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Teacher Perceptions of Middle School Students Meeting English Language Arts Literacy Standards

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Teacher Perceptions of Middle School Students Meeting English Language Arts Standards

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Concordia University–Portland

College of Education

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Teacher Leadership

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' perceptions of middle school students meeting English Language Arts standards. Guided by the theories of Vygotsky (1978), which are founded in the cognitive, communicative, and developmental ideologies, this study examined how educators perceived instructional supports, teacher expectations, the student and teacher relationship, and teacher morale to impact achievement. This study revealed that middle school English Language Arts educators perceived that instructional supports, teacher expectations, the student and teacher relationship, and teacher morale do impact students meeting English Language Arts Standards. However, educators perceive that if combined, the components of each have the potential to make a greater positive impact on student achievement. Twelve English Language Arts teachers participated in the study. These teachers completed a questionnaire and participated in an interview with the researcher. Observational field notes also were recorded during the study by the researcher. The questionnaires, interviews, and field notes were coded using Excel and NVivo software. The documents were used to determine the educators' perceptions of students meeting English Language Arts standards. The results indicated that teachers perceive a positive correlation between students meeting English Language Arts standards and instructional supports, teacher expectations, teacher morale, and the student and teacher relationship.

Keywords: instructional supports, teacher expectations, teacher morale, student and teacher relationship

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my incredible support system. My Creator blessed me with my first grand teachers that happen to be my amazing parents, Jesse and Mary. They shielded, guided, taught, and most importantly loved me daily. I am who I am today because of the greatness they possess as human beings. As an adult, my life has doubly been blessed with my two great loves. To my husband, John, and my son, Riley, each word I write is for you, my beautiful loves.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

This qualitative case study explored teachers' perceptions of middle school students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards. The principal research of Sabol and Pianta (2012) served as a chief influence for this qualitative case study design. Academic achievement, in correlation with perceived influences from the teacher and student relationships and instructional supports, were the focus of Sabol and Pianta's research. However, the authors noted the importance of future research exploring the teacher perceptions of other areas as well. Additional research studies have also singularly investigated components of perception. The researcher in the present study used case study design to examine teachers' perceptions of middle school students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards in parallel with the perceived influences of teacher and student relationships, instructional supports, teacher morale, and teacher expectations.

The chapter will provide an overview of and background of the problem. When investigating other qualitative case studies of similar topics, the researcher discovered that scholars evaluated only portions of this study's intended research focus. None of the studies thoroughly analyzed teacher perceptions of middle school students from varying socioeconomic student populations within the same geographic region meeting English Language Arts literacy standards. To explore teachers' perceptions of student achievement, the goal of the study was to build upon current research by adding this investigative, objective, and qualitative approach to previously unexplored aspects of the problem under investigation. The problem statement, purpose statement, and research questions are also aligned to show the importance of exploring teachers' perceptions of middle school students meeting English Language Arts literacy

standards. Finally, the research's methodology, design, terms, delimitations, limitations, and assumptions are outlined to provide a clear understanding that this qualitative case study pursued measures of research using core ethical and universal principles.

Background to the Problem

Teachers' perceptions of middle school students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards appear impacted by engaged and encouraging learning environments (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015; Hen & Sharabi-Nov, 2014; Rettig, 2016; Sabol & Pianta, 2012; Tschannen-Moran, 2014). As student learning outcomes increase, achievement gaps simultaneously minimize. Thus, teachers' perceptions of students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards were explored as the topic of study. First, the data of multiple research studies was reviewed in preparation for the present study in order to find the relevance to teachers' perceptions of students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards. This search repetitively highlighted four main focus areas—instructional support, student and teacher relationships, teacher morale, and teacher expectations.

Research surrounding instructional support illuminated the importance of collaboration amongst educators. Neumerski's (2013) research demonstrated that collaboration between special area educators, instructional coaches, and special education teachers was perceived to support both teacher and student successes. Collaboration has also been shown to provide another layer of support for behavioral support for students (Anderson, Turtura, & Parry, 2013). Finally, Joyce and Showers' (2002) work has shown that professional learning was perceived as an additional component of both instructional support and collaboration. The ability to gain content knowledge in a professional learning environment that embraces collaboration amongst

educators was found to support both student successes and school culture (Joyce & Showers, 2002).

Student and teacher relationships must be formed surrounding positive connections to support student learning (Brooks, Brooks, & Goldstein, 2012; Finn, 2012; Schoenbach, Greenleaf, & Murphy, 2012). Research studies found that socioeconomics, race, gender, and personality are perceived to affect student learning outcomes. Perceived discrimination was also found to affect academic efficacy (Wang & Huguley, 2012). Furthermore, the perception of behaviors may be perceived differently by educator and student. This magnifies the significance of clear expectations and communications between teachers and students.

The third area researched surrounded the topic of teacher morale. Research showed a parallel between low teacher morale and low student socioeconomics (Dunn, 2015; Grissom, Nicholson-Crotty, & Harrington, 2014; Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015; Waldron & McLeskey, 2010). The connection between teacher morale and student socioeconomics also highlighted teacher experience and training as an additional component. Educators with fewer years of experience and less teacher training or certification were compared with the educators with the lowest morale. Finally, schools with poor school climate and lacking teacher collaboration also had elevated levels of low teacher morale. The research found a perceived view that educators with low morale exhibit lacking the professional intrinsic motivation to facilitate instruction and form deep connections with learners. In return, teacher morale was found to influence student achievement.

The last area researched in the literature review focused on the perceived importance of teachers' expectations on student achievement. Teachers with high expectations correlate with higher student achievement than teachers with low expectations (Davies, 2012). In the review of

literature for the present study the researcher found multi-dimensional methods to exploring

teachers' expectations through social supports, teacher perceptions, student motivators, and

student perceptions (Wentzel, Baker, & Russell, 2012; Tyler & Boelter, 2008). The studies that

were reviewed reported a connection between an educator's expectations and student

achievement. Tyler and Boelter (2008) noted: "—how students perceive their teachers'

expectation for their classroom behavior is linked to …engagement" (p. 34). In return,

engagement is related to achievement. Thus, teachers' expectations impact middle school

teachers' perceptions of students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards.

Problem Statement

A data report by the 2015 National Assessment of Educational Progress's (NAEP)

indicated the gap for struggling readers in middle school is increasing; this study is significant to

the field of education (The National Center for Educational Statistics, 2015). According to the

National Center for Educational Statistics (2015), only 44% of students in grade eight are

proficient in reading. The national report card continued to show negative trends by noting the

drop in the overall average score of student scores in 2015, 2014, and 2013. Students are

students failing to meet comprehensive literacy standards; this study was guided by the following

research question: how do teachers perceive middle school students are meeting English

Language Arts literacy standards in middle school in southeastern Alabama?

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore teachers' perceptions of middle

school students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards. The goal of this case study

was to present a synthesis of information regarding the reasoning behind the middle school

teachers' perceptions. The research study uncovered areas that affect student achievement.

These areas include instructional supports, teacher expectations, student and teacher relationships, and teacher morale.

Research Question

This study focused on how teachers perceive middle school students are meeting English Language Arts literacy standards in southeastern Alabama. Data was gathered to answer the research question through three methods: interview, questionnaires, and field notes. The following research question guided the researcher to explore teacher perceptions of middle school students meeting English Language Arts Literacy standards:

1. How do teachers perceive middle school students are meeting English Language Arts literacy standards in middle school in southeastern Alabama?

Rationale for the Methodology

Qualitative research served as the category of research methodology for this study. The interpretation of persons and their environment describes the social inquiry elements of qualitative research. The research question for this study asked how teachers perceive middle school students are meeting English Language Arts literacy standards in southeastern Alabama. This qualitative case study took place at a local middle school in southeastern Alabama. The middle school serves students in grades six through eight. The middle school is a Title I school and serves a student population with a high poverty level. The middle school serves 91% at-risk, high poverty students. Most students are African-American or belong to an ethnic group. To better explore the teacher perceptions of students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards, the researcher identified well-defined boundaries for the case (Baxter & Jack, 2008). As noted by Yin (2016), research studies that explore situations have no clear, single set of outcomes.

This study focused on a specific phenomenon, i.e., the perception of the educators in the qualitative study). In the proposed study, it was anticipated that the patterns of the educators' perceptions around the teachers' expectations, the relationships with students, teachers' morale, and professional implementation of instructional supports would connect with the educators' perceived thoughts of the middle students in southeastern Alabama meeting English Language Arts literacy standards. Interviews, questionnaires, and field notes were utilized to examine the factors influencing the teachers' perceptions of students' achievement in Language Arts.

Research Design

Case study research endeavors to discover meaning and understanding about the individual, group, or situation in the research study.   In this research study, the perceptions of the educators involved, served as the phenomenon being explored. The study presents a pattern of the educators' perceptions that exist around the teachers' expectations, the relationships with students, teachers' morale, and professional implementation of instructional supports.

Interviews allowed the researcher to distinguish common classroom patterns, instructional practices, and strategies by comparing the data from each interview period.   Face-to-face interviews were used with the teachers in the case study.   The interviews were recorded and coded. The interviews utilized a questionnaire form. The interview questions were divided into three main categories: introductory, research, and closing.

Field notes allow researchers to document non-verbal communications, as well as documentation of the setting, behaviors, activities, and other engagement. Through field notes, researchers can draw interpretations about meanings and perspectives about others (Stake, 2010). During the study, the researcher assumed the role of the observer recording reflective field notes

that tracked the non-verbal cues. The field notes occurred in each of the English Language Arts interviews with the researcher as a silent observer for the entire documented session.

Research data was collected from participants from the local middle school by analyzing the teachers' responses to the questionnaires. The aim of the questionnaires was to gather data on the teachers' perceptions of students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards. The questions also explored if middle school teachers perceive instructional support, teacher expectations, student and teacher relationships, and teacher morale as impacting students meeting English Language Arts standards.

Vygotsky's (1978) cognitive development theory explained that the mastery of concepts is improved through enriched interactions. In return, such activities promote student academic efficacy. Problem-solving, cognitive development, and academic progression correlate directly to middle school students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards. Thus, the researcher in this study explored the teachers' perceptions of pupils as skillful and competent problem solvers.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms are defined.

Achievement gap is a barrier that exists for a learner or group of learners preventing consistently yearly and proficient mastery of grade-level standards (Kintsch & Vipond, 2014).

Comprehension is the process of understanding during reading. Comprehension involves a process of communication between the reader and the text (Kintsch & Vipond, 2014).

English Language Arts literacy standards encompass reading, writing, and language College and Career Ready Standards for the state of Alabama for middle school students (Kintsch & Vipond, 2014).

Fluency is the ability to read a text accurately and fluently (Kintsch & Vipond, 2014).

Highly Qualified Teacher defines a teacher in the state of Alabama who has met the following qualifications: holds a bachelor's degree from an accredited in-state four year college institution, passed the content Praxis test in the field area studied, completed the content-specific portfolio requirements, and passed the criminal background clearance (Alabama State Department of Education, 2016).

Instructional support is a variety of instructional approaches, scholastic services, or school resources provided to educators and students to positively impact student achievement (Joyce & Showers, 2002; Fullan, 2007).

Literacy refers to a middle school students' ability to read and convey written meaning (Joyce & Showers, 2002; Literacy How, 2016).

Title I School refers to a school that serves a minimum of 40% of low-income student population (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

The following assumptions are present for this qualitative case study:

1. It is assumed that all educators in the study answered all questionnaires truthfully and accurately. The participants were asked, to be honest with all answers and information. All participants were given complete confidentiality to support truthful responses.

2. It is assumed that all educators in the study responded to all interview questions with factual and precise responses. All participants were provided the purpose statement for the case study and disclose rights. All participants understood their rights and obligations for participating in the study.

The delimitations of this qualitative case study included defining the settings' location parameter. Delimitations consisted of a selection of a Title I middle school in southeastern Alabama serving the educational needs of students in a metropolitan city in grades six through eight. Additional delimitations defined in the parameters of the investigation included the selected population and instrumentation. Participants in the study included highly qualified teachers of the school as classified by the State of Alabama Department of Education. The educators included six English Language Arts literacy teachers, five special education collaborative teachers, and one reading intervention specialist. The study utilized the findings from teacher interviews, field notes, and questionnaires in southeastern Alabama during the 2016-2017 school year. Online questionnaires were the method used to collect teacher data from participating educators.

Limitations of this study consisted of evaluating online responses that may be limited regarding perception and thoroughness in completing the questions. Second, the researcher had a professional relationship with the educators in the study. As a result of these relationships, bias could have occurred but the researcher sought to control bias through the use of predetermined interviewed questions and pre-scheduled questionnaires formatted from a researched-based platform. The relational time existing between the teachers and students in the study is the third limitation. A component of the study's limitations involved the student and teacher relationship; taking into consideration the amount of time the relationship had to develop may limit the perceptions of the participants of the study. However, the use of other forms of data collections was implemented to improve validity, while limiting bias. These included member checking, field notes, and the collection of documents. Triangulation of multiple data sources supports increasing validity when obvious limitations are present (Yin, 2015).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore teachers' perceptions of middle school students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards. This study is relevant to the field of education because data showed there to be a clear achievement gap increasing in the middle grades. A data report by the 2015 National Assessment of Educational Progress's (NAEP) showed the gap for struggling readers in middle school is increasing (The National Center for Educational Statistics, 2015). Overall, eighth-grade students in the United States are not performing proficiently in reading. Specifically, according to reports provided by NAEP, 56% of pupils failed to meet the target level of proficiency in reading on the 2015 Reading Assessment. Furthermore, after analyzing the data provided by NAEP, the national average for students in the eighth grade fell by two points as compared to 2013. Also, students eligible for free lunch, students with disabilities, male students, female students, White students, Black students, and Hispanic students showed a decline in test scores as compared to the 2013 achievement test (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2015).

Reardon (2013) explained that middle school students in grades 6 through 8 are failing to meet literacy standards at increasing levels. According to Reardon, the implementation of comprehensive educational opportunities for all learners to "learn, develop, and thrive" must occur for educational settings to begin minimizing achievement gaps in the middle grades (p. 14). Joyce and Showers (2002) compliment Reardon's sentiments as the authors note, "…content of the highest quality must be implemented to change student learning" (p.13). They finalized their argument by noting that school-wide goals, staff development, and collaboration must correspond with quality instruction.

The goal of this chapter is to present a synthesis of information regarding the reasoning behind teachers' perceptions of middle school students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards. The researcher's review uncovered areas that effects student achievement. These areas include instructional supports, teacher expectations, student and teacher relationships, and teacher morale. These are the main subheadings and frames for the succeeding literature review.

The researcher's searched literature to find, analyze and describe information relating to teachers' perception of students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards. The surveyed literature uncovered factors relating to middle school teachers perception of students' achievement corresponding to four main areas. These include instructional supports, teacher expectations, student and teacher relationships, and teacher morale. Keyword searches utilized terminology such as middle school teachers' perceptions, student achievement, collaboration, special area educators, instructional coaches, professional learning, professional development, behavioral supports, teacher expectations, classroom culture, teacher morale, student expectations, school culture, racism, inequity, discrimination, and learning achievement gaps. A large variety of databases was utilized during the process, including ERIC, Google Scholar, Concordia University's Online Library, Education Research Complete, and ProQuest.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore teachers' perceptions of students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards at a local middle school in southeastern Alabama. An educator's awareness, insight, observation, view, and opinion by which one extracts meaningful information defines a teacher's perception (National Education Association, 2016). Literacy refers to a middle school students' ability to read and convey written meaning (Joyce & Showers, 2002; Literacy How, 2016). Last, the achievement gap

signifies that a barrier exists for a learner or group of learners circumventing consistently yearly and proficient mastery of grade-level standards.

Background to the Problem

Throughout the literature review, teachers' perceptions of middle school students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards appeared to be impacted by engaged, supportive, cooperative educational environments (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015; Hen & Sharabi-Nov, 2014; Rettig, 2016; Sabol & Pianta, 2012; Tschannen-Moran, 2014). As student learning outcomes increase, achievement gaps minimize. Thus, teachers' perceptions of students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards were explored as the topic of study. First, the data of multiple research studies was reviewed to find the relevance to teachers' perceptions of students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards. This search illuminated repetitively four main focus areas – instructional support, student and teacher relationships, teacher morale, and teacher expectations.

When examining the perceived impact of instructional supports, various educational tiers of collaboration were highlighted in the research. Initially, the significant impacts of behavioral supports on student achievement as perceived by educators were explored by the researcher (Anderson, Turtura, & Parry, 2013; Flannery, Frank, Kato, Doren, & Fenning, 2011; Simonsen, Myers, & Briere, 2011). The review of the literature found progressive student achievement gains and learning outcomes when reinforced by positive behavior (Anderson et al., 2013; Simonsen et al., 2011). The significance of setting a consistent tone of expectations that includes respect, resourcefulness, and responsibility to all students and staff members at the beginning of a school year establishes supportive team building that is aligned to a mission of student achievement.

Next, the review of the literature found that collaboration between teachers and instructional coaches maintains a fundamental role in refining instructional practices and student learning outcomes (Neumerski, 2013; Marsh & Farrell, 2015). Collaboration among special education teachers, general education teachers, instructional coaches, special area teachers, and community members was perceived to positively impact student achievement (Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010). Coaches are problem solvers, collaborators, teacher leaders, mentors, and agents of data analysis. The perceived impact of the coaches on student achievement was transcribed as a positive interaction. Friend et al. (2010) discussed the perception that collaboration with special area educators impacts student learning outcomes and achievement. According to a collaborative article by Friend et al. (2010), "…ultimately, co-teaching stands as a metaphor for the profound transition occurring currently in education, that is, the blurring of traditional boundaries that separated students who experience significant difficulty in learning from their peers and the recognition that two systems—general education and special education—may not work in the best interests of maximizing student achievement and other outcomes" (p. 23). Instructional coaches, special area educators, and special education teachers collaborating alongside the general education teacher have the ability to make a positive impact on student achievement. The opportunity to provide new strategies, facilitation of additional interventions, opportunities for extra behavioral support for learners, data analysis, and professional learning communities were a few of the benefits of the collaborative efforts amongst the educators. In the end, students' achievement and educators' professional knowledge increased from such collaboration.

