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Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

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Discerning and Developing Department Chairs as Instructional Leaders:
A Case Study of a Large Suburban High School

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

Michael David Heath

March 2021

Acknowledgments

I want to give a special thank you to my dissertation chair, Dr. John Kellmayer. It was through his guidance, wisdom, and support that I was able to persevere through this process. The accountability and constructive critique have made me a better educator and most of all a better person. I looked forward to our phone conversations to better understand your background and apply your teachings to my daily practice.

I would also like to thank Dr. Mary Diez. As I have learned through the dissertation process, one's work is in constant revision. Your editing expertise and guidance were crucial to help me drive forward to the finish line. To Dr. Leah Wickersham Fish and Dr. Kyle Butler, I will be forever grateful for your willingness and wisdom you provided as part of my dissertation committee. Both of you challenged me to look deeper and strengthen my work while helping me grow throughout the process. To Dr. Peter Williams and Dr. Scott Self, I want to express my gratitude for your patience and understanding throughout my doctoral course work. Your support and direction will never be forgotten.

The dissertation process has been an amazing journey of trials and personal growth. I believe this would have not been possible without the love and support of my wife, Stephanie. You have always been my rock and supported me in all my endeavors. Your patience and sacrifice have allowed me to reach my goals. I am truly blessed.

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Abstract

Prevailing research on instructional leadership has primarily focused on school administration to fulfill this role. Growing accountability from state officials, increased departmentalization, and demands on administrations' time and resources led to the need to study other avenues of leadership in secondary schools. In this qualitative case study, the researcher looked at the current perceptions and beliefs of administration, department chairs, and teachers concerning the department chair role. An understanding of department chairs' instructional leadership capacity, distributed leadership in the school of study, and collective efficacy were investigated to determine the best ways to employ department chairs to support teacher development while impacting student performance. Interviews of administrators, department chairs, and teachers were solicited to provide their perceptions and beliefs regarding the position of department chair through the lens of instructional leadership. Similarities and differences were collected to develop descriptive themes designed to encompass department chair characteristics currently present in the school of study. The study findings indicated continuity in some aspects of the role of department chair while highlighting disparities between perceived and substantive characteristics. The major themes of collaboration, trust, traditional management, advocacy, mentorship, growth mindset, instruction, and distributed leadership were found throughout the participants' responses. Perceptions and beliefs of how each group observed these themes regarding the research questions illustrated areas of inconsistencies for future analysis and study. As a consequence, a clearly defined job description and training program for the position of department chair and other lower-level positions such as professional learning community leads need to be considered to provide more opportunity for the role of departments to develop their instructional leadership capacity, to enhance teacher growth, and to increase student success.

Keywords: administrators, collective efficacy, department chairs, distributed leadership, instructional leadership

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The traditional conception of educational leadership in the United States places principals of public secondary schools as the primary agents to facilitate teaching and learning for the schools they serve (Brent et al., 2014). Traditionally, principals' instructional leadership has been seen as focused on school improvement and student academic achievement (Ghavifekr et al., 2019). For example, in the 1970s, research began to highlight *effective schools* as those that were led through a principalship that embodied instructional leadership (Brent et al., 2014). However, schools and educational leaders' leadership practices have been forced to evolve as schools have increased in size and complexity, bringing into question the effectiveness of a principal as the sole leader (DeAngelis, 2013).

The current principal's role requires delegating leadership to department chairs in order to be effective. Delegating leadership is necessary because of the growing demands that principals face from increased accountability, imposing more demands on their time and negatively impacting their other principalship activities (DeAngelis, 2013). One potential avenue to assist principals in the effectiveness of school operations is developing department chairs as instructional leaders. Historically, academic department chair positions emerged as distributed leadership roles designed to alleviate logistical demands on the principal (DeAngelis, 2013). However, limited research has been conducted on the role of department chairs as instructional leaders, preventing U.S. secondary public schools from effectively delegating leadership to the department chairs using data-driven policies (Brent et al., 2014). Therefore, this exploratory case study of a large suburban high school was designed to investigate the current roles and leadership of department chairs and their perceptions and beliefs on effective instructional leadership so as to create recommendations for changes and best practices for future implementation.

The study site was in a large suburban school district with over 40,000 students with six large high schools, eight middle schools, and 27 elementary schools. The large suburban school, regarding this case study, opened in 1998 and had an enrollment of approximately 2,000 students in 2018 (see Table 1). The administration consisted of one head principal, five assistant principals (APs), one dean of instruction, counselors, and department chairs.

Table 1

2017–2018 State-Reported Demographic Data

Category	Subcategory	%
Ethnicity	Caucasian	67
	Hispanic	20
	Asian	6
	African American	3
	Other	2
	Subcategory	#
Class sizes	Seniors	500
	Juniors	512
	Sophomores	526
	Freshmen	543
		%
English language learner		1.7
Economically disadvantaged		11.5
Attendance rate		95.1
Graduation rate (Class of 2018)		99.1

Note. Demographic data derived from district database.

The high school that served as the site for this study had six department chairs to manage over 111 teachers. Table 2 shows the breakdown of each department with the number of department chairs and teachers in each.

Table 2*Number of Department Chairs and Teachers by Department*

Department	No. of department chairs	No. of teachers
Math	1	14
Science	1	15
Career technology education (CTE) / fine arts	1	40
Social studies	1	19
English	1	14
Foreign language (LOTE)	1	9

Statement of the Problem

Managing educational leadership with rapidly growing enrollment is a significant problem for U.S. secondary school administration. The principal's and assistant principals' core work responsibility is to serve as instructional leaders but demands on their time due to rapidly increasing student enrollment create strain in effectively performing all their various responsibilities (Brent et al., 2014). This strain is important because the tasks associated with instructional leadership across all academic entities are daunting even for the most skilled principals (Bredeson, 2013). To address these increasing demands, principals must be willing to expand the influence of their leadership and allow key stakeholders such as department chairs the opportunity to impact learning for student achievement (Bredeson, 2013).

Some secondary school principals have begun utilizing the knowledge and skills of teacher leaders to handle delegable academic leadership and service that schools must provide (Bredeson, 2013). Bredeson found that department chair leadership can positively impact all student learning through four categories: (a) knowledge of instructional leadership, (b) the ethics of why department chairs should shift their roles, (c) the impact on all students' achievements,

and (d) ability to navigate distractions. According to Brent et al. (2014), several strategies have proven effective for distributing leadership to key school personnel and have provided means to analyze student data to improve instruction. One strategy is surveying faculty and staff to gain a better understanding of department chairs' responsibilities and efficacy. A second strategy mentioned is to have a collaborative panel of administrators and teachers in the selection of the department chairs. Finally, the third strategy Brent et al. discussed was expanding the department chair role by including standardization such as school vision and instructional leadership. Additionally, Brent et al. suggested visioning would allow department chairs to be involved with promoting the school culture through teacher development of stewardship and with implementation of both. Sharing the role of instructional leadership, according to Brent et al., would allow department chairs to develop and support best teaching practices along with designing individual teacher development plans for continued growth in their disciplines. Understanding the ability of school administration to embrace distributed leadership practices provides a foundation for the development of department chairs as instructional leaders for their teachers and students (Corcoran, 2017).

The implementation of professional learning communities (PLCs) is another avenue to consider when analyzing the impact department chairs have on instructional leadership. An emphasis on collaboration is vital to the development of PLCs and the effectiveness (Battersby & Verdi, 2015). PLCs also offer an approach to analyzing and navigating instructional practices by a community of learners in a growth-promoting way (Watson, 2014). PLCs afford a platform to allow department chairs to impact their teachers' learning, which has become increasingly difficult for administration to achieve as schools have increased in size and accountability. Mid-level teacher leaders, if properly trained, can exhibit the capacities to provide professional development for continued teacher learning and growth (Bryant et al., 2019).

