th grade, the targeted students will have played a critical role in training and helping develop a therapy dog. Canine tasks and training were built into every facet of the classroom, from taking the dog outside between classes to teaching the dog obedience and tricks. Every student (that took STAAR math in 7th and 8th grade) was included to ensure an adequate sample size. Data were coded by gender and socioeconomic status to address the sub-research questions. The canine in the classroom was the one significant variable from 7th to 8th-grade math. Using the STAAR test results, the researcher believed the study's outcome would impact the therapy dog's use. The use of a control group further supported this hypothesis. The control group was the entire population of the one period when the dog would not work; instead, the therapy dog rested in a crate in the classroom (best practices for canine health).

Instrumentation

The instrument for this study was the math portion of the STAAR for the 7th and 8th grades. In 2012, the Texas Education Agency changed the required standardized assessment to STAAR. The STAAR is the latest product of testing that began in Texas in 1979. The curriculum for the test is derived from the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). TEKS replaced Essential Elements in 1998-1999 and focused more on student knowledge and teacher performance. The TEKS are revised, with considerations made by public comment every seven years (Texas Education Agency, 2012).

In 2016, the Texas Education Agency outsourced an evaluation of the reliability and validity of the STAAR assessments, specifically reading and math, in grades 3-8. The sixty-nine-page report, completed by Human Resources Research Organization, detailed the findings of the three-prong task. Deatz (2016) determined that "the vast majority of items were aligned with the

TEKS expectations" (p. 58). Furthermore, Deatz and his team provided empirical evidence of the reliability of the assessment and standard error of measurement. A review of the STAAR's test construction and scoring methods was consistent with industry standards and supported the claim that the STAAR assessment measures the knowledge and skills outlined in the TEKS. Evaluating the reliability and validity of the STAAR assessment provided confidence to the researcher that the study's results would be accurate. This measure was the best fit for this study because it is given across Texas and the ease with which assessment results were available to the researcher. Every public school in Texas is familiar with the STAAR assessment, and states across the union must give their version of this summative assessment to meet the requirements outlined in the ESSA.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection occurred after the data had been released to the district by the Texas Education Agency. The data for the analysis were pulled from the school district's data platform, Eduphoria, and then entered into SPSS for the data analysis. Data for the research question and each sub-research question were analyzed and compared to the control group to determine the score difference in each area. A three-way repeated measured ANOVA test was utilized to compare data pre and post-intervention. An increase in scores would indicate that the canine intervention was effective. No significant change in scores would indicate that the canine did not have an effect. The dependent variable was the test scores. The therapy dog intervention was the independent variable.

Intervention

In pursuing this study, the researcher wanted to quantify therapy dogs' impact on math academic achievement by measuring the passing rate on STAAR math tests from 7th to 8th grade. The straightest line to this information was the data from the STAAR test administered each spring in grades 3-8. Using scores from students who took the STAAR math assessment in 7th and 8th grade at CISD, a statistical comparison determined the impact of therapy dogs on achievement. The analysis utilized the 7th-grade assessment as the pre-test. The 8th-grade test served as the post-test. The intervention was the therapy dog in the math classroom for 8th grade.

The intervention for this pre and post-test study was in the form of a therapy dog in training. After a puppy undergoes temperament testing, the canine is assigned to teacher fosters at CISD. The teacher worked to make the dog part of every aspect of the classroom. For example, the student completes the bell ringer activity and can give the dog a goldfish cracker treat, given that the dog follows the command (sit, stay, down, heel, home). Students were given *jobs* to assist in housekeeping. Jobs included walking the dog, feeding/watering the dog, taking the dog to visit another class, or sending the dog home (to the crate) to rest. Access to the therapy dog was tied to attendance, tardies, or desired behaviors for students that needed extra support. For example, if Janie came to class every day this week, she held the therapy dog during the lecture on Friday. If Timmy gets to class on time, he can take the puppy outside at the end of the period. Therapy dogs ensured that every aspect of a student's social and emotional needs was met. One of the ways dogs helped was by the dog having opportunities to shop. Shopping is when a canine walks up and down the aisle or around the room and alerts someone. Often, the alert is a student that needs extra attention and has needs not visible to the teacher. This process encouraged

students and provided a much-needed cortisol boost during class. Shopping was where many of the strongest canine/student bonds were formed (Davis, 2022).

Threats to Internal Validity

Threats to internal validity include history and maturation (Adams & Lawrence, 2019). Kelce (2017) states that tremendous growth and maturation occur between the 7th and 8th grades. As eighth graders, students felt more confident and at ease with the school year. Confidence in the location of courses, expectations, and more freedom to move across campus are a few reasons for improved confidence in 8th grade. The pre-teen moodiness noted in 7th graders has dissipated notably by 8th grade. Combined with the improved academic response, these biological maturation factors could threaten internal validity. The researcher expected validity to remain intact for the study by utilizing the entire grade. History is another consideration when discussing internal validity. Because this study involved humans and canines, this researcher could not be sure that history over one year would not be an influence one way or another. Canine's bond with humans to different degrees of closeness (Barber & Proops, 2019). It is impossible to infer the closeness of a canine to any given group of students. The teacher has been a crucial part of K9U since its inception; therefore, the researcher anticipated that the teacher would be able to help negate any history that would risk the study's internal validity.

External Validity

External validity is the extent to which study findings can be skilled across settings, people, situations, and measures (Bhandari, 2020). Threats to external validity include selection bias, history, experimenter effect, testing effect, aptitude treatment, and situation effect. This experiment involved pre and post-test data, and students did not know they were part of the experiment; therefore, the testing effect and situation effect were the external validity concerns in this setting. The testing effect occurs when subjects are tested more than once, skewing the results. Students took each test only one time, as required by law. The situational effect refers to the fact that students are assessed in classrooms with which they are familiar. The canine visited each testing room to ensure students felt loved and reassured. Students are familiar with their testing environment, and the researcher did not anticipate any complications with external validity.

STAAR testing was the measure, making replicating this outside of Texas hard. However, this study should be reproducible in any school with a vetted therapy dog program. An enormous body of literature cites the success of canine therapy programs on student reading. While the approach differed for this study, the impact of canines on academics is documented. The researcher does not recommend that schools replicate CISD's K9U program without the supervision of a reputable dog trainer and breeder. A canine's temperament can make a K9U experience successful or not. An ill-tempered dog will not learn commands as fast or be a good fit for children. Therapy dogs, especially those used in a school setting, must be mild-tempered, with a drive to please (Davis, 2022).

Ethical Procedures

The data were analyzed using Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS) software. For the RQ and sub-RQs one and two, a repeated measures ANOVA was performed between all students for RQ1. Sub-RQ1 examined the differences between gender, and sub-RQ2 between socioeconomic statuses. Research indicated that boys and students from low socioeconomic

backgrounds struggle more academically than their peers (Beetz et al., 2012; Payne, 2018). This test was appropriate when determining the effect of an intervention on pre/post-test scores. The descriptive statistics include the mean pre/post as a grade level, mean difference, p-value, standard deviation, confidence interval, effect size, and degrees of freedom.

Potential Research Bias

The researcher has served as a canine foster and has been involved in training therapy dogs since K9U began in 2017. Watching the growth of the canines and students is inexplicable. Having a front seat, the researcher has numerous positive narratives about how a therapy dog brought a student out of their shell, motivated them, helped them learn multiplication facts, and improved student attendance. However, these anecdotes are not numbers and are difficult to quantify, thus the decision to conduct this study. The researcher could quantify with data any impact therapy dogs may have on student achievement using an instrument that would provide data that could be measured, such as the STAAR assessment.

Results

This quantitative study aimed to determine therapy dogs' impact on academic achievement in a rural math classroom. The STAAR measured academic achievement, the summative evaluation given to every student in grades 3-10 in reading and math at the end of every academic school year. Research participants included 7th and 8th graders enrolled in and taking STAAR assessments at Centerville ISD for both grade levels and were selected to provide numerical statistics for the effectiveness of the canine intervention. The results of this study provided insight as to whether canine therapy is a potential way to impact math achievement. The data were assembled from the STAAR in math class at the end of the 7th and 8th-grade years. The researcher used a randomized experimental design to answer the questions. This random assignment method helps to ensure that any differences between the two groups are due to the intervention rather than any other factor.

Description of the Sample

A sample of 123 students in rural classrooms participated in the study. These students were divided into a control group and an intervention group that received therapy dogs (AAI). Twenty-two students participated in the control group, and 101 students participated in the AAI group, as noted in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Therapy Dog Intervention Participation Numbers

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Control	22	17.9	17.9	17.9
AAI	101	82.1	82.1	82.1
Total	123	100	100	100

Table 2 shows that the control group consisted of 7 females and 15 males, with 10 being economically disadvantaged and 12 being non-economically disadvantaged. The AAI group comprised 39 females and 62 males, 45 economically disadvantaged and 56 non-economically disadvantaged. The math scores of the participants were measured at grade 7 and grade 8, and a three-way mixed repeated measures ANOVA was conducted to examine the main and interaction effects of gender, economic status, and therapy dog intervention on math scores. The statistical analysis was performed using IBM SPSS V.27 software.

Table 2

Number of Participants in the Control and AAI Groups by Gender and Economic Status

		Female		Male	
		Non-EcoDis	Eco. Dis	Non-Eco. Dis	Eco. Dis
Groups	Control	5	2	7	8
	AAI	22	17	34	28

A three-way mixed ANOVA was conducted to examine whether there was an effect of students' gender (male and female) and their economic status (economically disadvantaged and non-economically disadvantaged) by therapy dogs intervention groups (Control and AAI) on student math achievement in rural classrooms. RQ 1 was evaluated, what impact do therapy dogs have on rural math achievement? The Tests of Within-Subjects Effects results showed a significant main effect of grade on math scores, $F(1, 115) = 38.77, p < .001, \eta^2 = .25$, indicating that math scores significantly raised from 7th grade to 8th grade, not controlling for other factors.

The results of the Tests of Between-Subjects Effects showed a significant main effect of group on math scores, $F(1, 115) = 7.70, p = .006, \eta^2 = .06$, indicating that the therapy dogs (AAI) intervention group ($M=55.78, SE=1.43$) had significantly higher math score differences compared to the control group ($M=45.48, SE=3.42$), as shown in Figure 1. The mean average increased by 14 points from 7th to 8th grade. This conclusion supports the hypothesis that there is a significant impact on student math achievement in rural classrooms where AAI is used.

Next was the evaluation of sub-RQ1, which asked what difference is realized in math academic achievement by gender in rural middle schools when a therapy dog is present. There was also a significant interaction effect of group and gender on math scores, $F(1, 115) = 6.79, p = .010, \eta^2 = .06$. The second null hypothesis was rejected. There was a significant impact on math achievement by gender in rural classrooms where AAI was used. This result indicated that the math scores between the control and AAI groups differed for males and females. Figure 2 shows that Female students improved their math scores more than male students. The mean average for females improved by 10 points, compared to the mean average for males, only improving by one point.

Figure 1

Interaction of Therapy Dog Intervention and Control Groups
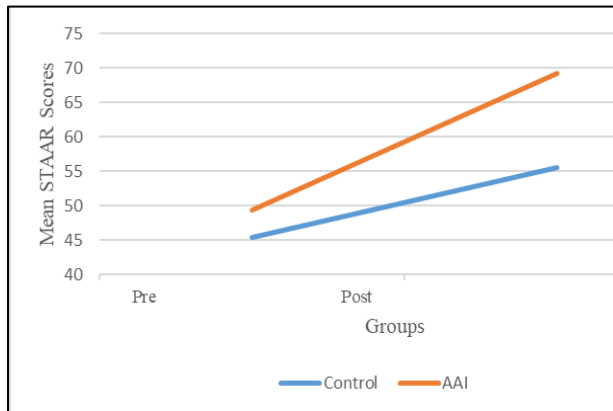
Figure 2

Interaction of Therapy Dog Intervention Group and Gender on Math Scores
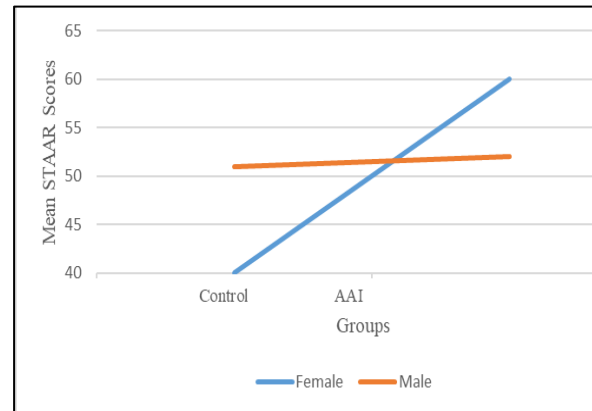
Lastly, sub-RQ 2 was evaluated; what difference is realized in math academic achievement by SES in rural middle schools when therapy dogs are present? In contrast to gender, there was no significant interaction effect of group and economic status on math scores, $F (1, 115) = 0.05, p = .822, \eta^2 = .001$. Each group grew parallel, showing equal growth. Therefore, the third null hypothesis failed to reject that there is no impact on math achievement by socioeconomic status in rural classrooms where AAI was used. Figure 3 shows that the difference in math scores between the control group and the AAI group did not vary significantly based on students' economic status.

Additionally, the non-significant interaction effect of group, economic status, and gender on math scores was found, $F (1, 115) = 3.65, p = .058, \eta^2 = .03$, indicating that the difference in math scores between the therapy dog intervention and control groups was not different for students who were economically disadvantaged and those who were not, depending on their gender. The mean average increase for economically disadvantaged students was 10 points, compared to non-economically disadvantaged students, with an 11-point average increase in test scores.

Figure 3

Impact of Therapy Dog Intervention Group and Economic Status on Math Scores
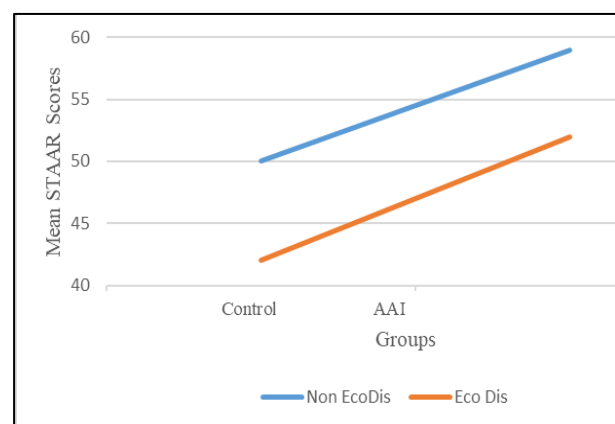
Discussion

Increasing academic achievement for rural schools in Texas is becoming more critical as school accountability hinges on student performance. Centerville ISD has tried traditional approaches to improve student academic achievement, including instructional coaching, professional development, and software programs that guarantee results. All measures to improve student academic achievement have yet to provide the results needed to increase student proficiency. The failure to improve student achievement began the evolution of K9U, a program that allows teachers to foster therapy dogs in training for use in their classrooms.

The researcher sought to determine therapy dogs' impact on rural math academic achievement for middle school students. The current study was significant because it added another facet of use for therapy dogs in educational settings. Canines are widely used in reading interventions, counseling sessions, and special education (behavior and autism) classrooms. The current study may help rural schools identify an unconventional method to help with math achievement, as the canines help focus on social and emotional learning, which opens the mind to learn (Payne, 2018). The results of this study were also significant in adding to the overall body of literature on the use of animal-assisted interventions in rural general education classrooms.

Summary of Findings

The primary focus of this study was to determine the impact on students who received an AAI and those who did not. Research question one asked what impact therapy dogs had on rural math achievement. The quantitative approach allowed data from the STAAR test to be collected and analyzed on 123 students enrolled at Centerville ISD. This question was the baseline as it addressed students' overall academic performance in a rural math classroom. The data analysis concluded that math scores increased significantly from 7th to 8th grade. This score increase was significant because of the national below-average scores on the NAEP 8th-grade assessment (NCES, 2022). We know therapy dogs improve reading skills (Bassette & Taber-Doughty, 2016; Fung, 2016; Kropp & Shupp, 2017; le Roux et al., 2014), and this improvement in scores tells us therapy dogs can improve math scores.

The next question, sub-research question one, inquired about the difference in math achievement by gender in rural middle schools when therapy dogs are present. The results indicated that females improved scores more than males when exposed to an AAI. These findings are consistent with females scoring better on reading achievement (Hochweber & Vieluf, 2018; Duckworth & Seligman, 2006; Reilly et al., 2018; Chou, 2019).

The last question used data on the difference in math achievement by socioeconomic status in rural middle school classrooms with therapy dogs present. The data analysis results indicated no significant difference in scores between the control group that received the intervention based on socioeconomic status. Krupp and Schupp (2017) suggested that children living in poverty (low-socioeconomic status) suffer from outside circumstances that can limit their learning ability. It was suggested that therapy dogs could help meet the emotional needs of students living in poverty and help foster improvement in their academic achievement. However, the data of the study indicated that animal assistance intervention did not support the specific subgroup of socioeconomic status.

The results of this study indicated that animal-assisted interventions could be effective in a rural middle school math classroom. Therapy dogs have been helping people for centuries (Hill et al., 2020). Levinson was the forefather of modern animal-assisted interventions, as he noticed his patients talked more when his dog, Jingles, was in the room (le Roux et al., 2014; Walsh, 2009). The improvement in scores from seventh to eighth grade indicates the AAI effectively reduced stress and anxiety, allowing students to learn the content easier (le Roux et al., 2014; Morrison, 2007).

Interpretation of Findings

The impact of therapy dogs in rural math classrooms had gone unmeasured until the current study. Through this study, the researcher stated that animal-assisted interventions positively impacted students in multiple areas of education. There was a need to determine if the exact impact would be realized in the content area of mathematics. This study could imply that therapy dogs in math classrooms are capable of similar outcomes found when dogs integrate into a reading or special education program. The literature backing the therapeutic use of canines is vast; however, the information on the impact in rural math classrooms needs to be more present. This study revealed information beneficial to the AAI community and the use of dogs in the classroom.

The researcher examined research question one and found that overall test scores from 7th to 8th grade improved with the help of canine-assisted interventions. The researcher expected results of overall higher scores. With the significant literature supporting canine interventions in reading, the author expected some of that benefit to be transferable to math skills (Barber & Proops, 2019). This increase in overall scores is significant, especially for Centerville ISD, because traditional teaching and interventions failed to raise scores. The hypothesis was supported, which stated that there was a substantial impact on student math achievement in rural classrooms where AAI is used. Furthermore, the 8th graders across the nation performed below average (NCES, 2022), and this study provides insight into the benefits AAI can provide to rural students. The improvement in test scores for the grade level is exciting for the field, as it hints at canines being as effective in math classrooms as they are in other educational settings.

The second research question examined therapy dogs' impact on genders (male versus female) in rural math classrooms. The results showed that females responded more to the canine AAI, and the scores rose significantly. However, the scores for the males did not show that same growth. Ruby Payne (2018) discussed those boys from low-socioeconomic backgrounds struggle with classroom achievement. The researcher theorized that the presence of a dog in the classroom would give all students more emotional connection and safety and allow them to improve their academic achievement. The study's results demonstrated a different outcome from the researcher's theory. The researcher hoped the achievement could have been higher for males that received the canine intervention. Therefore, the researcher rejected the null hypothesis that there is no significant impact on math achievement by gender in rural classrooms where AAI was used.

The last question in the study addressed the variance in scores among socioeconomic statuses (SES): those that are low-SES compared to those that are not. The researcher hypothesized that there would be a significant impact on math achievement on SES in rural classrooms where AAI is used. Therefore, the null hypothesis failed to be rejected, which stated that socioeconomic status has no impact on math achievement in rural classrooms where AAI

was used. This finding surprised the researcher because, much like gender, canine therapy was expected to impact socioeconomic status performance significantly (Beetz et al., 2012). Research suggests that when students feel emotionally secure, their learning will improve, yielding higher academic achievement (Payne, 2018; Beetz et al., 2012). Canine research suggests that students had those emotional security needs met by petting and bonding with the dog (Zents et al., 2016; le Roux et al., 2014; Walsh, 2009).