The last part of instructional support included literature revolving around the area of professional learning and cooperative learning. The impacts of cooperative learning on student

learning outcomes revealed that teacher effectiveness and cooperative learning connect to impact student learning outcomes (Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Gillies & Boyle, 2011; Lakshmanan, Heath, Perlmutter, and Elder, 2011). Cooperative learning amongst students provides learners the opportunity to engage, explore, and think out of the box. Rigor, scaffolding, and even interventive teaching methods are enhanced through the utilization of cooperative learning. Peer behavior interaction is also reinforced through cooperative learning. Strong classroom management and clear student expectations must be outlined for cooperative learning to be successful in the classroom.

The review of research also presented a need for professional learning while implementing cooperative learning in the classroom. School settings that focus on cooperative learning impact student achievement positively while minimizing the effects of achievement gaps (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). Finally, by examining the impact of a teacher's content knowledge on student learning, connections with research were formed to show the perception that professional development impacts teacher training, teacher quality, teacher efficacy, and student achievement (Postholm, 2012; Harris & Sass, 2011; Sailors & Price, 2010). The research literature highlighted professional learning and professional development as two different entities. Professional learning involved teachers actively engaged in the professional practice (Joyce & Showers, 2002). The practice offers a 95% greater chance of implementation of learning to practice than professional development (Joyce & Showers, 2002). Professional learning embedded into the classroom experience provides the educator with the opportunity for the learning to have meaning. Such professional learning also combines for a collaborative culture to exist in the classroom between the general education teacher and another special area educator, instructional coach, special education teacher, or teacher leader. The professional

learning community provides a direct relationship for increasing teacher efficacy and student achievement.

After examining the research literature the perceived impact of instructional supports, the researcher reviewed the perceived impression of the student and teacher relationship. The impact of the student and teacher relationship on student achievement yielded the ideology that socioeconomics, race, gender, and personality differences affected student learning outcomes. Overall, the literature showcased the importance of forming positive connections with the learner (Brooks, Brooks, and Goldstein, 2012; Finn, 2012; Schoenbach, Greenleaf, & Murphy, 2012). The texts and guidebooks shared teacher perspectives, strategies, documentaries, and student testimonies from individuals of different races, genders, and socioeconomics. Students and teachers often perceive exhibited behaviors differently. Thus, students may perceive bias and discrimination; in return, the student and teacher relationship is misinterpreted because of differing teacher and student perceptions. Academic efficacy is also not achieved. Clear expectations and communications may correct such situations. The analyzed literature showed a relationship between teachers' perceptions of academic engagement, effectiveness, and achievement and the teachers' relationships with students. The data analysis also concluded perceived student discrimination (gender, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomics), students' and teachers' perceptions vary, and communication is vital because the teacher and student relationship impacts students' learning outcomes. Classroom settings with clear expectations provide learners with avenues to communicate and learn successfully.

The third area of the literature review involved investigating the impact of teacher morale on middle school students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards. The case studies' data found that educational settings with low socioeconomic student populations, teacher morale

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were low (Dunn, 2015; Grissom, Nicholson-Crotty, & Harrington, 2014; Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015; Waldron & McLeskey, 2010). In return, poor teacher morale is highest with educators with the least teaching experience, collegiate degrees, and less access to quality professional learning. Furthermore, peer teacher collaboration was another factor on the level of satisfaction with regards to teacher morale. Researchers discovered the importance collaboration plays when examining the impacts of teacher morale on student achievement by compiling socioeconomics, teaching experience, and school climate. Teamwork significantly affects teacher morale; teacher morale impacts student achievement.

Finally, the review of the impact of teachers' expectation on middle school students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards found a correlation between expectations and student achievement. Teachers with high expectations correlate with higher student achievement than teachers with low expectations (Davies, 2012). The review of the literature found multi-dimensional methods to exploring teacher expectations through social supports, teacher perceptions, student motivators, and student perceptions (Wentzel, Baker, & Russell, 2012; Tyler & Boelter, 2008). The studies reported a correlation between an educator's expectations and student achievement. Student achievement and "—how students perceive their teachers' expectation for their classroom behavior is linked to engagement" (Tyler and Boelter, 2008, p.34). Teachers' expectations impact middle school teachers' perceptions of students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards.

The researcher discovered abnormalities when reviewing the research literature. Yin (2016) advised that researchers utilize triangulation. Anderson et al. (2013) conducted a case study to investigate the perceived impact of behavioral supports. However, the research failed to employ triangulation. Observations and data were the only items supplied in the research study.

Also, a similar research case study completed by Simonsen et al. (2011), denoted that statistically significant differences were detected for methodological or observational data of classroom behavior; however, statistically significant differences were not confirmed by the rating scale data. Also, while investigating the impact of collaboration on student learning outcomes, Marsh et al. (2015) summarized that although the results of the study portrayed a positive perception between the collaboration between instruction coaches and teachers, the study failed to analyze teacher practice, coach experience, or the growth of the relationship. The case study completed by Eccles and Roeser (2011) focused on the perceived impacts of cooperative learning; however, the methodology reflected issues with implementation. Eccles and Roesner's study showed that teacher perceptions revealed a greater need for professional learning. This was a contradictory statement from the data documented in the study (Eccles & Roeser, 2011).

In summary, when investigating the qualitative case studies noted above, scholars evaluated only portions of this researcher's intended research focus. None of the studies thoroughly analyzed teachers' perceptions of middle school students from varying socioeconomic student populations within the same geographic region meeting English Language Arts literacy standards. To explore teachers' perceptions of student achievement, the goal of the study was to build upon current research by adding this investigative, objective, and qualitative approach to research.

Conceptual Framework

In this qualitative case study, the researcher sought to explore middle school teachers' perceptions about students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards. The theories of perception connect strongly with achievement (Neisser, 1976). Vygotsky's (1978) theory frames

the intent of the study by addressing the way students learn, and educators teach. The

perceptions of Woolfook (2007) and the elements of Parsons' Social Support System (1951)

were also utilized to form the frame for middle school teachers' perceptions of students meeting

English Language Arts Literacy standards.

Cognitive Learning Theory. The manner in which students think and the social context

of learning to play is noted by Vygotsky (1978). The theme of Vygotsky's theoretical framework

is that social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition. Included in

this exchange of meaning is peer interaction, student and teacher interaction, and colleague

interaction. Vygotsky (1978) stated,

Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level,

and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the

child (intrapsychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to

the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relationships between

individuals. (p. 57).

Vygotsky's cognitive learning theory described the significant role of language and

collaboration in understanding and perception. According to Vygotsky's theory, collaborative

learning environments that provide authentic opportunities for cooperative learning impact

cognition. Thus, students' academic success is impacted by a social context. Also, Vygotsky

(1978) explained the connection between an individual's belief and action. Some cognitive

theorists also ascertain that people form their realities because of perception (Greenberg,

Westcott, & Bailey, 1998; Horner, Guyer, & Kalter, 1993; Inkpen & Crossan, 2007; O'Brien,

2005). Therefore, one might presume that how teachers perceive middle school students are

meeting English Language Arts Literacy standards influence the professional actions and sentiments of the educators. This study explored the validity of this assumption.

The zone of proximal development was also identified by Vygotsky (1978) as the following:

the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (p. 86).

According to the cognitive development theory, the mastery of concepts improves through enriched interactions. In return, the activities promote student academic growth. A main priority of teachers is to provide thought-provoking, scaffolding, and engaging dialogue for learners. The constructivist approach provides learners with the stability and sophistication for successful communication of working collaboratively. Classroom settings that provide this type of positive approach allow students to develop effective academic dispositions and habits while becoming active participants in the learning process. Language is regarded as the most valuable in educational development amongst social constructivists. An individual's ability to articulate ideas by engaging in dialogue with others, including peers, teachers, and parents, using prior knowledge is the foundation for making meaningful discussion. Vygotsky ascertained that learning is a process that is constructive and active. In classroom settings with clear communications and consistent, active discussions between learners and teachers, students become engaged, independent, and successful learners. Problem-solving, cognitive development, and academic growth correlate directly to middle school students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards. Thus, the exploration of teachers' perceptions of pupils as capable and independent problem solvers occurred in this research study. The researcher applied

Vygotsky's core layers of *What I can't do, What I can do with help, and What I can do* to the teachers' perceptions of middle school students meeting English Language Arts Literacy Standards (Vygotsky, 1978).

       Perception. One interpretation of learning was presented by Woolfolk (2007). According to Woolfolk, cognition and understanding are learned and as knowledge grows so does the behavior. Background knowledge is the basis and platform for building future learning. This "determines to a great extent what we will pay attention to, perceive, learn, remember, and forget" (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, cited in Woolfolk, 2007, p. 249). Woolfolk (2007) defined perception as "the process of detecting a stimulus and assigning meaning to it" (p. 251). This definition utilizes the concept of prior knowledge driving an individual's current learning environment or situation. Neisser (1976) described a similar cycle between environment, experience, and perception. An educator's facilitation of instruction, practice, actions, and experiences are derived from personal and practical knowledge (Clandinin,1985; Connelly & Clandinin, 1984, 1985; Connelly & Diennes, 1982). Blending one's background knowledge, personal character traits, and content expertise connects present and future opportunities for professional experience growth (Clandinin, 1985). An educator's perception of professional self-image, specialized roles, students, and schools impact actions, knowledge, and thinking (Connelly & Diennes, 1982).

       Also, Parsons (1951) researched school settings' organizational structure and school climate. Parson's Social System Perspective adds a theoretical dimension to the framework. According to Parsons, school organizations contain three levels of social systems—technical, managerial, and institutional. The technical field encompasses the instructional practices of the establishment. This level's focus includes academic expectations, facilitation of instruction,

collaboration, school spirit, and teacher and student relationships. Next, the managerial level

includes the administrative staff and resources of the school. Parsons noted that this level's

authority impacts the school's culture, teacher morale, collaboration, and support. The

institutional level concentrates on the connections between the community and the school.

Conceptualizing educator's knowledge, impacts, roles, and perceptions provide such foundation

for influencing professional educators' growth while promoting positive student achievement

gains (Clandinin, 1985).

This qualitative case study explored teachers' perceptions of middle school students

meeting English Language Arts literacy standards. Combining the contexts of Vygotsky's

(1978) constructivist approach of dialogue, communication, collaboration, expectations, and

language with the perceptions of Woolfolk (2007), and the impacts of morale and culture as

noted by Parsons (1951), the objective of this study was to analyze the middle school educators'

perceptions of students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards.

Review of Literature

The review of research has determined the main areas that impact middle school students

meeting English Language Arts literacy standards in Alabama. These areas included the need

for instructional supports, teacher expectations, teacher morale, and the teacher and student

relationship. The following synthesis of research findings shows a division of each within the

literature review as each impacts student learning in middle school English Language Arts.

Instructional supports. Instructional supports for educators cover a vast array of items.

Joyce and Showers (2002) explained that implementing a school culture and climate of

collaboration that guarantees all teachers attain the professional level that affords all learners

with the skilled facilitation of instruction is vital for positively impacting student achievement. A

variety of instructional approaches, scholastic services, or school resources provided to educators and students to positively impact student achievement references the term instructional support. The instructional approaches provided educators with collaborative, professional learning communities.

Professional learning communities involving collaboration, collaboration among teachers, and student behavior and academic supports impact student achievement (Anderson et al., 2013; Fullan, 2014; Lynch, Lerner, and Leventh, 2013; Joyce & Showers, 2002; Ruiz-Esparza Barajas, 2016). Thus, the following areas will be included in this section of the literature review:

1. Professional development and professional learning

2. Instructional coaches

3. Collaboration with special area educators

4. Behavioral supports

5. Academic intervention supports

Boud and Hager (2012) explained that professional development and professional learning are two different entities. Professional learning encompasses active learning in the educational setting; whereas, professional development removes the educator from the classroom to facilitate training in another location. Sabol and Pianta (2012) stated that teacher efficacy is associated with teacher professional learning opportunities when involvements provide situations embedded in the sense of mastery for the educator. The professional learning allows the teacher with a rise in professional competence and improvement in the facilitation of instructional method or strategy. Ruiz-Esparza Barajas (2016) stated that through efficient, professional

learning opportunities, educators are afforded the possibility to impact student learning outcomes.

Effectual professional learning is a continuous progression. Teachers gain vast professional rewards from others' experiences, given an opportunity to do so. Educators need continued professional learning to grow, observe effective teaching practices, share instructional strategies, provide feedback, and collaborate (Ruiz-Esparza Barajas, 2016). Professional learning opportunities allow educators these components while enriching the perception of students meeting standards.

Joyce and Showers (2002) shared that the opportunity to improve an educator's learning and growth is present through professional development. However, the authors continued by explaining that professional learning outcomes that impact teacher development and student learning outcomes must include theory, demonstration, practice, and coaching. The idea of transferring learned theory to practice is research that Joyce and Showers reported on in earlier studies in 1980 and 1982. Also, Joyce and Showers' research (2002, 1982) provided the following summarized purposes for coaching:

1. establishing collaboration and forming relationships or connections

2. providing methodological feedback

3. investigation of the skills, theory, or strategy learned through coaching or professional learning

4. adjusting new knowledge to meet the responses and needs of the learners

5. practice or facilitation of new learning

The practice and impact of coaching embedded into educational establishments maintain the opportunity to affect the facilitation of instruction. According to the authors, coaching

influences educators' practice, application, and mastery of professional development theory elements by 95%. Hence, an educator's confidence of his or her facilitation of instruction, through the support of coaching, transfers as a perceived constructive impact on students meeting English Language Arts standards in middle school while working to reduce achievement gaps in literacy.

Also, Ruiz-Esparza Barajas (2016) explained that teacher collaboration is one of the most vital and fundamental areas of education. According to the authors, collaboration amongst educators from varying areas of expertise fosters school culture. Learning communities promote continued educator growth, trust, and knowledge (Fullan, 2014). In return, student learning and achievement are impacted positively.

Moolenaar, Sleegers, and Daly (2012) described the collaboration between special area educators and classroom teachers as a method to partnering to meet the needs of a diverse group of learners. This point of view was also implemented by Cochran-Smith and Dudley-Marling (2012) and Friend et al. (2010) as alternate methods for teaching special needs learners and gifted students.   Regardless of the type of individual learner, as pointed out by Friend et al. (2010), it is essential for a close professional connection and partnership to be formed between the educators so that the different expertise can be utilized and maximized to the fullest potentials. This will reinforce the greatest results' potential for effecting positive student learning outcomes and minimizing learners' achievement gaps.

Student efforts to withdraw from academic tasks, classroom engagement activities, learning, and support systems reference instructional avoidance (Li & Lerner, 2011). Instructional avoidance is perceived to impact middle school students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards. According to research, instructional avoidance was documented as the

primary justification for behavioral support (Anderson et al., 2013). Anderson et al. (2013) further documented that providing time management resources for students, tutorial services, and school-wide interventions that provide additional academic assistance to students have been shown to alleviate behavioral needs in learners. An essential element of intervention is instruction; specifically, Tier II interventions enrich the facilitation of teaching delivered at Tier I by providing personalized instruction based on the needs of the individual learners. Thus, interventions intended to redirect work avoidance must offer complementary instruction pertinent to educational engagement. However, in situations where additional behavioral supports are essential, data must lead all decision-making processes (Benner, Kutash, Nelson, & Fisher, 2013).

In addition, Lynch, Lerner, and Leventhal (2013) researched the students' perceptions of behavior in comparison to engagement in school. Specifically, Lynch, Lerner, and Leventhal noted negative school climate with characteristics similar to injustice, aggression, and victimization. The final data revealed a similar association connecting negative school climate and students perceiving low school engagement. Also, the results of the research concluded that educational settings with a lower perceived adverse environment had a higher perceived school engagement. In general, an association can be reached to combine a connection linking the need for behavioral support as it impacts student learning outcome. The way that students perceive the educational environments that surround them influences their performance and achievement. In return, teachers' perceptions of middle school students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards are influenced (Lynch, Lerner, and Leventhal, 2013).

Teacher expectations. Teachers' perceptions of students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards form direct connections to teachers' expectations (Davies, 2012). Teacher expectations are also a vital component of student achievement (Davies, 2012, Südkamp, Kaiser, & Möller, 2012; Tyler & Boelter, 2008). Educators with a melded level of expectations (high expectations for some students and low expectations for other students) direct students to perceiving a difference based on student characteristics (Davies, 2012). However, linking teachers' expectations to students' performance outcomes were initially undertaken by researchers Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968). Their work showed that positive teacher expectations associated with performance gains, and negative teacher expectations resulted in academic difficulty. Merton's (1948) literature on teacher expectations suggested that if a teacher has high expectations for students, then he or she is likely to create a more productive climate and thus facilitates academic success (Goldenberg, 2013).

Tyler and Boelter (2008) recognized the work of Gay (2000) by citing that the issue of students underperforming is related to self-efficacy. However, teacher expectations and teacher and student relationships can positively affect student's self-belief; thus, promoting academic achievement. This is evident through Tyler and Boelter's 2008 study that revealed a statistical significance between teachers' perceptions and students' cognitive, behavioral, and emotional engagement. The authors researched the theory through a random sampling of high at-risk, low socioeconomic middle school pupils in the sixth, seventh and eighth grades. The study documented the perceived correlation between teacher expectations with academic efficacy and academic engagement. To ensure validity, variables for students' perceptions and teachers' practices were measured using subscales to make sure that the tiered regression analysis was not flawed.

A primarily low socioeconomic and at-risk middle school served as the location for the research center for this study (Tyler & Boelter, 2008). The study utilized random sampling of students from 262 schools in the southeastern United States. Data showed that 93% of the sixth, seventh, and eighth-grade students were black, and 87% qualified for free or reduced lunch. According to the study, gender, grade level, and race did not statistically affect teacher expectations. The study revealed a statistical significance between teachers' perceptions and students' cognitive, behavioral, and emotional engagement.