Mid-level leadership has seen an increase in the need to enhance department chairs' instructional leadership abilities to impact student learning. Student achievement data have indicated the need to determine areas for intervention. Department chairs are now being tasked with developing and organizing instructional activities to address concerns uncovered through the analysis of student achievement data (Akram et al., 2018). Researchers such as van der Mars et al. (2018) have emphasized the use of formative assessment in tandem with standard-based instruction to ensure students are meeting the requirements of local and state initiatives. Concurrent with the development of mid-level instructional leadership is the need to design and implement fair assessments that provide equal and equitable opportunities for all students and to inform and improve teaching and learning (Webber et al., 2014).

Finally, teacher self-efficacy and collective efficacy need to be addressed in relation to instructional leadership development and practices. Kim and Seo (2018) demonstrated that a teacher's belief in their effectiveness can improve student achievement. Building on an individual's perception of effectiveness is the need to discuss the collective efficacy of PLCs. Collective efficacy looks at elaborating and operationalizing a model for learning teams to impact instruction and student performance (Donohoo, 2018). Donohoo also noted that a shared belief through teachers' combined efforts can better impact teaching practices and student learning. Collective efficacy can be developed through PLCs by (a) increasing collaboration, (b) utilizing teachers' expertise to improve instruction, and (c) taking student learning to levels exceeding a student's home and community environment (Mosoge et al., 2018).

Department chairs can potentially provide critical leadership due to their proximity to teachers and their ability to create collaborative cultures for growth and student success (Gardner & Ward, 2018; Klar, 2013). Most prior research on instructional leadership in public secondary schools in the United States has focused on principals; however, there is limited research on the

role of the department chairs as instructional leaders. The specific problem addressed in this dissertation is that principals do not have access to data-driven research that would allow them to assess current department chairs' leadership qualifications. Insufficient research exploring the department chair as an asset for instructional leadership has led to hesitation on the part of the principal to utilize the department chair position more effectively.

The department chair position has evolved across the United States, resulting from an increase in school size along with constantly revised state standard requirements focusing on curriculum and instructional strategies (Brent et al., 2014). Increased expectations by state and district administration potentially allow department chairs greater leadership responsibilities at both the department and school levels (DeAngelis, 2013). At the time of this study, school administration assigned traditional functions to the department chair. The department chair has been designated by the principal as a standard managerial position (as described by DeAngelis, 2013) designed to oversee department funds and disseminate information from the administrative team to the teachers. Currently, department chairs do not receive training components to develop them as instructional leaders. As a previous science department chair, I did not receive any training as an instructional leader to prepare me for future leadership demands. As an assistant principal, my current position, I noted that lack of school-level competency development suggests that gaining an understanding of department chairs' perceptions and beliefs of instructional leadership and their leadership capacities must be explored.

Purpose of This Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the current perceptions and beliefs of department chairs, administrators, and teachers regarding instructional leadership and the role of the department chair. It is essential that stakeholders, such as administration, can accurately describe their programs in meaningful ways for evaluation purposes (Chen, 2015).

Qualitative research enables an analysis of data from a variety of methods focusing on the natural social life of the subjects (Anderson, 2017; Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). Examination of the administration's knowledge of the department chair role and teachers' perceptions of their department chair's responsibilities regarding instructional leadership were explored.

Three research questions guided the study. Semistructured online Zoom interviews provided the data for qualitative analysis for this case study. Department chairs, administration, and department teachers were used for this case study. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic and quarantine orders, Zoom online interviews were utilized. Dedoose software provided the platform for open coding to determine patterns in relation to the current role of department chair for instructional leadership.

Research Questions

Three research questions guided this study:

RQ1: What are the perceptions and beliefs of the participants regarding the role and responsibilities of department chairs?

RQ2: What are the perceptions and beliefs of the participants regarding distributed leadership in their school?

RQ3: What are the perceptions and beliefs of the participants on the impact of department chairs on collective teacher efficacy?

Definitions of Key Terms

The following definitions were utilized for this research:

Academic departments. Academic departments are a fundamental feature, and a highly stable structure, of secondary schooling (DeAngelis, 2013).

Competencies. Competencies are the applied skills and knowledge that enable people to successfully perform in professional, educational, and other life contexts (Hartel & Foegeding, 2006).

Department chair (teacher leader). A department chair is an individual selected to supervise teachers within a specific content area (Gaubatz & Ensminger, 2017).

Distributed leadership. Distributed leadership is the development of leadership styles and strategies that continuously spread the capacity to act, to initiate, and to learn on behalf of the whole organization (Hartley, 2009).

Instructional leadership. Instructional leadership is an influence process through which leaders identify a direction for the school, motivate staff, and coordinate school- and classroom-based strategies aimed at improvements in teaching and learning (Hallinger & Murphy, 2012).

Operational beliefs. Operational beliefs are one's vision of something that is accepted, considered to be true, or held as an opinion, or something believed (Merriam-Webster, n.d.a).

Operational perceptions. Operational perceptions are one's understanding of how the current environment and systems are being carried out (Merriam-Webster, n.d.b).

Stakeholders. Stakeholders are individuals such as principals, departments, chairs, and teachers who are part of the educational setting (DeAngelis, 2013).

Transformational autonomy. Transformational autonomy describes leaders who recognize employees' needs and perspectives to increase productivity and self-initiation (Gilbert et al., 2017).

Conclusion

Traditional school leadership has been tasked with many operations that require flexibility and innovative avenues to impact all students. Department chairs provide a pathway to alleviate some of the responsibilities of centralized leadership while making an impact on

teachers and students. Historical competencies of department chairs comprise the foundation for traditional roles. Evaluation of the school's department chair position may lead to recommendations to increase instructional leadership capacities for department chairs.

Distributed and instructional leadership theories provide the framework to develop a blueprint to move the high school forward. Discussion and analysis of PLCs examined set practices that allow department chairs to better serve teachers through instructional leadership development and systems implementation. Understanding the importance of fair assessments and evaluating student achievement data can uncover areas where department chairs can focus their PLCs' attention to implement their best instructional practices. Helping teachers consider their own effectiveness and that of the collective whole can be best served through department chairs' ability to increase teacher development while empowering their teachers to demonstrate their value and ownership of their classroom and students.

Past research highlights that school administration describes its most successful department chairs as those individuals who engage in instructional leadership with their departments (Kelley & Salisbury, 2013). The qualitative investigation allowed both teacher leaders and their colleagues to voice their knowledge of the current leadership structure. The findings of this study addressed the current perceptions and beliefs of the role of the department chair and how the high school utilizes this position. The results of this research provide recommendations for the development of the department chair position along with competencies to better support teachers with instructional leadership and positively impact student learning.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Department chairs are considered the content specialists of their departments (Zepeda & Kruskamp, 2007) and are positioned to impact the teachers they support, promoting and facilitating change in their schools (Gaubatz & Ensminger, 2015). However, an understanding of instructional leadership and how to best support teachers in this realm has not been defined clearly. According to the literature, generic delivery models of professional development have revealed department chairs were ineffective in improving instructional strategies with their teachers (Timperley, 2005). Teachers and students have presented a unique blend of social, cultural, and political conditions that must be considered when addressing circumstances to improve learning (Timperley, 2005).

Department chairs in the large suburban district are not formerly trained to be instructional leaders for the teachers in their departments. Through continued development of APs, the district has continued to rely on school administration to be instructional leaders for their campuses. Increasing demands and responsibilities have led to constraints on the school administration's time and resources, resulting in difficulty in meeting the instructional needs of teachers. A rapidly increasing student and teacher population has made it difficult for the administration to perform all their various roles effectively (Brent et al., 2014).