The results of this study showed an overall impact of higher scores on students in this rural math classroom. Females were particularly receptive to the intervention, as demonstrated by the significant jump in improvement from 7th to 8th grade (Duckworth & Seligman, 2006). There needed to be more time for each student to bond with the dog or more opportunities to work one-on-one with the canine in the classroom. While implementing the therapy dog intervention in the classroom was carefully thought out, the researcher and classroom teacher could only foresee some potential issues. Overall, the impact of AAI in this rural math classroom was positive.

Implications of Findings

The data analysis of this quantitative study analyzed the impact of therapy dogs on academic achievement in rural math classrooms. The immediate implications of this study are significant to the overall field of AAI, especially those interventions that use canines, as it sheds light on the fact that canine therapy can raise math performance. Schools across the nation have dogs in their facilities for students to read to or to help with students in special education settings; however, the results of this study suggested that their school dogs can be used in a math setting as well.

Previous research supports using AAI for reading improvement, behavioral regulation, and to help counsel. However, canines are helpful in other educational settings, as evidenced by the results of this study. Bhandari (2020) discussed generalizing skills from one context to the next. The researcher believes the practice of reading to a dog can be generalized to the math classroom to specifically address concepts like math fact fluency, fractions, and time. With reinforcement in these essential math building blocks, there is potential for dogs to be as effective in math as they have proven to be in reading.

By having a classroom resource that can bond with students, help students feel calm, and provide a sense of security and confidence (Sokal & Kahl, 2019), Texas schools can begin to close the academic achievement gap in math. With more students performing on grade level, the accountability ratings for schools using therapy dogs in math classes would increase. The therapy dog program aims to reduce stress and help problem-solving skills (Zents et al., 2007), and this study implies that canine AAI can help do that in math, leading to higher scores.

Limitations and Delimitations

Most research studies have limitations that must be evaluated when looking at the study results. There could be possible threats to the validity of the study. Internal threads to validity include the history and maturation of the students. History threatens internal validity due to not knowing if a student has an unknown preference or issue with the canine. Based on their history, students may need to be more engaged when the trained therapy canine is present. Another limitation that could impact internal validity is that of maturation. The researcher can only definitively say the growth in scores is from the canine because students mature between 7th and

8th grade. The most significant external validity limitation is that of a situation effect. This study involves multiple class periods that occur all day long. The composition of the students in the classroom can make bonding with a canine or learning the presented content more difficult. The composition of students must be considered when examining the study's results. The most significant limitation was the school's location and sample size. The study could have had a more robust effect size had there been enough student population to have a larger control group. All these limitations must be considered when evaluating the results.

This study's primary delimitation is that only one school and one teacher provided the data. While the researcher consciously made that decision, it is a choice that must be examined when analyzing the data. The results of this study came from a small population sample. Had the researcher included more schools, the results data could have been much stronger; however, that was not a risk the researcher was willing to take. While other local schools have K9U programs, the researcher needed to speak to the fidelity of implementation and the access students have to the canines during core content classes, such as math. Therefore, the researcher opted for a delimitation of the setting.

The completion of this study demonstrated the benefit of using canine AAI in other content areas, specifically math. The primary goal of this study was to determine if therapy dogs impacted math achievement in rural middle school math classrooms. While there were positive outcomes in the study, more work needs to be done to ensure that canines can positively impact math achievement in the same way that canines impact reading achievement.

Conclusion

The research findings of this study showed an overall increase in scores from 7th to 8th grade with canine intervention. Furthermore, the results indicated that females responded more favorably than males to the intervention. There was no discernable difference in academic achievement in response to intervention between high and low-socioeconomic student groups. The researcher found no scientific information on using canine AAI in math classrooms to improve student achievement. Any further research in this area would be ground-breaking and provide additional information on the impact canines can make in math settings.

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No Excuses: How One District Made Sure Students Thrived Mathematically Through The Pandemic

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Abstract

The global pandemic left many schools across the country content with low expectations regarding student achievement (Gross & Opalka, 2020). It seemed as though learning loss and academic struggles would become the norm for students throughout the country, particularly in mathematics. Though few states could maintain or improve math performance on their respective standardized testing, there were examples where individual schools could prevent a learning loss and improve academically from where they were from 2019 to 2022. Out of 3700 school systems, seven of the top ten systems with the highest gains were from the state of Alabama (Crain, 2022). A case study was designed around one of these school systems, referred to in this paper as The Martell School System. This study catalyzed fellow school district leaders to learn strategies that could be duplicated in other systems for school improvement. Through times of change and uncertainty, influential instructional leaders maintain high levels of expectation. Through interviews with school and district leadership, and data analysis, knowledge will be gained that will allow schools to learn from these instructional leaders and implement strategies with their students as we return to normalcy.

Introduction

There is little debate that the global pandemic created unprecedented challenges for educators throughout the United States (Buda & Czekman, 2021). It seemed as though learning loss and academic struggles would become the norm for students throughout the country, particularly in mathematics. Although no state as a whole was able to maintain or improve math performance on state testing, there are examples where individual schools were able to prevent a learning loss and academically enhance from 2019 to 2022. Out of 3700 school systems, 7 of the top 10 systems with the highest gains were from the state of Alabama (Crain, 2022). One of the highest-performing school systems was the Martell City School System, a small city school system in Martell County, Alabama. Martell City Schools saw gains of .753 from 2019 to 2022. Changes in math scores were tracked from 2019 to 2022 using publicly reported assessment data (Crain, 2022). Using a framework of existing research about factors that drive student success, this study attempted to identify strategies that correlate to these factors and perhaps broaden educators' understanding of student achievement.

Pandemic Problems

At the time of publication of this article, the magnitude of academic consequences was still relatively unknown. Initial studies showed the completion of academic tasks and increased disparity among students who completed standardized testing in schools worldwide (Engzel et al., 2021). Standardized testing was not the only concern K-12 school personnel were burdened with. The ability to recruit students back into the school building and see them through completion was also a concern. Schools that housed students who struggled academically before the pandemic continued to see increased dropouts and poor academic performance as students returned to a traditional school setting (Khan & Ahmed, 2021). Mental health became a concern for guidance counselors, teachers, and administrators as students, including some who missed over a year of social interaction, returned to school. Reports showed that up to 83% of young people reported worsened mental conditions post-pandemic (Grubic et al., 2020).

Modality of instruction became a concern during the pandemic. As schools prepared to resume teaching, educational leaders had to decide how to best deliver the curriculum and instruction. Some schools shut their doors altogether, while others attempted to educate students remotely or through a hybrid model. Korhonen et al. (2021) explained, "As the autonomous implementers of the curriculum, this exceptional period calls for the ability of teachers to not just adapt to changing circumstances but also use innovation skills to create new practices" (p.170). It should come as no surprise that many teachers struggled to adapt to teaching hybrid or remote. Teachers, many of whom had little to no experience with online education, were forced to teach standards via new methods with which they were unfamiliar. Some struggled to connect with their students, while others saw a rise in academic dishonesty as they could not establish norms and expectations (Matić, 2021).

The Math Dilemma

Even before the pandemic, concerns overwhelmed the nation regarding student achievement in mathematics. All schools across the country saw math scores plummeting before the pandemic, and Alabama ranked dead last in this area by NAEP rankings in 2019. Moseley (2022) wrote the following:

In 2019, 45% of Alabama's fourth graders were proficient in math. In 2021, that number had plummeted to just 24% proficient. In 2022, that number had climbed to just 32%. Only 32% of students who mastered fourth-grade math by the end of the fourth grade will have lifetime consequences for those who failed to grasp basic math concepts. However, the collapse in math proficiency was much worse in other states, so the state jumped in the NAEP rankings from 52nd place nationally to 40th" (para. 4).

Although initially, one may conclude schools to be on the right path, the jump in rankings had more to do with other states failing to progress during the pandemic and Alabama holding steady or regressing at a lower rate during the pandemic (Mosely, 2022). Some researchers believe the key to improving student achievement is increasing the competency of teachers through high-quality professional development. They feel that the most effective professional development requires teachers to attend an initial professional development session followed by mini-workshops to reflect on and enhance their practices (Gersten et al., 2014). Plenty of data and educational theories claim answers to increasing educational outcomes. One would be remiss not to consider the work of Hattie, who has dedicated his research to analyzing factors that most impact student achievement. Hattie (2017) identified over 250 influences and their respective effect sizes through research involving millions of students. The top seven factors include collective teacher efficacy, self-reported grades, teacher estimates of achievement, cognitive task analysis, response to intervention, Piagetian Programs, and the Jigsaw Method.

Collective teacher efficacy, self-reported grading, and teacher estimates of achievement

A learning organization comprises many players with individual beliefs, perceptions, and mental models. Research shows a positive impact on student achievement when there is alignment among faculty. Hattie's number one factor that he identified as an influencer of student achievement is collective teacher efficacy—the belief of a school's faculty that the collaborative efforts of teachers will positively impact student achievement Hattie (2011). Collective teacher efficacy is a marriage between personal convictions and institutional belief. Goddard et al. (2000) explained, "Collective teacher efficacy is a way of conceptualizing the normative environment of a school and its influences on both personal and organizational behavior…teachers' beliefs about their faculty's capability to educate students constitute a norm that influences the actions and achievements of schools" (p. 502).

Self-reported grading refers to the ability of students to assess their mastery of standards and objectives and anticipate how they will perform on assessments (Hattie, 2011). Having students self-assess and set attainable goals for themselves can occur informally through one-on-one conversations with the teacher or through strategic events such as student-led conferences. Bailey and Guskey (2001) argued that "student-led conferences require students to take most responsibility for reporting what they have learned. To prepare for this responsibility, students must evaluate on reflecting upon their work regularly…In short, students must be actively involved in learning" (p. 6).

The third highest influencer of student achievement is teacher estimates of achievement, with an effect size of 1.29 (Hattie, 2011). The potential for research on the impact of relationships between teachers and students is vast regarding teacher practices and student response to instruction. Fredriksen and Rhodes (2004) suggested that "supportive relationships with teachers may augment students' motivation to learn and actively participate in subject domains that have traditionally held little interest for them" (p. 45).

The benefits of supportive relationships between students and teachers are not mutually exclusive. Just as students are shown to excel academically, teachers have experienced an improvement in their mental health when they intentionally develop interpersonal skills and bonds with their students (Spilt et al., 2011). There are questions to be answered regarding the effect size of teachers' mental well-being related to burnout and the number of teachers retiring. In a time when we see teachers leave the profession faster than they are entering, this is no small detail and is worthy of further investigation.

Cognitive Task Analysis and Response to Intervention

Cognitive task analysis means that the student does not simply learn the content but deeply understands the learning objective and outcome and can apply it to other concepts (Hattie, 2011). This concept has similarities to Bloom's taxonomy, where learning occurs on different levels, and teachers strive to expand content from simple to complex ideas. The main difference is that Hattie emphasizes that the teacher makes excellent efforts to assess the student's learning level and gradually builds. Hattie (2011) pointed out that "teachers must know at what phase of learning the student is best invested in learning more surface ideas and moving from the surface to a deeper relating and extending of these ideas. The aim is to work at, or +1 beyond, where the student works now" (p. 107).

Schools across Alabama and the United States use Response to Intervention (RTI). School district leaders have invested time and money into implementing what they feel are best practices in addressing deficiencies among students in reading and math. Efforts in Alabama have been amplified since adopting the Literacy Act (Schuyler, 2022). This law, delayed a year due to the pandemic, requires third-grade students to be on the reading level before being promoted to the next level. RTI models are typically multi-tiered approaches to intervention that usually start with adjustments to whole group instruction, progress to small group instruction, and in cases of students with the most significant deficiencies, individualized support outside of the classroom setting with specialized education. Progress monitoring during intervention is a critical component of RTI models and varies from school to school. "The primary goal of RTI models is the prevention and remediation of academic and behavioral difficulties through effective classroom instruction and increasingly intense interventions…districts that successfully implement RTI models may improve achievement and behavioral outcomes in all students, especially those most at risk for academic difficulties" (Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009. p. 35).

Piagetian Programs and the Jigsaw Method

Discovery-based, hands-on learning theories are certainly familiar concepts, although the idea was considerably challenged during the pandemic with doors shuttered. The central timeless theme of Piagetian programs is that before teachers attempt to deliver content to their students, they must first understand how children think (Hattie, 2011). This requires them to be cognizant of students' different academic abilities and intelligence levels on their roster. Kaplan (2018) found that Piagetian theories "describe how humans construct and adapt understanding through processes of sensory and intellectual development through experience in the environment (p. 831). Understanding that students learn and acquire knowledge at different stages is vital to teaching and student achievement.

The last effect identified by Hattie that I will discuss is the Jigsaw Method. The Jigsaw Method is an instructional cooperative learning technique in which students are placed in home groups and rotated to other stations where they become experts on topics. Students eventually

return to their home groups, disseminating information to their classmates (Hattie, 2011). The unique concept of the Jigsaw Method is not that it allows students to take the role of the teacher, but it encourages collaboration, team building, and learning. Teachers who utilize the Jigsaw Method effectively see improvements in reading comprehension, as students are motivated by the technique that allows interaction with their peers (Salahi, 2019).

Research Questions

This study aimed to analyze the perceptions of district and school-level educators' perceptions of their student's academic success during the height of the pandemic. While other schools across the nation struggled with learning loss, Martell City Schools saw the third highest gains in the state of Alabama in math at .75 growth (Crain, 2022). While several themes emerged throughout the study that gave rise to other questions, two main research questions drove the interviews and follow-up questions:

1. What do educators in the school district attribute their mathematical success related to other schools during the pandemic?

2. What strategies will the district continue beyond the pandemic that can be of value to other schools and districts?

By appropriately answering these two questions, one is likely to take lessons learned and apply them to classrooms throughout the state and nation as we seek a return to normalcy in public education.

Methods

Student achievement and school accountability are educational buzzwords that were in place long before the pandemic hit. The general public now has more access than ever to school data, and rankings and comparisons are available for criticism and commentary online twenty-four hours, seven days a week. While many schools struggled to educate students during the pandemic for many reasons effectively, instructional leaders find themselves in a situation where they can look at schools and districts that saw success and learn from them. This study focuses on decisions that impacted student achievement at the district and school levels.

Research Design

The design most appropriate for this study was qualitative. The researcher provided unique access and perspective of stakeholders within the district who had firsthand knowledge of what made them successful. This study allowed the researcher to examine the individual experiences and perspectives of educators within the school district, learn what they believe drove student achievement, and compare it to existing literature that explicitly cites factors to which student success can be attributed. The researcher wanted a study that allowed the participants' stories to be told and to determine if they corresponded to existing educational theory. Interviews allowed for follow-up questions, and participants could express themselves freely as pseudonyms were given to protect their identity. Participants were also invited to submit artifacts for consideration and evidence to be included in data analysis.

The research was conducted in a bounded case where district and school-level educational leaders utilized various strategies and techniques to limit mathematical learning loss during the pandemic. This study's case was a small city school system comprising five schools. Multiple data sources were analyzed, including formal and informal interviews, documents, and

observations. The case study design was chosen as it was most appropriate for helping to answer the research questions of this study, and asking open-ended interview questions allowed for a free-flowing conversation and understanding of the case on a deeper level, as opposed to survey questions which would limit the responses. This study was designed around understanding factors that have been proven to impact student learning positively. One of the goals of this study was to understand how strategies utilized by educational leaders in the school system corresponded with techniques that we already know impact student achievement. Another goal was to understand the uniqueness of the methods employed in this particular system.

Sampling and Data Collection

Martell City School System is a public city school system in rural Alabama. It is comprised of five schools. Last year, the district served about 2,300 students, with more than 12% having limited English proficiency, 60% economically disadvantaged, and 7% homeless. Students with disabilities comprise about 12% (Alabama State Department of Education, 2022). Participants in this study included employees who have either previously served or currently serve as central office administration, teachers, principals, and assistant principals within the district. Participants were recruited through an email forwarded by the superintendent, and interviews were set up at the convenience of the participants. Purposeful sampling was used to gain multiple perspectives on what strategies could be mainly attributed to success within the district. Interviews were conducted and flowed in a way that allowed unique stories and attitudes to be shared based on the participant's role.

Formal and informal qualitative data collection methods were utilized during this study. Along with formal interviews, data was collected through recorded field notes, artifacts made available by the participants for the study, and public information from the schools' websites. These documents were used to compare themes from participant responses and general field notes. Structured interviews focused on the research questions at hand. Interviews were arranged with participants through recruitment emails facilitated by the superintendent, referred to in this paper as Dr. T. For the sake of protecting identification, all participants, including Dr. T, will be given pseudonyms in discussing their responses in the data analysis and conclusion session when direct quotes are included. Measures were taken to keep the position of those responding to questions. This allowed participants to answer freely without fear or detriment to their posts within the district. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed of their opt-out rights. Although interviews were semi-structured, a list of several themes was kept with each interview, and notes were made as the interview took place. These themes included the strategies proven to positively affect student achievement discussed in the literature review (Hattie, 2011). Interviews were recorded and transcribed. After transcribing the interviews, key points from each question were summarized. Interview summaries and clarifying questions, if applicable, were sent to participants who were given the opportunity for review and input. Participants were also provided with contact information to clarify any of their points. One of the participants was unavailable for an interview and elected to send the responses to the questions in written form. The interview was later followed up with a discussion via telephone conversation.

Data Analysis

Data transcriptions were analyzed, looking for repetitions, metaphors and analogies, transitions, similarities and differences, linguistic connectors, missing data, and theory-related material (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). Data were also coded using a priori code correlating to the

Table 1

Codebook

Category	Code	Operational Definition	Data Exemplar
Analysis of multiple forms of data	AMFD	Reports of analyzing multiple forms of student data	We very much were. Data-driven, and we I know people talk about this and don't really do it. But I'm telling you we did it where we actually adjusted our instruction based on our data.
Vertical alignment of math instruction	VA	Reports of aligning math curriculum	I know if I push vertical progression, what happens in the midst of that is that horizontal grade level, shared planning. ownership has to happen for it to go up and down vertically.
Teacher goal setting for students and progress monitoring	GS	Reports of teacher goal setting and monitoring student progress/adjusting	We do a phenomenal job of individual student goal-setting in our lower elementary grades. Our students have learned to identify their strengths and weaknesses and can communicate that to their parents in our student-led conferences at our elementary schools. We are beginning to implement those same strategies at our high grade levels.
Servant leadership	SL	Reports of servant leadership/leading by example	The kindergarten teacher, all the way up through that principal through Central Office is, we believe in mission work. So what is our mission? What is our field? Where are we? Where do we do it? And we try to get our kids to do it. And that's one thing I think when kids realize we care about them and others.
Relationships	R	Reports of addressing student need beyond academics	In our district, we try to do various things to ensure that our students have someone they can trust and go to in the event of need.
Strategic professional development	PD	Descriptions of professional development	Over the last 5-6 years, our school district has invested significant time and resources into professional learning for our teachers. Our teachers have become more confident in their abilities to teach mathematics using proven strategies for enhancing student learning during that time frame. This has played a major role in the successes we have recently experienced.
Individualized student needs	ISN	Reports of Addressing individualized student needs	We utilize our "Pirate Period" as a form of advisement in which students are assigned to a particular teacher, and that teacher mentors those students each week.
Continued academic efforts during the pandemic	CAE	Reports of continuing work done before the pandemic began	We felt it was extremely important to continue delivering good quality instruction to meet the collective and individual needs of our students.
Reviewing previous academic content	RPC	Reports of curriculum/academic review	For 50 minutes a week, I've got a math teacher to teach them at a 3rd grade level, or whatever level they are at.
Hattie identified actions.	HA	Reports of actions identified by Hattie (included in interview questions and lit review)	(Responses to interview questions were all Hattie Based)

actions identified by Hattie as having a significant impact on student achievement. Utilizing multiple techniques allowed me to see patterns and reduce data into distinct categories. As themes were created, I created a codebook to include a list of codes, identification of principles, operational definitions, and data exemplars. (See Table 1).

Warrants and assertions were made while seeking out disconfirming evidence for each warrant. Warrants and reports were included as part of member checks, and participants were allowed to respond to or refute any warrant and assertion that they declined.

Results

This study aimed to determine what strategies educators in Martell utilized to limit the learning loss of students in their district at the start of the pandemic. At the same time, other schools across the country saw significant learning loss. Research questions addressed during the study included the following:

1. What do educators in the school district attribute their mathematical success related to other schools during the pandemic?