Also, the study's results followed the same research pattern as previous researchers. Südkamp, Kaiser, and Möller (2012) and Francis (2012) stated that elevated educator expectations connect with prime scholastic performance (Tyler & Boelter, 2008). In Tyler and Boelter's 2008 study, "…perceived teacher expectation emerged as a significant predictor of students' academic efficacy and each form of academic engagement" (p. 27). In the end, Tyler and Boelter were able to affirm that when teachers with low student expectations believe a student may have difficulty on academic tasks, they will be disinclined to offer more challenging work to him or her. Also, the teacher with low student expectations may create a less congenial classroom learning environment. Thus, teacher expectations play an integral role in bridging achievement gaps and influencing student outcomes because "affective qualities of teacher-student relationships and students' school engagement and achievement" are statistically significant (Roorda et. al, 2011, p. 1).

Research by Glock, Krolak-Schwerdt, Klapproth, and Böhmer (2013) showed that students of ethnic minority groups are at risk for school failure, teacher bias, negative, and teacher expectations due to less than positive academic profiles. Such stereotypical referencing of ethnic background in educational settings is a perception that Fiske and Neuberg (1990) and

Lepore and Brown (1997) originated as influencing teachers' judgments and in return, students' behaviors. Thus, teachers' expectations can affect the individuals of student groups. Such favor can either support or diminish the achievement gap of students from various ethnic backgrounds (Glock, Krolak-Schwerdt, Klapproth, & Böhmer, 2013).

In a study performed by van den Bergh (2010), 434 students' achievement scores and some teachers' expectations were investigated. The study found a relationship between varying teacher expectations and achievement gaps with ethnic minority groups. Furthermore, a teacher's level of expectations of a student from an ethnic minority group was shown to vary substantially. By reviewing the data, van den Bergh (2010) explained "the significant influence of the cross-level interactions between implicit teacher prejudiced attitudes and student ethnicity on the academic achievement of students suggests that the differences in student achievement will be relatively larger in those classrooms where the teacher holds more negative attitudes toward ethnic minorities than in other classrooms. That is, the implicitly prejudiced attitudes of teachers clearly appear to influence the association between student ethnicity and academic achievement" (p. 516).

Also, Davies (2012) performed a research study that investigated the perceived implications of teacher expectations on student performance. The study corroborates the findings of Glock, Krolak-Schwerdt, Klapproth, and Böhmer (2013) and van den Bergh (2010). Davies found a direct correlation between teachers with high expectations and positive outcomes and teachers with low expectations and negative outcomes. Of the 220 students, six of the teachers were found to have high expectations and three low expectations. The teacher ratings of the high expectation teachers were concurrently parallel with the students with the highest achievement scores. Davies' research supports the perception that teachers' expectations impact

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students' learning outcomes and achievement disparities while relating to varying teachers' principles and qualities.

Furthermore, the role of a teacher as a motivator and the influence of such on student support and achievement applies to the perceived impact of middle school students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards (Noddings, 2015; Wentzel et al., 2012). Wentzel et al. (2012) examined middle school students to investigate the perceptions of teacher support on academic outcomes. In the study, a relationship appeared between the source of the support and the level of assistance. Being a teacher has much to do with efficiency, understanding of present research, and facilitating instruction utilizing numerous perceptions. Contrastingly, educators are likely to possess specific perceptions of the students that they educate based on characteristics and socioeconomics (Ryan, Ensminger, Heineke, Kennedy, Prasse, & Smetana, 2014). Such effects impact the evaluation of students and the student and teacher relationship due to the student's perceived lack of care. Noddings (2015) proposed that caring is a fundamental requirement in relationships needed to foster all members' perspectives. Beyond possessing a caring attitude and maintaining high expectations, students also signify that caring teachers are those who provide constructive feedback (Wentzel, 2012). Thus, the cooperative influences of educators directly impact the learning outcomes and achievement goals of students.

The effects of teachers' expectations on student learning outcomes in educational settings with high populations of high at-risk learners are found, by research, to be influential. The terminology at-risk, in this situation, references at-risk of academic failure due to underperformance and non-mastery of literacy standards. Balfanz, Byrnes, and Fox (2015) suggested that students with low socioeconomics are at a greater risk of academic failure than their counterparts. The authors proclaimed that students of low socioeconomic status

characteristically do not respond to the standards that bind traditional classroom settings. Furthermore, it is suggested that motivating this classification of underserved students with high teacher expectations that encompass personal, social, and emotional student growth is essential. Teachers' perceptions of middle school students meeting English Language Arts' standards in low socioeconomic areas appear reduced in comparison to those of traditional classroom settings (Balfanz, Byrnes, & Fox, 2015).

Teacher morale. According to Miller, Kuykendall, and Thomas (2013), educational settings with high student populations of low socioeconomic status have lower teacher perceptions. The researchers' data shows the reductions of the positive perceptions of the educators. This is in regards to morale, students' academic performance, communication, and parental involvement as compared to other settings.

Also, Dunn (2015) completed research focusing on teacher morale. Dunn's data showed that teachers with less than five years of teaching experience, teachers with only a Bachelor's degree, and secondary teachers had the lowest teacher morale. Furthermore, the study compared the perceptions of the educators' beliefs and attributes towards high stakes testing. The secondary teachers scored higher on only seven of the 21 attributes. According to Dunn, the effects of low teacher morale negatively impacted the perception of student achievement.

Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) also focused on teacher morale impacting student achievement; however, the scholar took a slightly different approach. The researcher approached the topic by analyzing how a school's culture affects an educator's morale. Per Gruenert and Whitaker (2015), a school climate that supports unity, sharing, teamwork, and collaboration calculates to a result of high-quality instruction impacting student learning. The authors'

approach and research portrayed the perception and impact of a positive school culture on students meeting literacy standards or diminishing achievement disproportions.

According to Rettig (2016) and Marsh, Waniganayake, and De Nobile, (2016), educational leaders influence teacher morale of the teachers in schools. The researchers supported teacher empowerment as an essential method of improving teacher morale. Rettig (2016) and Marsh et al. (2016) also see the empowerment of teachers as a means of fostering communication, improving school culture, enhancing teacher morale, and enriching student achievement. Together the researchers' works formed the theory that empowered teachers equate to inspired educators. The researchers also perceived that settings with encouraged and invested professionals reach a higher degree of students attaining mastery of content standards while decreasing achievement inequalities.

Another area that affects a teacher's effectiveness and professional gratification is the educator's perceived feeling of stress (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). This research also connects the motivation and commitment of teaching to student achievement. Kelm and McIntosh (2012) explained that perceived high teacher value, elevated staff morale, minimal educator stress equated to a greater perceived level of student learning outcomes.

Finally, Collie, Shapka, and Perry (2012) and Hen and Sharabi-Nov (2014) explained the impact of teacher morale on student achievement. According to the researchers, if an educator possesses supportive student and teacher relationships and classroom culture then the teacher will have positive job satisfaction, effective teaching and learning opportunities, and high teacher morale. The authors continued by equating these characteristics to impact a positive association to student achievement. Teachers' perceptions of students meeting English Language Arts

standards in middle school were influenced by the morale of the educator (Kelm & McIntosh, 2012; Collie et al., 2012; Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015; Hen and Sharabi-Nov, 2014).

Student and teacher relationship. The teacher and student relationship is key to successful learning. Most theories of motivation hypothesize connections between the importance of the educator playing a central role as a motivator to the student (Brooks, Brooks, & Goldstein, 2012). The authors also illustrated the essentialness of the teacher as a positive and inspiring guide to adolescents when comprehension difficulties are present. By providing students with clear strategies and goals, educators afford students with an improved connection, personal connection, and more successful learning experience.

Furthermore, additional research on student and teacher relationships and the impact of literacy instruction has shown that teachers contribute to adolescents' sense of competence and self-worth when the educator can convince the student that they care about him or her as an individual and want him or her to learn (Corkett, Hatt, & Benevides, 2011). According to Dotterer and Lowe, K. (2011), adolescents which have encouraging, caring, mentor-like connections at school are more engaged in school and less likely to participate in criminal or neglectful behaviors. Likewise, research studying teacher and student relationships found that adolescents that positively perceive teachers, also have more positive opinions of the school environment, and recount reduced levels of negligence (Wit, Karioja, Rye, & Shain, 2011).

Finn (2012), a Chicago educator, spent much time exploring the perceptions of teachers and students alike. According to Finn, two varying types of education exist:

First, there is empowering education, which leads to powerful literacy, the kind of literacy that leads to positions of power and authority. Second, there is domesticating

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education, which leads to functional literacy, or literacy that makes a person productive and dependable, but not troublesome" (pp. ix-x).

Schoenback et al. (2012) also discussed this topic and shared a statement made by a student to a crowd of educators.

> We know we aren't very well educated. We know there are things we should know by now that we don't. But we're not stupid; most of us are really smart. You just need to show us, break it down for us, work with us and expect us to do it. (Schoenback et al., 2012, p. 10)

Thus, if a student believes in his or her abilities, the task becomes more meaningful and easier to master. The teacher and student relationship also flourishes because the educator has taken the time to build a bridge connecting the student to believe in himself or herself while knowing the teacher also believes in him or her (Finn, 2012).

Also, Hall, Burns, and Edwards (2011) completed a case study of three struggling readers. The learners were in grades sixth, seventh, and eighth, respectively. The case study addressed the influences of student motivation in regards to reading. The research study showed that student engagement affected student's perception of ability and academic desires. The work also noted that the connections and relationships educators in the case study were influenced by their perceptions of the students' academic strengths and weaknesses and the perceived teacher motivations by the students. In the end, the researchers formed two concluding suppositions from the study. Struggling students, often with negative self-views, attempt to locate ways to understand difficult text. Also, teachers' perceptions of struggling readers have a greater impact on student learning outcomes than instructional strategy or method.

Another component of the teacher and student relationship that is vital is clear

communication. Recognizing the fact that often perceptions of events and relationships vary

among individuals, Bohlmann and Weinstein (2013) discussed the reasoning and purpose for

studying the student perception of teachers. The author explained that often students perceive

the teacher and student relationship differently that the teacher. In return, the student's analysis

is the foundation for the behaviors and academic performances that they exhibit in the classroom.

Teachers relate that students meeting content standards are impacted by the social realm of the

teacher and student relationship; to connect with the learner in positive manners outside

academic standards provides the opportunity for depth to enter the relationship (Bohlmann &

Weinstein, 2013).

In addition, Wentzel (2016) researched the perceived qualities of a caring teacher. In the

study, teachers were seen as caring by their pupils with two primary attributes. These included

academic rigor and interpersonal skills. Student ranked the educators that were perceived to

maintain high educational standards, while communicating on an interpersonal level, at the

highest levels. The teacher and student relationships in these studies showed positive growth as

students were encouraged, motivated, and pressed scholastically, emotionally, and communally.

As the teacher and student relationship developed, teachers' perceptions of students meeting

English Language Arts literacy standards and closing achievement gaps accelerated as the

pupils' perceptions of the educators also developed.

In conclusion, the success of any relationship is dependent upon successful

communication; the teacher and student relationship is not of exception (Sabol & Pianta, 2012).

The authors explained the importance of communication and the impact of clear communication

on the teacher and student relationship. According to the Sabol and Pianta (2012),

miscommunication patterns between the two parties often result in a miscalculated perception of uncaring on the part of the educator, especially in situations when socioeconomic and/or cultural diversity characteristics separate the teacher and student. A cultural division between the average learner and educator in the United States appears to mark a trend. Thus, the vitality of clear, caring communication patterns that are culturally sensitive is crucial as these are deemed to impact the perception of students meeting learning standards and outcomes.

Chapter 2 Summary

The focus of this qualitative case study was to explore teachers' perceptions of how middle school teachers perceive students are meeting English Language Arts literacy standards. Data was collected through analysis of interviews, field notes, and questionnaires. Teachers perceived a direct link between four main categories and student achievement in literacy. These areas included the following: instructional support, teacher expectations, teacher morale, and students' and teachers' expectations.

Instructional support explains a greater need for behavioral supports, collaboration, cooperative learning, and developmental learning. Literature documented that professional development, special area educators, instructional coaches, and intervention support positively related to teacher perceptions of students meeting literacy standards (Fullan, 2014; Joyce & Showers, 2002; Ruiz-Esparza Barajas). Next, teachers' expectations influenced much more than classroom culture (van den Bergh, 2010). Also, according to research, classroom culture interchangeably affected student achievement in literacy (Roorda et. al, 2011). Furthermore, research suggests that teacher and student relationships also predicted literacy achievement gaps and connected teachers' perceptions of students meeting English Language Arts literacy

standards (Davies, 2012; Francis, 2012; Südkamp, Kaiser, & Möller, 2012; Tyler & Boelter, 2008).

The perceived impact of teacher morale on student literacy achievement indicated the connections between the two entities (Dunn, 2015; Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015; Rettig, 2016; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Hen and Sharabi-Nov, 2014). According to research, an educator's experience level correlated to the professional's morale while simultaneously impacting students meeting content standards (Dunn, 2015). Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) and Miller, Kuykendall, and Thomas (2013) described how low socioeconomic status related to lower teacher perceptions; school climate transferred to low perceptions of students meeting standards. Moreover, teacher empowerment proves a technique of improving teacher morale for educational settings of all types (Rettig, 2016; Marsh et al., 2016). School settings that fostered teacher empowerment maintained active communication, enhanced school culture, and augment student achievement. Empowered educators translated to greater teacher perceptions of students meeting English Language Arts' Literacy standards (Tschannen-Moran, 204).

Research also showed that student and teacher relationships impacted student achievement (Brooks et al., 2012; Corkett et al., 2011; Finn, 2012; Weinstein, 2012; Sabol & Pianta, 2012; Wentzel, 2016). Also, Brooks et al. (2012), Corkett et al. (2011), and Finn (2012) illustrated the essentialness of the teacher as a positive and inspiring guide to adolescents when comprehension difficulties are present. Hall, Burns, and Edwards (2011) and Bohlman and Weinstein (2013) explained the connection between teachers' perceptions and students' academic and behavioral performances - positive teacher and student relationship promoted higher student academic discourse and rigor. Furthermore, this research supported the interpersonal relationships and perceived qualities of a caring teacher that positively impact

student achievement (Wentzel, 2016). Teacher and student relationships correlated to teachers'

perceptions of middle school students meeting English Language Arts' standards (Wit et al.,

2011).

Conclusively, clear communication linked all components of the research review analysis

(Noddings, 2015). As noted by Neumerski (2013) and Marsh and Farrell (2015), a separation

between the typical pupil and teacher in the United States appeared to characterize the

development of miscommunication. To meet the needs of all learners, the perception that all

students in the classroom are equal members of the academic establishment is essential (Tyler &

Boelter, 2008). Instructional supports, teacher expectations, teacher morale, and the teacher and

student relationship are essential components of student learning; together a compiled list is

formed of teachers' perceived impacts of students meeting English Language Arts literacy

standards.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This qualitative case study was based on the premise that teacher perception of middle school students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards is effected by instructional supports, teacher morale, the teacher and student relationship, and teacher expectations. As such, teachers' perceptions of students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards in southeastern Alabama was the focus of this study. The English Language Arts (ELA) standards for the state of Alabama are comprised of the following four areas: reading, speaking and listening, language, and writing (Alabama State Department of Education, 2017). The standards are developed as a continual growing foundation for students in English Language Arts each year and are equally distributed throughout course of study per grade level. Each grade level's standards begins with a abstract that describes for teachers the importance of skill development and reading readiness. The standard guides also lists for Alabama's educators a reminder that "all students will graduate college or career ready" by having "engaging," "rigorous," and "relevant" "relationships" (Alabama State Department of Education, 2017). This chapter will include an in-depth description of the data collection and data analysis of this qualitative case study. Data collection will include the following: field notes, interviews, and questionnaires. This section also includes discussion and identification of the research design and approach, instrumentation, setting, and data. Threats to reliability and validity will also be identified.

Research Questions

This study focused on how teachers perceive middle school students are meeting English Language Arts literacy standards in southeastern Alabama. Prior qualitative research studies focused on more singular perceptions of students from low socioeconomics meeting English

Language Arts literacy standards (Byrd-Blake, Afolayan, Hunt, Fabunmi, Pryor, & Leander, 2010; Grissom, Nicholson-Crotty, & Harrington, 2014; Waldron & McLeskey, 2010). The following research question guided the researcher to explore teacher perceptions of middle school students meeting English Language Arts Literacy standards:

- How do teachers perceive middle school students are meeting English Language Arts literacy standards in middle school in southeastern Alabama?

The research question is addressed using three research strategies: field notes, interviews, and questionnaires. The perceptions of middle school teachers of students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards were explored during the qualitative case study.

Purpose and Design of the Study

Qualitative case study research serves as the methodology for this study. This qualitative study was designed to focus on the perceptions of the twelve middle school teachers related to student achievement with English Language Arts literacy standards. This section describes the background of case study research, explores case study methodology, and explains the characteristics of case study methods. The collaboration between persons and their environment describes the elements of qualitative research. Qualitative research is the research method principally utilized in social science fields such as ethnography, political science, sociology, psychology, anthropology, linguistics, and education. When researchers are interested in exploring, explaining, and describing a phenomenon within a real-life context, a case study method is desirable since it focuses on a particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon, that expresses rich details and illuminates the phenomenon while asking how or why questions (Yin, 2016). Stake (2010) also offered the constructed reality that the case study should construct knowledge while gathering the participant's perception. Stake's view of qualitative

research regards interpretation as the primary component of case studies. The primary research question for this study centered on discovering how teachers perceive middle school students are meeting English Language Arts literacy standards in southeastern Alabama. The middle school serves 91% at-risk, high poverty students. The majority of the students are African-American or belong to an ethnic group.

Also, case study research is designed to discover meaning and understanding about the individual, group, or situation in the research study. Yin (2015) stated, "—a case study allows investigators to focus on a "case" and retain a holistic and real-world perspective" (p. 4). To better explore the teacher perceptions of students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards, a process of binding the research study was followed (Baxter & Jack, 2008). As noted by Yin (2016), research studies that explore situations have no clear, single set of outcomes. This case study was a single case study that explored how teachers perceive middle school students are meeting English Language Arts literacy standards in southeastern Alabama.