In this chapter, I analyze the literature from a multitude of sources and viewpoints to define the role of department chair and the impact these individuals have on the academic development of teachers in the classroom. Literature focusing on the historical context of department chairs has provided a foundation for the traditional role. Next, a review of the literature concerning the evolution of school leadership and state certification shifts (Brent et al., 2014) was conducted to redefine the role of department chairs in schools. The literature on distributed and instructional leadership provided a framework for enabling department chairs to

become change agents regarding instructional leadership for their teachers. Finally, a review of the literature allowed me to discuss characteristics that department chairs, as change agents, must develop and express to impact the effectiveness of academic delivery of their teachers and performance of students through instructional leadership practices.

Literature Review

For this literature review, a period from 2012–2020 was chosen for all references, except for a few seminal articles. The reasoning for the time-frame selection was to ensure current information was being provided. Those articles outside the date range were selected for historical and foundational purposes. Peer-reviewed journals were the primary source of information based on the scrutiny colleagues provide to ensure the quality and value the journal articles bring to the research community. Three databases provided the majority of the articles for this study. Abilene Christian University, the University of Texas at Austin, and Google Scholar were selected. Search parameters were set through these online databases for full article access. Selected articles came from higher education, secondary education, and outside organizations that discussed leadership theories and capacities. All articles were provided with a digital object identifier (DOI) if available. Those articles that did not have a DOI were given the website address or permalink. Distributed and instructional leadership were the two theories selected to narrow article searches to enable the manageability of resources. This review focused on the peer-reviewed literature, affirming department chairs' importance and the need to expand their role as instructional leaders.

Historical View of the Principal's Role as an Instructional Leader

Principals, viewed as the leader of their schools, have not always had this designation. During the 19th century, superintendents and principals held little authority to run their schools (Martin, 2018). Schools were primarily run by school boards that had little structure or

centralization (Martin, 2018). By the 1920s, principals were primarily tasked with ensuring the development of inexperienced teachers and considered the sole instructional leader for their schools (Martin, 2018). In 1966 the Coleman Report stated that socioeconomic factors had more of an impact on student achievement than internal school factors such as curriculum and instruction (Martin, 2018). The 1970s saw the release of the effective schools movement, which was a model based on the research of Brookover and Lezotte (Martin, 2018). The study uncovered data that contradicted the Coleman Report and emphasized that schools, which (a) offered a safe environment, (b) a climate of high expectations for success, (c) a clear and focused mission, (d) an opportunity to learn that requires sufficient time on task, (e) frequent monitoring of student progress, (f) positive home-school relations, and (g) purposeful instructional leadership could impact student success despite socioeconomic factors (Martin, 2018).

High School Principals as Instructional Leaders

U.S. high school principals have seen an increase in accountability measures aimed at increasing student learning (Klar, 2013) and improving teacher performance in the classroom (Vogel, 2018). Data collection and analysis have provided meaningful information to highlight areas of focus. The primary emphasis on narrowing the achievement gap between subpopulations has been a focal point for legislation that has driven the need for increased instructional leadership for principals because of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Vogel, 2018). To impact instruction in the classroom, the Obama administration developed Race to the Top grants, which focused on the principal's actions of supervision and evaluation to develop data sets that highlighted students' performance and to inform teachers and administrations of areas to address (Vogel, 2018). Even though federal regulations and demands have been put into place, obstacles have been identified limiting principals' effectiveness as instructional leaders.

Current research uncovered a lack of confidence in curriculum as one obstacle principals

have faced when implementing instructional leadership for their schools. Wallin et al. (2019) noted that principals felt inadequate to be instructional leaders due to constraints on their time and ability to be in the classroom. According to Wallin et al., literature emphasized that principals serve a dual role in supporting instructional practices while managing the day-to-day running of the school. Wallin et al. contended that the principals' abilities to be in the classroom to monitor, encourage the instruction, and encourage curriculum implementation have become strained by the many demands principals face, which some administrators felt led to a sense of not achieving expectations. Principals have also mentioned that time is a significant factor hindering their instructional leadership abilities. Many principals have noted that scheduled classroom visits are often changed as situations arise requiring their attention (Wallin et al., 2019).

Several factors have been consistent throughout the literature. Enormous amounts of strain decrease a principal's ability to be an effective instructional leader. Martin (2018) listed parent concerns and emails as significant consumers of a principal's time. On top of that, district administration meetings often pull school leadership away from campuses, coupled with daily crises that are unforeseen (Martin, 2018). Finally, principals need to be visible. It is imperative to build school culture; however, time required for community connections and classroom visits limits the principal's ability to maintain that focus (Martin, 2018). As instructional leadership demands increased for principals, a clear definition and leadership style needed to be agreed upon.

The definition of instructional leadership remains complex in scope. Initially, instructional leadership encompassed three domains: a school's mission, instructional programs, and a positive school learning environment (Vogel, 2018). Although this provided a foundation, the definition was broad and left districts in a place of ambiguity. More recently, instructional

leadership has been defined as the act of aiming to achieve success in the teaching-learning process (Özdemir et al., 2020). Instructional leadership has expanded to include the principal's behaviors that lead the entire school to high achievement (Mestry, 2017). These behaviors work by developing shared goals, monitoring and providing feedback on teaching and learning, and promoting school-wide professional development through shared or distributed leadership (Hansen & Larusdottir, 2015; Mestry, 2017).

School leaders face a dilemma. Principals have seen an increase in their responsibilities but have run into obstacles that limit their abilities to impact the instruction for the communities they serve proactively. As the definition of instructional leadership continues to be refined, principals are beginning to realize that specific steps must be put into place to enhance their instructional leadership capabilities while distributing responsibilities to increase the magnitude of student achievement. Clearly defined protocols need to be discussed and implemented to allow school leaders to answer the call from federal, state, and district initiatives while balancing the school's daily operations. As research continued to examine the construct of instructional leadership, blueprints began to emerge to meet the needs of school stakeholders and impact student learning.

Research has revealed that instructional leadership is not a concept that can be achieved by utilizing a limited group of individuals. Most school personnel view instructional leadership as a collaborative effort (Hansen & Larusdottir, 2015). Research also points out that teachers do not view the principal as one who facilitates and drives instruction in the classroom (Hansen & Larusdottir, 2015). Principals, therefore, must be more proactive in developing stakeholders' ability to provide instructional leadership through delegation and training (Hansen & Larusdottir, 2015). Three dimensions, coupled with five practices, have been studied to illustrate the

capacities and impact school principals can demonstrate to drive instructional leadership for their campuses.

The first dimension principals must demonstrate is defining the school's mission. Clear, measurable, and time-focused goals must be articulated and understood by the entire school community (Mestry, 2017). Many principals have a solid understanding of instructional leadership practices, but they have not assimilated these roles in their daily functions (Mestry, 2017). To accomplish this task, regarding instructional leadership, principals must establish goals and expectations. Principals must be vulnerable and willing to share their thoughts while eliciting feedback from teachers and staff (Wallin et al., 2019). One avenue to accomplish increased instructional leadership is to develop growth plans for teaching and learning in their departments (Wallin et al., 2019). Instructional framework development and critical conversations can allow for realistic expectations to be uncovered and utilized for planning (Wallin et al., 2019). Principals must also ensure that ample time is set aside to revisit and adjust goals and expectations built into the school year (Wallin et al., 2019).

The second dimension principals must demonstrate is the ability to manage the instructional programs of their school. Mestry (2017) noted that many head principals believe instructional leadership should be carried out primarily through assistant principals and the dean of instruction. Even though principals expressed this mindset, many of them still aimed to accomplish instructional leadership by being intentional in stimulating, supervising, and monitoring the teaching and learning in their schools (Mestry, 2017). Wallin et al. (2019) indicated that principals must set parameters for the planning, coordinating, and evaluation of teaching and the curriculum. Furthermore, Wallin et al. emphasized distributed leadership encourages principals to utilize the expertise and input of all teachers to develop instructional plans that best fit the populations they serve. By providing the facilities, resources, and

professional development to their teachers, Wallin et al. illustrated how principals can navigate the obstacles that hinder teachers such as the need for support and a large student population. Distributed leadership capacities can also help school administration with the support structure to enable teachers to be productive throughout the school year (Mestry, 2017; Wallin et al., 2019).