2. What strategies will the district continue beyond the pandemic that can be of value to other schools and communities?

To help answer these questions, I interviewed educators and examined artifacts and field notes. Rather than discuss each research question individually, I will discuss the major themes that emerged from this study, including analysis of multiple forms of data, vertical alignment of math instruction, teacher goal setting for students and progress monitoring, servant leadership, relationships, strategic professional development, individualized student needs, continued academic efforts during the pandemic, higher order thinking activities, and Hattie identified actions. Because there was much overlap in the data, some of these themes can be combined as findings are discussed. Because interview questions included the top actions identified by Hattie, discussions of this theme will be included in each debate.

As data were analyzed, it became apparent that although the participants had different actions for which they credited their success, some were accepted across the board as significant influences over the positive student achievement they saw. Multiple participants spoke passionately about how when schools shut down during the pandemic, Martell City School system leaders doubled down on continuing to do what they needed for student success. This theme emerged more so than any other theme throughout the data analysis. Participant 1 stated, "Some people were surprised at some of the things we continued doing. We continued progress monitoring. We continued intervention with students who needed it". Participant 2 talked about continuing a high level of instruction. Participant 3 agreed that while it was an event like nothing anyone had gone through, the teachers did an excellent job of keeping things as normal as possible. Principal and central office participants quickly credited teachers with maintaining the course. Hattie's action of collective teacher efficacy resonated with participants. Participant 4 stated, "Throughout the pandemic, our organizational goal was to focus on the processes rather than the eventual outcomes. We felt it was essential to continue delivering good quality instruction to meet our students' collective and individual needs".

Participants were asked to describe their response to intervention models, self-reported grading examples, and what role both actions played in the success. While most participants did not specifically identify self-reported grading as a factor that led to winning, all participants spoke about the benefits of goal setting. Participants credited teachers with taking data from progress monitoring and setting goals for students. Some schools in the system utilized student-led conferences to connect with parents and explain their child's academic progress. Participant 4 stated, "We do a phenomenal job of individual student goal setting at our lower elementary grades. Our students have learned to identify their strengths and weaknesses and can communicate that to their parents in our student-led conferences at our elementary schools. We are beginning to implement those same strategies at our high-grade levels". Participant 2 was very confident that anyone could "walk into a 5th-grade classroom, and ask a student his or her math goal, and get a quick response." One participant who served as a teacher described the process. "We were given autonomy as to how we did it, but we were expected by our administration to meet with our students one on one and set those goals."

Interviews of this study included a specific question regarding teacher efficacy of achievement and, specifically, the power of relationships. However, it was surprising to hear participants discuss the power of district-wide relationships between employees and students. There would appear to exist a district-wide commitment to serving as a positive influence on students. Further evidence of district-wide service was provided through a continuous improvement presentation, as one of the district's core values explicitly states, "All persons bear responsibility for contributing positively to the community." One participant (not the superintendent) gave an example. "We are small enough and close enough that our students know that if they need Dr. T, it does not matter that he is the superintendent. They can go to him. We have that open door". Another participant described one of the tenants of Martell as "We believe in mission work. We want our kids to be servant leaders. When kids realize we care about them and others, we start seeing a change."

The theme of vertical math planning and curriculum alignment emerged throughout the data analysis. This is true from both interviews as well as document analysis. In a public presentation, the superintendent cites the vertical alignment of the math curriculum as a notable achievement for Martell City Schools. Participants identified this as a source of their success as well. One participant explained a conversation between math teachers from different grade levels. The lower grade level teacher had shown some frustration at not seeing students having success at a particular skill. After dissecting the associated standard, they realized there was some out-of-sequence teaching going on, and they were able to make some adjustments to their instruction. Another participant cited vertical planning as an example of collective teacher efficacy. The participant stated, "The big thing for me is vertical progression, being aligned K-12. That is how we check on teacher efficacy."

The final themes that emerged throughout the interviews and document analysis were individualized student needs and reviewing previous academic content. These themes commonly emerged through questions about responses to intervention programs, Piagetian Models, and the Jigsaw Method. One participant stated, "We have started focusing on preparing kids for success here in our community, focusing on skills may be that they do not know they even have…We want our kids to be critical thinkers". Another participant described a jigsaw session that evolved into a regular flipped classroom. The participant pointed out, "I watched a student create a model for multiplication. It was the coolest thing that he created, representing a three-digit addition. All

it was place value, but he came up with it, or so I thought. After talking to him, another student came up with the strategy and taught him, who then taught the class."

Discussions and Implications

Several lessons are to be learned from educators in Martell City Schools System. The first evident lesson is that vision and direction must be communicated. Many school systems were shell-shocked and unprepared to shut their doors at the pandemic's start. Those schools that were grounded in what they did at least had the advantage of knowing what they were trying to maintain. Vertical alignment requires excellent cooperation and communication among school and central office administrators and teachers. Shared teacher efficacy is critical to everyone buying into the same beliefs. Most teachers believe students can learn. It is also fair to say that everyone has a set of ideas about what must be done. Martell Schools was successful mainly because the leaders of the systems could get principals and teachers in different buildings to work together under standard guidelines and a common purpose. Unsurprisingly, many of the district's educators' actions mirrored those identified by Hattie (2011) as having a meaningful effect on student achievement. Opportunities for future research in casting a shared vision and how to instill buy-in from all educators would be most enjoyable.

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Veteran Teachers' Resistance Factors to Technology Usage in the Face of Change in the Secondary Classroom in Northwest Alabama

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Abstract

Technology has inserted itself into everyday life. This includes the classroom and instructional practices; however, veteran teachers face unique circumstances with technology. Veteran teachers are looking for leadership in the face of current technological changes. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, we examined the current use of technology in veteran teachers' classrooms in rural Northwest Alabama. Forty veteran teachers answered an online survey about their perceptions of technology in daily instruction, and 12 were selected via purposeful sampling to complete an interview to expound on the survey responses. Findings revealed that these veteran teachers wanted more administrative support, copious yet practical professional development sessions, and removing as many barriers as possible.

Introduction

In this article, we present findings from a qualitative study to explore the resistance factors that veteran teachers face when implementing technology into their instructional planning and practices. We surveyed and then conducted semi-structured interviews with 12 veteran teachers to determine what they perceived to be barriers to technology and planning in their classrooms. As a result of our findings, we present ideas and methods for veteran teachers to overcome the implementation barriers.

Purpose of the Study

Despite researchers' findings on technology implementation and teachers, there has been a lack of information about veteran teachers, especially those teaching in rural communities. Therefore, the purpose of this descriptive study was to describe resistances that prevent or delay veteran teachers in rural Alabama from integrating technology into their instructional design and planning processes. These resistances included potential physical or psychological barriers when implementing technological components to their pedagogical practices.

Research Question

The overall guiding qualitative question for this study was as follows:

What resistances do veteran teachers have to prevent appropriate and usable technology integration into the secondary content classroom?

Background to the Study

The use of technology has been a paradigm shift in education today and has been more than a passing trend. It has become a mainstay in today's ever-changing world. It has also been an essential function of today's educational umbrella. This specific need for classroom technology has made appropriate and proper technology implementation key to positive technological success, such as learning management systems and file-sharing programs.

Today's students have been identified as daily consumers and patrons of technology. They need to be treated as such by teachers prepared to complete the task of putting a quality lesson before the students. In recent years, many students could access various technological opportunities. In contrast, teachers may not be as up-to-date on the technological changes. Smith stated, "Today's students are early adopters of new technology, creating new uses for many technology products to meet their sophisticated needs. They serve as technology trendsetters for their peers, and increasingly for their parents and teachers" (2015, p. 349).

Kormos (2018) stated a disparity between students, novice teachers, and veteran teachers' use of technology, which can cause a separation of academic goals. This disparity was due to an age gap between younger students and older teachers. The students are digital natives who were "born or brought up during the age of digital technology and, therefore, familiar with computers and the internet from an early age" (Nikou et al., 2020, p. 2). Prensky coined the term digital native in 2001, and the moniker has stuck. The digital natives are considered more tech-savvy than their teachers; however, that should not hinder the classroom's technological movement or pedagogical practices (Gu et al., 2013).

Many of today's veteran teachers have been identified as digital immigrants, people born or brought up before the widespread use of digital technology. They must attempt to learn on the

go and apply them to their subject area (Nikou et al., 2020). This change was considered daunting for veteran teachers who may not be as familiar or willing to become familiar with the technological modality of teaching and student engagement. This paradigm shifted as digital immigrant teachers retired and the digital natives became the teacher, creating other research problems.

Kormos (2018) stated that the main difference in technology use is that teachers use it more for educational purposes, including educational videos and WebQuests, while students use technology to connect via social applications, such as Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube. However, Ertmer and Ottenbreit-Leftwich (2013) contradict Kormos's findings. With the changing of technology's techniques and purposes, it was important to merge these two thought paradigms to create more opportunities for appropriate usage with veteran teachers and students. Barriers should be removed to help with the paradigm change, and professional development must be provided to ensure proper teacher development.

Framework and Literature Review

This descriptive, qualitative study used the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework to guide and support this study. Within this context, three key forms of knowledge were recognized: content, pedagogical, and technological (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). The framework proposal has shown a model that may allow teachers to reflect on how their content, pedagogical, and technological knowledge domains intersect to efficiently teach and involve students with technology for appropriate academic engagement.

While other frameworks guide educators and their understanding of technology, the researcher found the TPACK to be the most credible, with citations and evidence in over 600 journals and professional development sessions (Koehler et al., 2013). The TPACK framework in Figure 1 visually illustrates the framework, including its components and overlapping concepts.

The TPACK framework contains three core concepts, which can be combined into three additional concepts by overlapping theories, culminating into one central summative concept. The TPACK framework was designed to incorporate content, pedagogy, and technology into how teachers can produce lessons with the best student outcome. In simpler terms, the what can now equal the why and provide an enhanced classroom product.

Mishra and Koehler (2006) produced a seminal work based on Shulman's previous work with educational technology and teachers. This work was created after years of research among teachers, schools, and professional development sessions. Mishra and Koehler (2006) found that many researchers focused on what technology was, not how it was used in their work. Padmavathi (2017) also provided evidence of a shift in content transactions, meaning how students receive information may be contrary to how the teacher presents the material.

Mishra and Koehler (2006) worked and found that "understanding that teaching is a highly complex activity that draws on many kinds of knowledge and occurs in an ill-structured, dynamic environment" (p. 1020). From this research, they created a framework for what

Figure 1

TPACK MODEL
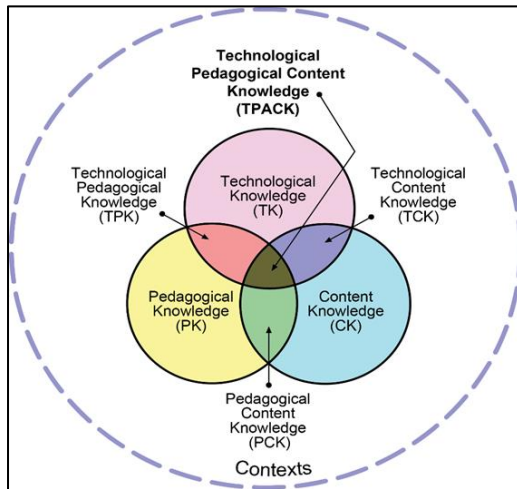
Reproduced by permission of the publisher. TPACK.org (2012).

teachers needed to know about content and curriculum and how to merge them into a working product. The seven components of their new framework included technology knowledge (TK), content knowledge (CK), pedagogical knowledge (PK), pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), technological content knowledge (TCK), technological pedagogical knowledge (TPK), and technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK).

The culmination of the seven components was one centrally based idea — TPACK. Technological, Pedagogical and Content Knowledge refers to the "knowledge required by the teacher to integrate technology in the respective content areas" (Padmavathi, 2017, p. 4). With an understanding of the interaction between the basic components of knowledge of content in the subject area and the knowledge of pedagogy, Padmavathi contends that teachers use appropriate technologies to deliver the content.

A thorough literature review on veteran teachers and resistance to technology factors revealed several emerging themes related to rural veteran teachers and technology integration. These themes were grouped into five broad categories: rural education, veteran teachers, technology implementation, barriers, and professional development.

Rural Education

The face of rural education has changed over the past several decades. The economy has changed its focus from an agrarian society to a technological society. Communication and transportation have shortened the distance from "the country to the city" (Connors et al., 2020, p. 156). Even with the economic shifts toward urbanization, the economic decline of rural America has taken a toll on the educational systems of rural areas (Tieken & Montgomery, 2021).

Approximately 50% of America's schools are rural, with 52 out of 67 (77.6%) Alabama counties considered rural (Dulgerian, 2016). The study used the definition based on 50 or fewer people per square mile as well as the National Center for Education Statistics definition of rural/remote, which is census defined as more than 25 miles from an urban area and 10 miles

away from any urban cluster (Levalley, 2018; United States Census Bureau, 2020). While rural does not necessarily mean poor, it was noteworthy to look at the poverty levels of schools deemed rural because up to 25% of students in rural schools are considered impoverished compared to 20% of urban children (Dulgerian, 2016; Levalley, 2018).

Dulgerian (2016) stated that six major issues facing rural schools are "administrative constraints due to lack of staff, disproportionate funding formulas, adequate teacher retention, teacher certification quality, low student enrollment, and lack of access to technology" (p. 114).

Veteran Teachers

There has been much research about novice teachers and the issues they face. However, research about the veteran teacher must often be more understood and noticed. Veteran teachers have gained vast knowledge and experience that can only be achieved by daily working and experiencing daily practices and situations (Beck et al., 2020; Lowe et al., 2019).

While Snyder (2017) and Beck (2020) agreed that length of time is a critical issue in defining a veteran teacher, there has been much debate about what other factors define a veteran teacher. Carrillo and Flores (2018) stated that veteran teachers could also be defined by a commitment to professional development to the degree of knowledge, the ability to reflect upon a career, and use that experience to enhance their profession. Research from Beck et al. (2020) supported Carrillo and Flores's research.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2020), only 23% of teachers today have over twenty years of experience. This is a 9% decrease from 20 years ago. While the purpose of this dissertation is not to look at the declining numbers of veteran teachers, it is essential to note that the research discussed in this literature has contributed to the attrition rate of veteran teachers. In a qualitative study by Snyder (2017) and Orlando (2014), each researcher found that the new "technology fatigue" caused many veteran teachers to become overwhelmed due to the number of implementations and lack of professional development to help smooth the transition.

Implementation of Technology

Technology integration is "the effective implementation of educational technology to accomplish intended learning outcomes" (Davies & West, 2014, p. 841). Having technology is not near enough to warrant a successful implementation plan; the user must have a defined use and purpose. In a study by Hartman et al. (2019), the authors stated that the number of technology devices has increased by 363% in the past seven years; however, the methods used have not modernized. This study, along with Harrell and Bynum (2018), showed that more is not necessarily better and that the purpose should be visible. The traditional idea of school is no longer applicable, which means pedagogical and technical skills must be continually updated. Schools now have a social responsibility to prepare students to enter the workforce or attend college (Harrell & Bynum, 2018).

The technology integration national plans of 2004, 2010, 2016, and 2017 (Office of Educational Technology, 2017) required school districts to develop a plan of action to enhance teachers' classrooms to benefit student use. Due to tremendous growth and academic focus, technology created a society demanding adequate ability in this area (Davies & West, 2014; Ghavifekr & Rosdy, 2015; Harrell & Bynum, 2018). A meta-analysis provided by Delgado et al. (2015) offers several methods of integration. The research group looked at literature from 1986-

2014, focusing on technology. These methods favor all stakeholders and can be scaffolded not to overwhelm any one party. The first method was to provide research-based instructional strategies for the involved stakeholders. The second was allowing students to bring their own devices (BYOD). The BYOD method provided a functional comfort level for the teachers and students. Flipped classrooms also provide an implementation that can give the teachers autonomy with the new techniques (Davies & West, 2014).

Barriers

Technology was and has always been a part of society. There was and is no way around how much of an impact technology has on daily life. Today's students are deemed digital natives, people born after the analog age and during the digital age (Coklar, 2021). Due to the nature of the student's upbringing, it is now the school's responsibility to "integrate technology into teaching and learning while preparing the students for 21st-century skills and jobs" (Harrell & Bynum, 2018, p. 12).

Studies from Borup et al. (2019), Tondeur et al. (2017), and Turley and Graham (2019) stated that while technology usage is expanding in many school systems, many barriers still exist and prohibit total acceptance and immersion. Durff and Carter (2019) stated that up to 40% of educators have failed to implement technological means into their classrooms yet can put a positive spin on technology in the classroom. The research also stated that while 40% have failed to implement, they wanted to use the concept of many barriers as a justification that prevents successful outcomes. Obstacles were evident at all societal levels and have always been present in some form or fashion. Barriers must be addressed in education. Proper and equitable education must be provided to all students in all settings. However, to address the variety of educational technology barriers, administrators and teachers need to have the barriers identified, how the barriers developed, and what can be done to overcome them.

Professional Development

With the surge of online teaching, teachers have often felt nervous and unprepared for the newest teaching challenge (Baran & Correia, 2014). Many are prepared to teach face-to-face because their teacher preparation programs provide skills. However, many face-to-face abilities have not necessarily translated into the needed skills to offer online instruction (Reeves & Pedulla, 2013). Online instruction and technology implementation have had different, yet needed; skill sets to be attainable, equitable, and prosperous. This skill set included online pedagogical skills, online psychology theories, and content knowledge (Roy & Boboc, 2016). The key to this challenge was implementing ongoing and relevant professional development. To help digital immigrants overcome as many barriers as possible, professional development sessions should be relevant and purposeful to the new changes (Baran & Correia, 2014; Reeves & Pedulla, 2013; Roy & Boboc, 2016).

Teacher professional development has conventionally been the key to the constant growth of teachers and their classroom practices, and some level of accountability keeps them current on current pedagogical issues (White, 2020). Professional development was defined as "a variety of educational experiences related to an individual's work and is designed to improve practice and outcomes" (Patton et al., 2015, p. 3). District and building-level administrators must focus on cultivating robust and usable teacher experiences via professional development sessions (Sterrett & Richardson, 2020). By providing functional professional development, administrators

have aligned education and leadership practices with research and authentic best practices (Merchie et al., 2018; Patton et al., 2015; Schmidt-Crawford et al., 2020).

While teachers are ultimately responsible for their professional development, building-level administrators should provide ample and relevant professional development sessions. As global society changes, teachers must maintain a continual growth pattern to enhance the students' learning experiences (Gore & Rosser, 2020; Hemmeter et al., 2015; Merchie et al., 2018; Roy & Boboc, 2016; Tuli, 2017; Whitworth & Chiu, 2015).

Methods

This descriptive qualitative study examined the resistance factors that veteran teachers in rural northwest Alabama faced when integrating technology into their instructional design and planning process.

Sample Selection

The researchers aimed to identify a sample of current educational practitioners with over twenty years of experience. The setting of this study was in secondary schools in rural northwest Alabama. According to the Economic Research Service of the United States Department of Agriculture (2019), rural has a variety of governmental definitions. However, the definition used for this study will be based on square mileage. As of 2019, the site counties had a population of 39, 42, and 49 people per square mile, qualifying it as a rural area (United States Census Bureau, 2020).

The researchers emailed principals a link for a Qualtrics survey applicable to all subject area teachers. In the beginning, A filtering question asked if the potential participant has 20 or more years of experience and is over 40. If so, the participant could continue the survey. If the participant did not meet study parameters, no other items were asked as the individual did not meet study eligibility.

Participants were asked questions about their usage of technology in their daily content area and their perceived ability to use it. They were asked specific probes based on the TPACK questions to ensure participants were given a fair and equitable interview. Participants were also asked about being a veteran teacher, what technology implementation means to them, barriers to technology implementation, and professional development for veteran teachers about technology integration.

The research asked expounding probes based on the TPACK framework and asked open-ended questions to draw out participants' responses in greater detail through interview protocol. At the beginning of each interview, the researchers took a few minutes to brief the interview participants and explain the audio recording system. After the interview, participants were allowed to make additional comments and clarifications if needed.