Research Population and Sample Selections

Selecting the population and sample for the study was primarily based on three criteria: (a) access to the school (b) established and accredited English Language Arts literacy programs with Highly Qualified teachers (c) student populations with identified at-risk socioeconomic backgrounds. Yin (2016) explained that purposeful sampling is a process that enables a researcher to acquire a comprehensive understanding of a research topic. The participants included English Language Arts teachers at a local middle school in southeastern Alabama; each will have a pseudonym. The middle school serves students in grades six through eight. The middle school is a Title I school and serves a student population with a high poverty level. The Title I school serves approximately 613 students. Ninety-one percent of the current student body

of the Title I school qualifies as underserved pupils and receives services such as free or reduced

lunch. The Title I school also serves the district's largest middle school special education

population with 142 students identified with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). Also, the

school also serves English Language Learners with accommodations. The school has six English

Language Arts teachers. Five collaborative special education teachers work directly with the

English Language Arts teachers and an intervention teacher working directly with low

performing English Language Arts students. A total of twelve English Language Arts educators

participated in the qualitative case study.

The selection of participating educators for this case was straightforward. Since the

overall study intended to explore the perception of how middle school educators perceive

students are meeting English Language Arts Literacy standards, all teachers instructing literacy

classes to learners in grades six thru eight were included in the study. Each of the teachers was

informed of the purpose of the study. Educators were assured that confidentiality will remain an

absolute in the process. No participant names were connected with field notes, interviews, or

questionnaires. Participants had the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time without risk

of any negative infringement. Participants involved in the study were asked to be completely

honest and straightforward with responses for valid research. Participants were informed of the

stages of each portion of the research process: field notes, interview, and questionnaire.

Participants were supplied with the research purpose statement and research question.

The research conducted for this study followed a uniform protocol to ensure that the

interviews yield data consistent with the study's goals:

1. Participants were invited to the study verbally by the researcher and were informed

of the risks involved.

2. In-depth, semi-structured, interviews were held with participants in their respective schools for a period of no longer than 70 minutes each.

3. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed.

4. Follow up informal contact was initiated and each participant was given his or her respective transcript for member-checking to verify transcript content.

5. Tracking of field notes of each participant in their respective interviews occurred. Immediately following each session, the field notes' protocol form was coded.

6. Each participant was given a questionnaire to complete. Immediately following the return of the questionnaires, the responses were coded per teacher and grade level.

7. Grade-level survey data were reviewed by the researcher.

8. School-level data was reviewed by the researcher.

9. The researcher coded the data for emergent themes.

Sources of Data

The collection of multiple modes of data was in the forms of teacher interviews, field notes, and questionnaires. Data was collected from the twelve middle school teachers in southeastern Alabama. The subjects taught multiple sessions of English Language Arts in grades six, seven, or eight each day.

Interviews. Interviews allow the researcher to distinguish common classroom patterns, instructional practices, and strategies by comparing the data from each interview period. Stake (2010) notated that the interview is used most frequently as a primary research tool for qualitative researchers. Interviews conducted throughout the data collection phase provided an opportunity to explore choices made by the teachers in relation to the English Language Arts literacy standards as well as after thought perceptions of the educators. According to Stake,

open-ended semi-structured interviews provide researchers the flexibility to determine which direction to take during the interview process. Face-to-face interviews were used with the teachers in the study. The interviews were recorded and coded. The interviews utilized a questionnaire form consisting of a total of ten questions. The first section had participants responding to open-ended questions regarding their teaching background and philosophy. The questions centered around teacher perceptions of middle school students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards in southeastern Alabama.

Field notes. Field notes allow researchers to document non-verbal communications, as well as documentation of the setting, behaviors, activities, and other engagement. Through field notes, researchers can draw interpretations about meanings and perspectives about others (Stake, 2010). Field notes allow the greatest method for surveying the studied phenomenon (Yin, 2016). Field notes should be descriptive while containing a reflective account of the event. During the study, the researcher assumed the role of the observer recording reflective field notes that tracked the non-verbal cues. The recording of field notes occurred in each of the English Language Arts interviews with the researcher as a silent observer for the entire documented session. The field notes were coded (see Appendix C).

Questionnaires. The aim of the questionnaires was to collect data on the teachers' perceptions of students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards. The Alabama State Department of Education's Annual Continuous Improvement Plan's (ACIP) questionnaires, given in accordance to AdvancEd, were used to design the questions (Alabama State Department of Education, 2016; AdvancEd, 2016). The combination of interview transcripts, questionnaires, and field note reflections provided triangulation for this qualitative case study. Document analysis can also assist the researcher to understand the context in which teacher perceptions may

exist. The common themes and characteristics that promote student success were also analyzed.

Data was collected from the teachers to determine the perceived factors identified as the

elements impacting middle schools students meeting English Language Arts standards.

Data Collection

Data collection must draw from multiple sources to capture the case under study in its

complexity and entirety (Stake, 2010; Yin, 2016). According to the authors, field notes, in-depth

interviews, and questionnaires are effective methods of collecting specific types of information.

Being a *good listener* while remaining *adaptive* allows the researcher to understand and apply

new information without bias (Yin, 2015, p. 74). Noting the differences in the authors, a similar

strength of qualitative case study research with data collection is the researcher's ability to

provide textual descriptions of how participants perceive or respond to a specific research issue.

Last, Yin (2016) indicated the importance of the interviewer to follow an established line of

protocol and to ask questions in an unbiased manner that will serve the needs of inquiry with

open-ended questions

Field notes. Tracking through the process of observation of field notes is the purposeful

process in which familiarity with the understanding of the perceptions of others grows. In this

research study, field notes tracked the silent observations of the participants. During this

practice, the non-verbal communications of the teachers were documented. This portion of the

field notes were a *reflective* component (Yin, 2015). The field notes are reflective, thorough, and

coded. Such documentation reflect the non-verbal mirrored perceptions of the educators of how

teachers perceive students are meeting English Language Arts literacy standards in southeastern

Alabama. The field notes track each of the interview sessions with the educators and were coded

at the end of each session (see Appendix C). Field notes were annotated and reviewed soon after each session.

Interviews. The interview questions further explore the perceived viewpoints of the educators towards the impacts of instructional supports, teacher expectations, student and teacher relationships, and teacher morale as related to students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards.   Open-ended semi-structured interviews occurred during the case study. The interviews were in a face-to-face forum format style allowing the interviewed educators an opportunity to reflect on their perceptions, beliefs, choices, and practices. During each interview, brief notes recorded the responses of the educators; however, audio recordings also recorded each interview. The audio allowed for transcribing and coding post-interview. Coding consisted of two processes. Word and Excel were first utilized by the researcher to code the transcripts. Next, the information was input into NVivo. The information from NVivo was then transferred and saved for calucalations and data graph creations.

The interview questions were formatted to explore the teachers' perceptions of middle school students meeting English Language Arts Literacy standards. The interviews began by exploring the educators' background, beliefs, and perceptions in general about students' needs and abilities. The questions regarding the specifics that appealed to the desire to teach and to teach at this specific school will disclose insight about the school's culture and teachers' morale. Next, interview questions inquired about classroom supports, behavioral supports, instructional supports, student and teacher relationships, and teacher's curricular decisions. These questions inquired of the teachers' perceptions of the choices that contribute to the middle school learners meeting English Language Arts literacy standards. Individual teacher interviews lasted on approximately 30-40 minutes. Each interview occurred during either the teacher planning period

or after school. Approximately, three interviews were held on average each week during the second nine weeks of the 2016-2017 school year. At the end of the study, a total collection of 12 interviews reflected of the perceptions of the English Language Arts' educators. The interview questions intended to explore the teachers' perceptions of their students meeting learning outcomes.

Questionnaires. This research study gathered data from online questionnaires of the educators of the middle school in the study. These educators were directly involved in teaching English Language Arts to the middle school students while simultaneously collaborating with each other. The online questionnaires collected information based on research-based questions developed from the State of Alabama's Continuous Improvement Plan and platform of questionnaires for educators for the 2015-2016 school year. The online questionnaires addressed the teachers' perceptions of middle school students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards. Data collected from the twelve English Language Arts teachers' questionnaires gave the researcher a better understanding of the teachers' perceptions of middle school students meeting learning outcomes.

Phenomenon

In this research, the perceptions of the educators involved in the study served as the phenomenon being explored. The study presented a pattern of the educators' perceptions that exist around the teachers' expectations, the relationships with students, teachers' morale, and professional implementation of instructional supports. When considering this, the exploration of the how teachers perceive middle school students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards in southeastern Alabama occurred.

Definitions

For the purpose of this study, the following terms are defined.

Achievement gap is a barrier that exists for a learner or group of learners preventing consistently yearly and proficient mastery of grade-level standards (Kintsch & Vipond, 2014).

Comprehension is the process of understanding during reading. Comprehension involves a process of communication between the reader and the text (Kintsch & Vipond, 2014).

English Language Arts literacy standards encompass reading, writing, and language College and Career Ready Standards for the state of Alabama for middle school students (Kintsch & Vipond, 2014).

Fluency is the ability to read a text accurately and fluently (Kintsch & Vipond, 2014).

Highly Qualified Teacher defines a teacher in the state of Alabama that has met the following qualifications: holds a bachelor's degree from an accredited in-state four year college institution, passed the content Praxis test in the field area studied, completed the content-specific portfolio requirements, and passed the criminal background clearance (Alabama State Department of Education, 2016).

Instructional support is a variety of instructional approaches, scholastic services, or school resources provided to educators and students to positively impact student achievement (Joyce & Showers, 2002; Fullan, 2007).

Literacy refers to a middle school students' proficient ability to read and convey written meaning (Joyce & Showers, 2002; Literacy How, 2016).

Title I School refers to a school that serves a minimum of 40% of low-income student population (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016).

Data Analysis Procedures

Deliberate data analysis procedures form the foundation of exploring data. Yin (2015) described qualitative cases studies as situational events that explore limitations, circumstances, and occurrences between persons. The focus of this study was on middle school teacher perceptions of students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards. Teachers impact student achievement and students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards are the core premises of the research study. Through qualitative research strategies, such as field notes, interviews, and questionnaires, the researcher focused on the perceptions of the middle schools' English Language Arts teachers. The "phenomenon of interest" for the study is the perceptions of the educators in the middle school setting (Yin, 2015, p. 16). The data for this case study was used to examine teachers' perceptions of middle school students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards in Alabama. Additionally, the researcher analyzed data to explore the perceptions of teachers on student populations' achievement in the middle school settings.

Data from field notes, interviews, and questionnaires were utilized in this research study to provide triangulation and to support a descriptive analysis of the case study. Descriptive coding techniques were utilized to analyze all transcripts from recorded interviews and field notes. Detailed descriptions of the sites, the individuals, and the context were generated from the data to provide contextual themes. Using categorical frequency collections established the themes for classifying the data's patterns also. This process included a process of organizing data to prepare for the analysis process. Analysis required reading data to make meaning of the data. The reflective process also required detailed coding. Descriptive coding was utilized in the field notes and interview portions of the case studies (see Appendices A & B). The field notes tracked the frequency of the non-verbal cues of the educators. The interview coding represented

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the frequency educators utilized key terms and phrases. These include the following: perceive, meet, perceive students meet, low morale, high morale, high expectations, low expectations, student and teacher relationship, instructional supports, behavioral support, or collaboration.

After the data was interpreted, an open coding process occurred. The results were examined for emerging themes. Research participants also had interview transcripts and field notes available for their review. As the study explored teachers' perceptions of middle school students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards, balance and triangulation were formed by utilizing multiple perceptions and data formats.

Field notes. The field notes are commentaries with reflective jot notes in the margins. The marginal notes recorded any observed non-verbal observations or perceived expressions. Field notes document recorded observations surrounding the perceived non-verbal cues exhibited in the interviews by the educators. A field note documentation form recorded the tracking documentation (Appendix C). Such tracking recorded data on the following perceived themes: instructional supports, teacher expectations, student and teacher relationships, and teacher morale. The field notes were analyzed and coded for emerging themes related to the teacher behaviors to their perceptions of students meeting English Language Art literacy standards but also to the the impact of instructional supports, teacher morale, the student and teacher relationship, and teacher expectations. As themes and patterns emerged, ongoing data collection was used to confirm or rebut the presence of such patterns. The new data collection confirmed developing trends. The themes and data recorded also assisted in answering the research question of relating to how teachers perceive middle school student meeting English Language Arts literacy standards in southeastern Alabama.

Interviews. Qualitative research studies include a constant relationship amongst data collection and data analysis. Stake (2010) explained to qualitative researchers that data analysis entails the science of "taking something apart" (p. 71). Thus, analyzing data following the first interview to start classifying response patterns and to facilitate subsequent data collection commenced promptly. Also, immediately after the interviews, a transcription file was created for each participant's interview. Two sources were used to create the transcripts; these include the following: the brief interview notes and audio recordings. The interview notes were taken in a shorthand format so that the flow of the interview was not interrupted. Marginal notes recorded any non-verbal commentary noted during the interview. The audio recordings were transcribed immediately following the interviews. Transcripts were entered into a word processing document with numbered lines on the side of each line. Each transcription was date and time stamped. Codes were entered entered in the right margins of each transrcipt. Codes were categorized by topic based on the interview guide (perception, instructional support, teacher morale, student and teacher expectations, teacher morale, etc.). Each member of the study received an individual copy of the transcript to confirm that all documented analysis was recorded correctly. The process of debriefing the members of the study is known as member checking (Stake, 2015, Creswell, 2009). The process also helped to ensure the validity of the research findings.

Analysis of the interview followed a coding format. Patterns that emerged through the participants' responses was coded using the research questions as a frame. The coding emphasized on not only the educators' perception of middle school students meeting English Language Arts' literacy standards, but also the perceptions of the impacts of instructional supports, student and teacher relationships, teacher expectations, and teacher morale. NVivo was

utilized to transfer Word and Excel researcher documents and transcrips. The NVivo file

comprised a data file and was also utilized to create the data graphs later in Chapter 4 during

analysis of the teacher perceptions.

Questionnaires. The researcher utilized the State of Alabama's Continuous

Improvement Plan's platform and AdvacED's questions to generate questionnaires for this

research project. The research questionnaires were presented to the participating educators

through an email link using Survey Monkey. A copy of the questionnaire is attached as

Appendix B below. The results were analyzed to establish patterns in the educators' perceptions

regarding students' abilities to meet English Language Arts' literacy standards and the

perceptions of the impacts of instructional supports, student and teacher relationships, teacher

expectations, and teacher morale.

Limitations of the Research Design

Creswell (2009) stated that delimitations are used "to narrow the scope of the study" (p.

148). The choices are the boundaries set for the scope of the study. The delimitations of this

qualitative case study include defining the settings' location parameter. Delimitations consisted

of a selection of a Title I middle school in southeastern Alabama serving the educational needs of

students in a metropolitan city in grades six through eight. Additional delimitations defined in

the parameters of the investigation include the selected population and instrumentation.

Participants in the study included highly qualified teachers of the school as classified by the State

of Alabama Department of Education. The educators included six English Language Arts

literacy teachers, five special education collaborative teachers, and one reading intervention

specialist. The study utilized the findings from teacher interviews, field notes, and

questionnaires on students in southeastern Alabama meetings English Language Arts literacy standards during the 2016—2017 school year.

Limitations of this study consisted of evaluating online responses that may be limited regarding perception and thoroughness in completing the survey questions. Second, the researcher has a professional relationship with the educators in the study. As a result of these relationships, bias could have occurred but was limited because of predetermined interviewed questions and pre-scheduled questionnaires formatted from a researched-based platform. The relational time existing between the teachers and students in the study is the third limitation. A component of the study's limitations involves the teacher and student relationship; taking into consideration the amount of time the relationship had to develop may limit the perceptions of the participants of the study. However, the use of other forms of data collections was implemented to improve validity, while limiting bias. These included member checking, field notes, and the collection of documents. Triangulation of multiple data sources supports increasing validity when obvious limitations are present (Yin, 2015).

Validation

Validity affords researchers with accurate conclusions based on the data analysis. Validation is the process of gathering evidence to support inferences. Corroboration of multiple forms of data findings is necessary due to the interpretive nature of qualitative research. Stake (2010) refers to triangulation as

> a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation (p. 443).

Triangulation "—serves also to clarify meaning by identifying different ways the phenomenon is being seen" (Stake, 2010, p. 444). To increase credibility and trustworthiness, multiple other

strategies were employed. These include performing member checks, peer review of findings and the use of a rich, description of the results for the potential of transferability (Yin, 2016).

Credibility

Credibility refers to assurance in the truth of the data. This research study sought to ensure that all participants are confident in the researcher's data. To promote this confidence, each educator received a copy of the transcription of the interview. Additionally, both field notes and audio files recorded the interview process. Reflective field notes documented the non-verbal cues of the educators. These documentation forms maintained uniformity in the research study. Finally, coded survey results finalize the triangulation process for this qualitative research study while showing credibility.

Dependability

Dependability references the reliability of the instruments used in the research study to produce results.   Yin (2015) described triangulation as the use of multiple methods for collecting and analyzing data that strengthens the reliability and validity of qualitative research. This research study utilized multiple methods to ensure that the data was consistent and stable. Member checking, triangulation of data, rich and thick descriptions in field notes, researcher reflection, and reflexivity are measures that the study took to strengthen the dependability of the data.

Expected Findings

Vygotsky's (1978) cognitive development theory explained that the mastery of concepts is improved through enriched interactions.   In return, the activities promote student academic growth. Problem-solving, cognitive development, and academic growth correlate directly to middle school students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards. Thus, the research

study explored the teachers' perceptions of pupils as capable and independent problem solvers. Building on Vygotsky's (1978) theory, other literature and research showed the perceptions of the impacts of instructional supports, teacher expectations, student and teacher relationships, and teacher morale. This research study expected to find a similar but collective gathering of evidence. A positive impact on student success was perceived to be held by instructional supports. Instructional supports in the research study may appear as collaborative efforts between the classroom teacher and specialized educators, academic support programs, behavioral support programs, and professional learning opportunities. Also, teacher expectations was linked with student academic growth and success. The expectation level of the teacher effected the student and teacher relationship. Classrooms with efficient management are linked to positive relationships. Finally, teacher morale was perceived to be impacted by the teacher's years of experience, classroom management, and educational expertise.