The third dimension principals must address involves the ability to promote a positive school learning climate (Mestry, 2017). A school climate focused on instructional leadership and based on continuous improvement is modeled by the principal. Encouragement and rewards are put in place to acknowledge and support all teachers and students based on the purposes and practices implemented by the principal (Mestry, 2017).

Even though distributing capacities to school stakeholders can potentially impact instructional leadership in a positive manner, principals must continue to promote and continue to participate in teacher learning. Doing so can ensure that principals remain an active part of the instructional leadership process while still being able to handle the school (Mestry, 2017). Wallin et al. (2019) identified five strategies based on previous research to aid principals in accomplishing this endeavor: (a) grant autonomy in choices for professional development, (b) develop a culture of collaboration, (c) promote action research in the classroom, (d) place teachers strategically, and (e) model a growth mindset by continuing their own professional growth.

The first strategy is to grant autonomy for departments and teachers to take on their own professional development needs (Wallin et al., 2019). Support and resources are instrumental for principals to meet this strategy. The second is developing a culture that allows teachers the time to collaborate and work as a team to address the needs of their students (Wallin et al., 2019). PLCs and subject-level teams can provide the necessary collaborative space to use this strategy. Assisting in this direction, the third strategy is for principals to be proactive in developing action

research or program evaluations to ensure the school's and teachers' concerns are being addressed (Wallin et al., 2019). Based on program evaluation, the fourth strategy is for principals to be active in encouraging and participating in teacher learning (Wallin et al., 2019). As the head of the school, principals manage school budgets and resources. Being intentional in allocating funds and assets for teachers allows school personnel to take risks to enhance learning and implement new strategies to improve instruction (Wallin et al., 2019). Principals are tasked with promoting a positive school learning climate through high expectations for teachers and learners (Mestry, 2017). Mestry stated, "The principal models values and practices that create a climate to support the continuous improvement of teaching and learning" (p. 264). The fifth strategy, according to Wallin et al. (2019), involved principals being proactive in the growth of their entire faculty and staff by modeling their own professional learning. Principals are tasked with the management and distribution of district and school resources. Principals can advocate for additional staff positions, outside resources, and substitutes to allow current teachers to collaborate with their teams and develop instructional strategies moving forward (Wallin et al., 2019). Another avenue a principal can employ regarding resource allocation is to seek professional development resources that can be implemented with in-school opportunities to maximize exposure to the material while alleviating monetary demands to send individuals to outside training (Wallin et al., 2019).

Integrating the dimensions and strategies presented by Mestry (2017) and Wallin et al. (2019), one can conclude that principals need to analyze the school environment to ensure an orderly and supportive culture that can provide principals with innovative ways to maximize their resources and staff. Principals must be willing to challenge the old-style teaching by allowing teachers to create a classroom atmosphere that is relaxing, inclusive, and culturally responsive to all students. To carry out this practice, principals provide transparent

communication driven by data collection and analysis, which encourages risk-taking, pedagogical change, and student transition (Wallin et al., 2019). Encouraging the community to be involved in inclusive environments allows principals to form partnerships with all school stakeholders through constructive dialogue aimed at improving instruction in the classroom (Mestry, 2017; Wallin et al., 2019).

History of the Department Chair Position

The role of the department chair has roots in many different facets of education. The district consolidation movement, which housed many schools under one administration, led to the development of secondary schools of increased size and organizational structures (Brent et al., 2014). Principals have also faced increasing demands and responsibilities (Peters et al., 2018). Although principals had traditionally been viewed as the primary source of direction and leadership, the need for individuals who could supervise instruction and attend to administrative duties arose (Zepeda & Kruskamp, 2007). Principals looked to find ways to delegate responsibilities through distributed leadership (Brent et al., 2014) as departmentalization produced specialized curriculum content and instructors (Gaubatz & Ensminger, 2017). These changes made it difficult for principals to support faculty across a broad spectrum of disciplines (Brent et al., 2014). Along with the revisions as mentioned earlier, state certification requirements further shifted the importance of pedagogical training to one of disciplinary knowledge in lieu of best teaching practices (Brent et al., 2014).

Research has been conducted on school leadership regarding principals and policy, yet limited attention has focused on the role of department chairs (DeAngelis, 2013). Department chairs have a critical leadership opportunity due to their proximity to teachers to create collaborative cultures for growth and student success (Gardner & Ward, 2018; Klar, 2013). Bredeson (2013) stated that leadership is second only to instruction in the classroom; principals

are focusing on the knowledge and skills of teacher leaders to handle the academics and service schools must provide. Through distributed instructional leadership, administrators are expanding the potential and influence of department chairs (Bredeson, 2013).

At the secondary level, departments are fundamental and highly stable structures that provide teachers a place to collaborate (Brent et al., 2014). Research has shown that the chair assumed a managerial or supervisory role (Zepeda & Kruskamp, 2007) along with budget control and teacher assignments (DeAngelis, 2013). Other duties tended to include coordinating professional development, setting and conducting meetings, and overseeing departmental budgets (Gaubatz & Ensminger, 2017). Studies have also indicated that the purpose of department chairs was to close the gap between the teacher's classroom and the administrative office regarding communication and policy (Gaubatz & Ensminger, 2015; Peacock, 2014).

The department chair, as part of the organizational structure of school leadership, first gained prominence in the 1930s and began to expand to meet the increased expectations leadership was being tasked with as schools grew (DeAngelis, 2013; Gaubatz & Ensminger, 2017). Competencies resulting from this movement included evaluation, monitoring, and development of colleagues (DeAngelis, 2013), but limited attention was paid to how principals could foster the capacities of individuals such as department chairs (Klar, 2013). Even at the collegiate level, where department chairs have been heavily relied upon, it is not uncommon for individuals new to the position to have unclear expectations (Riley & Russell, 2013). The literature on teacher leadership began to highlight the dilemma of the educational change and the obstacles presented. During the 1980s, educational reform began focusing on the teacher's active participation in a school's development and governance (Lai & Cheung, 2014). Also, during that time, instructional leadership began to emerge with a focus on defining the school's mission, instructional programs, and a positive school culture (Akram et al., 2018). Although teachers

have always been viewed as leaders in their classroom, when challenged to move this ability to a broader scope, an agreed-upon definition resulted in ambiguities and inconsistencies regarding the actual role even though teachers were perceived to possess a robust knowledge base to drive change and improvement (Lai & Cheung, 2014).

The research discussing the history of the department chair position brings to light several aspects. The first is that the need for distributed leadership is apparent for school administration to meet the expectations and demands of the state while ensuring student growth and success (Hansen & Larusdottir, 2015). Department chairs play an integral role in secondary schools to assist the principals with the logistical requirements typically handled with regards to budget, communication, and school culture (DeAngelis, 2013). School leadership has begun to find innovative ways to increase school organization and effectiveness, but clear definitions of roles, professional development, and obstacles have hindered the potential impact department chairs can make on the teachers they serve (Lai & Cheung, 2014). Although these issues have been brought to light through past research, developing a better understanding of three key areas will lay the foundation for this study: (a) exploring the research on distributed leadership, (b) understanding the importance of instructional leadership, and finally, (c) looking at the department chair as a change agent. My research contributes to the importance of studying the department chair position as an avenue to increase instructional leadership capacity of department chairs to support teachers.