Data Analysis

The authors drew from professionally transcribed interviews, as well as anecdotal notes. The participants could see their respective transcripts to ensure the interviews were sound (Creswell, 2015). Several rounds of coding took place, including open coding and descriptive coding. Once the coding was finished and coding became apparent, the researchers reread the transcripts to ensure saturation of the codes.

The analysis sought to summarize and explain the potentially vast amount of data into manageable chunks of understandable information (Creswell & Creswell, 2015). Qualitative (coding and thematic) analysis was used. Participants were analyzed. Creswell and Creswell (2015) advised starting qualitative data analysis with a basic exploratory analysis to understand the data and generate codes. The data analysis approach was designed to get the maximum data from each participant. To understand the dialogues and record early thoughts, the researcher immersed and "active" in the transcripts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Preliminary codes were the second step (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Coding "identifies features of the data that pertain to your study questions" (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 206). Participant data was better analyzed with this coding. After explanatory analysis, the researchers classified codes by similarities and differences or themes. This transcript "refocus" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 89). After grouping the codes, the researcher reviewed the data until no new themes or details of existing themes emerged. The themes described the primary occurrence of participants' descriptions (Mills & Gay, 2019). After an initial explanatory analysis, the researchers classified codes by similarities and differences or themes. "Refocusing" the transcripts (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 89). After grouping the codes, the researcher evaluated the data to discover all relevant topics until saturation, when no new themes or details emerged. To describe the primary occurrence of participants' descriptions, themes were established (Mills & Gay, 2019). Fourth, check the topics for coding. Themes helped the researcher identify trends and outliers. So, the researcher examined level one and two reviews. Level one examined themes individually; level two examined themes across the transcript (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic maps from step four were used to define and name topics in step five. Braun and Clarke (2006) explained how to match data to themes. Step five clarified the concepts. This enabled data analysis and visualization. Triangulation compared segment results. Interview and outlier responses were compared to better understand the research questions. To verify the project, open-ended interview responses were constantly compared. The technique, as a whole, revealed how veteran teachers employ technology in their daily lessons.

Table 1

Data Analysis Preliminary Codes (N = 12)

Initial codes formed during Step 2 of the thematic analysis (alphabetic list)	*n* of participants contributing	*n* of transcript excerpts included
Analog	12	17
Change	12	27
Chromebooks	10	6
Confidence with content	12	20
Daily usage	12	6
Frustration	12	28
Google Classroom	8	8
Lack of access	6	18
Lack of technology knowledge	12	24
Low socioeconomic status (SES)	12	18
Open minded	10	15
Schoology/PowerSchool	12	19
Willingness to change	10	23

This section begins with the setting of the study and a description of the 12 participants and what defines them as veteran teachers. Self-identified demographic information is also included in the table. Next, the major themes and the coding processes used were presented. The last section discusses the presentation of findings and themes.

Participants

A survey was sent out to the four-county area. From this survey, participants self-identified that they met the parameters of the study. If a valid email was provided, that was considered consent to make contact about the potential participation in the semi-structured interview. Once all surveys were in, the researchers selected the first 12 participants for the interview process. Semi-structured interviews were conducted via in-person and the videoconference platform of Zoom. While this is less than ideal, this was the only way to achieve interview protocol and saturation in the current global health pandemic. Each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes.

For this research, a veteran teacher was defined as a teacher with over 20 years of experience and over 40 years old. In the table below, the researchers present data regarding the 12 participants who met Lowe's definition of a veteran teacher. As a form of protecting the identity of each participant, P# was used to ensure anonymity. The participants self-identified with the demographic data. The ages of the participants ranged from 40-64, with teaching experience ranging from 20-34 years. 58% of the participants self-identified as male. 92% identified as white. The school size varied for each teacher as well as the content area.

The survey was the TPACK survey and had qualifying questions to determine the sample population that was required to complete this study. The survey instrument was divided into general technology knowledge, content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, technological content knowledge, technological pedagogical knowledge, and technological pedagogical content knowledge. The participants used a Likert-type scale from strongly agree to strongly.

Table 2

Participants' Demographic and Experience Information

Participant Code	Age Group	Teaching Experience	Race/Ethnicity	Gender
P1	60-64	30-34	White	Male
P2	50-54	25-29	White	Male
P3	40-44	20-24	White	Female
P4	50-54	25-29	White	Female
P5	55-59	30-34	Black	Male
P6	45-49	20-24	White	Male
P7	40-44	20-24	White	Male
P8	45-49	25-29	White	Female
P9	50-54	30-34	White	Female
P10	60-64	35-39	White	Male
P11	40-44	20-24	White	Male
P12	55-59	30-34	White	Female

Note. Each participant self-identified in each of the listed categories.

Survey Results

The 33-question Likert survey was electronically administered. Once the time frame for survey submissions was closed, the researcher began to look at the results. 100% of the participants stated that they each needed more professional development with new technology, while only 67% said they could choose technologies that enhanced the content for a lesson. 25% of the participants revealed they could help colleagues with technology implementation, but 100% said they were comfortable with each content area.

As noted in the themes, all the participants finished an undergraduate degree in the late 1900s to early 2000s. Teacher preparation programs looked much different then as they currently do. All the participants made mention of their skeptical attitudes and the needed change to implement any technology into their content.

Open Coding and Emergent Themes

After the interviews were transcribed and checked for accuracy, the initial coding process began using a line-by-line process, finding over 500 codes in the transcripts. Similar codes were considered one code for the sake of brevity in the process.

All 12 participants began the interview by stating that instructional planning technology had "thrown them for a curve." When pressed about this thought, many stated that their teacher preparation programs did not have any or many technology-based instructional planning classes. This is due to the time frame in which all finished—all 12 finished their undergraduate work at 21-23, which would put them graduating in the late 1900s to early 2000s.

The presentation of the research findings was organized by theme. As discussed in the previous section, the theme name was delineated by segments related to the research. The research question was how veteran teachers describe their instructional practices using technology. The three themes identified during the data analysis process were: (Theme 1) veteran teacher attitudes play a large role in technology usage in daily practices, (Theme 2) barriers play a large role in teacher attitudes in daily technological use, and (Theme 3) professional development is needed to ensure best practices of technology usage in the classroom.

Theme 1--Attitude

All 12 participants reported that their attitude played a large role in the daily use of technology. The participants acknowledged that change was a key part of their negative attitude, but each also said they were willing to learn to make their content areas more enriching and engaging. P3 said, "I feel like my content area is great, but the technology is not, which is frustrating." All other 11 participants stated something very similar. Participant 4 went as far as saying, "Technology outgrew me. I could do it right out of college, but now not so much." That statement reflected a few participants, including P3, P7, P8, and P12. The other participants never were prepped as much for technology use during their limited teacher prep program.

Another factor the participants associated with their attitude was the willingness to change and learn. All 12 participants stated that if shown, all would be willing to incorporate more technological usage in their content and pedagogical practices. The common word that kept being revealed was willing. All stated that they were openly willing, without administrative pressure, to change their way of instruction for the benefit of their students. P2 said, "As I get older, I see a need for technology, but I understand why some teachers don't use it." P6 said,

"Technology still throws a curve at me, but I am willing to try and hit that curve to help my students." P6 also expressed disdain for barriers not controllable by teachers by stating, "If I'm going to use it, it needs to work." P9 contradicted this statement: "I'll keep trying to make it work and call for help if needed. I won't just not use it."

P11 refers to being able to figure issues out without any technical assistance. "If you need something done, it is usually up to you to figure it out or wait a while." This is congruent with the second career participants, P5 and P12. However, the other 10 participants, traditionally educated teachers, disagreed with those sentiments and stated that technical assistance was needed. P3 replied, "It's difficult to understand…I always go back to the Stone Age of paper and pencil notes." Many respondents felt that paper and pencil were a safe alternative to the inability to fix technical issues.

Theme 2—Barriers

Studies from Borup et al. (2019), Tondeur et al. (2017), and Turley and Graham (2019) stated that while technology usage is expanding in many school systems, many barriers still exist and prohibit total acceptance and immersion. All 12 participants were very vocal about the barriers that impede their instructional use and used frustration or some variance to describe the barriers that often impeded them. No participant provided any data that would dispute this theme. Participants stated that barriers caused them to question their ability to provide adequate and engaging lessons to their students. P7 stated, "When you go to work to make an awesome lesson and the Internet or whatever is down, it is very disheartening, especially if you've been pumping the lesson up for a few days."

P7 expressed exasperation and frustration with barriers because of the hindrance they caused with planning and implementation. "How am I supposed to be a good teacher, master classroom manager, and tech-savvy person if things I need don't work? It's so frustrating to have something not work! We might as well not have it if it doesn't work."

Some barriers are considered instructional flaws that neither the teacher nor the district can control. These are barriers that are often with the hardware or software programs. Barriers like this often need a specialist on a programming level to solve. P2 stated that a barrier to his instruction was the online math program his district had purchased:

> Big Idea is a math setup, and we didn't have access to it. So, for two weeks math teachers were spinning their wheels. We had to adapt every day because we had planned to do a lesson through the Big Ideas program, but we couldn't because it wasn't accessible.

P2 referred to this as a power struggle over who knew what was best for the students— the designers or the teachers. P2 remained committed to the Big Ideas math program because it was what the district-mandated and aligned with the Alabama state curriculum, which has been revamped to become more rigorous. P4 does not share the same power struggle because the online math program and implementation in the respective district has been a smoother transition with fewer barriers.

Theme 3—Professional Development

All 12 participants specified that more technological professional development was needed. The participants believe providing adequate and relevant professional development would change attitudes and barriers. The participants also commented on the quality of the needed professional development. P1 stated, "Professional development is needed, and I want to

learn, but when it is just a sit and get, without any interaction, I get lost." A similar statement was made by P9, who stated that "I have to have something to do in the sessions we go to. I get bored too easily if it is just a speaker droning on and on." P10 indicated, "While I know I need professional development, I don't want professional development because so many times it is catered to the younger crowd of teachers, and I feel left out." Evidence from the literature supported the participants' need for adequate professional development.

Discussion

The purpose of the descriptive study was to research and listen to veteran teachers describe what they felt were barriers to their technology use within their instructional planning. The outcomes of this study presented some potential answers to some pressing issues that veteran teachers are currently facing. The research showed that many veteran teachers could identify the technological issues facing instructional planning but needed to know how to solve them. From the interviews, all 12 participants said they are willing to learn how to overcome the barriers and learn new ways to enhance their students' educational experience.

Limitations and Delimitations

Due to this study's descriptive nature, the researchers was bound by the survey and interviews collected from the participants, field notes, and reflexive journals. The sample size presented an issue due to the narrow focus of the study. Also, with the global pandemic of COVID-19, many teachers were under extreme amounts of additional stress. The interviews could be done over the phone or via Zoom or Google Meets. Braun and Clarke (2013) called these types of interviews virtual and regarded them as a poor substitute for face-to-face interview protocol. Due to these potential constraints, it was possible that the answers given in the interviews may not necessarily be the ones provided under normal circumstances. This potential bias was noted in all interviews and the researchers' reflexive journals. This study was delimited to a rural four-county area in northwest Alabama. The researchers delimited participants who are veteran teachers with twenty or more years of experience and over 40 years of age. This delimitation was set to gauge teachers' perceptions of technology use and its impact on daily instructional practices. The researchers recognized that the survey and interview(s) would be conducted freely and may not express other content areas or subject area colleagues' descriptions.

Implications and Recommendations

While finding implications for future research, it is equally important to have applicable and practical recommendations for future practice to encourage the reader to think and expand. The three recommendations for future practice would be more administrative support, adequate and relevant professional development, and removing as many barriers as possible.

Administrative support is the key to teacher success. This could include recognizing the veteran teacher for all the value brought to the campus or allowing them to take a leadership role to help novice teachers if wanted. Administrators should also strive for unity and a peaceful workplace. Providing these things allows veteran teachers to see still the value and worth of their participation in the school climate and culture. Participant 4 stated, "I want to know that my years of experience are valuable to my students and school."

Second, the researchers recommend that administrators listen and provide adequate and relevant professional development. By meeting the professional needs of teachers, the

administrator is attempting to lessen the stress teachers face. These professional needs include monitoring classes for an extra break, allowing dress-down days, providing professional development on the appropriate level, and providing a safe place to express concerns (Bailey et al., 2013; Beck et al., 2020; Carillo & Flores, 2018; & Korthagen, 2017). Some veteran teachers have seen many changes over the course of a lengthy career, and it can be very disheartening to feel alone and unsupported. Having an administrator who can listen and provide professional needs, it eased the burden of "change fatigue" and "technology fatigue." Professional development should be provided in frequent increments and allow cross-curricular/grade-level planning to allow all teachers to collaborate and create a solid flow of information and technology. This could also include having veteran voices in the adoption practices of curriculum and technology and the hiring practices that impact their content area.

Thirdly, the removal of as many barriers as possible to ensure veteran teacher success. While the removal of all barriers is next to impossible, it is possible for veteran teachers to receive support by having many barriers removed. Having a balance of what can be done at the building level and what cannot be done at the building level can provide some relief and comfort, knowing that veteran teachers' voices are heard and valued. Valuing their voices and recognizing that some problems can be fixed as needed and not put aside ensures communication and trust between all stakeholders. This ensures veteran voices are heard and valued at the site and classroom.

Summary

The discussion and conclusions confirm the research study. As expressed by various researchers' veteran teachers need a lot of support, such as administrative support, instructional coaching, the removal of barriers, and professional development. Findings in this study can be extended among the previous literature by suggesting that veteran teachers should be given special consideration when new software and hardware programs are implemented into a district. Future research was recommended to measure the transferability of these findings to other occupational settings. Future quantitative research is recommended to confirm or disprove the generalizability of the findings. In making practical recommendations, it is acknowledged that not all methods will be fulfilling for all veteran teachers. However, several recommendations were made for increasing veteran teacher technology usage, including administrative support, professional development, and removing barriers. An important finding of this study was that all 12 participants stated they were all willing to change and put in the work to make all possible efforts to improve themselves for their students.

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PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL COUNSELORS AND ADMINISTRATORS ON THE ROLE OF SCHOOL COUNSELING

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Abstract

This quantitative survey study aimed to identify differences between school counselors' and administrators' perceptions of the school counselors' role and if demographic criteria of years of experience, years in education, enrollment size, and grade level impacted these perceptions. Currently employed school counselors and administrators in Alabama with at least one year of experience were recruited to participate in this study. The School Counseling Activity Rating Scale (SCARS) (Scarborough, 2005b) and SCARS Modified (Lane et al., 2020) instruments were utilized. Results were analyzed by comparing descriptive statistics and performing a factorial ANOVA and multiple regression. Results of the ANOVA suggest that discrepancies exist between how school counselors and administrators view the preferred role of the school counselor but were not statistically significant in how the groups perceive the fundamental role of the school counselor. The results of the multiple regression were inconclusive and suggested additional research. Implications for school counselors and administrators aim toward opportunities for advocacy and leadership through professional development, training, and collaboration.

Introduction

School counselors report incongruency between their trained role as students and their expected role once established in the profession (Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Mullen et al., 2018). This discrepancy causes school counselors to experience various emotional concerns, including burnout, stress, and role confusion (Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Holman et al., 2019; Mullen et al., 2018). While many stakeholders within the school setting exist (administrators, teachers, parents, students, etc.), each has been reported to have differing expectations for the role of the school counselor (Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Birdsong & Yakimowski, 2021; Burnham & Jackson, 2000; Mullen et al., 2018; Ruiz et al., 2019). The most reported stakeholder group with differing perceptions of the role of the school counselor is that of administrators (Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Birdsong & Yakimowski, 2021; Fye et al., 2018; Fye et al., 2020; Lane et al., 2020; Moyer, 2011; Mullen et al., 2018; Rose, 2019; Ruiz et al., 2019).

Administrators report that while the school counselor's role, as defined by the American School Counseling Association (ASCA), is important, so are non-counseling duties (Finkelstein, 2009; Fitch et al., 2001; Ruiz et al., 2019). When school counselors are asked to complete these non-counseling duties, they report higher levels of burnout, job dissatisfaction, stress, role confusion, role ambiguity, exhaustion, and incompetence (Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Fye et al., 2020; Holman et al., 2019; Moyer, 2011; Mullen et al., 2018). School counselors have also reported a misunderstanding of the school counseling role often leads to an increase in non-counseling duties, stress, burnout, and exhaustion (Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Carey et al., 2012; Lapan et al., 2012; Mullen et al., 2018).

When school counselors experience these negative consequences from a discrepancy in the school counselor role, the impact leads to a decrease in direct counseling services, student outcomes, and overall implementation of the ASCA National Model (Carey et al., 2012; Lapan et al., 2012; Moyer, 2011). Therefore, it can be posited that the incongruence between school counselor role perceptions can lead to an increase in non-counseling duties, which causes a myriad of negative consequences for school counselors, and further decreases the productivity of the school counseling program. While it is evident that school counselors experience negative repercussions both personally and professionally from the disconnect between school counselors and administrators on the role of the school counselor (Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Carey et al., 2012; Lapan et al., 2012; Mullen et al., 2018), there remains a need to explore where the disconnect lies (Graham et al., 2011; Lane et al., 2020). The school counselor's role continues to change and adapt (Stone & Dahir, 2016); stakeholders within the school should continue to seek updated information on the school counselor's role. It is recommended that future research focus on including both school counselors' and administrators' perceptions of the role of the school counselor in the same study (Graham et al., 2011; Ruiz et al., 2019).

Review of the Literature

ASCA National Model: Framework

The ASCA National Model is a framework established by ASCA to guide school counselors in developing a comprehensive school counseling program. The National Model encompasses four main components: define, manage, deliver, and assess (ASCA, 2019b).

School Counselor Role

While these four components constitute the overall framework for the model, the introduction and executive summary of the ASCA (2019b) National Model addresses additional information relevant to the role of school counselors. For instance, the ASCA (2019b) National Model addresses that a school counselor should spend a minimum of eighty percent of time delivering direct or indirect services to students, outlines a recommended student-to-school counselor ratio of 250:1, and includes a list of appropriate and inappropriate activities for a school counselor to do within the role. The ASCA (2019b) National Model also speaks to a school counselor's importance in serving all students' academic, career, and social and emotional needs through classroom lessons, small groups, and individual sessions. Additionally, the ASCA National Model provides several methods of data collection to identify students' needs, school counselors' current time allocation, and methods to adjust this allocation as needed (ASCA, 2019b). This clear outline of the school counselor's role provides a grounding platform for school counselors to understand their role and ability to perform required duties.

School Counseling Stakeholders

Generally, stakeholders in education can be defined as individuals with a vested interest in the school's overall success (The Glossary of Education Reform, 2014). This can include teachers, administrators, parents, students, school personnel, community members, or others (The Glossary of Education Reform, 2014). Additional examples of stakeholders specific to school counseling include principals, teachers, school board members from the internal school community, parents, business partners, faith representatives, and college and university personnel from the external school community (Stone & Dahir, 2016). School counseling stakeholders support the comprehensive program (Stone & Dahir, 2016).

The administrator is a primary stakeholder in the comprehensive school counseling program (Cervoni & DeLucia-Waack, 2011; Moyer, 2011). School counselors often are supervised by the administrator of their building (Stone, 2022); therefore, the administrator directly impacts the school counseling program. Administrators are often responsible for assigning duties to school counselors (Birdsong & Yakimowski, 2021; Moyer, 2011). Further, administrators have a change in position about every three years (Gates et al., 2003), causing school counselors to have a new set of job duties assigned to them often (Cervoni & DeLucia-Waack, 2011). With each new administrator, school counselors are likely to deal with new role assignments and an increase in role conflict (Cervoni & DeLucia-Waack, 2011). The frequent change in leadership, and thus job expectations, may contribute to the role confusion that school counselors experience (Cervoni & DeLucia-Waack, 2011).