Ethical Issues

Conflict of interest assessment. A conflict of interest occurs when secondary interests distort the integrity of judgments regarding the primary interest of a research study. This qualitative research study utilized the place of employment of the researcher. However, the participants were informed of the study's goals, risks, data analysis methods, limitations, and results. Participation remained voluntary throughout the proceedings of the research study. Furthermore, the research study followed ethical research standards by setting reasonable objectives and deliverables. All data analysis documented the conducted research and observed measures of the study. The study's records reported the perceptions and interpretations of the middle school educators in the study in regards to middle school students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards.

Researcher's position. According to Stake (2010), the qualitative researcher may have a variety of roles to utilize during the data collection process. Yin (2016) described the different phases a researcher employs in qualitative research as a methodological process applied to gather valid and reliable data. Unbiased generalizations about investigated subject are difficult since the researcher is directly involved in creating the data collection instruments for the study. For this qualitative research study, an online survey instrument was utilized to gather information regarding how teachers perceive of middle school students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards in southeastern Alabama. Interview questions were also be pre-determined and followed a Member Checking protocol after transcription. Last, the researcher has a professional relationship with the educators in the study. The researcher is the Literacy Coach at the middle school in which the study took place.

Ethical issues in the study. This research study embraced the core universal principles of respect, integrity, and impartiality toward all participants. Participants in the study received complete disclosure of the following: (a) the purpose of the study, (b) the expectation of the research participant, (c) the expected risk and benefits of the study, (d) the fact that participation will be voluntary, (e) the assurance that confidentiality will be protected (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013). To adhere to these ethical considerations, the names of the participating educators were not disclosed in the field notes, interview transcriptions, survey chronicles, or other data documents. The process of informed consent ensured that all participants in the research study understood and decided in a mindful, purposeful way to participate in the study. Furthermore, by explaining the purpose and significance of the study, through a process of debriefing the educators, the rationale of the research was served with value.

Chapter 3 Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore how teachers perceive middle school students are meeting English Language Arts Literacy standards in southeastern Alabama. Vygotsky's (1978) cognitive development theory explicates that concept mastery is enhanced through enriched collaborations or connections. In return, the events support students' scholastic development. Middle school students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards precisely correlate with cognitive development, problem-solving, and academic growth. Supplementing Vygotsky's theory, other research and literature also support the perceptions of the impacts of instructional supports, teacher expectations, student and teacher relationships, and teacher morale. The impacts of each were explored while embracing the ethical principles of qualitative research. The research study encompassed respect, integrity, and impartiality toward all voluntary participants. These core principles supported the validation process of gathering evidence to support the inferences of the study. Data from field notes, interviews, and questionnaires were utilized in this research study to provide triangulation and support an analysis of the case study exploring the middle school teachers' perceptions of students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore teachers' perceptions of middle school students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards. The setting for this qualitative case study was a middle school located in a community in southeastern Alabama. The middle school consists of students in grades 6 through 8 and has an enrollment of 600 students. Data collection involved gathering individual interviews, field notes, and questionnaires. The sample size for the interviews consisted of 12 participants; seven were general education teachers and five were special education teachers. The findings of this qualitative study were based on the responses the participants gave during individual interviews, feedback received to questionnaires and data interpreted from field notes. As noted, an interview process and questionnaire seeking these perceptions were completed by a group of middle school English Language Arts teachers. The first portion of this chapter presents descriptive analysis while the second part of the chapter presents the findings in detail by research question and each hypothesis.

To guide the process of data collection and to fulfill the purpose of the study, the following research question was used:

- How do middle school teachers perceive students are meeting English Language Arts literacy standards in southeastern Alabama?

Chapter 4 will begin with a descriptive data of the sample. The next section includes a description of the data analysis procedure used to analyze the qualitative data. The chapter also includes the presentation of the results, which are based on the research question of the study.

Descriptive Data

For the purposes of this study, the teachers selected were from the middle school level. Data for this study was obtained by interviewing twelve purposefully selected teachers who serve as highly qualified middle school English Language Arts educators in southeastern Alabama. The educators are charged with facilitating instruction to a wide array of learners that range from gifted, at-risk, English Language Learners, and Special Education students. Participants for the study were chosen because they were certified general education and special education teachers. The target sample size used for this study was 12 middle school teachers, and 12 teachers agreed to participate in the study. They were interviewed and audio recorded. Each participant was given a pseudonym by which they would be referred to in the study to protect their identity. The gender associated with the name selected by the participant may or may not be the same as the gender of the participant. The pronouns used by the researcher in presenting the responses matched the gender of the pseudonym, not necessarily the gender of the respondent.

To collect data and answer the research questions guiding this study, an individual interview with each teacher was conducted with the use of an interview guide consisting of ten questions. The interviews were held on the middle school campus in the classrooms of the participants. The average time of each interview was approximately 30-40 minutes. The interviews were conducted for a total of 7 hours, producing 36 transcript pages. The sample size for the individual interviews consisted of 12 participants. Among the teachers, four teach grade six, four teach grade seven, three teach grade eight, and one teaches grades six, seven, and eight. Table 1 shows the summary of the demographic data for the participants in the individual

interviews. Table 2 illustrates the overview of the number of individual interviews conducted,

the duration of the interviews, and a number of interview transcription pages for each interview.

Table 1

Demographic Data for Participants' Individual Interview

	$N = 12$	Percentage Breakdown
Type of Teacher		
General Education	7	58%
Special Education	5	42%
Gender		
Male	2	17%
Female	10	83%
Race		
White	7	58%
Black	5	42%

Note. This table illustrates the demographic breakdown of the number of participants by gender, race, and professional certification.

Table 2

Individual Participant Interviews

	Duration	Transcript Pages
Participant		
Betty	35	3
Carlie	35	2
Georgia	40	5
Gwen	30	2
Holly	35	2
Kasey	30	2
Kelly	35	3
Maggie	30	2
Paul	40	4
Rhonda	35	3
Tiffany	40	5
William	35	3

Note. This table illustrates lists the participants' interview session durations and transcript page lengths.

      To collect data and answer the research questions guiding this study, field notes were recorded as well. These records documented the nonverbal cues of each participant during interview sessions. The twelve educators that participated in individual interviews also have individual field note transcripts. The transcripts consist of a single coded documentation form for each participant with marginal notes scripted by the researcher.

Questionnaires were pertinent to the process of triangulation in this qualitative case study. The questionnaires allowed the researcher to collect relevant information from the teachers anonymously and associate the findings in connection with the interviews and field notes. By using direct quotations of the participants, this section presents the teacher perceptions of middle school students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards in southeastern Alabama. Data that were collected were transformed into transcripts for the individual interviews and researcher field notes. An excerpt of the transcripts results can be found in Appendix D.

Data Analysis

The researcher used a qualitative case study research design to conduct the study and to explore the teacher perceptions middle school students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards. Data transcripts gathered from the responses of the teachers in the individual interviews were loaded into NVivo software for the storage and organization of the data, in preparation for the analysis. The Nvivo software allowed the researcher to code the data in a systematic method; however, the researcher's discretion remained the central factor in the analysis of the data.

Data collected in this study were analyzed using transcripts from field notes and interviews. Results from participants' questionnaires were also utilized to provide triangulation and to support a descriptive analysis of the qualitative research study.   Descriptive coding techniques were employed to analyze all transcripts from recorded interviews and field notes. Detailed descriptions of the sites, the individuals, and the context generated from the data provided contextual themes. Using categorical frequency collections established themes for classifying the data's patterns also. This process included a process of organizing data to prepare

for the analysis process. The reflective process also requires detailed coding. Descriptive coding was utilized in the field notes and interview portions of the case studies. The field notes tracked the frequency of the non-verbal cues of the educators. The interview coding represented the frequency educators utilized key terms and phrases. These include the following: perceive, meet, perceive students meet, low morale, high morale, high expectations, low expectations, student and teacher relationship, instructional supports, behavioral support, or collaboration. After the data was interpreted, an open coding process occurred; the results were examined for emerging themes.

The Nvivo software allowed transcript information and open codes to be represented in new labels, experiences, and data representations through axial coding. The reconstruction of data offered new categories of data (see Appendix E). Thematic codes previously generated during open coding now identified relationships among the perceived and connected categorical codes. The goal was to form, enhance, and confirm the results that emerged from the analysis of the data. As the study explored teachers' perceptions of middle school students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards, balance and triangulation are formed by utilizing multiple perceptions and data formats.

To address concerns relating to the validity, multiple strategies were used by the researcher. Corroboration of multiple forms of data findings is necessary due to the interpretive nature of qualitative research. Stake (2010) refers to triangulation as "a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation" (p. 443). These include performing member checks, peer review of findings, providing an audit trail of data analysis methods (see Appendix D), and use of a rich, description of the results or use of transferability (Yin, 2016). To address issues about validity, the strategies that were used

included triangulation of different data sources of information and the use of rich and thick description to convey the findings. Data in this study came from several data sources, such as individual interviews, questionnaires, and field notes.

The protocol for data collection and analysis was a fundamental element in affirming the reliability of the qualitative case study. To address reliability, detailed field notes, and transcribed interviews were used to increase reliability in the study. Detailed field notes were made to record important information that may be meaningful in the analysis process. For member checking purposes, the transcripts were returned to each participant in person. Participants were asked to review the transcribed interview data to increase the accuracy of the transcripts and address possible errors. In the case of errors, the participants were asked to respond with any proposed corrections or additions that needed to be made within eight business days. A notation was also made that in the situation of a "no reply," would be understood that no corrections were needed and that the researcher could proceed 'as is' with the research study. None of the twelve individuals made any corrections, edits, additions, modifications, or changes to the data or transcripts in any way.

The research study was organized surrounding the central research question of the study. The categories, themes, and codes were developed and linked to the question during the study. This alignment of results will be reflected in the next section. Reflective data analysis was used in this qualitative research and was ongoing throughout the study. During the interviews, the researcher made field notes about the replies the participant being interviewed gave to each of the interview guide questions. Being a good listener while remaining adaptive allows the researcher to understand and apply new information without bias (Yin, 2015, p. 74). A strength shown in this qualitative study research is the researcher's ability to provide textual descriptions

of how participants perceive or respond to a specific research issue. Following each interview, the researcher listened to the recordings and transcribed the entire interview. The researcher then reviewed relevant written data from her notes and the transcript of each interview; using knowledge of and sensitivity to the issues being studied, the researcher selected and included the portions of the participants' responses which most directly replied to the issues raised during the interview and which helped to answer the research question.

Results

This section contains the presentation of the results of the collected data. The organization of the results will be based on the research question of the study. Graphic figures and direct quotes from the participants were used to exhibit data results. To satisfy the purpose of the study, the following research question was addressed and used to report the findings that follow:

- How do middle school teachers perceive students are meeting English Language Arts Literacy standards in southeastern Alabama?

The researcher sought to triangulate the data gleaned from the reflective data analysis of the interview responses by conducting a analysis of the replies to a questionnaire provided to all participants. The results of this effort were included following the responses to the interview questions. The initial part of the interview process was an introductory section. The section asked participants three fundamental questions that included the following:

1. How would you describe yourself?

2. What is your teaching background?

3. What is your teaching philosophy?

Overall, the experience and educational background of the teachers varied somewhat and is depicted below in Table 3.

Table 3

Teachers' Experience and Training

Teacher	Years of Experience	Collegiate/Educational Background
Betty	22	Ed.S
Carlie	7	Masters
Georgia	12	Masters
Gwen	9	Bachelors
Holly	18	Masters
Kasey	4	Masters
Kelly	5	Bachelors
Maggie	19	Ed.D
Paul	2	Bachelors
Rhonda	16	Masters
Tiffany	25	Masters
William	3	Bachelors

Each of the teachers described passion, commitment, and similar views of teaching. Specific philosophies and descriptions used strong verbiages by the educators such as "commitment," "excellence in education," "cultivating student-centered learning environments," "attaining student literacy while developing student growth," and "preparing students to become valuable members of our society." Two thematic categories were developed relevant to the first research question. The thematic categories were: (a) teaching philosophy and (b) teaching background.

Both of these thematic categories will be discussed to illustrate how teachers perceive middle

school students are meeting English Language Arts literacy standards.
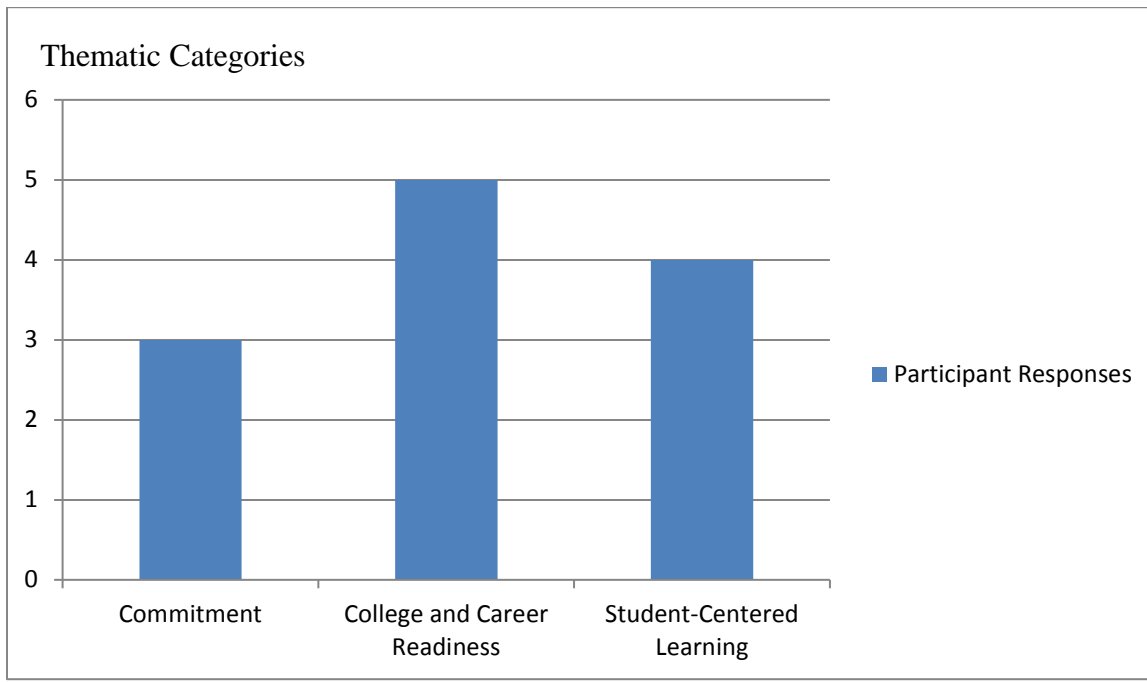
Figure 1. This figure illustrates a comparison of participant responses between commitment, college and career readiness, and student-centered learning.

The next section of the interview process focused on the research question and

subquestions. During this portion of the interview process, teacher responses appeared

categorical.

R1. How do middle school teachers perceive students are meeting English Language

Arts literacy standards in southeastern Alabama? The participating teachers' initial

sentiment revealed that students' socioeconomics plays a vital role in determining their

perception of students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards in southeastern

Alabama. Specific thematic categories appeared during analysis that included achievement gaps,

socioeconomics, student placement levels, and content standards. To analyze these thematic

categories, Figure 2 presents the frequency of the participants denoting the categories during

interview sessions. Also, following Figure 2, specifics from the interview sessions are utilized to support and provide evidence of each category.
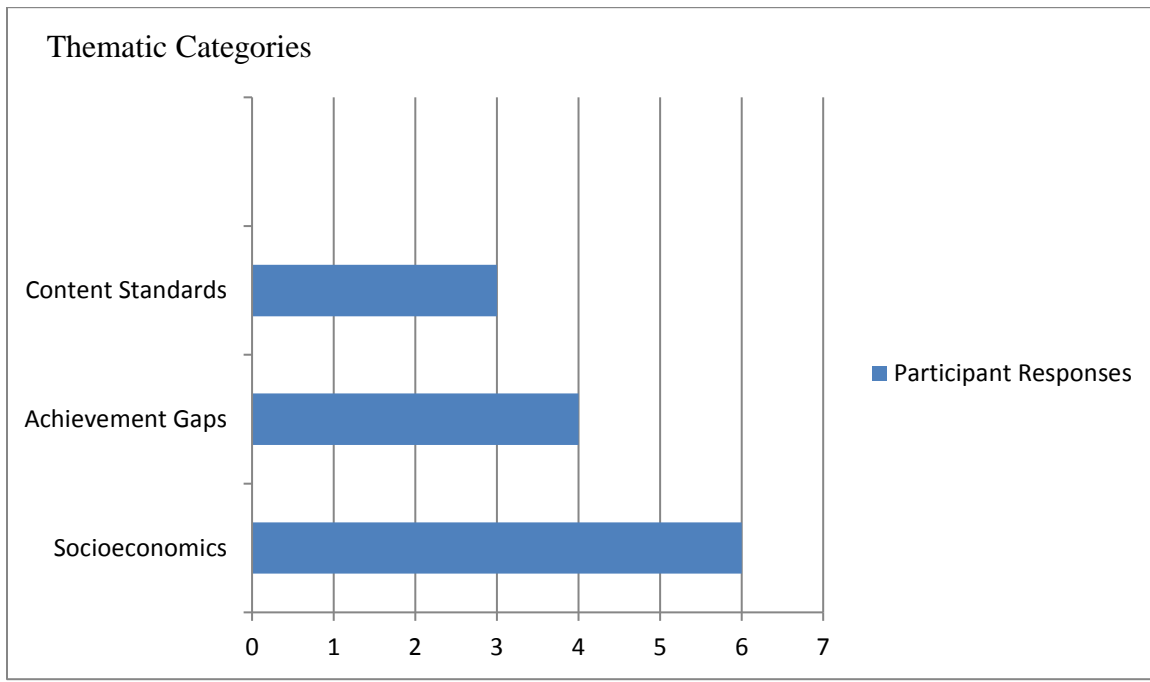
Figure 2. This graph illustrates a comparison of participant responses between content standards, achievement gaps, and socioeconomics.

The thematic categories, socioeconomics, achievement gaps, and content standards relate to how the teachers perceive the students they teach are meeting English Language Arts literacy content standards. Most participants described the high rigor of common core content standards, socioeconomics, and achievement gaps as current concerns with students meeting standards. Paul stated that he believed student achievement was greatly dependent upon the individual school. Paul continued by explaining that the previous school he taught at had different student socioeconomics.