Conceptual Framework

Secondary high school principals have seen an increase in the scope of their leadership. State standards and accountability ratings have increased the demands on school leadership with more focus on instructional reform and practices to elevate student performance in the classroom (Kelley & Salisbury, 2013). The distributed perspective has gained popularity in focusing on the

development of the framework for leadership and management of school leaders to address the need for increased development of leadership to alleviate the demands on the principal (Diamond & Spillane, 2016). The conceptual framework regarding distributed leadership highlights three aspects of the successful utilization of this theory. The first concept is that leadership must be stretched over many individuals (Diamond & Spillane, 2016). Distributed leadership involves many individuals leading and managing school processes (Diamond & Spillane, 2016). Previous research notes the traditional managerial role of department chairs, but new initiatives, through the distributed perspective, provide department chairs with the training and tools to advance instructional guidance of the teachers they serve (Peters et al., 2018).

The second concept for successful use of distributed leadership requires the principal to consider the subject matter. Department chairs, considered the experts of their discipline, allow their leadership to have a more significant impact on their teaching practices within their department (Diamond & Spillane, 2016). Principals must ensure that department chairs have the knowledge needed to improve teacher instruction while supporting district requirements for content of state curriculum (Diamond & Spillane, 2016). The distributed perspective allows teacher leaders, or department chairs, the ability to perform best leadership practices through collaboration. PLCs provide department chairs with the forum to discuss and implement best teaching practices that will positively impact all students' learning (Peters et al., 2018). Allowing department chairs to cultivate leadership in their departments enables teachers to collectively make decisions regarding their instructional elements and increase ownership (Peters et al., 2018).

The third concept is impacting the legitimacy of instructional practices. Distributed leadership allows a better understanding of the relationship between school policy, school leadership, and best teaching practices (Diamond & Spillane, 2016). Teacher leaders, such as

department chairs, can convince teachers of the legitimacy of ideas and practices through collaboration and relationships developed at the departmental level (DeAngelis, 2013; Diamond & Spillane, 2016). The sharing of power is deemed essential for site-based management and decision-making responsibilities (Peters et al., 2018). Distributed leadership involving increased reach of department chairs, strategic focus on the subject matter, and the justification of curriculum and instructional practices allows a systematic framework to be observed in the fabric of the school culture (Peters et al., 2018).

As with distributed leadership, school administrators are tasked with increasing the academic performance of all students. Instructional leadership theory utilizes the power of influence of school leadership to enhance best practices for classroom instruction (Jita & Mokhele, 2013). As mentioned earlier, with a distributed perspective, instructional leadership allows principals to empower department chairs with authority in daily tasks, activities, and interactions throughout their department (Timperley, 2005). Past research primarily involved teacher-proofing student curriculum and teacher pedagogy (Timperley, 2005). As studies pointed out, highly qualified teachers resulted in higher-student achievement (Timperley, 2005). School administrators must be willing to distribute tasks to teacher leaders to provide flexibility to meet each student's unique challenges (Timperley, 2005).

Instructional leadership focuses on teachers and how they operate. The change in the role of the school administrator to be the critical instructional leader has led to teachers being more integral in the success of their students through the development of the instructors' knowledge and skills (Jita & Mokhele, 2013). Instructional leadership assists the traditional hierarchy of schools by distributing responsibility across many levels with the utilization of formal positions, including the department chairs and team leads (Jita & Mokhele, 2013). It is essential to focus on

this aspect of leadership because previous research has primarily concentrated on the school's centralized authority (Jita & Mokhele, 2013).

Distributed Leadership

How principals handle this transition of allowing department chairs more autonomy to lead is essential. The literature on distributed leadership, or allowing others to take on responsibilities traditionally held by the school administration, has been crucial for educational change. Educational organizations have begun to shift to sharing and participation by teachers in the leadership process (Shava & Tlou, 2018). Klar (2013) showed that schools making this transition from traditional to distributed leadership have a principal who authentically and publicly ties this change to district efforts for growth and improvement. The movement to a distributed leadership perspective requires the administration to address school culture and ensure that the school vision remains a driving force for all (Hauge et al., 2014). Past studies reviewed by Hauge et al. have stressed the importance of institutional design and the constraints on leadership that are present. Hauge et al. emphasized that district and school leaders develop clear competencies that stimulate daily work and move the school forward as a whole. Other factors that were observed in the research were principals who kept the community informed through promoting the school vision, evaluating the strategies that are in place, and building relationships through leadership communication (Hogan, 2018). In communicating to the public, data show that it is critical to inform the chair of the administration's support (Klar, 2013).

Research has shown that hierarchical or vertical leaders show great potential in influencing and developing shared or collective leadership, and whether shared or joint, these styles can lead to positivity, motivation, and increased performance in their employees (Hans & Gupta, 2018). Principals are crucial in the implementation of distributed leadership since they can empower department chairs to venture out of their comfort zone and exercise their strengths,

which can lead to an increase in motivation (Hans & Gupta, 2018). Before allowing others to take charge, trust must be established. In the past two decades, the concept of integrity has been shown to be a major player in increasing positivity in schools (Graham, 2018). To build trust, according to Graham, the administration works on relationships and consistency with teachers, along with building capacity through proper communication in the distribution of responsibilities. Leadership should also be proactive and work with stakeholders, as Graham pointed out, through collaboration to help trusted personnel grow and function with their new role and responsibilities.

Principals are the leaders of their school and have the capacity to make a change. Bredeson (2013) illustrated that the principal historically was the sole decision maker with all school policies and procedures. School systems have grown in complexity and have many facets that require a different approach to leadership (Bredeson, 2013). Regarding these approaches, teacher perspectives are needed to help enable the decision-making process for schools and increase engagement from faculty and staff (Arnett, 2017). As mentioned previously, empowerment and trust are essential for leadership. Coinciding with these attributes is the need to act ethically. Data from research highlight that, next in importance to being a visionary, ethical practices are a significant factor department chairs must model in their leadership. These ethical practices include respect for others and honest interactions (Brent et al., 2014). Finally, the policy context allows chairs to promote multiculturalism and social justice so that teachers and students feel valued and know their best interests are at the forefront (Brent et al., 2014).

Distributed leadership requires a commitment from all parties involved. School administration must be willing to relinquish control to allow others to become part of the process. As mentioned earlier, increased demands need to be addressed, and distributed leadership empowers others to contribute. Distributed leadership also encompasses trust by

allowing department chairs to demonstrate their strengths while providing insight into the school mission. Ethically, distributed leadership functions on respect, honest communication, and the value of all stakeholders as an integral part of the school community. Although the research shows how distributed leadership can positively impact educational leadership, it is critical to understand how principals can make this happen.

Principals, as Klar (2013) stated, “utilized their leadership teams as nurseries for developing leadership capacity but also transformed them into professional communities” (p. 353). The practice of nurturing leadership growth in the art of visioning to lead students to success occurs through innovative methods and strategies (Brent et al., 2014). Gaubatz and Ensminger (2017) developed suggestions for principals and chairs to consider when becoming a change agent. First is becoming knowledgeable about the department itself. Second, chairs should know what others are doing in their field by studying the research and looking for new ways to improve their department (Gaubatz & Ensminger, 2017). As leaders, chairs must ensure their development along with that of their teachers. Third, as a change agent, chairs should be mindful of how they address their teachers. Professional development is crucial to prepare a department chair to be successful in this leadership role (Riley & Russell, 2013).

As early as the 1930s, research emphasized that the principal and administrative team were the primary locus of leadership, with department chairs overseeing specified content areas (Gaubatz & Ensminger, 2017). As mentioned earlier, department chair positioning places them ideally in the middle between the administration and the classroom (Gaubatz & Ensminger, 2017). Past literature has explained the evolution of the department chair. Understanding the impact this position has on change is also considered. Department chairs can be instrumental in educational change, but lack of control and defined roles can lead to ambiguity (Gaubatz &

Ensminger, 2015). Department chairs, who traditionally follow a vertical leadership approach, can benefit from the horizontal leadership style of distributed leadership (Peacock, 2014).