School Counselor Role Confusion

When school counselors feel an imbalance between duties assigned and expected within an occupation, including duties that other individuals are equally qualified to perform, this is called role confusion or role diffusion (Astramovich et al., 2013; McCarthy et al., 2010). Research has shown that role confusion can develop without an established professional identity (Gibson et al., 2018). Furthermore, Brott and Myers (1999) found that professional identity is negatively impacted due to the disconnect between how school counselors are trained and the job expectations in the field. School counselors are trained through a graduate master's program, often accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) (Branthoover et al., 2010; Perry et al., 2020). Programs accredited through

CACREP cover eight common core areas and school counseling-specific standards (CACREP, 2015). The disconnect between the training school counselors receive, and the expectation after graduation leads to role confusion for school counselors (Cinotti, 2014).

Additionally, school counselors are trained by the same curriculum that professional counselors in other specialty areas receive (Gibson et al., 2018). The Education Trust's Transforming School Counseling Initiative (TSCI) tried to improve the training for school counselors by implementing an updated vision of the role of the school counselor to that of a student-oriented, holistic system approach to be change agents to ensure that all students experience educational equity (Perkins et al., 2010). However, this similarity among curricula can lead to an internal debate on whether their role is that of a counselor or educator in the school setting (Gibson et al., 2018). A study by Perkins et al. (2010) reports that stakeholders view the predominant role of school counselors as counselors to support students' emotional or personal needs over academic or career roles. However, in a study by Lane et al. (2020), 89% of administrators stated that they were not familiar with the ASCA National Model, a tool that outlines the expected role of the school counselor.

Administrators' Training of the School Counselor Role

School counselors and administrators are trained in different programs in which the coursework is aligned with their specific roles (Carnes-Holt et al., 2012). While there is a focus on collaboration between school counselors and administrators in the school setting, administrators may not be receiving training on the benefits of this collaboration (Perruse et al., n.d., as cited in Perruse et al., 2009; Tygret et al., 2020). Additionally, administrators have reported not feeling adequately trained to collaborate with school counselors (Lowrey et al., 2018). Unfortunately, it is common for administrators in training to learn about the role of the school counselor through informal sources, primarily personal experience (Mason & Perera-Diltz, 2010). The National Policy Board for Educational Administration has produced Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (McConnell et al., 2020; NPBEA, 2015). However, this document neglects to provide specific instruction on the collaboration with or roles of school counselors (McConnell et al., 2020; NPBEA, 2015). Administrators may remain unclear on the counselor's role as outlined by ASCA (Boyland et al., 2019; Graham et al., 2011). Therefore, it may be helpful to overlap the training that future school counselors and administrators receive (Carnes-Holt et al., 2012; Perruse et al., 2009; Tygret et al., 2020). Administrators who understand the school counselor's role can ensure that school counselors are assigned roles and responsibilities aligned with their training and advocate for appropriate tasks (Birdsong & Yakimowski, 2021).

School Counselor Burnout

Burnout has been defined as extensive feelings related to exhaustion, pessimism, inefficiency, and other negative workplace factors (Maslach & Leiter, 2017). School counselors experience high levels of burnout due to daily job expectations (Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Fye et al., 2020; Mullen et al., 2018). There has been research to directly connect an increase in school counselor burnout when school counselors are asked to complete tasks that are labeled as non-counseling tasks or tasks that contradict the training that school counselors have received about their intended role (Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Fye et al., 2020; Moyer, 2011; Mullen et al., 2018). When school counselors experience burnout, they have less job satisfaction (Baggerly & Osborn, 2006; Mullen et al., 2018; Rayle, 2006). This is predominantly a concern for younger school

counselors, a distinction from being novice school counselors (Mullen et al., 2018; Wilkerson, 2009). Additionally, school counselors with high caseloads experience higher levels of burnout (Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2007; Moyer, 2011). ASCA recommends that the caseload of students assigned to school counselors, or the school counselor-to-student ratio, be 1:250 (ASCA, 2019b). However, in 2019-2020 only 4% of the United States met this ideal ratio, with the national average being 1:424 (ASCA, 2021). This information supports the increase in burnout that school counselors have experienced.

Statement of the Problem

Stakeholders in the comprehensive counseling program, such as administrators, teachers, and parents, have conflicting perceptions of the school counselor's role (Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Birdsong & Yakimowski, 2021; Moyer et al., 2011; Mullen et al., 2018). This controversy on the school counselor role has led to an increase in non-counseling duties assigned to school counselors and school counselor burnout, exhaustion, and stress (Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Carey et al., 2012; Cervoni & DeLuca-Waack, 2011; Lapan et al., 2012; Moyer, 2011; Mullen et al., 2018). Research by Cervoni and DeLuca-Waack (2011) posited that the more time school counselors spent completing non-counseling duties, the less time was spent on the duties that ASCA (2019b) recommends. Further, the primary indicator of high school counselors' job satisfaction in a study by Cervoni and DeLuca-Waack (2011) was how much time was spent on non-counselor-related duties. In addition to job satisfaction, when school counselors have non-counseling tasks assigned to them, they also have increased reports of burnout (Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2007; Moyer, 2011). An increase in school counselor burnout leads to school counselors having negative feelings about the work environment, more exhaustion and feelings of incompetency, and increased negativity in their personal lives (Moyer, 2011).

With increased non-counseling duties, school counselors also experience increased role confusion (Holman et al., 2019). The role confusion that school counselors experience impacts their ability to implement a comprehensive school counseling program (Carey et al., 2012; Lapan et al., 2012; Moyer, 2011). Because the comprehensive school counseling program is developed with the primary goal of supporting the emotional and social, career, and academic needs of students (ASCA, 2019b), students are the ones who primarily suffer from an underperforming counseling program (Carey et al., 2012; Lapan et al., 2012). School counselors also suffer from role confusion personally. For instance, Cervoni and DeLuca-Waack (2011) found that when school counselors reported less role confusion, they also reported higher job satisfaction. Therefore, the disconnect in school counselor role assignments impacts the assignment of non-counseling duties, role confusion, and the success of the comprehensive counseling program.

Purpose of the Study

This study aimed to determine the differences between the perspectives of school counselors and administrators on the school counselor's role and how demographic criteria impact these differences. School counselors who graduate from the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) accredited programs are trained using the ASCA National Model (Olsen et al., 2018). However, there is continued evidence of a disconnect between the trained role of the school counselor and the job expectations of a school counselor from administrators (Brott & Myers, 1999; Cinotti, 2014; Havlick et al., 2019; Lane et al., 2020; Mullen et al., 2018; Ruiz et al., 2019; Slaten et al., 2013). Therefore, this study

examines the differences between how the school counselor and administrator view the school counselor's role.

Research Questions

The following research questions will be utilized for this study:

1. What are administrators' perceptions of the school counselor's role in the ASCA National Model?

2. What are school counselors' perceptions of the role of the school counselor in the ASCA National Model?

3. What are the differences between school counselors' and administrators' perceptions of the role of school counselors?

4. Does the perception of the school counselor's role differ based on demographic criteria?

Significance of the Study

This study provides critical insight into the disconnect between how administrators and school counselors view the school counselor's role. There has been ample evidence to support that there is a disconnect between the perceptions of these two roles (Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Brott & Myers, 1999; Cinotti, 2014; Graham et al., 2011; Henderson, 2020; Lane et al., 2020; Monterio-Leitner et al., 2006; Rose, 2019; Ruiz et al., 2019; Unger et al., 2021), with little change in recent studies (Unger et al., 2021). Therefore, this study pinpoints certain differentiating factors. It is crucial for the role of the school counselor to be understood in the field in which they work. This would reduce school counselor role confusion and burnout (Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Fye et al., 2020; Mullen et al., 2018). For instance, in a study by Graham et al. (2011), administrators were surveyed on their familiarity with the role of the school counselor, but the authors recommended that school counselors be included in future research to compare the perception of the role fully. This study meets this need by contributing to the research on school counselors' and administrators' roles of the school counselor about the ASCA National Model.

Methods

Procedures

Before conducting this study, permission was collected from the Auburn University Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Human Subjects. Permission to utilize the adapted SCARS instrument has already been collected from the authors of the survey instrument. Participants were asked to complete an electronic Qualtrics survey containing a demographic form and two measures. This survey was modified with consent from authors: Lane et al. (2020). The survey consisted of five parts: multiple choice, short response, ranking, and slider questions, including the SCARS instrument.

Instrumentation

The School Counselor Activity Rating Scale (SCARS) (Scarborough, 2005a) was established by Scarborough (2005b) as a reliable scale to measure the differences between how school counselors spend their time and how they would prefer to spend their time. This measure

includes 48 survey items broken down into five subscales: (a) counseling activities, (b) consultation activities, (c) curriculum activities, (d) coordination activities, and (e) other activities (Scarborough, 2005b). Instead of using a traditional Likert scale to have participants rate how much they agree with a particular statement, this instrument utilizes a verbal frequency scale to measure how often school counselors spend their time performing each task (Scarborough, 2005b).

SCARS Modified

Lane and colleagues (2020) received permission to adapt the SCARS survey instrument to meet the needs of their study; to measure how familiar administrators were with the duties of school counselors and the school counseling programs. This survey consisted of five parts, one of which included the adapted SCARS instrument.

The first section of the survey asked administrators about school counseling national and state programs (three Likert-type questions and six yes or no questions), the program implemented at the participant's current school (four or five multiple-choice responses), and the responsibility of particular tasks at the participant's current school (five open-ended questions) (Lane et al., 2020). The second section of the survey measured appropriate and inappropriate activities through 28 statements taken from ASCA (2019a) (Lane et al., 2020). Participants were asked to rank these statements of possible activities as appropriate, inappropriate, or neutral (Lane et al., 2020). The third section of the survey consisted of the SCARS instrument, which was adapted slightly in verbiage to accommodate administrators as participants instead of school counselors (Lane et al., 2020). The fourth section of this survey measured the percentage of time perceived and desired for each category within the SCARS instrument (counseling, consultation, curriculum, coordination, and other activities) (Lane et al., 2020). Participants were asked to use a slider to place a percentage of time beside each category that added up to 100% of the school counselors' time for both how much the administrator perceived that a school counselor spends on the tasks and for the administrators' desired amount of time for a school counselor to spend on the tasks (Lane et al., 2020). The final section of the survey included ten demographic questions about the participant's current school, professional experience, and personal demographic information (Lane et al., 2020).

Demographic Information

Participants were asked to self-report multiple types of demographic data used in this study's data analysis. Participants first identified their current roles as school counselors or administrators. Participants then reported how many years of work experience they have obtained within their specified role and their total years of experience in the field of education. Participants were asked to include their school level to determine the impact of the education setting (elementary, middle, high, combination of grade levels, or all grade levels) on the study variables. School enrollment size, whether the school is classified as public or private, and the school's urban or rural classification were also collected to determine the impact of these factors. Participants were also asked to provide their identified gender and ethnicity. These demographic factors were expected to impact the variables measured in this study as these have aligned with previous research (Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2007; Mullen et al., 2018).

Participants

Participants for this study consisted of both currently practicing school counselors and administrators from Alabama. School counselors were invited to participate in the study through statewide professional listservs. Snowballing was encouraged to increase the number of professionals invited to participate in the study. All eligible part- or full-time administrators (assistant principals or principals) and school counselors (elementary, middle, or high school) in these positions in Alabama were recruited for this study. Participants were limited to school counselors and administrators working in these positions for at least one academic year.

G*Power software (Faul et al., 2007) was utilized to determine the required sample size for this study. Utilizing a priori power analysis for multiple linear regression, the total sample size needed was 85. The following parameters were used to determine this sample size: a medium effect size of ($f = 0.15$), an alpha level of $p < 0.05$, and 4 predictors. With 85 total participants, the estimated critical f value is $F(4,80) = 2.49$, $p < 0.05$.

Data Analysis

This study utilized multiple data analysis methods to address each research question. The first and second research questions were analyzed utilizing descriptive statistics for the responses of administrators and school counselors individually. This research question was analyzed with a factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA). The fourth research question was analyzed using multiple regression to explain the relationship between school counselors and administrators broken down by demographic factors (years of experience, years in education, enrollment size, and grade level. This study had the following *independent variables*: years of experience, years in education, enrollment size, and grade level. The *dependent variables* in this study were the school counselor and administrator's responses to the SCARS instrument. The dependent variables were measured using the sum means of each of the subscales of the SCARS instrument (counseling, consultation, curriculum, coordination, and other activities), as conducted in research by Wilder and Ray (2013).

Results

Of the 51 initial survey responses (n=51), 30 participants (n=30) completed the survey in full. These responses comprised 25 school counselors (n=25) and 5 administrators (n=5). Therefore, this study had a completion rate of 58.8%. The completion rate for school counselors was 69.4%, while only 55.6% for administrators. It is also important that the participant ratio of the school counselor to administrator was 4:1, as there were more school counselor participants (n=36) than administrator participants (n=9).

Research Question 1: What are administrators' perceptions of the school counselor's role in the ASCA National Model?

When comparing the responses from administrators to the list of appropriate and inappropriate school counselor duties, administrators averaged a score of 1.45, with 2 being the score assigned to duties as they aligned with the ASCA NM. Table 1 shows the average administrator and school counselor responses to each item within the survey corresponding to the ASCA NM list of appropriate and inappropriate school counselor activities.

Table 1

Appropriate and Inappropriate School Counselor Duties

Item		ASCA Rating	M Responses	
			Admin	SC
1	Consulting with teachers about building classroom connections, effective classroom management, and the role of noncognitive factors in student success	A	1.00	1.47
2	Maintaining student records	I	0.57	1.13
3	Interpreting cognitive, aptitude, and achievement tests	A	1.71	1.39
4	Analyzing grade-point averages in relationship to achievement	A	2.00	1.55
5	Keeping clerical records	I	1.14	1.58
6	Providing counseling to students who are tardy or absent	A	1.71	1.68
7	Performing disciplinary actions or assigning disciplinary consequences	I	2.00	1.87
8	Consulting with the school principal to identify and resolve student issues, needs, and problems	A	1.86	2.00
9	Assisting with duties in the principal's office	I	1.57	1.65
10	Advisement and appraisal for academic planning	A	2.00	1.77
11	Supervising classrooms or common areas	I	1.14	1.81
12	Providing long-term counseling in schools to address psychological disorders	I	1.00	1.65
13	Advocating for students at individual education plan meetings, student study teams, and school attendance review boards	A	1.57	1.87
14	Analyzing disaggregated schoolwide and school counseling program data	A	1.86	2.00
15	Serving as a data entry clerk	I	1.43	1.90
16	Coordinating cognitive, aptitude, and achievement testing programs	I	0.71	1.29
17	Coordinating paperwork and data entry of all new students	I	0.71	1.61
18	Providing counseling to students who have disciplinary problems	A	1.57	1.97
19	Building the master schedule	I	1.43	1.68
20	Consulting with teachers to schedule and present school counseling curriculum lessons based on developmental needs and needs identified through data	A	1.86	1.94
21	Providing short-term individual and small-group counseling services to students	A	2.00	2.00
22	Coordinating schoolwide individual education plans, 504 plans, student study teams, response to intervention plans, MTSS, and school attendance review boards	I	0.43	1.61
23	Protecting student records and information per state and federal regulations	A	1.86	1.55
24	Signing excuses for students who are tardy or absent	I	2.00	1.81
25	Covering classes when teachers are absent or creating teacher planning time	I	1.29	1.90
26	Computing grade-point averages	I	0.57	1.26
27	Interpreting student records	A	1.71	1.26
28	Orientation, coordination, and academic advising for new students	A	2.00	1.77

Note: The "ASCA Rating" column signifies which items are listed in the ASCA National Model chart for Appropriate and Inappropriate Activities for School Counselors (ASCA, 2019a). Items above deemed A are listed as "Appropriate," and items deemed I are listed as "Inappropriate" (ASCA, 2019a).

Table 2

SCARS Means

Subscale and Corresponding Items	Admin		SC	
	Act.	Pref.	Act.	Pref.
Subscale: Counseling Activities	**3.36**	**3.60**	**3.65**	**4.10**
Counsel with students regarding personal/family concerns	4.00	3.80	4.73	4.85
Counsel students regarding school behavior	3.00	3.00	4.47	4.62
Counsel students regarding academic issues	4.40	4.40	4.07	4.31
Counsel students regarding crisis/emergency issues	4.00	4.00	4.20	4.62
Counsel with students regarding relationships (e.g., family, friends, romantic)	3.80	3.80	4.73	4.58
Provide small group counseling addressing relationship/social skills	3.20	4.00	3.00	3.85
Provide small group counseling for academic issues	3.20	4.00	2.87	3.67
Conduct small groups regarding family/personal issues (e.g., divorce, death)	2.40	3.00	3.20	3.92
Conduct small group counseling for students regarding substance abuse issues	2.20	2.20	1.67	2.45
Follow-up on individual and group counseling participants	3.40	3.80	3.60	4.08
Subscale: Consultation Activities	**2.97**	**3.29**	**3.48**	**3.59**
Consult with school staff concerning student behavior	3.20	4.00	4.60	4.54
Consult with community and school agencies concerning individual students	3.60	3.60	3.60	3.85
Consult with parents regarding child/adolescent development issues	3.80	4.00	3.73	4.00
Coordinate referrals for students	3.40	3.60	3.60	4.08
Assist in identifying exceptional children (special education)	2.00	2.60	2.93	2.58
Provide consultation for administrators	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.17
Participate in team/grade level / subject team meetings	1.80	2.20	2.87	2.92
Subscale: Curriculum Activities	**2.80**	**4.00**	**3.77**	**4.38**
Conduct classroom activities to introduce yourself and explain the program	3.00	4.20	4.20	4.62
Conduct classroom lessons addressing career development and the world of work	3.00	3.80	3.93	4.46
Conduct classroom lessons on various personal and social traits	2.60	4.00	4.00	4.62
Conduct classroom lessons on personal growth and development issues	3.00	4.20	3.80	4.62
Conduct classroom lessons on conflict resolution	3.00	4.20	3.47	4.38
Conduct classroom lessons regarding substance abuse	2.00	3.40	3.20	3.83
Conduct classroom lessons on personal safety issues	3.00	4.20	3.80	4.15
Subscale: Coordination Activities	**3.16**	**3.69**	**3.33**	**3.87**
Coordinate special events and programs or personal/social issues	2.80	3.60	3.53	4.23
Coordinate and maintain a comprehensive school counseling program	4.20	4.40	4.40	4.92
Inform parents about the role, training, program, and interventions	3.80	4.00	3.87	4.42
Conduct or coordinate parent education classes or workshops	2.60	3.20	2.40	3.83
Coordinate school-wide response for crisis management and intervention	3.00	3.20	2.87	3.50
Inform teachers/administrators about the role, training, program, and interventions	3.00	3.80	2.67	4.00
Conduct or coordinate teacher in-service programs	1.40	2.60	2.53	2.58
Keep track of how time is being spent on the functions that you perform	3.25	3.75	3.40	3.62
Attend professional development activities (e.g., state conferences, local in-services)	3.60	4.00	4.00	3.85
Coordinate with an advisory team to analyze/respond to counseling program needs	3.00	3.80	2.87	3.62
Evaluate student progress as a result of participation in individual/group counseling	3.00	3.60	3.27	3.77
Conduct needs assessments and counseling program evaluations	3.40	4.00	3.87	4.17
Coordinate orientation process/activities for students	4.00	4.00	3.67	3.83
Subscale: "Other" Activities	**2.92**	**3.04**	**3.03**	**2.26**
Participate on committees within the school	3.20	3.60	3.87	4.17
Coordinate the standardized testing program	4.40	4.40	3.53	1.67
Organize outreach to low-income families	2.80	3.20	4.07	3.85
Respond to health issues (e.g., check for lice, eye screening, 504 coordination)	2.60	2.80	3.87	2.00
Perform hall, bus, and cafeteria duty	1.60	2.60	3.20	1.67
Schedule students for classes	4.00	3.40	3.27	3.00
Enroll students in and withdraw students from school	3.60	3.60	2.13	1.62
Maintain/Complete educational records/reports	3.80	3.80	2.60	1.67
Handle discipline of students	1.40	1.20	1.80	1.64
Substitutes teach and cover classes for teachers at your school	1.80	1.80	1.93	1.29

Note: Some items are abbreviated.

Table 2 outlines the item means reported by administrators and school counselors. These results suggest that administrators prefer that as part of the school counselor's role, school counselors limit their engagement in these activities.