> The schools' overall achievement scores were much higher also. Last year I would have had a positive response to this question; however, after teaching in a school setting with such drastic student populations and achievements, my views are different.

Carlie felt that achievement gains have been made, but great achievement gaps remain in schools today—especially with learners from low socioeconomic situations.

At-risk learners remain at a great disadvantage. Common Core standards have intensified at a level that requires higher order thinking at a record level. These learners were already behind; now we require more from them. As we work to teach them strategic ways to problem solve through literacy they will continue to make gains; however, the process takes time. Unfortunately, some of our older learners do not have time on their side. Achievement gaps exist and greatly impact learners meeting English Language Arts standards.

Georgia explained the impact of socioeconomics on students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards.

Socioeconomics plays a crucial role in determining whether learners are meeting standards or not. Students that face life burdens due to socioeconomics are at greater risk of not meeting standards. These students require additional support at school. Programs in place such as Response to Intervention, After School tutoring, Bright Key, student mentoring, and S4 are aligned to ensure that these students succeed. Title I funding for programs to assist a student from poor socioeconomics is essential to ensure that they too meet content standards.

Other interviewed teachers shared sentiments of similar viewpoints. For example, Gwen stated that in her opinion, "For the one student that meets the standard, few others are meeting them." Maggie said, "students that are registered for advanced or honors classes are meeting the standards, but few of the other students are meeting all of the standards." Kasey explained, "Students have made progress over the past couple of years, but great achievement gaps still

exist—especially amongst groups of learners from socioeconomic groups that are considered at-risk." Kelly stated, "While pupils have made strides in closing achievement gaps, greater gains must be met to ensure all students are successful and prepared for college and career readiness." Tiffany explained that she has seen "students more prepared as they enter grade level content; however, less remediation does not equate to mastery higher order thinking and content standards. This explains that fewer students begin the school year in need of support from previous year's content". William explained that in his opinion "learners still struggle with the rigor of higher order and relevance of English Language Arts standards." William continued to state that although some "achievement gaps have reduced; much more work must be done to create an atmosphere of excellence and success for all learners."

Q2. What types of collaboration amongst staff members do you believe supports students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards? The participants shared a variety of strategies; however, the underlying theme of team lesson planning existed amongst the responses. Specifically, thematic categories also arose surrounding the question of collaboration supporting students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards. These included team planning, dialogue with sharing, and strategies. Figure 3 describes the thematic categories.
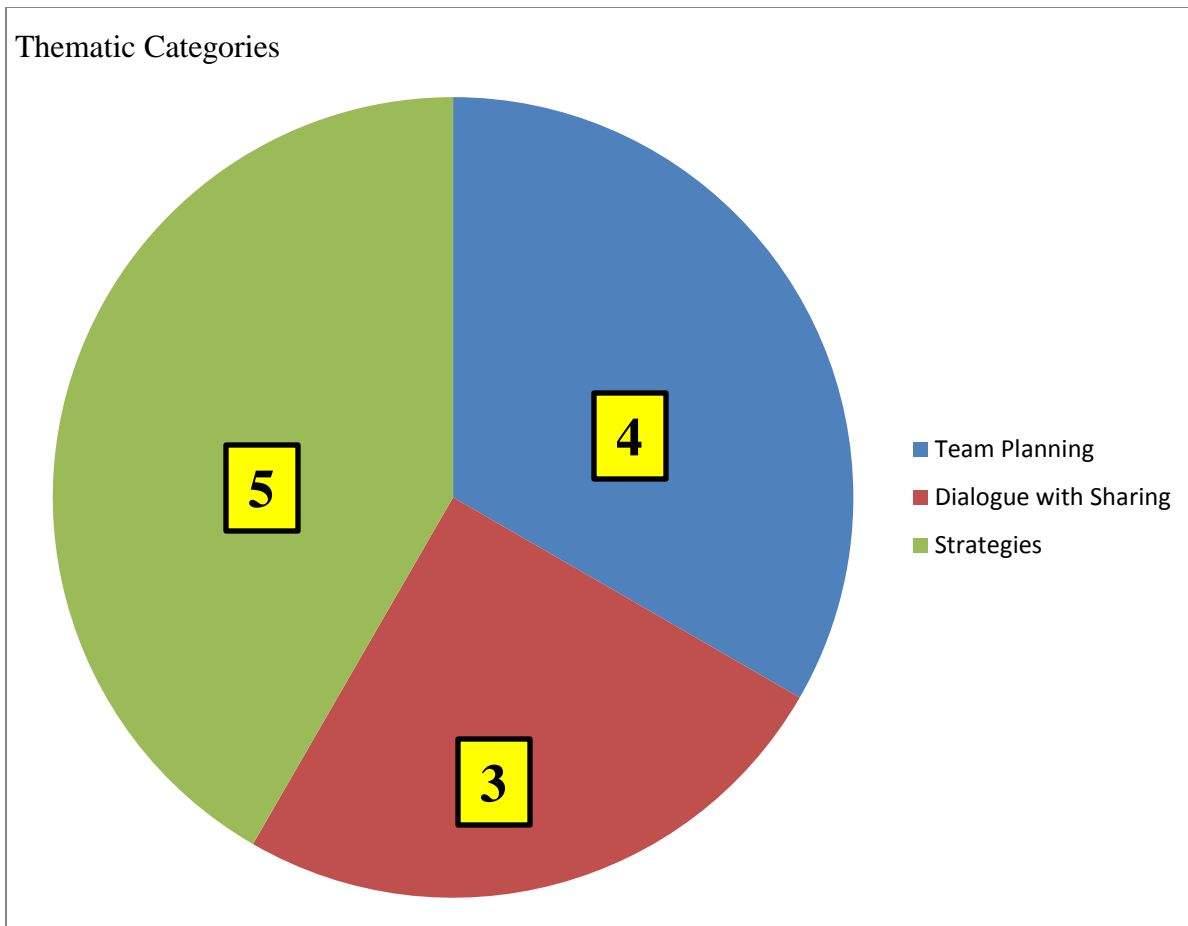
Figure 3. This graph illustrates a comparison of participant responses between team planning, dialogue with sharing, and strategies.

Betty continued to explain that in her many years of experience, her most successful years have been her most collaborative years.

Collaboration should build off of educator's strengths and expertise. This year is one of my most successful planning years. It is successful because of the collaboration that exists between my teammate and myself. He possesses greater strengths in current day literature, whereas I am gifted in a more technical aspect. Collaboration yields success for all students.

Other participants spoke about the importance of team planning and dialogue. William explained the importance of standards-based collaboration.

Collaboration amongst colleagues should be student-centered to produce the best results. Dialogue should be open, and members should always be trusting and share with each other. It is essential that we remember that we are all in this for the same common goal—student success.

Rhonda also discussed the importance of open dialogue and team planning and the impact of the components on student achievement.

Consistent and established collaboration between general education, special education, and special area educators best supports student growth and achievement. An open dialogue that invites all parties supports all learners. This also promotes a positive school culture and team planning.

The category labeled strategies was a thematic category that appeared amongst the teachers. The participants offered various strategic examples surrounding collaboration. Tiffany gave examples of "lesson planning" as her number one collaborative strategy for supporting student successes. Tiffany continued to explain that collaborative planning helps both teachers and students by aiding the educator with preparations and planning for facilitating a quality instruction to learners. Carlie stated that collaboration is "a great tool for helping both teachers and students." She continued by saying that "cross-curricular projects that provide collaboration between teachers from different subject areas is one of her favorite strategies to utilize. The approach allows students to draw from content knowledge in multiple classrooms while also providing the educators the opportunity to learn and grow with and from each other's strengths." Gwen stated, "Unified teams that collaborate are setting teachers and students up for success." Gwen explained that she "participates in weekly collaborative planning with her team on two occasions—one is for content planning and one is for strategy planning." Georgia explained,

"Strategies utilized cross-subject areas are essential for student success." Georgia continued by explaining that often "students use a strategy for a single subject area, but the approach would be much more powerful if used across the curriculum—this is where team planning and collaboration is essential." Georgia stated that for "students to be successful, teachers must be willing to talk and share." Kelly indicated that small groups, literature circles, and re-teaching are her three top choices for collaboration. These collaborative efforts are first supported by peer educators through discourse and then in the classroom with student dialogue and facilitation of instruction.

The three thematic categories above were developed relating to the research question. The thematic categories, team planning, strategies, and dialogue with sharing, relate to how the teachers perceive the students they teach are meeting English Language Arts literacy content standards. Participants described collaboration as essential to promoting student success; however, some teachers focused on specific teaching strategies whereas others discussed the importance of open dialogue that surrounds sharing and trust. Team planning appeared as a common theme with the educators.

Q3. What impact do you believe student and teacher relationship play in student achievement? The educators unanimously responded that the student and teacher relationship affects student achievement. A focused response of care, empathy, and belief in students trended in participant responses. Thematic categories also emerged surrounding the role of the student and teacher relationship impacting student achievement. These included care, empathy, and belief in students. Figure 4 depicts these thematic categories.
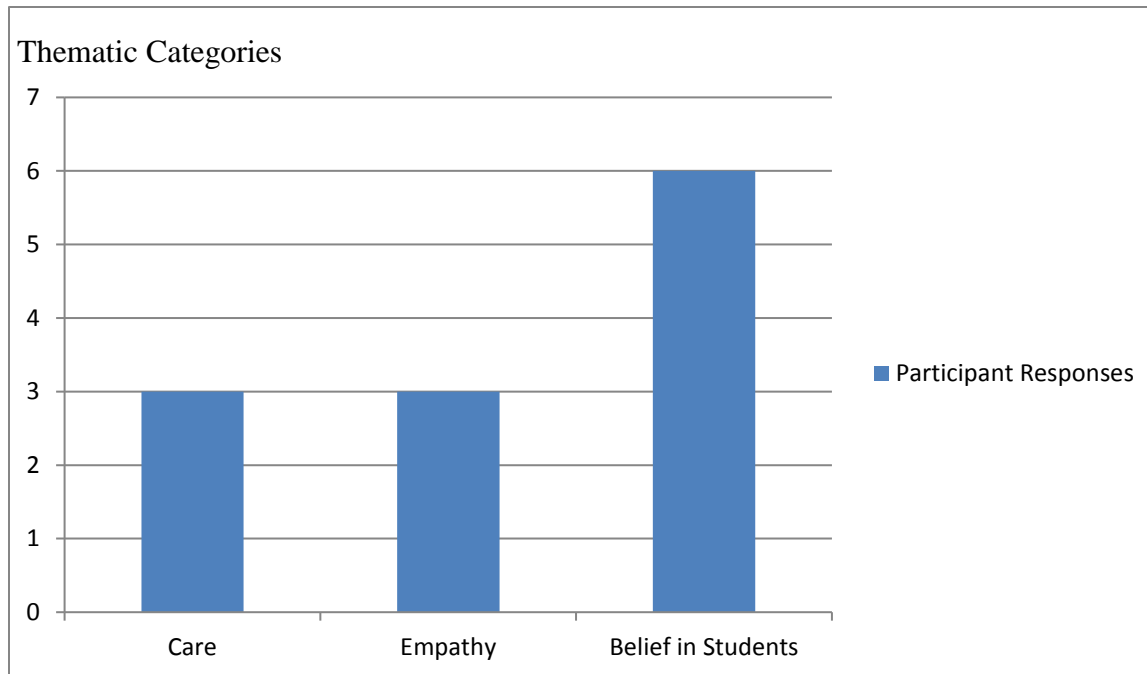
Figure 4. This graph illustrates a comparison of participant responses between care, empathy, and belief in students.

The perception of care impacting students and student achievement was discussed as a thematic category. Paul immediately explained that the student and teacher relationship impacted achievement and this was impacted by the educator's level of care.

The student's belief that the teacher cared plays a crucial role in student achievement. Also, a teacher's perceived empathy impacts the classrooms expectations; together the student and teacher relationship and expectation can either motivate a student to greatness or deflate their successes.

Tiffany and Carlie also expressed that care greatly impacted the student and teacher relationship and that this impacts student achievement. Tiffany explained the relevance of the student and teacher relationship with achievement. Tiffany stated that connections are "essential to bridge student achievement gaps – teachers' caring connections allow educators to find learners independent levels and support them to reach new goals and gains." Carlie also

explained that teacher expectations play a "prominent role in student success— when students perceive genuine care, they will work hard for you."

Gwen quickly stated, "Yes, the student and teacher relationship impacts student achievement!"

> Teachers must believe in students and students must think that their teachers believe in them. A teacher must foster a connection with a student. This is an essential component to student achievement. Students must believe that you believe in them!

Maggie also immediately responded yes to this question. Maggie explained that a teacher's empathy significantly impacts students' success.

> The student and teacher relationship is the single biggest predictor of student success. In school settings that have high poverty, the student and teacher relationship is even more powerful. Connections built between the student and teacher at a high-poverty school not only impact success but create success. While building connections, the teacher must show the learner empathy, compassion, care, concern, etc. These basic human feelings that we all need to feel and be shown to trust and build a relationship are the very tools that teachers need to utilize to motivate learners to reach goals of success.

The three thematic categories above were developed relating to the research question. The thematic categories, care, empathy, and belief in students, relate to how the teachers perceive the students they teach are meeting English Language Arts literacy content standards. The teachers described the importance of the student and teacher relationship and developing authentic, rich connections - every interview mentioned at some point "developing connections." Thus, developing connections is the central thematic category for care, empathy, and belief in students.

Q4. Do teachers' expectations impact students' success; if so, how? Clear, consistent classroom expectations positively impact student success appeared the response of the participants. The teachers also discussed the importance of care and equality in the classroom. Thematic categories appeared surrounding the question of teachers' expectations impacting students' success. These included team consistency with superiority, safe boundaries with equality, and student motivators. Figure 5 describes the thematic categories.
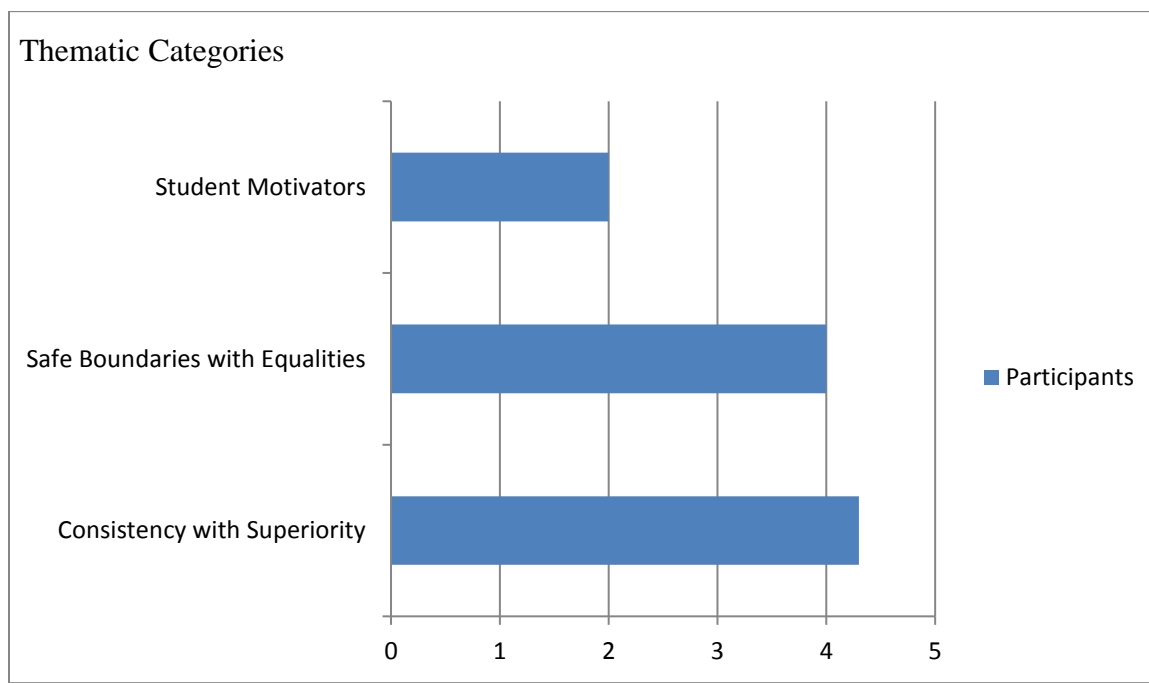
Figure 5. This graph illustrates a comparison of participant responses between student motivators, safe boundaries with equalities, and consistency with superiority.

The thematic category of consistency with superiority was evident during the teacher interview sessions when asked about the impact of teachers' expectations on students' achievement. The educators were clear that teachers' expectations must be high and consistent for students to reach achievement goals. Paul explained this by discussing the importance of modeling expectations consistently.

The performance and passion of a teacher equate to student successes. Consistent, caring, and equivalent to all classroom actions—these measures must also be held by the teacher of themselves since the teacher is the model for the classroom.

Maggie shared similar views as Paul by noting the importance by being thorough with expectations with students.

Daily expectations must be reviewed with students. Clear, consistent expectations are conducive to student successes. Each of my lessons begins with my expectations, consequences, and rewards. In my class, we call these our steps. The first few days of the year I recite the statements, after that the students become a part of the oral review daily. They understand that they are held accountable for their actions; thus, classroom behaviors are minimized.

Safe boundaries with equalities was a second thematic category that the participants discussed as playing a fundamental role in teachers' expectations and students' achievement. Tiffany explained that classroom settings must present an atmosphere in which all learners feel secure and successful.

The importance of clear expectations that is consistent and equal for all learners. Environments that are conducive to such offer learners an atmosphere of safety and boundaries—which is needed to be successful academically.

The third thematic category, student motivators, was discussed as also playing a vital role in teachers' expectations and students' achievement. The educators noted that student relationships are greatly enhanced through connections formed with educators with consistent, caring expectations. In return, the connections and expectations motivate students to reach

achievement goals. William was one participant that voiced the importance of student motivators.

Student motivators are critical to student success with both achievement and classroom expectations. They allow educators to form connections with students that are rich and caring while providing educators with the foundation to provide classroom experiences with clear expectations that simultaneously foster students' achievement successes.