Department chairs carry a full workload and possess information and strategies for development. Instructional leadership development should be done in chunks that are manageable by teachers through formal and informal channels (Gaubatz & Ensminger, 2017). Department chairs should also solicit feedback from teachers so that they can gauge the climate and make changes while promoting opportunities for teachers to advance their careers through professional development (Coggins & McGovern, 2014; Gaubatz & Ensminger, 2017). Finally, chairs need to be patient. The evolution of this role is a process and takes time. Department chairs also positively recognize members of the team to minimize negative feelings while stressing team members' importance to one another through expanding teachers' influence on their peers (Coggins & McGovern, 2014; Gaubatz & Ensminger, 2017).

When principals understand and provide department chairs with the capacity to expand their function, how they work with teachers becomes essential. As previously mentioned, the research has emphasized that instructional leadership will impact teachers in a profession with higher accountability for students' learning and performance (Bredeson, 2013). Increased capacities will also challenge departmental leaders to be more involved with monitoring and developing the colleagues they serve (DeAngelis, 2013). One must also keep in mind that distributed leadership allows a team approach to implement directives, support students, and lead to school improvement (Delp, 2014). Principals agreed that shared leadership is critical for increasing instructional capacity for the school and the development of students (Klar, 2013). Principals must be aware that chairs benefit from being a part of the team by being responsible for and presenting professional development, collaboration, and consolidated work with their teachers (Bredeson, 2013). Principals also need to develop the chairs' ability to increase

instructional support by improving curriculum and instructional strategies for teachers to impact students (Brent et al., 2014). In the beginning, principals need to be involved in this process by attending all leadership team activities. Principals are also required initially to facilitate meetings to provide examples and to reiterate their commitment to their chairs and teachers (Klar, 2013). Although a managerial role was the initial intention for department chairs, they must understand that this is still an integral part of their position by ensuring the team functions properly and the environment is safe and efficient for learning to occur (Brent et al., 2014). Principals need to include departmental leadership in community relations (Brent et al., 2014).

As education has expanded in scope, chairs are being charged with greater accountability and leadership to handle broadening responsibilities. The range includes the teachers they oversee and students they serve while demonstrating trust and equity for all through increased instructional leadership responsibilities (Brent et al., 2014; Virick & Strage, 2016). Studies point out that successful department chairs surpass traditional roles. Department chairs are charged with running their departments smoothly while being leaders of curriculum and instructional change that improve student outcomes across the school (Coggins & McGovern, 2014; Gaubatz & Ensminger, 2015). The department chair position is unique in that it lies between administration, policymakers, and the teachers who enact that policy (Gaubatz & Ensminger, 2017). The positioning allows them to act one-on-one with teachers while being a liaison with the administration for organizational decisions and planning for the future (DeAngelis, 2013; Gaubatz & Ensminger, 2017; Kelley & Salisbury, 2013). Although little research has focused on department chairs and their ability to serve as change agents, recent studies have shown that department chairs can be useful as content area specialists, such that they act as a bridge between policy and procedure (Gaubatz & Ensminger, 2015). Many schools have distributed leadership practices in place to support instructional leadership from others, but this has often been

underutilized (Kelley & Salisbury, 2013). Data have emphasized that department chairs who are instructional leaders share commonalities with their administrator counterparts. Both promote and support teacher growth and identify and implement school priorities (Gaubatz & Ensminger, 2015). Research also points out that the selection of department chairs may be strategic, which can transcend individual departments (DeAngelis, 2013). Departments can vary in effectiveness; thus, the chair must have the capacity to promote change school-wide (DeAngelis, 2013).

Previous research (DeAngelis, 2013; Gaubatz & Ensminger 2015, 2017; Kelley & Salisbury, 2013) demonstrated principals who have utilized distributed leadership have increased the capacities of teacher-leaders or department chairs to impact instruction. Department chairs are knowledgeable of the departments they serve, and administration employs this position as an avenue to cultivate future school leaders. Mentoring teachers through continuous personal, professional study can promote cohesiveness throughout the department. Department chairs must also be educated on how to have crucial conversations with colleagues to address areas of concern and grow as a team. Department chairs are also an asset for instructional leadership. Previous research acknowledges principals who allow department chairs to surpass the traditional role. In their specific discipline, the chair's depth of knowledge can assist both administrators and teachers through their positioning, allowing them to act in an individualized or group manner to promote organization, structure, and curriculum implementation. As the data have shown, the instructional impact of department chairs has been promising, but understanding instructional leadership is vital if administration moves to develop expanded capacities for department chairs.

Instructional Leadership

Peacock (2014) wrote, "Department chair leadership is highly context-dependent and is influenced by chairs' experience and personal qualities, teacher characteristics, departmental

cohesion and shared vision, leadership approach, [and] subject-related issues” (p. 37). Teachers tend to view the department chair as more of an instructional leader due to their proximity in the school leadership chain (Kelley & Salisbury, 2013). Evolution of the department chair role offers the potential to create collaborative cultures within their departments that support teachers and students (Klar, 2013). Furthermore, high school principals would be well served by focusing their school improvement efforts and resources on developing the department chair position into influential instructional leaders (Klar, 2013).

Instructional leadership is a significant direction for department chairs. Instructional leadership is aimed at improving instruction through a variety of techniques and practices. Rigby (2014) defined instructional leadership as a means of developing conditions for successful schooling. These conditions include logic that will specify what “instructional leadership” looks like based on the school’s leadership beliefs and practices (Rigby, 2014). Prevailing logic has traditionally been the status quo for school leadership. Two decades ago, principals were considered the manager of the school. However, a shift using prevailing logic began being included in most principal preparation programs, state standards, and national conversations, which viewed the principal as both the manager and instructional leader for their school (Rigby, 2014). Entrepreneurial logic enables schools to look at a variety of entities, such as the private sector, to develop mechanisms for instructional leadership practices such as innovation and ensuring all students have access to an excellent education (Rigby, 2014). Finally, social justice logic allows leadership to foster, cultivate, and implement equitable and socially responsible learning and accountability for all students (Rigby, 2014). One unique aspect of social logic is that it is emergent. Rigby (2014) noted that this emergent quality coincides with instructional leadership, allowing for adjustments and growth of the qualities to meet the needs of the times.

Other research on instructional leadership focused on attributes department chairs must exhibit to support their teachers. The first factor is being a resource provider who equips teachers with instructional activities and development (Akram et al., 2018). A second factor is being an instructional resource. Principals need to utilize the expertise of their experienced staff (Preston & Barnes, 2017). Doing so will allow department chairs to encourage and provide instructional strategies to assist teachers with data interpretation, teaching strategies, and conflict management (Akram et al., 2018). The third factor is communication. Department chairs must be transparent by identifying and assisting teachers in improving instructional practices, leading formal discussions, setting clear expectations, and expressing positivity for teacher success (Akram et al., 2018). Finally, the fourth factor is department chairs must also be people-centered and nurture interpersonal relationships with the entire school community (Preston & Barnes, 2017).

Department chairs are viewed from different angles by faculty and staff. Teachers see their instructional abilities, while the administration values their management skills. They sit on the front lines with their fellow teachers, but balance outside duties to ensure the department needs are met. Roles and responsibilities have created ambiguity as schools employ many facets to meet the needs of teachers, such as instructional coaches, curriculum directors, and assistant principals. These three entities continue to answer the call, but time and scheduling obstacles hinder implementation of efficient and meaningful interventions. Many schools use professional development days to allow for department teams to meet. The department chair interacts with their teachers daily and provides a valuable line of communication through well-established interpersonal relationships that can enhance teacher success and student achievement. As school leadership expands department chair responsibilities, understanding the aspects of instructional leadership is critical.