Table 3 summarizes the SCARS mean responses from administrators and school counselors for actual and preferred activities based on the subscale means. Recall that the SCARS instrument utilized a frequency rating scale from 1 to 5, with 1 representing a low frequency and 5 a high frequency of a function (Scarborough, 2005b). The results from comparing the scores of the SCARS instrument suggested that administrators prefer for school counselors to be frequently performing curriculum activities (M = 4.00) while only occasionally performing all other activities (Counseling, M = 3.60; Consultation, M = 3.29; Coordination, M = 3.69; "Other," M = 3.04).

Table 3

Results: SCARS Summary of Mean Responses

Subscale	Admin		SC	
	Act.	Pref.	Act.	Pref.
Counseling Activities	3.36	3.60	3.65	4.10
Consultation Activities	2.97	3.29	3.48	3.59
Curriculum Activities	2.80	4.00	3.77	4.38
Coordination Activities	3.16	3.69	3.33	3.87
"Other" Activities	2.92	3.04	3.03	2.26

When reviewing the administrators' responses to how much time they would prefer that school counselors spend in each category of activities, administrators favored counseling. As shown in Table 4, administrators preferred that school counselors spend about half of their time counseling (M = 48.00), about a third of their time providing curriculum (M = 32.00), about a fifth of their time consulting (M = 20.00), and a small percentage of time doing "other" activities (M = 6.00).

Percentage of Time-based on SCARS

	Statements	Admin		SC	
		Act.	Pref.	Act.	Pref.
1	Counseling Activities (individual, group, etc.)	46.00	48.00	38.40	43.75
2	Consultation Activities (school staff, community partners, etc.)	20.00	20.00	18.00	17.60
3	Curriculum Activities (classroom guidance on career, personal/social, and academic issues)	32.00	32.00	25.60	36.40
4	Coordination Activities (special events, training, etc.).	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
5	Other Activities (committee participation, responding to health concerns, disciplining students, hallway monitoring)	10.00	6.00	20.40	7.20

Research Question 2: What are school counselors' perceptions of the role of the school counselor in the ASCA National Model?

School counselors' average responses on the list of appropriate or inappropriate activities for school counselors are located in Table 1. The overall average for school counselors on all items was M = 1.68. This study found that school counselors agree with the ASCA's list of appropriate and inappropriate duties for school counselors.

After reviewing school counselors' responses to the SCARS instrument, as shown in Table 3, school counselors prefer to engage in counseling and curriculum activities frequently (M = 4.10, M = 4.38). While school counselors reported a preference for engaging in consultation and coordination activities occasionally (M = 3.59, M = 3.87), they only rarely preferred to engage in "other" activities (M = 2.26). Table 2 outlines school counselors' itemized results for this instrument.

As Table 4 reports, school counselors preferred spending time with students. School counselors indicated a preference for spending about half their time counseling (M = 43.75), about a third of their time providing curriculum activities (M = 36.40), about 18% of their time consulting (M = 17.60), and about 7% of their time completing "other" activities (M = 7.20).

Research Question 3: What are the differences between school counselors' and administrators' perceptions of the role of school counselors?

To determine differences between the perceptions of school counselors and administrators on the role of school counselors, data results were sorted into two groups based on how each participant responded to their current role (school counselor or administrator). Sum means were used to develop independent variables for this study, as was done by Wilder and Ray (2013). This allowed for a factorial ANOVA to compare the main effects of actual and preferred activities (IV) and their interaction effects on school counselors and administrator responses (DV).

The effects of actual scores were not statistically significant ($p = 0.66$), but the effects of preferred scores were statistically significant ($p = 0.05$). Therefore, the effect size of preferred scores indicated that they account for 100% of the variance in the school counselor and administrator responses ($F_{(1, 27)} = 4.12, p = 0.05$). This also explains why there was no significance in the effect of actual scores ($F_{(1, 27)} = 0.19, p = 0.66$) or the interaction of actual and preferred scores ($F_{(1, 27)} = 1.43, p = 0.24$). The assumptions of a factorial ANOVA were also tested. A Levene's test was conducted, and homogeneity of variances was found ($F_{(1, 27)} = 1.95, p = 0.17$). Histograms were utilized to graph and confirm the normality of samples and residuals.

Research Question 4: Does the perception of the school counselor's role differ based on demographic criteria?

Multiple regression was completed to determine if demographic criteria (IV) could statistically significantly predict administrator responses (DV). The specific demographic criteria observed were years of experience, years in education, enrollment size, and grade level. Sum means were used to develop independent variables for this study, as was done by Wilder and Ray (2013). A participant's sum mean was collected by averaging their responses in one category and then adding among each subscale to obtain one score per participant. Sum mean scores were obtained for responses on the following SCARS subscales: counseling activities, consultation activities, curriculum activities, coordination activities, and other activities.

The final predictive model was as follows: Administrator Responses = 8.90 + (0.80*Years of Experience) + (0.10*Years in Education) + (0.60*Enrollment Size) + (5.13*Grade Level). The results indicated that the model explained 100% of the proportion of variation ($R^2 = 1.00$). In contrast, years of experience explain about 63% ($R^2 = 0.63$), years in education explain about 16% ($R^2 = 0.16$), enrollment size explains about 29% ($R^2 = 0.29$), and grade level explains about 98% ($R^2 = 0.98$) of SCARS responses. The model did not significantly predict the administrator's SCARS responses, as the results were inconclusive ($F_{(4, 0)} = $ NaN, $p = $ NA). The inconclusive results are likely explained by the small participant sample (n = 30) and the lack of reaching the G*Power target sample size (n = 85). Grade level contributed significantly to the model ($F_{(1,3)} = 140.9$, $p = .001$); however, years of experience ($F_{(1, 3)} = 5.06$, $p = .11$), years in education ($F_{(1,3)} = 0.59$, $p = .49$), and enrollment size ($F_{(2,2)} = 0.41$, $p = .71$) did not contribute significantly to the model. Therefore, it can be hypothesized that grade level impacts administrators' perception of the school counselor's role, although additional research is needed to determine this.

Results Summary

This study aimed to identify differences between administrators' and school counselors' perceptions of the role of school counselors. The SCARS and SCARS Modified instrumentations were utilized to achieve this goal. The results demonstrated no statistically significant effects on administrators' and school counselors' perceptions of the school counselor's role when comparing actual and preferred scores. However, small differences exist, such as the statistically significant effect of preferred scores on the school counselor and administrator responses. Additionally, the results were inconclusive in determining how demographic criteria impact the perception of the school counselor's role.

Discussion

This study focused on the school counselor's role and how administrators and school counselors perceive this role. This study's first two research questions aimed to determine how administrators and school counselors perceive the school counselor's role concerning the ASCA National Model, respectively. The third research question sought to determine if differences existed between how school counselors and administrators perceived the school counselor's role. While the overall effects were not statistically significant, the results suggest that preferred scores affect how school counselors and administrators perceive the school counselor's role. Lastly, the fourth research question aimed to consider the impact of demographic criteria on the perception of the school counselor's role. The specific demographic criteria considered in this study include the following: years of experience, total years of experience in the field of education, school enrollment size, and grade levels served. Due to the small sample size, these results were inconclusive in determining the effect of demographic criteria on the perception of the school counselor's role.

As part of the SCARS Modified instrument (Lane, 2020), participants were given items from the ASCA National Model list of appropriate and inappropriate activities for school counselors (ASCA, 2019a). There was only one item in which administrators and school counselors completely agreed with the ASCA National Model: "Providing short-term individual and small-group counseling services to students" (See Table 1, Item 21; M = 2.0). It is a positive finding that there is agreeance among administrators and school counselors that school

counselors should be providing individual and small-group counseling to students. However, it is also a testament to the differences among these perceptions of the role. This is the singular response in which both groups of participants fully agreed with the ASCA National Model.

However, there were other items in which school counselors and administrators did not fully agree with the ASCA National Model, yet their responses agreed. For instance, the item "Providing counseling to students who are tardy or absent" (See Table 1, Item 6) was scored similarly for both administrators (M = 1.71) and school counselors (M = 1.68). This suggests that while both groups agree with the ASCA National Model, they have a stronger agreement with one another (range = 0.03). Therefore, the results suggest that while both groups have somewhat differing opinions and differing opinions from the ASCA National Model, there are specific items in which they agree with one another.

Desired Activities for School Counselors

The SCARS Modified (Lane et al., 2020) instrument was utilized to determine how often school counselors and administrators sought school counselors to engage in particular activities. The results of this instrument suggested that administrators want school counselors to engage in these activities more often than they believe they currently are (Actual Mean < Preferred Mean). While school counselors agree for most categories of activities, they desire to do less in the "Other" Activities category than they currently are (Actual M = 3.03, Prefer M = 2.26). The specific activities in which school counselors feel the strongest desire to engage less often are as follows: "Respond to health issues (e.g., check for live, eye screening, 504 coordination)" (Table 2, Subscale "Other" Activities, Item 4, Range = 1.87), "Coordinate the standardized testing program" (Table 2, Subscale "Other" Activities, Item 2, Range = 1.86), and "Perform hall, bus, and cafeteria duty" (Table 2, Subscale "Other" Activities, Item 5, Range = 1.53). For each of these tasks, school counselors feel as though they are engaging in these tasks occasionally (M ≈ 3.00) and desire to engage in these tasks either never (M ≈ 1.00) or rarely (M ≈ 2.00). However, administrators prefer that school counselors engage in testing coordination frequently (M ≈ 4.00) and rarely (M ≈ 2.00) respond to health issues or engage in shared duties.

Another finding is that school counselors believe to be engaging in activities more often than administrators believe that they are. For instance, administrators reported that school counselors rarely engage in consultation (M ≈ 2.00), curriculum, and "other" activities, whereas school counselors believe they are engaging in these activities occasionally (M ≈ 3.00). School counselors and administrators believe that school counselors engage in counseling and coordination activities occasionally (M ≈ 3.00), but school counselors rated actual engagement in these activities higher than administrators did.

Differences in Perceptions of Role

The main method of determining differences in how school counselors and administrators perceive the school counselor's role was done through a factorial ANOVA. While these results suggested no statistically significant difference in how these two groups perceive this role, there are slight differences in the way these two groups responded to the survey.

The results from the appropriate and inappropriate duties of the school counselor section of the survey suggest some activities in which school counselors and administrators disagree. As mentioned, these results directly respond to the groups' agreement towards the ASCA National Model. There are 6 items in which the school counseling group scored the task agreeing with the

ASCA National Model (N > 1). In contrast, the administrator group scored the task as disagreeing with the ASCA National Model (N < 1), and one item in which the administrator group scored the task as neutral in agreeance with the ASCA National Model (N = 1.00). These findings suggest that the following tasks are viewed by administrators as appropriate for school counselors but are viewed as inappropriate by school counselors themselves and the ASCA National Model: a) student record keeping, b) new student data entry, c) student grade calculations, d) school-wide testing organization, and e) coordination of school-wide MTSS programs. For the following tasks, school counselors agreed with the ASCA National Model as an appropriate activity, while administrators disagreed with counseling students with disciplinary concerns and assisting teachers with rapport building, classroom management, and overall student success.

Based on the SCARS results (see Table 2), both school counselors and administrators agree that the school counselor's role should include counseling activities; however, there is a difference in agreement on how often to engage in these specific behaviors. School counselors reported a desire to engage in counseling activities frequently (M = 4.10), while administrators reported a preference for school counselors to provide counseling services only occasionally (M = 3.60). However, when reviewing how both groups responded to the percentage of the time portion of the instrument (see Table 4), administrators prefer school counselors to engage in counseling services for approximately half of the day (M = 48.00). School counselors believe to are providing counseling services (M = 38.40) less often than administrators perceive them to be (M = 46.00) and only want to be engaging in counseling activities about 44% of the time (M = 43.75). This is likely a result of the ASCA National Model recommendation that school counselors spend 80% of their time engaging in direct or indirect services to benefit students (ASCA, 2019b).

Implications of Research Findings

Targeted ASCA Training

In the appropriate and inappropriate school counselor duties section of the survey, the findings suggest that the school counseling group did not fully align with the ASCA National Model either. School counselors agreed with all appropriate and inappropriate activities overall (N > 1) and agreed more strongly than administrators did, with an average of 1.68 compared to the administrators' overall group average of 1.45. However, when school counselors are trained with the ASCA National Model in CACREP-accredited programs (Branthoover et al., 2010; Perry et al., 2020), it can be hypothesized that these individuals would score in more agreement with the ASCA National Model. These findings may be skewed. There were 105 instances when a school counselor marked an item in this portion of the survey as "neutral," which means that each school counselor rated approximately 3 items as neutral when taking the survey (n = 2.92). While this number may seem low, this is approximately 10% of the items in which school counselors either did not have a strong opinion or were unsure whether the activity listed should be considered appropriate or inappropriate for their role. It is possible that school counselors need additional training in the use of the ASCA National Model themselves.

Additionally, participants were asked in the survey to rate how familiar they were with the ASCA National Model. The responses were coded such that "Not familiar at all" = 0, "Not very familiar" = 1, "Familiar" = 2, and "Very familiar" = 3. School counselors reported feeling familiar (M = 2.52) with the ASCA National Model. This further supports the idea that school

counselors may need additional training in the ASCA National Model. This may be helpful to be provided in the form of professional supervision. Many school counselors reportedly lack professional supervision (Zalewski, 2022) or targeted professional development for school counselors (Griffen & Hallett, 2017), and this may be a great way to fill that gap.

Administrators reported feeling unfamiliar (M = 1.88) with the ASCA National Model. As a result, administrators must receive proper training in the ASCA National Model because this tool trains school counselors within their programs (Birdsong & Yakimowski, 2021). Administrators can learn more about the ASCA National Model through webinars, conferences, or even collaborative team meetings with the school counselor at their school or district. The ASCA National Model (2019b) supports this idea and teaches school counselors to hold an "Annual Administrative Conference" in which these concerns could be addressed. This conference or meeting is intended to be a time to outline the goals of the school counseling comprehensive program, address any limitations or needs of the program, and foster collaboration between these two roles (ASCA, 2019b). This would be a good time for school counselors to model the school counselor's role and for the administrator to bridge any gaps in their knowledge of the ASCA National Model.

Open Communication and Role Expectations

This study found that administrators do not feel familiar (M = 1.88) with the ASCA National Model. While increasing administrators' knowledge about the ASCA National Model is a step in the right direction, administrators and school counselors also need to have formalized conversations about how the ASCA National Model will be integrated into the school counselor's role at their school. This study found some specific activities in which school counselors and administrators agree more with one another than with the ASCA National Model (See Table 1, Item 6). There are also some instances in which school counselors and administrators have differing perceptions on how much time school counselors are and should be spending on certain activities (See Table 4). While school counselors and administrators can increase their understanding of the ASCA National Model, they should also increase communication to ensure a collaborative approach to the comprehensive school counseling program (Geesa et al., 2019).

Open communication between administrators and school counselors needs to include the perception of a safe space in which both parties feel respected and valued when expressing agreement and disagreement (Lawrence & Stone, 2019). Some examples of ways to increase this open communication include asking administrators to serve on the advisory council, as recommended by ASCA (ASCA, 2019b); holding weekly or bi-weekly check-in meetings between administrators and school counselors within a school or district and holding debriefing opportunities after professional development related to the ASCA National Model. Increasing open communication between school counselors and administrators on the role expectations for school counselors would increase unified perspectives.

In addition to increasing communication, school counselors and administrators should formally outline specific role expectations. The ASCA National Model (2019b) provides an outline or template for the suggested Annual Administrative Conference. This template, to be filled out by the school counselor and then discussed during the meeting, consists of the following components: priorities and goals of the school counseling comprehensive program, school counselor use of time analysis, ratio, and caseload size, the comprehensive program plan

to address student needs (based on student data), professional development plan, and school and district responsibilities (ASCA, 2019b). While all of these components are great for minimizing role confusion, a primary tool of focus should be the section related to school and district responsibilities. This section might include responsibilities associated with bus duty, testing, 504 planning, Response to Intervention, or advisory council. It also allows school counselors and administrators to be clear about the time commitment requirements of each activity and the overall time that school counselors should spend in each category (direct or indirect services, program planning, or non-school counseling duties). Providing a document with clear role expectations can increase the ability for both parties to have open communication about these expectations. This would reduce school counselor role confusion and burnout (Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Fye et al., 2020; Mullen et al., 2018).

Collaborative Educational Opportunities

School counseling and educational leadership educators can also intentionally integrate collaborations between program coursework. There are numerous opportunities to provide collaboration between these programs. For instance, section 2 of the CACREP School Counseling specialty standards highlights contextual dimensions (CACREP, 2015). One standard reflects school counselors' content knowledge of effective leadership styles (CACREP, 2015, Standard 5.G.2.j.). This could be done by having educational leadership students collaborate with school counseling students by presenting knowledge on leadership styles. The school counseling students could practice demonstrating a specific leadership style while teaching administrators about the school counselor role. This would also interweave another standard by demonstrating their ability to advocate for the school counselor role (CACREP, 2015, Standard 5.G.2.f.). Further, school counseling and educational leadership students could engage in a group project to train the other students in their roles, establish ways that each role could collaborate throughout the year, and build a sample annual collaboration plan. This could include components of several CACREP (2015) standards: "school counselor roles in school leadership and multidisciplinary teams" (5.G.2.d.), "competencies to advocate for school counseling roles," (5.G.2.f.), "Development of school counseling program mission statements and objectives," (5.G.3.a.), "design and evaluation of school counseling programs" (5.G.3.b.), "techniques to foster collaboration and teamwork within schools," (5.G.3.l.), "use of accountability data to inform decision making," (5.G.3.n.) and "use of data to advocate for programs and students," (5.G.3.o.).

While these are suggestions for collaboration, these are the only ways students could engage with one another. Faculty can also organize for students to attend a class from the other program; invite guest speakers of students, recently graduated students, or faculty from the other program to speak on a specific topic; develop collaborative assignments across courses; or integrate role-play or other hands-on activities across courses, giving students practice interacting with one another. These teaching tools would greatly increase advocacy skills and basic content knowledge of the other profession and provide networking opportunities for students. Previous scholarship has also supported the idea of collaboration between training programs for future school counselors and administrators (Carnes-Holt et al., 2012; Perruse et al., 2009; Tygret et al., 2020). This would encourage the overlap in training for school counselors and administrators moving forward.

Limitations

One limitation of this study was the limited number of survey participants. Only 9 administrators and 36 school counselors contributed to the survey. This unequal distribution of participants could have impacted the data analysis of this study. Additionally, the G*Power software (Faul et al., 2007) utilized recommended sample size of 85 participants, of which only 30 were obtained to complete the survey in full. This resulted in inconclusive data in the multiple regression for research question number 4, made it challenging to compare differences in perceptions of the school counselor's role for research question number 3, and limited the overall representation of the sample. This also impacts the generalizability of the study results as this small sample size cannot ethically represent the intended population. It is also possible that the decision to recruit participants during the spring of the academic year made it difficult for administrators to find time to engage in research. Additionally, the length of the survey may have contributed to the level of participatory dropout from the beginning of the survey.

Another limitation of this study was that there were two flaws in the percentage of time section of the SCARS Modified (Lane et al., 2020) instrument. The participants were instructed to identify how much time they engaged and preferred to engage in each category per week. When doing so, they were asked to make the results equal to 100, representing 100% of the time spent in all five categories each week. However, the sum of responses in this section for many participants was higher than 100. This caused this section of the data to be skewed. Additionally, the researcher neglected to include a sliding bar to represent the Coordination Activities section. Therefore, this component has no data to report (See Table 4).

Recommendations for Future Research

This study utilized multiple regression to determine if demographic factors impacted the perception of the school counselor's role. The findings were inconclusive in determining if years of experience, years in education, enrollment size, or grade level impact the way school counselors or administrators view the role of the school counselor. However, grade level contributed significantly to the model ($F_{(1,3)} = 140.9$, $p = .001$). This suggests that grade level may influence the perception of the role, although more research is needed to support this.

Additionally, expanding the demographic criteria utilized when determining the impact on the perception of the school counselor's role may be beneficial. For instance, research has shown that school counselors with higher caseloads also have higher levels of burnout and job dissatisfaction (Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Mullen et al., 2021). It may be worth considering how caseload size may impact the perception of the school counselor's role. Many school counselors are trained in CACREP-accredited programs (Brandthoover, 2010; Perry et al., 2020). Therefore, comparing the results of individuals trained by CACREP programs to those who attended non-CACREP accredited programs would be interesting. Another possible impact on this perception could be the difference in public and private school settings. The responses of this study were 100% from public entities, which lends itself to the question if results would differ if participants worked in another setting.