The three thematic categories above were developed relating to the research question. The thematic categories, consistency with superiority, safe boundaries with equality, and student motivators, relate to how the teachers perceive the students they teach are meeting English Language Arts literacy content standards. The teachers described the importance of teacher expectations being clear and consistent. Connections to care, empathy, concern and student motivation were also drawn from previously discussed questions during the interview process.

Q5. What significance does teacher morale play with students meeting standards? What factors do you believe impact educators' morale and is this a continuum between the school, educators' morale, and students' success? If so, how? The participants expressed the concern that teacher morale does impact student achievement. Multiple educators expressed the sentiment that students perceive teachers' attitudes and feelings. Thematic categories appeared surrounding the question of teacher morale impacting student achievement. These included school culture, professional satisfaction, and teacher expertise. Figure 6 describes the thematic categories.

Thematic Categories
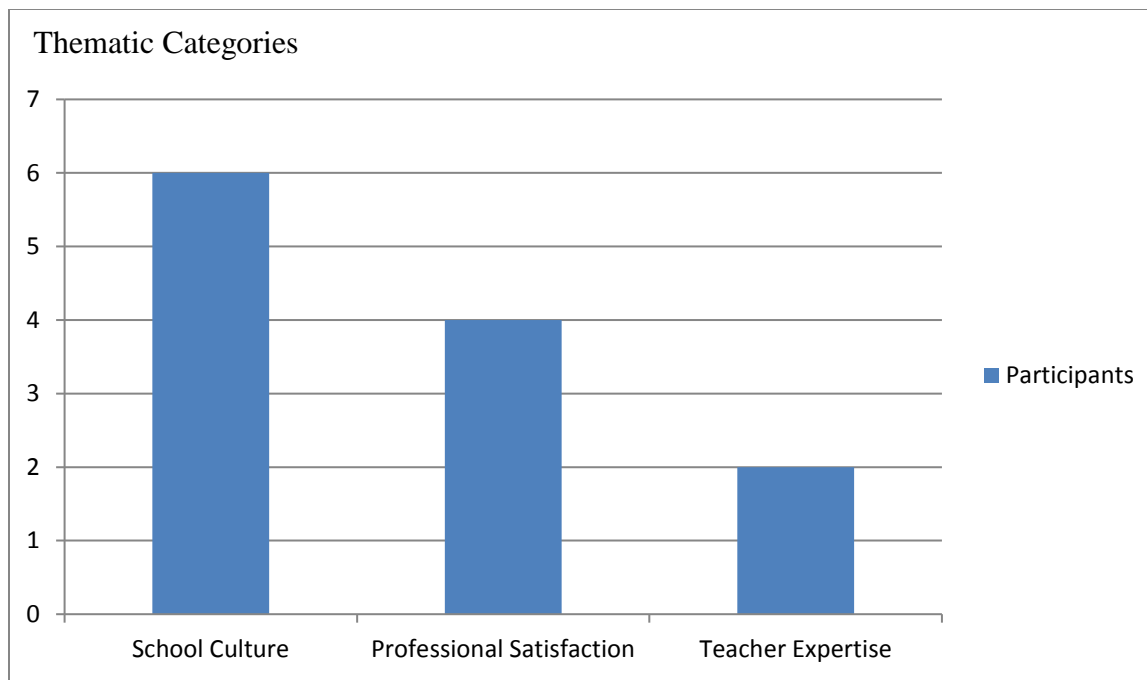
Figure 6. This graph illustrates a comparison of participant responses between school culture, professional satisfaction, and teacher expertise.

School culture was one of the thematic categories presented in the interviews by the participants when discussing teacher morale. Betty explained that working in a high poverty school in a large school district can play a large impact on a teacher's morale. Betty further explained that ofter schools serving student populations with fewer struggles and difficulties are viewed differently by other educators and the public.

Respect and appreciation for all educators, along with acknowledgment of one's service, would play a crucial role in enhancing teacher morale. Poor teacher morale equates to poor student achievement because students are keen and very observant of their teacher's regards and actions.

Professional satisfaction was a second thematic category presented in the interview by the participants when discussing teacher morale. Kelly shared the view that the sentiment of a teacher is perceived by his or her students.

Happy teachers equal happy students. Extremely perceptive of their teacher's sentiments – they are very aware of when we are happy or sad. When an educator is unhappy with position, learners will perceive this and perform accordingly—the educator most likely will not facilitate the quality instruction that the content teacher will either.

The third thematic category, teacher expertise, Maggie explained that teachers' expertise and success would play a huge role in teacher morale. In her experiences, Maggie has felt overlooked for positions due to her over-achievements in the classroom with students. Her educational background and years of experience match her students' successes; however, she continues not to receive employment promotions.

Things such as this play a toll on a teacher's morale and students are aware of how their teacher's feel. In my situation; I choose not to let my professional situation affect my students, as long as I am a classroom teacher; I will teach to the best of my abilities. How many teachers do we know that have the commitment to do such, though? I may retire as a classroom teacher, instead of getting the promotion that I desire, but in the end, I will also know that I have made a difference.

The three thematic categories above were developed relating to the research question. The thematic categories, school culture, professional satisfaction, and teacher expertise, relate to how the teachers perceive the students they teach are meeting English Language Arts literacy content standards. The participants discussed the importance and impact of teacher morale on student achievement and the potential barriers to low morale. Perhaps it can best be summed up with Carlie's sentiments, "a teacher's attitude feeds students' responses, acceptances, and successes."

The participants' responses to the questionnaires are presented below in Table 4.

Table 4

Participant Questionnaire

Question	Not At All = 0	Partial = 1	Full = 2
Category: Instructional Supports			
Do special area educators support student success in content area classes?	0	2	10
Does the collaboration between special and general education teachers support student achievement?	0	1	11
Does the partnership between instructional coaches and classroom teachers support students meeting standards?	0	1	11
Do behavior support systems supports students meeting English Language Arts Literacy standards?	1	5	6
Do academic interventions positively impact students needs? (i.e.,.: math intervention, reading exploratory, Problem Solving Team, Response to Intervention)	0	3	9
Does professional learning opportunities support students meeting English Language Arts Literacy standards?	0	2	10
Sub Score	1	14	57
Category: Teacher Expectations			
Do positive teacher expectations associate with student learning gains?	0	0	12
Do negative teacher expectations associate with student learning difficulty?	0	0	12
Does the student and teacher relationship affect a student's self-efficacy?	0	0	12
Sub Score	0	0	36
Category: Teacher Morale			

Does an educator's years of experience impact his or her professional morale?	0	9	3
Does the level of collegiate degree impact a teacher's morale?	3	6	3
Are teachers at schools with low socioeconomics at greater risk of having lower teacher morale?	1	1	10
Do teacher collaboration and professional learning communities support enhancing teacher morale?	0	1	11
Does poor teacher morale translate to poor student test scores?	0	0	12
Would enhancing the school's culture have a positive impact on teacher morale and student achievement?	0	1	11
Sub Score	4	18	50
Category: Student and Teacher Relationship			
Does the student and teacher relationship impact student achievement?	0	0	12
Would clear, strategic, and personal instructional goals impact student learning?	0	0	12
Do educators needs to present learners with thoughtful and caring relationships to nurture the learning process?	0	0	12
Does the influence of an educator's interpersonal relationship help to begin the process of diminishing achievement gaps in English Language Arts?	0	2	10
Sub Score	0	2	46
Total	**5**	**34**	**189**

Table 4. This table illustrates the calculated responses on the questionnaire of the participates.

The participants' non-verbal responses observed during field notes are presented below in Table 5.

Table 5

Participant Field Notes Non-verbal Responses

Non-Verbal Cue or Expression	Frequency
Avoidance of eye contact	0
Clearing or throat	4
Frowning	2
Head nodding	65
Raising of eyebrows	21
Shift in expression (Positive to Negative)	5
Shift in expression (Negative to Positive)	7
Shifting in seat	18
Tapping of hand or finger	1
Wrinkling of forehead	11

Table 5. Table 5 illustrates the total non-verbal responses of the participants during observed sessions when field notes were recorded.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the perceptions of teachers of middle school students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards. Data were collected using interviews, field notes, and questionnaires with a sample size of 12 participants. Data were analyzed using open coding and axial coding to develop categories and themes.

The research question for this study asked how do teachers perceive middle schools students are meeting English Language Arts literacy standards in southeastern Alabama. The

results indicate that the participants described the necessity for the instructional supports, a positive student and teacher relationship, consistent teacher expectations, and constructive teacher morale. The success of the four categories was depicted as dependent on the success of the learners reaching achievement goals and meeting English Language Arts literacy standards.

Regarding their perceptions of teams and co-teaching, most of the participants had positive perceptions about working in a team, viewing the relationship as working together towards the same goals. Some members also noted the positive aspect of how working in teams offers a multi-perspective approach to teaching. However, some participants believed that working in teams depends on the quality of the relationship between general education and special education teachers. Communication and facilitating collaboration appeared to be an important factor that emerged.

Teacher expectations were associated with all participants as correlated directly with student achievement. All of the participants acknowledged the importance of positive expectations being related to achievement gains and negative expectations being associated with students' learning difficulty. Furthermore, themes of consistency, equality, and student motivators were recurring during the research study.

Teacher morale was also regarded by the participants as directly aligned with student achievement. The participants continually noted that students perceive teacher morale and that teacher morale impacts teacher performance; combined teacher performance and student perception impact student performance. Based on the results discussed in this chapter, the next chapter will discuss the conclusions and the recommendations.

Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusions, and Results

Teacher perceptions of middle school students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards appear impacted by engaged and encouraging learning environments (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015; Rettig, 2016; Sabol & Pianta, 2012; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Hen & Sharabi-Nov, 2014). As student learning outcomes increase, achievement gaps simultaneously minimize. The literature review for this study highlighted four main focus areas—instructional support, student and teacher relationships, teacher morale, and teacher expectations.   Thus, teachers' perceptions of students meeting English Language Arts Literacy standards in southeastern Alabama were explored as the topic of study.

In this qualitative study, the researcher sought to explore middle school teachers' perceptions of students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards. Vygotsky's (1978) theory frames the study by addressing the way students learn, and educators teach. The conceptual framework that guided this study is based on elements of cognitive, developmental, and democratic theories (Vygotsky, 1978). Developmental theories assert that the use of language in classroom settings is a primary cognitive tool. Thus, the collaboration between students, teachers, and colleagues is critical to the success of students' academic abilities (Vygotsky, 1978). The framework behind the study reveals the importance of utilizing interactions between students to increase their mastery of concepts. Woolfolk (2007) explained that cognition and understanding are learned and as knowledge grows so does the behavior. Therefore, background knowledge is the basis and platform for building future learning. An educator's perception of professional self-image, specialized roles, students, and schools impact the actions, knowledge, and thinking of students (Connelly & Diennes, 1982). Finally, the study

also was founded on a third framework—Parson's Social System. Parson's (1951) theory supports the levels that exist within a school—technical, managerial, and institutional. Each level impacts the school's morale, spirit, and success. Collectively, Vygotsky, Woolfolk, and Parson's Social System were utilized to form the frame for middle school teachers' perceptions of students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards. Data collection included field notes, interviews, and questionnaires.

The research question that guided the study asked: How do teachers perceive middle school student are meeting English Language Arts literacy standards in southeastern Alabama? This question focused the research on exploring teachers' perceptions within their classrooms. The method of study utilized a qualitative case study that used questionnaires, interviews, and field notes to identify common themes among participant responses. The study took eight weeks to conduct and revealed that teachers had positive perceptions of students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards in southeastern Alabama. Further conclusions, implications, and recommendations will be presented throughout subsequent sections of Chapter 5.

Summary of the Study

The study was conducted to explore teachers' perceptions of middle school students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards. The specific research question of the study asked: How do teachers perceive middle school students are meeting English Language Arts literacy standards in southeastern Alabama? Twelve middle schools English Language Art teachers from various ethnicities and genders agreed to participate in the qualitative study. Seven were general education teachers and five were special education teachers. All participants were given a questionnaire to complete. Participants also participated in an interview. Field notes were also taken as an observational measure of the non-verbal cues of the educators. The

questionnaires were coded by placing responses into multiple categories reflective of positive or negative perceptions of the middle school students' English Language Arts literacy performance. Interviews were coded to identify word and theme frequency to determine teachers' perceptions of students meeting English Language Arts standards. Field notes were coded by the frequency of non-verbal actions and cues of the educators along with marginal notations. The data collected through the interviews was audio recorded and transferred to a word file. The data was then transferred to excel notes to find theme frequency using NVivo word frequency software.

After sorting and coding the data using word frequency and axial coding in Excel and NVivo, the results reflected the teachers' perceptions of how teachers perceive middle school students are meeting English Language Arts literacy standards in southeastern Alabama. Results indicated that teachers perceive instructional supports, teacher morale, the student and teacher relationship, and teacher expectations to have an impact on students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards. The study's findings indicated a positive correlation between teachers' perceptions of students meeting standards and the teachers' perceptions of instructional supports, teacher morale, the student and teacher relationship, and teacher expectations. Combined, the teachers' perceptions correlate to justify that the educators believe that instructional supports, teacher morale, the student and teacher relationship, and teacher expectations have a positive impact on students meeting English Language Arts Literacy standards in southeastern Alabama.

Summary of Findings and Conclusion

The research question that guided this qualitative study asked, "How do teachers perceive middle school student are meeting English Language Arts literacy standards in southeastern Alabama?" Themes within the participants' responses and field note observations were identified as being positive about the teachers' perceptions of students meeting English

Language Arts literacy standards. Data from the questionnaire responses were examined first.

The clusters and patterns of responses revealed that participants perceived the area of teacher

expectations to have the greatest overall impact on students meeting English Language Arts

literacy standards. The questionnaire asked specific questions about teachers' perceptions of the

association of student learning gains, learning difficulties, and students' self-efficacy with

teacher expectations. According to the questionnaire responses, student successes, learning

difficulties, and student efficiency are perceived by teachers to be associated with teacher

expectations. Teachers' perceptions also link a connection to teacher morale, the student and

teacher relationship, and instructional supports as relating to students meeting English Language

Arts literacy standards. According to responses, the impact of thoughtful, caring relationships

that are collaborative and strategic are vital to students' successes. The collaboration between

peer teachers not only was perceived as supporting student success, but it also was believed to

impact school culture and morale. Combined, instructional supports, teacher morale, the student

and teacher relationship, and teacher expectations showed positive perception from the

participants as impacting students in southeastern Alabama with meeting English Language Arts

literacy standards. Data from interviews was also recorded to identify themes and word

frequency. The data reflected similar patterns as the questionnaires. Once the data was

examined, the raw information was analyzed from Word to Excel to NVivo. NVivo software

allowed frequency tables and axial coding to be identified from the thematic codes and word

frequencies. Specifically, from the emerging themes the categories of team planning, strategies,

and dialogue were analyized as the perceived categories by the English Language Arts teachers

as impacting students meeting content standards the most. The participants described

collaboration as a necessary component to student success; however, when analyzing the

questionnaire data, the researcher notated that 15 participants ,responded to the instructional supports questions as "not at all" or "partially". Next, the researcher reviewed the individual participant interview logs to analyze the relation between the questionnaires and the thematic categories. Data shows that the teachers relate student success to dialogue, team planning, and strategies. These instructional strategies were perceived by the teachers as for many educators in the case study shared that past experiences of collaboration had not been supportive or positive experiences of dialogue, team planning, and shared strategies among their peers. These sentiments were revealed in the questionnaires.

Classroom settings that provide a positive environment promote students' academic development while becoming active participants in the learning process. Therefore, the conceptual framework supporting teachers' perceptions, instructional supports, teacher expectations, teacher morale, and the student and teacher relationship is supported by Vygotsky (1978). Vygotsky's cognitive development theory explained that the mastery of concepts is improved through enriched interactions. Language is regarded as the most valuable in academic development, and an individual's ability to articulate ideas by engaging in dialogue with others, including peers, teachers, and parents using prior knowledge is the foundation for making meaningful discussion (Vygotsky). Vygotsky ascertained that learning is a process that is constructive and active. In classroom settings with consistent, active discussions between learners and teachers, students become engaged, independent, and successful learners. Problem-solving, cognitive development and academic progression correlated directly to middle school students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards. The teachers' perceptions revealed that an array of information to further validate Vygotsky's theory and extend this research study's information. Instructional supports include a variety of instructional approaches,

scholastic services, or school resources provided to educators and students to positively impact student achievement. Such includes professional learning communities, collaboration, academic supports, and behavior supports. Combining these instructional supports along with high teacher expectations, positive teacher morale, and a caring student and teacher relationship, the educators perceive student success for meeting English Language Arts literacy standards in a positive regard.

The areas of the teachers' perception (instructional support, teacher expectations, and the student and teacher relationship) are supported above by theory and are also categorized by utilizing the research question. Five thematic categories emerged by answering the research question: How do teachers perceive middle school student are meeting English Language Arts literacy standards in southeastern Alabama? The participants within the study revealed that teachers perceived that the *school culture*, *consistency with superiority*, *belief in students*, *strategies*, and *socioeconomics* impact students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards.