Establishing goals, maximizing resources, supporting teachers, and building teachers through professional development are areas for strong instructional leadership (Klar, 2013; Smith et al., 2017). Department chairs also are in an excellent position to act as change agents (Melville et al., 2016). Chairs can focus on three aspects of their department: individual teachers, PLCs, or the entire department (Gaubatz & Ensminger, 2017). Commonalities (Kelley & Salisbury, 2013), showed that department chairs, as instructional leaders, have vital areas to spotlight. These areas include ensuring the school vision is being upheld, and data are being collected and discussed to make real change in the classroom for student growth (Kelley & Salisbury, 2013). Chairs, through collaboration, ensure that instruction supports curriculum and that assessments are vertically aligned to educate students (Kelley & Salisbury, 2013). Finally, characteristics that department chairs should possess include (a) interpersonal and diplomatic skills, (b) organizational and communication skills, (c) approachability and availability, and (d) trustworthiness (Kelley & Salisbury, 2013; Pouramiri & Mehdinezhad, 2017). Chairs can identify teachers' outcomes and how they fit department goals by sharing knowledge with all parties involved. By doing so, department chairs can create cohesiveness, which leads to more exceptional citizenship and higher team performance (Han et al., 2018).

Although chairs have the potential to implement positive change, there are barriers to consider. Department chairs need the skills and training to become agents of change. They must also be able to identify and traverse barriers that arise, such as teacher satisfaction with the status quo and including teachers in the decision-making process (Gaubatz & Ensminger, 2015). Chairs must be vigilant in working with resisters by encouraging their importance to the team and soliciting ideas that may get them to buy in (Gaubatz & Ensminger, 2017). Other barriers to consider are job descriptors, implementation time, and the amount of authority they are allowed over their departments (Peacock, 2014). At the time of the study, the latter barrier is evident at

the research site. Another obstacle to departmental leadership lies in the balance between skill and authority. Chairs often lack the authoritative piece of working with their teachers. Even though this is true, department chairs must remember they are no longer peers, and they will be judged based on the fairness they exhibit (Dustin et al., 2014; Gaubatz & Ensminger, 2015). Gaubatz and Ensminger (2017) showed that chairs who exhibit authoritative power are often unsuccessful in implementing change. Some studies have shown that even though departmental leadership is tasked with more demands, resources decline (Kelley & Salisbury, 2013). As a result, chairs are going back to their original purpose due to increased stress, while teachers are feeling a lack of instructional support (Brent et al., 2014). The research emphasized that chairs must have the skills to reflect other aspects of power to work in their departments such as supervision of staff and students and ensuring adequate assessment of student performance (Achimugu, 2016; Gaubatz & Ensminger, 2015). Although adversity presents itself, chairs must remember that they can make an impact on their teachers and students as instructional leaders (Peacock, 2014). Both departmental leadership and school administration must navigate barriers and know that each department presents unique issues (Peacock, 2014). The literature indicates that leadership practices between principals and department chairs need to focus on several aspects: (a) a collective dialogue on a shared instructional vision, (b) proper and effective distribution of resources, (c) embracing individual instructional growth, (d) observing and evaluating best instructional practices, and (e) allowing instructional practices to become a priority (Kelley & Salisbury, 2013).

Department chairs have the potential to exhibit instructional leadership that was demonstrated typically in administration. On top of the managerial aspects of budget and communication, instructional aspects such as department goals and vision can be tasked on the front lines through department chairs. Echoing past research is the need for continued teacher

support and development concerning curriculum. Through innovation, the administration can ensure that teachers' needs are met through a content specialist to impact their growth and student success. Gaubatz and Ensminger (2017) also emphasized that the barriers to change must be considered and addressed. Through instructional leadership practices, proper department chair development is paramount if distributed leadership is to be successful (Peters et al., 2018). Relying on interpersonal skills and relationship building can allow department chairs to navigate colleagues that are resistant to change or those that feel the current practices are enough (Jones & Harvey, 2017). Backing by administration needs to be apparent from the onset of distributed instructional leadership (Jones & Harvey, 2017). Authoritative power must be considered since research has shown this to be an unsuccessful means of leadership implementation when compared to servant-oriented actions (Martin, 2018). An understanding that the department chair instructional leadership platform, from a nonevaluator perspective, is embedded based on teacher input and collaboration. Considerations from all department stakeholders have the potential to increase value and team cohesion (Peacock, 2014). Department chairs' capability is a pathway that needs more examination to ensure that distributed instruction leadership is a viable opportunity for the traditional leadership model.

Professional Learning Communities

School reform has paved the way for educators to explore and expand their abilities to impact student learning while adhering to state accountability requirements. As mentioned before, principals and their administrations are tasked with meeting these demands and ensuring instructional leadership for the school communities they serve. In 2009, the Race to the Top, as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act set forth by the Obama administration, challenged states across the country to obtain funding to enhance student learning and teacher evaluation (Battersby & Verdi, 2015). The funding also challenged schools to become more

innovative and incorporate PLCs (Battersby & Verdi, 2015). PLCs provide an atmosphere that is intended to focus on two areas, which include teacher collaboration and the analysis of student data (Burns et al., 2018). PLCs also provide a forum for teachers to ensure response to intervention (RTI) is being utilized to identify at-risk students and implement interventions to help them succeed (Burns et al., 2018). RTI allows for at-risk students to be designated, the level is one to three, for the level of intervention needed to help the student succeed.

As schools began to take on the challenges of innovation and increased accountability, principals needed to address two areas regarding teacher cultivation and student performance. Fullan (2002) mentioned that schools lacked sufficient teacher leadership reinforcing the need for teacher growth. Wilson (2016) also noted that school growth increased dependency on the principal position and required an effective leader to empower others to decrease the demands on their time and responsibilities. Through research, teacher cultivation has shown a positive correlation on student performance and school sustainability when principals invest and support teacher development (Wilson, 2016). PLC development presents an opportunity to address both teacher cultivation and student performance.

Historically, the PLC has been considered a complex entity. Originally, PLCs were a means to examine professional practices and increase teacher development (Watson, 2014). PLCs have now been observed as a pathway to bring institutional and educational reform through principals' demonstration of instructional leadership to develop capacities teachers can use to grow and improve instruction (Achimugu, 2016; Watson, 2014). Studies have brought to light that federal mandates and funding commenced the drive for PLCs through innovation and improved teacher assessment, but many other paths evolved with the increase in PLCs. As Wilson (2016) and Fullan (2002) discussed, the need to distribute leadership allows for others to take ownership while implementing a process for leadership development throughout the school.

Further, PLCs have afforded set forums for educators to collaborate and analyze their teaching practices to improve, as mentioned in Watson (2014), while focusing on closing disparities in student performance through the analysis of student data and interventions (Burns et al., 2018). As a complex body, PLCs represent a democratic group who strive to implement school culture and goals through effective instructional leadership and practice (Akram et al., 2018). With this in mind, understanding what makes PLCs effective must be discussed and understood.

Effective Professional Learning Communities

PLC development can vary depending on district and school directives, but research has highlighted five key characteristics that all effective PLCs possess: (a) shared values and vision, (b) collective responsibility for student learning, (c) reflection on inquiry, (d) collaboration focused on learning, and (e) both group and individual professional development (Watson, 2014). Watson illustrated three areas that should be considered to increase the effectiveness of PLC teams. Distributed leadership provides the platform to enlist and develop teachers in both the classroom and school reform. Although department chairs have traditionally filled a management role between the administration and the classroom, PLCs allow for department chairs to develop as vital instructional leaders for their campuses (Wilson, 2016). When implementing PLCs, it is essential to define the attributes of a successful PLC. Research has identified seven qualities: (a) working toward shared goals, (b) collaborating on student learning, (c) implementing best practices, (d) inquiry, (e) continuous improvement, (f) data analysis, and (g) focusing on results (Burns et al., 2018). Identifying these qualities can then lead to schools adjusting their focus and resources to impact PLCs (Burns et al., 2018).