Furthermore, qualitative research may help gain additional insight into how school counseling roles are perceived. This may help determine themes among the responses provided. Additionally, it may provide a way to increase the stakeholders included in the sample (i.e., teachers, students, parents, and staff members). A qualitative study may also be useful in comparing the direct results within one school system. This would allow a direct comparison

between a school counselor and an administrator within the same working dynamic. Lastly, a longitudinal study may be beneficial in identifying changes in the perception of the school counselor's role over time from both the administrator's and school counselor's perspectives.

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MIDWEST BLACK, INDIGENOUS, PEOPLE OF COLOR LEADERS SERVING IN WHITE SPACES

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Abstract

The narrative inquiry correlates to the Leadership in a Time of Change theme by examining the stories of 10 Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) school leaders serving in White suburban schools. The research study explores the experiences of eight Black and two Latinx school leaders that serve in K-12 school districts after the racial reckoning of 2020 when elevated racial tensions were significant. Limited research has been explored related to BIPOC school leaders' experiences in predominately White school institutions where they are underrepresented among educational stakeholder groups. The inquiry analyzes the data through the Critical Race Theory from Delgado and Stefancic (2017). The stories of the 10 BIPOC school leaders revealed three themes: racism, microaggressions, and pressure plus. The study is relevant to predominately White school district leaders attempting to hire and retain diverse school leaders.

Introduction

In some areas of the United States, "suburban education has become regarded as the ideal and urban education as the cautionary tale" (Lewis-McCoy, 2018, p. 146). When one imagines a suburban school setting, one pictures a modern facility surrounded by single-family homes with pristine fenced-in yards and newer vehicles parked in the driveways. The (mostly White) children from these families make up the majority of students attending the local suburban school. Nevertheless, in the last three decades, suburban America has seen a demographic change among the student population in suburban schools, where the Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) student population has increased in White suburbia (Diamond & Posey-Maddox, 2019).

As the demographics change among the student population, not much has changed in the recruitment and retention of BIPOC educational leaders serving in suburban public schools. School leadership at the building and central office levels continues to be monopolized by White educators. As of 2017-2018, 78 % of public school administrators were White, 10 percent were Black, 8.6 percent were Latinx, and 54% of that population was female (Diamond & Posey, 2019). Most BIPOC school administrators serve in public schools where most students identify as BIPOC. Schaeffer (2021) found that 37.5% of BIPOC school administrators are employed in urban schools, and 75 % of urban school students identify as BIPOC and qualify for free-reduced breakfast and lunch. While most BIPOC school administrators lead schools where most students are BIPOC themselves, few studies have examined the experiences of BIPOC school leaders serving in predominately White suburban public schools. The central theme of this journal is Leadership in a Time of Change. This study investigation is warranted based on the lack of research regarding the experiences of BIPOC educational leaders serving predominantly White school districts. Limited narratives describe the opportunities and challenge BIPOC school leaders endure when working in a predominantly White school setting.

In addition, educators serving in school leadership roles are under immense pressure. Job stress has escalated due to increased expectations, public scrutiny, and resolving stakeholder conflicts (Mahfouz, 2018). Scholars have argued that principals of color have additional job stress due to being school leaders of color (Steiner et al., 2022). Steiner et al. (2022) concluded by examining survey results from 1540 U.S. educators that participated in the State of the American Teacher and State of the American Principal research study (Doan et al., 2022). The scholars invited 3022 principals from all racial backgrounds to participate in the study. As a result, 1,540 U.S. school leaders responded to the survey. Among the 1,540 school leaders in the study, 32.3 percent identified as non-White (Doan et al., 2022). The scholars asked the sample questions about job stress, working conditions, political events, experience with racism, etc. (Doan et al., 2022). Steiner et al. and her team of researchers used the data from the American Teacher and State of the American Principal research study. They found that BIPOC school personnel are held to higher standards than their White counterparts in predominately White schools and that these educators experienced racial discrimination in their schools.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) has captured the attention of the mass media, public and private institutions, and politicians. CRT is an academic and legal theory claiming systemic racism is the norm in society. More recently, CRT has ignited contentious school board meetings among parents, administrators, and community members resulting in executive orders from President Trump banning the implementation of CRT in public institutions (Adams, 2021). In

addition, CRT has recently been under attack in public schools. For example, Governor Ron DeSantis formulated new legislation, "the Stop Woke Act," in Florida (Alfonseca, 2022). The intent of enacting "the Stop Woke Act" was to eliminate the integration of CRT into the school curriculum. The narrative inquiry investigation needs to examine the stories of BIPOC school leaders in predominately White school districts to understand their experiences during another historical time of racial unrest.

CRT scholars posit that stories of BIPOC educators are essential in understanding how normalized racism exists in White spaces where educators and administrators may claim not to see the color of individuals in their school community (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Delgado, 1995; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). CRT informed the investigation described in this article. Investigators applied the five basic tenets of CRT to the analysis and interpretation of findings (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Race and racism are central in society. CRT challenges dominant ideology, as its interdisciplinary knowledge from experience is at the center and focused on social justice.

Theoretical Framework

The CRT framework was selected for this study because it was essential to examine the stories of BIPOC school leaders from their perspectives in predominantly White schools where race and racism may "implicitly and explicitly affect social structures, practices, and discourses" (Yosso, 2006, p. 168). Exploring the stories through the vehicle of one-on-one interviews with BIPOC leaders connected to the tenets of the CRT framework. CRT scholars Delgado and Stefancic (2017) presented five fundamental tenets of racism. First, the scholars claim that racism in the U.S. is normal, fundamental, and ordinary to the BIPOC experience within the framework of White culture. Second, these CRT scholars claim that racism "advances the interests of both White elites and workings class," otherwise described as "interest convergence" (p. 9). White elites are willing to assist BIPOC individuals as long as Whites benefit materially or physically in some capacity. Another third tenet of racism, as defined through CRT, is that categorizing racial groups is a "social construction" (p. 9). Finally, CRT claims that an individual's race is not based on biological or genetic realities, intellect, personal conduct, or temperament. Rather, race is a 'social construct' created and interjected by those in power (i.e., Whites) to manipulate and control. A fourth tenet of CRT pertains to "differential racialization and its consequences" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 9).

CRT scholars have observed over time that members of the White society will leverage different racial groups during different periods based on needs in the "labor market" and what racial group can most aptly fill that market need at the time. For example, at certain times in history, Black workers were less needed than Mexican or Japanese agricultural workers. Society cultivates certain groups of color for certain needs at the time.

Furthermore, the fourth CRT tenet argues that racial identification is not as simplistic as checking a single racial box on a survey. CRT scholars claim that BIPOC individuals often possess "conflicting, overlapping identities, loyalties and allegiances" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 11). Just because someone identifies as Latinx does not mean they speak Spanish and practice Catholicism. Racial identification and backgrounds are complex and intersect with culture, sexual orientation, and religion. The fifth tenet among CRT scholars is that BIPOC

individuals possess a "unique voice" aligned to history and experiences with racism that uninformed White individuals lack adequate knowledge to discuss and understand appropriately.

Solorzano and Yosso (2002) examined the use of Critical race methodology. Critical race methodology has been utilized to conduct qualitative research that investigates the experiences of BIPOC educators and students. Solorzano and Yosso also tie gender, social class, and race to the tenets of CRT. Also, Solorzano and Yosso claim that CRT has five overall themes. First, the scholars evaluate the power dynamic in the school structure, specifically whether one racial group has an advantage over another based on current practices. Second, the researchers claim that the influence of power in a school setting is comparable to that in the larger society. Third, the scholars focus on social justice and empowering oppressed racial groups by eliminating racism and sexism. Fourth, Solorzano and Yosso state that the BIPOC educator's expertise through personal experiences has value. Fifth, the scholars believe using an interdisciplinary perspective is an optimal way to evaluate racism through the BIPOC educators' educational experiences. Thus, BIPOC educators are the sole experts in telling their stories about racism.

Research Questions

This qualitative study examines the experiences of BIPOC educational leaders serving in predominantly White suburban schools in the Midwest. A CRT framework (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017) may assist with examining BIPOC school leaders' experiences by exploring their Leadership in a predominantly White educational environment. The research study used a narrative inquiry design and semi-structured interviews with 10 Midwest BIPOC school administrators to answer the following questions:

1. What are the perceptions of BIPOC school leaders serving in a predominantly White School district?

2. What are the perceptions of BIPOC school leaders of their relationships with predominantly White teachers, parents, students, and central office staff?

3. What are the perceptions of BIPOC school leaders of their challenges and obstacles in serving in predominantly White school districts?

Methods

This qualitative research study used a narrative inquiry design. Scholars claim that narrative scholarship is useful for capturing the lived experiences of educators through stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2007; Kim, 2016). Narrative inquiry through a CRT lens provides a vehicle for the researcher and participants to engage in true dialogue in a space (school) that has been defined as "colorblind" by the "dominant culture" (Kim, 2006, p. 44). The researcher received approval to interview the participants from his university's Institutional Review Board Office. In addition, all participants agreed to participate and approved the interview to be recorded on Zoom and were assigned a pseudonym to maintain anonymity. The researcher utilized snowball sampling (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008), recruiting BIPOC school leaders serving predominantly White K-12 school districts in the Midwest who self-identified as Black, Latinx, multiracial, or other; for this study, participants were invited from the Midwest Region of the United States (Iowa, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Michigan, and Kentucky). The Latinx participants both identified as having parents that were born in Latin American countries, as well as claimed that English was their second language when they were under the age of 18. When the researcher was

conducting the first two interviews, he asked participants if they had any current BIPOC school leaders serving in predominantly White schools that may be interested in participating in the study. The scholar established credibility with each participant by disclosing his background, racial identification, and previous school administrator experiences and expertise.

The researcher's personal and professional experiences influenced the data collection and analysis. The researcher is a current BIPOC male assistant professor in Educational Administration with experience as a teacher, assistant principal, and principal at the elementary and middle school levels. Also, the BIPOC researcher has six years of experience serving as an educational leader or teacher in White suburban schools in the Midwest and was consistently the only school leader of color in the school and one of a handful in the school district. Also, the researcher has 14 years of experience serving as a principal in a school district where nearly 80 percent of the 13,000 students were categorized as BIPOC, and less than ten percent of the 90 total districts and school administrators were of color. The researcher provides this background information to acknowledge his positionality, which may enhance his understanding of the "potential bias, assumptions, and point of development, but also the potential contribution to the field" of educational Leadership (Holmes, 2020, p. 2).

Worldview guided the data collection process as the researcher was seeking to provide a vehicle to capture the voices of current BIPOC school leaders that were serving in White suburban schools after the death of George Floyd, followed by the period of racial reckoning in many suburban Midwest areas (Dueweke, 2022). Furthermore, the school districts where the participants served during the study all encountered protests, demonstrations, and heated discussions at school board meetings from community members who opposed the integration of the CRT curriculum (Jones, 2021). To mitigate any researcher bias and ensure validity, the researcher used "member checking" and maintained a "reflexive journal" to mitigate his bias and bracketed himself during the recorded participant interviews (Rocco, 2010). Furthermore, the researcher informed all 10 BIPOC school administrators that a transcription of their interview would be electronically sent to them if requested. However, none of the 10 BIPOC school administrators requested to view their transcripts.

Data Sources and Evidence

Data for this study were gathered from a brief demographic survey from 10 semi-structured interviews (45-60 minutes each) using Zoom Video Communication for recording, research notes, and clarification from follow-up questions from all ten semi-structured interviews. Member checking was used for validity purposes, where the researcher repeated the school leaders' statements to ensure their stories were accurate. Creswell and Miller (2000) claimed that member checking might be useful in qualitative research to increase validity. The first participant was interviewed in the fall of 2021, and the last school leader was interviewed in the fall of 2022.

The BIPOC school leaders were emailed a Qualtrics Link. They assigned a three-digit code asking questions about the participants' racial background and school demographic data. The Qualtrics link also asked participants to consent to the research study. Then, the researcher scheduled a date and time to conduct the semi-structured interviews using Zoom Video Communication and asked each BIPOC school leader five open-ended interview questions (see Appendix) focusing on their experiences and relationships with mostly White students, teachers, parents, and central office administrators. Finally, the researcher coded the interview

transcriptions in DeDoose, a research coding software that supported coding and organizing the data. Inductive coding methods were applied to create three themes, including first and second cycles, narrative, and focus coding (Saldana, 2016).

Results

This research study examined BIPOC school administrators' perceptions of serving in White school districts and their understanding of the connection between race, Leadership, and suburban education as a marginalized group member. The researcher interviewed 10 BIPOC school administrators from various racial backgrounds and district demographics. *Table 1* provides information pertinent information about the 10 BIPOC school administrators as well as demographic information about the predominantly White school districts in which they serve. The researcher used thematic coding to identify three themes to address the essential research questions: (1) racism, (2) microaggressions, and (3) pressure. *Figure 1* depicts the findings illustrating the results from the data. The following *narrative texts* (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) are professional and personal stories shared by the 10 BIPOC school leaders during the semi-structured interviews. All the names of the participants have been altered to ensure anonymity. The narrative texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) describe participants' experiences that were "shared in conversation" (Rigaud et al., 2022, p. 10) with the investigator. All participants were issued pseudonyms throughout the manuscript.

Table 1

BIPOC School Administrators and School District Demographics

Participant	Yolanda	Ricardo	Gerald	Janice	Traci	Michael	Thomas	Tiffany	Humberto	Vanessa
Gender	F	M	M	F	F	M	M	F	M	F
Racial Background	B	L	B	B	B	B	B	B	L	B
Education Level	M	D	M'	D	M	M	D	M	M	M
Role	AP	P	P	Dir	Oth	Dir	P	P	P	Dir
School Level	MS	HS	ElS	HS	K-12	HS	HS	ElS	ElS	K-12
% of students identify as White	51-75	76-100	76-100	51-75	51-75	51-75	51-75	76-100	76-100	76-100
% of faculty identify as White	76-100	76-100	76-100	76-100	76-100	76-100	76-100	76-100	76-100	76-100
School Location	Sub	Sub	Sub	Sub	Sub	Sub	Sub	Sub	Sub	Sub
Range of total certified teachers	51-75	75 +	75+	75+	75+	75+	75+	51-75	0-25	75+
How many years have you served as a school leader?	0-5	0-5	0-5	0-5	0-5	11-15	0-5	6-10	0-5	0-5

Note: N = 10 were school leaders in the Midwest Region of the United States

Figure 1

BIPOC School Administrators Study Findings
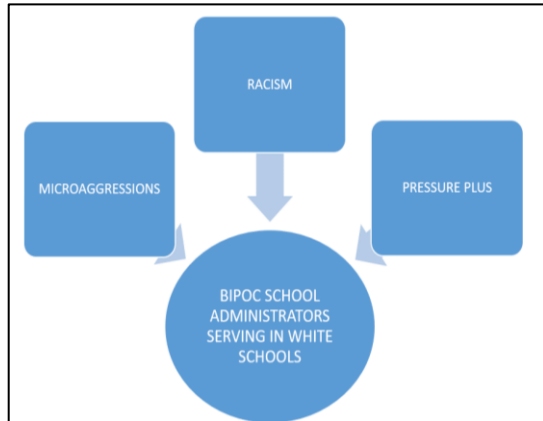
Note: Three major themes from BIPOC interviews

Theme One: Racism

The theme of *racism* explains BIPOC school administrators' perspectives in identifying the racist experiences these leaders encountered in White school districts. Eighty percent of BIPOC participants expressed that they experienced racism from one of the three educational stakeholder groups: students, parents, and or teachers. In addition, the participants provided explicit narratives that explained the true reality of leading in predominantly White school districts as a BIPOC school administrator.

Traci, a Black female, shared that when she was hired in the school district as a leader, she was one of two Black educators that year out of 30 and one of three Black educators out of 200 plus teachers and administrators. In this narrative, Traci describes how she chaperoned a field trip on a windy day where the teachers and students visited a farm in the area. Traci stated that after the field trip ended, while sitting on the bus to return to school, one of the White female teachers on the field trip looked at her and said aloud, "Traci, did you forget to brush your hair today?" After the comment from the teacher, the students, bus driver, and other teachers that heard the comment began to laugh. Traci shared how shocked she was to hear such a degrading, insensitive comment from one of her staff members. Subsequently, Traci met with the White teacher in her office to educate her on Black female hair. Traci shared with the researcher that:

> However, I felt like she [White teacher] would never fully understand what her words meant and how hurtful her words were to me… I got more questions about my hair even after that experience from students, teachers, and even a parent.

Another BIPOC administrator, Gerald, experienced racism as a Black male elementary school principal. When the interview was conducted, he was in his second year in a building with mostly White students enrolled. When asked about his experiences of leading as a BIPOC school leader, he stated:

> It is challenging, and there are things that I've had some conversations with colleagues about how and why I do certain things. Just before this interview, I had a conversation with a teacher about how I must leave the building before it is dark outside because

seeing a Black man in this neighborhood after dark concerns me based on what I have learned about this community. When I do leave work [school] in the early evening, I walk to my car with my hands in my pocket. When I shared this story with the teacher, she commented, 'You always make everything about being Black.

Gerald's story is powerful because he was a building principal in a predominantly White community but felt unsafe walking to his car after work. Gerald attempts to explain to a White staff member why he feels compelled to leave the building at a certain time. She immediately dismisses his reason when he explains this to the White female staff member. One may argue that the traditional barrier of institutional racism within this particular school and community fostered a lack of empathy with the racism Gerald encountered. Although the level of racist experiences among the BIPOC participants in this research was disheartening, it does not compare to the microaggressions they encountered and expressed during the interviews.

Theme Two: Microaggressions

The second theme, *microaggressions,* was identified based on the volume of statements. All 10 participants experienced microaggressions during their tenure as BIPOC school leaders serving in predominantly White school districts. Five unique stories are provided below as a sample of what they experienced. The narratives from the BIPOC school leaders exemplify the almost daily discrimination these educators endured in Predominantly White school districts.

Thomas shared his microaggression experiences as the first Black male high school principal in a school of 3,000 students and 230 staff members. When asked about his experiences as a BIPOC school leader serving in a White suburban high school, he shared a professional but personal story about his first month on the job. Thomas shared:

My first month [July] as the new principal of this school, I had teachers come in and introduce themselves to me. It was only usually the secretary in the office and me because other administrators were on vacation in July since their contract is 11 months. So, anyway, I had a White male veteran teacher teaching at the high school for 30 years during my second week as the principal. The teacher said something along the lines. 'I can't believe you are our principal. You are young, on top of being Black. Ha.. You're a Black boy running a large high school. Man, isn't that somethin'?

During the interview, Thomas stated that he was taken aback by what the teacher said and was unsure how to interpret the message. Thomas's first inclination was that the teacher was racist and believed this individual would have to be placed on notice. However, Thomas shared that he has created a positive relationship with this teacher during his tenure as principal and would classify this conversation as a microaggression. In the conversation later, the teacher shared with the principal that he knew Thomas was Black or African American but not aware that the principal was in his mid-30s. Thomas stated that these previous microaggressions still anger him when he thinks about these experiences, but forgiving is also important.

Another BIPOC school leader, Yolanda, a second-year assistant principal, discussed her experience with microaggressions when encountering a 20-year experienced White female teacher. During the interview, Yolanda shared that 87 percent of her current school is White, female, and mostly upper to middle class. Yolanda claimed that many of the teachers in her school are unfamiliar with culturally responsive practices and are challenged to relate to the small percentage of Black and Latinx students that attend her school. Yolanda has many

important professional responsibilities as an assistant principal. Still, she claimed during the interview that conducting teacher evaluations are the most important. Yolanda informed the researcher that her superintendent of schools intentionally recruited her to the school district to help the district implement culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP). Yolanda shared during the interview that she conducted professional development on culturally responsive pedagogy in her school but across the district. Also, Yolanda claimed that the school superintendent has her conduct bi-monthly professional development training on CRP throughout the district for teachers. As a result, teachers are provided CRP strategies recommended to integrate into their instruction. Yolanda said that she discusses CRP during the formal evaluation process with teachers during pre-conference and post-conference meetings in her building. Yolanda describes a post-conference meeting with a resistant teacher that did not feel CRP was necessary to integrate because she does not see color [teacher]. Yolanda retold the conversation with the teacher. Yolanda shared:

> She [the teacher] told me that kids are kids and that making everything about racial differences undermines the positive classroom environment she has created for her students. Then, she [teacher] tells me the reason some of her Black and Latinx students do not perform well in her class is that they [students] are unmotivated and don't care. She [teacher] said I teach all kids the same regardless of their race, and if the district would quit jamming this diversity and equity nonsense [referring to CRP] on teachers, things will be fine like they used to be.