Based on the findings presented, a student's social class or socioeconomic status community was perceived by the participants as a contributor to students' success. Most of the participants described that the hardships that low socioeconomic students face counteract academic successes. The educators also explained that at-risk learners remain at a significant disadvantage because state academic standards have become more rigorous. In addition, according to the teachers, due to low socioeconomic status, the need for programs to support academic success is crucial. Strategies were a second theme perceived by the participants. According to the perceptions of the educators, strategic planning involving a form of collaborative team planning positively impacts students meeting English Language Arts literacy

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standards. These strategies were purposefully described by the participants in a variety of ways; included strategies were team planning, cross-curricular planning, content planning, and centralized planning. Overall, a consensus of dialogue, discourse, and intentional sharing was common among all of the participants. The study's data also found the category labeled consistency with superiority was a thematic category. This category describes the educators' perception of the importance of high expectations and consistent classroom management. The participants unanimously shared the importance of maintaining a safe, learning environment that fosters the same expectations for all learners. Also, many educators noted the impact of students identifying the teacher's belief in the students' ability as affecting students' success. This thematic category also fell under the area of the student and teacher relationship. The educators perceived that if a student believed that his or her teacher believed in the student's academic potential, the student and teacher relationship and connection would flourish. The positive relationship was perceived to have a direct impact on the student's desire, motivation, and outcomes. Finally, school culture was perceived by the participants as affecting both teacher morale and student achievement successes. The participants of the study acknowledged that the school culture, or set of norms and values, form the persona of the school. The teachers in this study viewed school culture as not only impacted by staff within the school but all stakeholders. This explanation yielded the discussion of the importance of equality in all schools, no matter what student population is serviced at the school. Multiple educators felt that school culture was negatively impacted by non-school employee stakeholders because of adverse sentiments heard, told, and reported. Additionally, the educators described the equally important view of professional satisfaction as impacting school culture because contentment in one's profession relays positive values and norms. The educators' responses collaboratively showed the view that

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a positive school culture supports students' academic achievement and success and teachers' professional growth and instructional facilitation. The data revealed the trend the perception that the school's environment can make a positive impact on educators; likewise, a passionate and positive teacher is perceived to impact students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards in southeastern Alabama in a constructive manner also.

Implications

The study revealed that teachers maintain positive perceptions regarding the perceived impact of instructional supports, teacher expectations, teacher morale, and the student and teacher relationship to students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards. The research from this study implies that for practical purposes, instructional supports, teacher expectations, teacher morale, and the student and teacher relationship can be used to increase learner engagement and performance in middle school English Language Arts classrooms. This study generated a conceptual framework utilizing Vygotsky (1978). The conceptual framework held true in this study. Vygotsky's work emphasized the importance of language, collaboration, and meaningful tasks to develop the construction of knowledge. Vygotsky's theory also recognized the essential qualities surrounding peer interactions in positive environments that support strategic problem-solving and adult interactions. Furthermore, using the concept of perception as presented by Woolfolk (2007), this study explained that cognition and understanding are learned and as knowledge grows so does the behavior. Parson's Social System (1951) was the final principle that supported the study by showing how the levels that exist within a school setting impact a school's morale. Subsequently, the school's morale impacts both educators and students' success.

Practical implications. Identifying teachers' perceptions of specific instructional supports, teacher expectations, teacher morale, and the student and teacher relationship that can be implemented in the school setting is an essential tool in education. Recognizing the impact of instructional supports, teacher expectations, teacher morale, and the student and teacher relationship on students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards adds to the present research and studies on the impact of these strategic categories. The findings from this study provide educators with a compiled overview of the perception of teachers on students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards and the positive impacts surrounding the students meeting those standards. These results may be applied to the educational setting by utilizing the current study's facts, understandings, and principles to resolve that the educators in this study believe that instructional supports, teacher expectations, teacher morale, and the student and teacher relationship impact students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards. The study's methodology and study's literature review validate the educators' viewpoints. The research and teacher views also offer strategic suggestions for supporting positive collaboration with instructional supports, suggestions for teacher expectations, provisions for teacher morale, and the relevance of the student and teacher relationship.

Future implications. Future implications of this study would need to focus on the impact that instructional supports, teacher expectations, teacher morale, and the student and teacher relationship have within various age groups. The current study focused on the perceptions of middle school English Language Arts teachers; however, an assortment of other age groups could potentially benefit from this emphasis. Determining if an impact to students in other age groups would require another study was done that focuses on these groups. Middle

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school is an age group in which self-awareness, peer influence, physical developments, and social interactions climax. It would serve learners well to study the impacts that these strategic categories have on elementary and high school students meeting English Language Arts Literacy standards.

Recommendations

The recommendations for this study center around further insight on the effectiveness of cooperative learning strategies with regard to its impact on English language learners. The focus of this study was to identify teacher perceptions and find evidence to determine if cooperative learning strategies affect the engagement and performance levels of English language learners. The recommendations will give insight on extended assistance for this subgroup of student. Recommendations regarding this study will focus on extending the research to various other content areas, as well as ways to utilize the data from this study to assist students.

Recommendations for further research. This study explored the perceptions of teachers with regard to their perceptions of students meeting English Language Arts Literacy standards; however, a further study that focuses on quantitative data from student performance could add value to this study. Data reflecting assessment scores from subgroups of students would give further insight into the effectiveness of the categories perceived by these participants. This research would extend the data on this study and support teacher perspective with quantitative student data. Furthermore, a study that focused on teacher perceptions from the elementary and high school level would benefit students meeting English Language Arts Literacy standards.

Recommendations for further practice. Results from this study reveal that instructional supports, high teacher expectations, positive teacher morale, and the student and

teacher relationship promote student achievement; therefore, implementing these strategic categories would serve students with a better opportunity for academic success. Specifically, socioeconomics, strategies, consistency with superiority, belief in students, and school culture were perceived by the educators as essential categories as impacting students with meeting English Language Arts literacy standards. Teachers are continuously pursuing new and efficient approaches to make learning more positive and equal for students; the data gathered from this study reveals that these are categories that should be used in the classroom and can assist with bridging the achievement gap found in most United States' schools. This study provides research that reflects that middle school teachers maintain positive perceptions of students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards in southeastern Alabama with the support of instructional supports, high teacher expectations, positive teacher morale, and a caring student and teacher relationship.

Conclusion

The significance of this study relates to exploring teacher perceptions of strategic measures that positively impact students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards. Current research lacks data focused on the impact of the investigative components of perception by combining the study of instructional supports, teacher morale, teacher expectations, and the student and teacher relationship. The data from this study reveals that teacher perceptions reflect that the strategic categories above do positively impact students meeting English Language Arts literacy standards in southeastern Alabama.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

A.   Introduction

    1. How would you describe yourself?

    2. What is your teaching background?

    3. What is your teaching philosophy?

B.   Research Question: How do middle school teachers perceive students are meeting English

    Language Arts Literacy standards in southeastern Alabama?

    1.   What types of collaboration amongst staff members do you believe supports students

       meeting English Language Arts Literacy Standards?

    2. What impact do you believe student and teacher relationship play in student

       achievement?

    3. Do teacher expectations impact student success; if so, how?

    4. What significance does teacher morale play with students meeting standards? What

       factors do you believe impact educators' morale and is this a continuum between the

       school, educators' morale, and students' success? If so, how?

C. Closing

    1. Is there anything else that you would like to ask or talk about that has not been asked

       specifically?

Thank you for your time today. As previously noted, procedures are in place to ensure complete

confidentiality. You will also receive a written transcript of this interview for your review.

Again, thank you for your participation in this research project.

Middle School Teacher Perceptions Questionnaires

School: _____   District: _____

Date: _____   Grade Level Taught: _____

This questionnaire is an inventory that schools can utilize to evaluate the teachers' perceptions of how students meet achievement standards in English Language Arts. The questionnaire engages the educator on a continuum of questions regarding a) collaboration b) teacher expectations c) teacher morale, and d) student and teacher relationships. The questionnaire asks the participant to indicate to what degree he or she agrees with key features (not at all, partial, or completely). To complete the questionnaire: a. Evaluate each feature (i.e., not at all = 0; partial = 1; full = 2) b. Add each column to calculate a subscore for each column. c. Add each sub-category score to calculate a final or total score.

Question	Not At All = 0	Partial = 1	Full = 2
Category: Instructional Supports			
Do special area educators support student success in content area classes?			
Does the collaboration between special and general education teachers support student achievement?			
Does the partnership between instructional coaches and classroom teachers support students meeting standards?			
Do behavior support systems supports students meeting English Language Arts Literacy standards?			
Do academic interventions supports positively impact students needs? (i.e.,.: math intervention,			

reading exploratory, Problem Solving Team, Response to Intervention)

Does professional learning opportunities support students meeting English Language Arts Literacy standards?

Sub Score

Category: Teacher Expectations

Do positive teacher expectations associate with student learning gains?

Do negative teacher expectations associate with student learning difficulty?

Does the student and teacher relationship affect a student's self-efficacy?

Sub Score

Category: Teacher Morale

Does an educator's years of experience impact his or her professional morale?

Does the level of collegiate degree impact a teacher's morale?

Are teachers at schools with low socioeconomics at greater risk of having lower teacher morale?

Do teacher collaboration and professional learning communities support enhancing teacher morale?

Does poor teacher morale translate to poor student test scores?

Would enhancing the school's culture have a positive impact on teacher morale and student achievement?

Sub Score

Category: Student and Teacher Relationship

Does the student and teacher relationship impact student achievement?

Would clear, strategic, and personal instructional goals impact student learning?

Do educators needs to present learners with thoughtful and caring relationships to nurture the learning process?

Does the influence of an educator's interpersonal relationship help to begin the process of diminishing achievement gaps in English Language Arts?

Sub Score

Total

Table 4

Participant Questionnaire

Question	Not At All = 0	Partial = 1	Full = 2
Category: Instructional Supports			
Do special area educators support student success in content area classes?	0	2	10
Does the collaboration between special and general education teachers support student achievement?	0	1	11
Does the partnership between instructional coaches and classroom teachers support students meeting standards?	0	1	11
Do behavior support systems supports students meeting English Language Arts Literacy standards?	1	5	6
Do academic interventions positively impact students needs? (i.e.,.: math intervention, reading	0	3	9

exploratory, Problem Solving Team, Response to Intervention)			
Does professional learning opportunities support students meeting English Language Arts Literacy standards?	0	2	10
Sub Score	1	14	57
Category: Teacher Expectations			
Do positive teacher expectations associate with student learning gains?	0	0	12
Do negative teacher expectations associate with student learning difficulty?	0	0	12
Does the student and teacher relationship affect a student's self-efficacy?	0	0	12
Sub Score	0	0	36
Category: Teacher Morale			
Does an educator's years of experience impact his or her professional morale?	0	9	3
Does the level of collegiate degree impact a teacher's morale?	3	6	3
Are teachers at schools with low socioeconomics at greater risk of having lower teacher morale?	1	1	10
Do teacher collaboration and professional learning communities support enhancing teacher morale?	0	1	11
Does poor teacher morale translate to poor student test scores?	0	0	12

Would enhancing the school's culture have a positive impact on teacher morale and student achievement?	0	1	11
Sub Score	4	18	50
Category: Student and Teacher Relationship			
Does the student and teacher relationship impact student achievement?	0	0	12
Would clear, strategic, and personal instructional goals impact student learning?	0	0	12
Do educators needs to present learners with thoughtful and caring relationships to nurture the learning process?	0	0	12
Does the influence of an educator's interpersonal relationship help to begin the process of diminishing achievement gaps in English Language Arts?	0	2	10
Sub Score	0	2	46
Total	**5**	**34**	**189**

Appendix C: Coding Document

Interview Coding Document

Word or Phrase	Frequency
Perceive	
Meet	
perceive students meet	
low morale	
high morale	
high expectations	
low expectations	
student and teacher relationship	
instructional supports	
behavioral support	
Collaboration	

Field Notes Coding Document: Non-Verbal Cues

Non-Verbal Cue or Expression	Frequency
Shifting in seat	
Tapping of hand or finger	
Clearing or throat	
Frowning	
Wrinkling of forehead	
Raising of eyebrows	
Head nodding	
Avoidance of eye contact	
Shift in expression (Positive to Negative)	
Shift in expression (Negative to Positive)	

Participant Field Notes Non-verbal Responses

Non-Verbal Cue or Expression	Frequency
Avoidance of eye contact	0
Clearing or throat	4
Frowning	2
Head nodding	65
Raising of eyebrows	21
Shift in expression (Positive to Negative)	5
Shift in expression (Negative to Positive)	7
Shifting in seat	18
Tapping of hand or finger	1
Wrinkling of forehead	11

Appendix D: Word Frequency Excel Chart

Accounts	Questionnaire	Interview
positive accounts	**12**	**7**
negative accounts	**0**	**0**
Word and Meaning Frequency	**Questionnaire**	**Interview**
instructional supports		18
Collaboration	2	31
high expectations	1	14
low expectations	1	16
low morale	2	26
high morale		32
Meets	1	3
increase achievement		16
decrease achievement		2
professional learning		11
teacher expectations	2	19
perceives student meets		24
student and teacher relationship	2	37
teacher morale	4	28
Socioeconomics	1	37
school culture	1	31
Achievement	3	41
learning gap	1	14
higher understanding		11
shared responsibilities		2
student expectations		4
Motivators		9
Consistency		12
positive attitude		13
negative attitude		7
increase engagement		14
decrease engagement		1
Standards	3	15
Engaged		28
not engaged		10
Perception		43

Appendix E: NVivo Word Frequency Chart

Word Meaning	Word Length	Word Count	Weighted Percentage	Similar Words
Instruction	11	232	5.11	instruction, instructing, instructional
Support	7	212	3.38	Support
Behavioral	10	201	2.74	behavioral, behavior
Academic	8	197	2.68	academic, academia
Achievement	11	189	2.34	achievement, achievements
Increase	8	184	2.31	increase, increases, increased
Decrease	8	179	2.28	decrease, decreases, decreased
Learning	8	172	2.2	learning, learn, learns
Intervention	12	163	2.12	intervention, intervene, interventions
Effective	9	153	2.1	effective, effect, effects
Ineffective	11	132	1.71	Ineffective
Motivators	10	124	1.61	motivators, motivator, motivate, motivates
Standards	9	115	1.59	standards, standard
Professional Learning	21	101	1.48	professional learning, professional development
Teacher Expectations	20	98	1.39	teacher expectations
Learning Gains	14	96	1.37	learning gains
Student and Teacher Relationship	32	95	1.36	student and teacher relationship
Teacher Morale	13	94	1.35	teacher morale
Socioeconomics	14	93	1.33	Socioeconomics
School Culture	12	92	1.32	school culture
Perception	10	90	1.3	perception, perceive, perceived
Learning Gap	12	88	1.29	learning gap, learning gaps
Higher Understanding	20	87	1.28	higher understanding, higher understandings
Shared Responsibilities	23	86	1.27	shared responsibilities, shared responsibility
Student Expectations	20	85	1.26	student expectations, student expectation
Mastery	7	84	1.25	mastery, master
Consistency	11	83	1.24	consistency, consistent
Positive	9	83	1.24	positive
Negative	8	82	1.23	Negative
Attitude	8	80	1.22	attitude, attitudes

Meeting	8	76	1.18	meeting, meet, meets
Engaged	7	75	1.17	engaged, engage, engagement
English Language Arts	21	75	1.17	English Language Arts, ELA
Impact	6	74	1.16	impact, impacts, impacted
Poverty	7	73	1.15	Poverty
Consequences	12	73	1.15	consequences, consequence
Strategic	9	73	1.14	strategic, strategy, strategies
Equality	8	72	1.13	equality, equal
Content	7	71	1.12	content, content area
Practices	9	68	1.04	practices, practice, practiced
Literacy	8	66	1.02	literacy, literary
Reading	7	65	1.01	reading, read
Students	8	63	0.99	students, student
Educators	9	61	0.96	educators, educator
Stakeholders	12	60	0.93	stakeholders, stakeholder
Affect	6	58	0.9	affect, affects, affected
Cultures	8	57	0.89	cultures, culture
Help	4	57	0.89	help, helps, helped
Satisfaction	13	56	0.88	satisfaction, satisfy
Task	4	55	0.87	task, tasks
Staff	5	55	0.87	Staff
Instructional Coaches	21	54	0.86	instructional coaches, instructional coach
Together	8	54	0.86	Together
Cooperative	11	54	0.85	cooperative, cooperation
Special Educators	17	53	0.84	special educators, special educator, special area educator
Responsibilities	16	53	0.84	responsibilities, responsibility
Understanding	13	52	0.83	understanding, understand, understands
Administration	14	51	0.82	administration, administrator, administrators
Participation	13	50	0.81	participation, participate, participated, participates
Activities	10	49	0.8	activities, activity
Relate	6	49	0.8	relate, relates, related
Class	5	49	0.79	class, classes
Use	3	49	0.77	use, uses, used
Cooperating	11	47	0.76	cooperating, cooperate, cooperation
Confidence	10	46	0.73	confidence, confidences
Modifications	13	45	0.72	modifications, modification
Purposes	8	43	0.69	purposes, purpose
Enhances	8	41	0.65	enhances, enhance, enhanced
Groups	6	39	0.61	groups, group, grouped

Beliefs	7	35	0.58	beliefs, believed, believe, belief
White	5	33	0.56	white, Caucasian
Black	5	33	0.55	black, African American
Hispanic	8	32	0.54	Hispanic
Males	5	31	0.53	males, male
Females	7	30	0.52	females, female
Levels	6	29	0.51	levels, level
Performance	11	29	0.5	performance, performances
Planning	7	27	0.49	Planning
Complete	8	26	0.47	complete, completed, completion
Disadvantage	12	25	0.45	disadvantage, disadvantages, disadvantaged
Good	4	25	0.43	Good
Pages	5	23	0.41	pages, page
Remain	6	21	0.39	remain, remains, remained
Internet	8	20	0.35	Internet
Desks	3	19	0.33	Yes
Chairs	2	19	0.29	No
World	7	17	0.26	Alabama
Yes	10	16	0.25	advantages, advantage
No	7	14	0.21	initial, initials
Alabama	4	13	0.17	Last
Advantages	4	12	0.15	CCRS
Initial	8	11	0.12	involved, involve
Last	8	10	0.11	Language
CCRS	9	10	0.1	listening, listen
Involved	8	9	0.09	speaking, speak
Language	7	8	0.07	helping, help
Listening	4	7	0.06	2017
Speaking	13	6	0.05	United States
Helping	5	5	0.4	desks, desk
2017	6	4	0.03	chairs, chair
United States	5	3	0.02	World
Not	3	2	0.01	not, none, no

Appendix F: Statement of Original Work

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy.

This policy states the following:

Statement of academic integrity.

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

Explanations:

What does "fraudulent" mean?

"Fraudulent" work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one's own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidates' final work without full a complete documentation.

What is "unauthorized" assistance?

"Unauthorized" assistance refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. That can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another's work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.

Appendix G: Statement of Original Work

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.
2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertatin, all information and or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the Publication Manual of the The American Psychological Association.

Amanda Davis
_____
Digital Signature

Amanda Davis
_____
Name (Typed)

06/05/2017
_____
Date