Yolanda's story demonstrated that this particular teacher had stereotyped all Black and Latinx underperforming students as lazy and unmotivated. Educational leaders who experience high microaggressions in a school setting arguably have additional pressure to perform their job responsibilities.

Michael, a district-level director in a predominantly White school district, shared one microaggression conversation with a school board member during Black History Month last year. Michael shared a story about wearing a Civil Rights Black Power t-shirt with his sport coat to a meeting he scheduled with a principal in his school district. When Michael entered the school for his Meeting with the principal, a Board of Education member was leaving the school as Michael was entering. Michael knew all of the Board members since he attended the bi-monthly meetings Board of Education meetings. When Michael said "hello" to the Board member, the Board member responded with a "hello" in return and said "nice shirt" to Michael, shook his head, and walked to his car. Michael shared the next part of the story, a conversation with the superintendent. Michael stated,

> When I walked into D.O. [district office] for a 9:00 a.m. meeting with the superintendent and cabinet, the superintendent stepped out of his office and asked if he could speak with me before our Meeting. The superintendent told me he received an email last night from a Board member that told him I was not professionally dressed yesterday for hours. I explained to the superintendent that I wore a Civil Rights Black Power t-shirt under my sport coat in honor of Black History Month. I told the superintendent I knew something was up because the Board member said a backhanded comment to me along the lines of "nice shirt." The superintendent told me not to worry about it and that he would speak with the Board members. I doubt anything comes of it because it's just the way it is around this school district.

Another school administrator, Janice, shared an experience where she received a microaggression on the second day of her new administration position in a predominantly White high school. Janice described her experience walking into classrooms and introducing herself to students and faculty. Janice shared,

> I walked into this teacher's classroom to welcome the students back to school and introduce myself since I was a new administrator at the high school. When I entered the classroom, she [the teacher] abruptly greeted me and snapped her fingers to get the attention of the students. When the students were attentive I welcomed them back to school and introduced myself, and told them a little about me. The students were great during my short visit, but as I was walking out, the teacher walked with me to the door and quietly said, Well, I guess it was time for us to hire someone like you in our school. Immediately, I looked at her with my mouth open, and she could tell I was in shock. The teacher then stated I'm sorry I hope I didn't offend you. I meant to say that I knew they were going to hire a minority as the other administrators are White, and besides, I'm sure you're qualified. Then, she smiled at me, turned away, and went back to the students.

Janice expanded on the event and explained to the researcher that she felt that the teacher directly implied that she only got the new administrator job because she was Black. Janice later shared that this particular teacher applied for Janice's administration position but did not make it to the second round.

Tiffany, another BIPOC administrator that served as the first Black female elementary principal in a predominantly White school, claimed that she experienced microaggressions from parents. Tiffany stated,

> When I meet parents in person, usually sometime after a phone conversation. When they meet me in person and see who I am, they usually seem confused [White parents assume I am White]. Parents have said things to my face, not to be malicious or anything but still inappropriate; they make comments such as you speak intelligently, you know you speak very well, and I didn't realize you were Black on the phone.

Tiffany's powerful narrative demonstrated that their parents assume she is White because of the way she communicates with her stakeholders. The parents of Tiffany's students appear to have some preconceived notion of how a person of color may communicate.

Thomas, Yolanda, Michael, Janice, and Tiffany's powerful stories provided insight into the microaggressions BIPOC administrators in predominantly White schools encounter as leaders.

Theme 3: Pressure Plus

The third theme, *pressure plus*, was identified based on the number of statements that were aligned with BIPOC school leaders' feeling that their race added excessive pressure to perform not only for themselves but their entire race. Hence, the term pressure plus is applied to this theme. The stories from the BIPOC school leaders serving in White schools demonstrate the unique pressures these leaders endure consistently. Vanessa claims,

> I feel the pressure to perform. I have to do everything at a higher level because I feel like I'm going to be judged differently, and I have to prove my value and worth in this school district. Also, I feel pressure to protect my Black and brown students from systemic racism, but it's hard...because I feel the pressure of being expected to speak for an entire race of people at times, and it's too much.

Another BIPOC administrator, named Humberto, shared a story about the additional pressure he feels as the first-ever Latinx school principal of this traditional White elementary school:

> There's pressure for certain. First, my family moved into this school district, and my own kids are in the dual language program here. The superintendent and leadership team were receiving community pressure about hiring diverse educators, and that is a good pressure and change. It shows that we [the school district] are trying to reach families that historically are on the fringe. However, when I look around the room [referring to principal meetings], I'm um the only Hispanic male, not a lot like me in the room. That was very eye-opening for me when I was presented at the board [of education] Meeting. I realized I'm in a different world. I came from a diverse district, so the pressure for me now is how much do I stretch myself to help out other buildings when I know that I have some learning to do in this new role, sure that pressure is always there, right?"

Ricardo, another BIPOC administrator who served as the school's first Latinx high school principal in a predominantly White school, claimed he feels constant pressure to perform and exceed the superintendent and central office expectations. Ricardo states,

> Being the first Latinx principal of this high school is stressful and has taken an emotional toll on me as well as my family. I sacrifice hours on top of hours away from my family as I try to attend all student events and activities. I realize that all principals work very hard, but I feel like I have to take the position to another level. If I fail, I think other potential school leaders of color may not get a shot. I'm lucky in that my family is in the area, and they help pick up my kids from school or events since I am gone a lot, and my wife travels for work. What's that saying? Heavy is the head that wears the crown.

Vanessa, Humberto, and Ricardo shared powerful stories that provided insight into the additional pressure BIPOC administrators in predominantly White schools encounter as leaders.

Discussion

The individual narratives garnered from 10 different interviews with BIPOC school administrators serving in predominantly White school districts were presented in the findings and results section. All ten BIPOC school administrator voices were integrated into one of three themes. The stories of the 10 BIPOC school leaders revealed three overarching themes: racism, microaggressions, and pressure plus.

Racism

Delgado and Stefancic (2017) define racism as "any program or practice of discrimination, segregation, persecution, or mistreatment based on membership in a race or ethnic group" (p. 183). Eighty percent of the participants claimed they experienced racism from various stakeholders in their predominantly White school district. Two examples provided explicit narratives that shared the reality of leading in predominantly White school districts where they were a visible minority (Ladson-Billings, 1998). In the U.S. educational system, 80 percent of 90,000 school leaders identify as White (National Center of Educational Statistics, 2012). In addition, less than 25 percent of the total 20 percent of BIPOC school leaders serve in suburban or rural public school districts, meaning that most suburban and rural predominantly

White school districts are serviced by White school administrators (National Center of Educational Statistics, 2012). One may argue that BIPOC school leaders experiencing racism in predominantly White suburban school districts is not surprising but coincides with the historical racist housing practices in the suburban Midwest. Omi and Winant (1994) stated that the concept of suburban America was founded on a White supremacist racial ideology. White residents elected to self-segregate and created institutions such as schools under the guise of whiteness (Diamond & Posey-Maddox, 2017). Suppose the foundation of predominantly White schools was predicated on whiteness and white supremacy. In that case, it seems logical that BIPOC school leaders would experience racism and microaggressions (Diamond, 2018).

When predominantly White school districts elect to hire a BIPOC school leader, they may have good intentions and believe that hiring a person of color demonstrates that the school community is not racist and that racism is extinct. However, school district leaders and board of education members that promote diversity and recruit BIPOC school leaders may not realize that racism is "endemic, institutional, and systematic" in predominantly White schools and simply hiring people of color does not absolve the school district from its responsibility to create an environment that is inclusive and absent from racism (Sleeter, 2017, p. 157). The real work of eliminating racism in predominantly White schools perhaps legitimizes the need for school district leaders and board of education members to engage with CRT and create culturally responsive professional development opportunities for educational stakeholders.

Microaggressions

The 10 BIPOC school administrators serving in predominantly White schools experienced numerous microaggressions. The findings section of this manuscript provided the personal stories from five BIPOC school administrators to provide insight into the different forms of microaggressions that the BIPOC school leaders experienced. Microaggressions are defined as "brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to people of color because they belong to a racial minority group (Sue et al., 2007, p. 273). The challenges that people of color experience from microaggressions is that they are not as discernible as blatant racism, and at times microaggressive comments may even be "dismissed as harmless" (Williams et al., 2020). Microaggressions experienced by the BIPOC school administrators pertain to CRT. One of the foundational aspects of CRT that connects to microaggressions is that microaggressions are subtle malevolent comments that cause harm to BIPOC individuals within institutions. One of the BIPOC school leaders in the findings section claimed that White parents usually inform her that she "speaks so intelligently" that White parents may perceive their comment as a nice gesture and not denigrate the BIPOC school principal. When applying a CRT lens to the "speaks so intelligently" comment directed at the BIPOC school principal, one may argue that this microaggression is harmful because it conveys to the principal that White parents are biased and do not necessarily think BIPOC individuals speak intelligently. Furthermore, microaggression is normalized in predominantly White institutions. For example, Anderson et al. (2022) conducted a study that surveyed 759 medical students from different racial and gender backgrounds. The researchers' survey was adapted from the Institutional Betrayal Questionnaire (IBQ). The questions asked the medical students if they had experienced any of the 16 microaggression statements in medical school. The results from the survey determined that 61% of the medical students experienced at least one weekly microaggression. Racial microaggression comments were ranked at the top of the list. (Anderson et al., 2022). Also, the same study revealed that individuals that experience weekly microaggressions may suffer from mental health trauma.

BIPOC school administrators that experience racism and microaggressions while serving in predominantly White school districts may feel additional leadership pressure.

Pressure Plus

The BIPOC administrators in this study overcame "intentional or consequential racism in hiring and promotion." They felt the impact of additional "pressures to the same degree as school administrator peers from the dominant, White racial groups" (Smith, 2016. P. 126). Based on the stories of the BIPOC school leaders, the pressure they encountered was predominantly "internalized pressure" resulting from being in a position of authority but also due to being one of the only BIPOC school leaders within the building and school district (Deci & Flaste, 1995; Smith, 2016). Recently, educational leaders serving in public schools experienced various job-related pressures due to Covid-19 and the national media attention around teaching CRT in schools (DeMatthews & Clarida, 2021). However, the pressure level among BIPOC school leaders was elevated due to the "increased attention to systemic racism brought about by both the Covid-19 pandemic and the racial justice movement likely provoked race-related cognitive dissonance" (Coleman et al., 2022, p.84).

Based on the stories from the BIPOC school administrators, one may deduce that their racial background and the level of stress tied to the position of BIPOC leaders have significant challenges (Lunenberg & Irby, 2023). Scholars claim that school leaders encounter pressure from various job stressors, and "challenge and hindrance" are common (Podsakoff et al., 2007). The researchers define "challenge" stressors as tasks that align with a high volume of work with hard deadlines (Podsakoff et al., 2007). In addition, "hindrance." Stressors are defined as political responsibilities and ambiguous tasks not defined by central office administrators (Podsakoff et al., 2007). The stories of BIPOC school administrators in this study faced "hindrance" stressors that created additional pressures that their White counterparts may not experience since they belong to the racial group in power. Even though researchers (Steiner et al., 2022) from a recent study discovered that BIPOC teachers and principals described comparable job stressors to their White contemporaries, approximately 50 percent of BIPOC school leaders reported "racial discrimination" from staff and family members of students in their school environments. Therefore, school districts and board of education members must discuss solutions to address the racial bias prevalent in White suburban schools. Based on the sample in this study, efforts are being made to increase diversity among the faculty, including school leadership; however, additional efforts are needed to create an environment that supports BIPOC school leaders and mitigate the level of racism and microaggressions these educators experience in White suburban schools.

Recommendations and Implications

Based on the narratives from the 10 BIPOC educational leaders, many of their challenges were connected to serving in White school environments where they were sometimes the sole person of color in their school district. The 10 BIPOC educational leaders shared compelling stories about their personal and professional experiences, resulting in three primary themes: racism, microaggressions, and pressure. The personal narratives of the 10 BIPOC school leaders demonstrated that racism is alive and thriving in White suburban America. Equally important, suburban school districts commonly reflect community values and norms about race and racial prejudice among BIPOC stakeholders. As this study explored the

unique experiences of 10 BIPOC educational leaders, the findings reflected the existing challenges in university teacher education and educational leadership programs across the United States with recruiting potential teachers and school leaders of color. Teaching candidates in universities and colleges in the U.S. are predominantly White students, and 78% of the faculty teaching the teacher preparation candidates are White (Goldring et al., 2013; Rucinski, 2023). Predominantly White teacher candidates and faculty at the university may lack exposure to BIPOC university teacher candidates, reducing the opportunity for both groups to engage and learn about cultural differences and similarities. The same logic is transferrable to the challenges graduate programs in Educational Leadership are confronted with when attempting to increase BIPOC school administrators. Superville (2021) discovered that 80% of all current school principals are White. The current shortage of BIPOC school administrators has triggered school districts and universities to create alliances and identify BIPOC teachers in their districts with leadership potential (Superville, 2021). The researcher contends that university teacher education programs, professional development opportunities related to culturally responsive pedagogy, and affinity groups in White school districts may mitigate racism, microaggressions, and the pressure BIPOC administrators experience in their positions.

University Teacher Preparation Programs

To mitigate racism and micro-aggressions that BIPOC educators encounter in predominantly White schools, it is paramount that university teacher preparation programs confront the *colorblind* lens commonly used by White educators to dismiss racism (Singleton, 2006). Even though White educators may honestly believe that they do not see color (Singleton, 2006) and view their interactions and micro-aggressive comments to BIPOC school leaders as harmless, the stories from the 10 BIPOC administrators illustrate otherwise. This study demonstrated that participants experienced microaggressions serving as BIPOC school leaders in predominantly White school districts. Another study also discovered similar results among BIPOC school leaders. Steiner et al. (2022) found that "48 %" of BIPOC school leaders experienced at least one racial discrimination incident at school when 50 percent of the teaching staff was defined as White (p. 10). As the teaching workforce continues to be predominantly White, perhaps the time to "disrupt Whiteness in teacher education" (Picower, 2021, p. 85) is now. White teacher preparation students may only be transformed if they are educated by university professors committed to integrating social justice and culturally responsive pedagogy (Schauer, 2022).

Professional Development for Educators

As the teaching field remains a predominantly White employee group (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2023), school district leaders may want to consider increasing professional development opportunities aligned with Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS). The advantage of school district leaders facilitating workshops for teachers aligned to CWS is that critical professional development (CPD) "frames teachers as politically aware individuals who have a stake in teaching and transforming society" (Picower, 2021, p. 141). Therefore, a recommendation for new and experienced teachers serving in predominately White schools is to explore the benefits CWS may have with helping "people of all races think critically about how race functions systematically and often subconsciously to privilege people with certain perceived skin traits" (Beech, 2020, p. 3). One may argue that most White educators state that they are not racist as they define "racism as an overt behavior committed by an individual or group of individuals" (Williams, 2022, p. 74). For example, Yolanda, BIPOC Assistant Principal, in this

study shared her story about her conversation with a White female teacher in her school that claimed, "Kids are kids, and making everything about racial differences undermines the positive classroom environment she has created for her students." To evaluate the teacher's statement above, she [teacher] truly believes that she does not see racial differences and therefore does not sanction racism. Therefore, if White educators truly believe that they are not racist, perhaps creating and facilitating an in-service workshop using Critical Whiteness Professional Development may help well-intentioned White educators with "unpacking and exposing…racial stereotypes, bigotry, and forms of oppressive thinking" (Beech, 2020, p. 7). Educating the hard-working and well-intentioned White educators will help 'confront the racial inequity" (Kendi, 2019, p. 9) for not only the students that they [teachers] serve but the BIPOC school leaders that serve them.

Affinity Groups

The BIPOC educational leaders in this study demonstrated that they experienced additional pressure from serving as one of the few educational leaders of color. The BIPOC leaders shared their experiences with racism and micro-aggressive encounters from educators in their school community. As predominantly White school districts recruit BIPOC school leaders, it is paramount that systems exist to provide these courageous leaders with spaces to gather and feel supported. Educational organizations have started exploring and organizing racial affinity groups for educators of color to retain and support their colleagues of color (Great Schools Partnership, 2021). The vehicle educational organizations have determined that they may support BIPOC educators by creating racial affinity groups. Affinity groups are defined as a "group of people sharing a common race who gather intending to find connection, support, and inspiration" (Great Schools Partnership, 2021). School districts that create and support racial affinity groups should deem these systems not only as a support network for BIPOC school leaders but also as a form of professional learning which may increase social capital among BIPOC educational leaders. Firestone and Riehl (2005) stated that an "essential characteristic of social capital is the fact that it resides in the relationships among individuals within a social organization" (p. 69). Racial affinity groups for BIPOC school leaders serving in White schools may foster stronger relationships among the BIPOC educational peer group and serve as a form of learning among contemporaries.

Limitations and Future Research

This study had some limitations. The research study explores the experiences through the narrative of 10 BIPOC school administrators serving in predominately White school districts. One limitation of the research study was that the interviewer depended on the participants to candidly reveal their stories as they experienced racism and microaggressions in predominantly White school settings. In addition, all 10 BIPOC school administrators have high-pressure and time-consuming careers and personal family commitments. As most of the interviews with the participants ranged from 45-60 minutes, it was challenging to coordinate a time and date without interruptions from their busy schedules. Another limitation of the research study is potential researcher bias. The researcher, as previously mentioned, was a BIPOC school administrator that encountered racism, microaggressions, as well as a sense of additional pressure to perform as a school leader. However, the stories of the BIPOC school administrators did cause the researcher to pause and reflect on his own experiences throughout his tenure as a leader. Even though mitigating action steps were taken to reduce bias, it remains a limitation. In addition, the number

of participants as well as the location of the study should be considered limitations as well. Future research should consider increasing the number of participants to elevate the generalizability of the study. Furthermore, the research study could benefit from being conducted in other geographic locations in the United States, such as the Southwest, northwest, southeast, and Northeast.

Future research examining the experiences of BIPOC school leaders serving in White schools is needed. As awareness of racism has increased in the U.S. and school districts attempt to increase diversity among their teachers and administrators, the education system must understand the plight of BIPOC school administrators (Carter, 2020). Scholars have discovered that it is quite common for BIPOC educators to experience "racial battle fatigue" in predominantly White school districts (Pizarro & Kohli, 2020). Racial battle fatigue (RBF) is described as the exhaustion and negative impact "racism" has on BIPOC educators "who work in a predominately White profession" (Pizarro & Kohli, 2020). Hiring BIPOC teachers and administrators to serve in majority White schools is not sufficient in mitigating the systemic racism that has been in existence since the inception of the United States. Central offices and boards of education must support BIPOC administrators through mentoring, affinity groups, and racial justice professional development to eliminate racism and microaggressions (Carter, 2020; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

Conclusion

This study has looked into the experiences of 10 BIPOC school administrators serving in predominantly White school districts. The central theme of this journal, *Leadership in a Time of Change,* was essential in examining the experiences of BIPOC educational leaders serving in predominantly White school districts. As suburban, predominantly White school districts attempt to recruit and retain BIPOC educational leaders, school board members, and superintendents must be aware of the unique challenges BIPOC administrators will encounter. Creating systemic change in the hiring practices within predominantly White school districts is no small task, especially as adversaries of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) groups seek to adopt legislation to ban teaching about CRT and eliminate diversity training among faculty (Staver, 2023). It is time for the public education system in predominately White school districts to take the next step beyond hiring BIPOC educators. White school district leaders must create systems that will support BIPOC school leaders as successful leaders and key contributors to the fight against systemic racism.

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