As PLCs have increased in schools, several pathways have opened for department chairs, along with their teachers, to take on a variety of roles. Such roles include team leaders, curriculum developers, and staff development (Wilson, 2016). Research has been conducted on

the development of teacher leadership, which emphasized that the traditional view of being only leaders of their classroom has expanded to a broader scope. The expanded view allows for the cultivation of personal growth while simultaneously impacting student achievement (Wilson, 2016). Accomplishing this change in vision emphasizes the need for inclusive membership, mutual trust and respect of all members, and openness through networking and partnerships (Watson, 2014). Colmer (2017) added that PLCs must be nurturing to allow critical conversations and reflection on practice, defining changes that are well-planned and articulated, and applying new practices to learning.

Schools follow state guidelines and curriculum while developing culture and goals to fit best with their community. Ensuring effective PLCs is a significant piece to develop teachers while impacting student achievement. Although PLCs can differ in many aspects, studies by Battersby and Verdi (2015), Watson (2014), and Wilson (2016) have explained attributes that successful PLCs exhibit. Wilson began by emphasizing the administration's commitment to distributing leadership to colleagues, such as department chairs. Coupled with this is administration's willingness to expand the role of department chairs from the traditional managerial aspects by increasing their capacity to be influential instructional leaders (Wilson, 2016). Successful PLCs demonstrate the ability to work collaboratively by embracing the school's vision, focusing on student achievement, and instituting continuous improvement for all students (Burns et al., 2018). Through trust, respect, and openness to all members' strengths and ideas (Watson, 2014), reflection, development, and refinement of teaching practices can impact student growth and success (Colmer, 2017).

Student Assessment and Achievement

Schools function to help their students reach academic achievement while preparing them for the future. Predicting student achievement involves many factors such as the classroom

climate, student-teacher interaction, and academic motivation to determine the efficacy of current programs and to help identify the needs of both the students and the teachers who serve them. Classroom climate has been defined as a general concept describing the quality of classroom sustainability, which leads to context and learning (Jafari & Asgari, 2020). The research discussed student-teacher interaction and pointed out that a favorable climate of a classroom plays a vital role in increasing the quality of learning through positive synergy (Jafari & Asgari, 2020). Regarding academic motivation, teachers and students must collaborate to develop realistic goals that students feel are attainable, based on the expertise and guidance of educators, to meet the demands of extreme pressures and cultural expectations (Jafari & Asgari, 2020; Webber et al., 2014).

Assessments are central to the learning cycle and are a crucial standard for all educators to definitively show evidence of student learning (van der Mars et al., 2018). Development of assessment tools and consistency are constantly being reformed to ensure that all students have a fair opportunity to be evaluated while gaining an optimal view of student achievement. Advocacy must continue to focus on the needs of the students and teachers since findings have shown that educators are innately pro-student learning (Webber et al., 2014). With high-stakes teacher evaluations, supporting teachers to enhance their students' learning will articulate program outcomes and provide substantive evidence of learning to community stakeholders (van der Mars et al., 2018). Ethical aspects must also be considered when looking at assessing student achievement. Schools present a melting pot of ethnicities, cultures, and values. When assessing for student achievement, equality and equity must be considered. Educators need to ensure all students have access to the curriculum and opportunities presented while providing the support structures for those opportunities. Another ethical aspect is to consider student voice and cultural

demographics while limiting the impact of student behavior as a mask for a student's knowledge and skills (Webber et al., 2014).

Although the development of assessments and ethical standards must be a mainstay when determining student achievement, teacher knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy also fit into the equation. Webber et al. (2014) noted that teacher preparation programs rarely provide sufficient focus on student assessments. Previous research on this topic has shown a lack of focus on assessment practices (van der Mars et al., 2018). As more complex evaluation systems are being developed, guidelines emphasize a component that focuses on student achievement (Kim & Seo, 2018). Evaluators do not have the time to consistently observe teachers in the classroom setting and often look to assessment data to determine student achievement. Equipping teachers with the knowledge and tools to understand and utilize formative assessments can help guide instruction and maximize the learning of all students (Webber et al., 2014).

Student assessment provides pathways to understand better the level and retention of the curriculum students possess. Student assessment also offers insight into gaps that individuals may express due to a lack of understanding. To address these challenges, educators must be competent in analyzing the data that assessments provide to provide interventions and to improve teacher instruction (Brown, 2015). Coinciding with the ability to create and analyze assessment data, teachers must also continue to improve their knowledge and understanding of their content area while collaborating with others who exhibit expertise in complementary domains (Brown, 2015). Instructional leadership allows leaders to change the mentality and systems of teachers' classrooms (Brown, 2015) and to encourage PLCs to utilize formative assessment in their day-to-day teaching to gather more data to improve student achievement (van der Mars et al., 2018). Instructional leadership contributes to a leader's ability to challenge PLCs to incorporate student learning styles and needs to impact their achievement (Jafari & Asgari, 2020).

Teacher and Collective Efficacy

Corresponding with educational assessments, teacher efficacy must also be examined. Kim and Seo (2018) showed that teacher efficacy was positively related to student achievement in the classroom. Although experienced teachers demonstrated higher student achievement over novice educators, the need to improve efficacy through professional development and support is paramount (Kim & Seo, 2018). Efficacy has many facets to analyze and build to impact students in the classroom. Teachers must be proficient in their instruction to provide knowledge of the curriculum while managing student behavior. Lekwa et al. (2019) reported that instruction and classroom management are among the most critical influences on student achievement. Unfortunately, the balance between the two can be skewed and result in students receiving too much instruction with little structure or vice versa. Assessment of teaching allows leadership to determine the equity between instruction and management to prevent negative consequences while promoting efficacy in the educators they serve (Lekwa et al., 2019).

Although efficacy itself can focus on the individual, collective teacher efficacy encompasses many educators in the PLC, department, and school. Collective teacher efficacy centers on the shared belief that combining the best efforts of all educators will positively influence student achievement (Donohoo, 2018; Mosoge et al., 2018). In low-performing schools, Mosoge et al. (2018) illustrated that principals often work in isolation while collective teams, such as departments, do not meet regularly. Both Donohoo (2018) and Mosoge et al. (2018) concluded that when collective teacher efficacy is utilized and elevated, student achievement increased, and sociodemographic aspects declined. Research has also demonstrated that a positive correlation exists between collective efficacy and teacher efficacy (Donohoo, 2018).

Teachers are faced with a multitude of requirements and challenges in the classroom. Ensuring that all teachers have the training and tools they need to be successful is crucial. Instructional leaders need to use professional development opportunities and PLCs to establish a forum of trust and constructive dialogue while providing the support to assure teachers that they are competent to impact student achievement (Mosoge et al., 2018). Leadership has the authority to empower teachers to take risks and focus on self-efficacy. Instructional practices and autonomy can allow teachers to have control of their learning environment and strengthen their discipline while impacting student performance (Cansoy, 2020). Other aspects, such as classroom management and discipline, must also be addressed. Educators must be trained and supported with the ability to create conducive systems that embrace all their students while improving their overall effectiveness in the delivery of instruction (Mosoge et al., 2018).

Summary

The literature presented in this chapter has demonstrated the dynamic process of school leadership and the importance of meeting the needs of teachers and students. The field of education is always in flux, and administration must be proactive and meet this change head-on. Distributed leadership employs a style that allows others to take on responsibilities while maintaining the vision and mission of the school they serve. Principals must be proactive and select individuals who represent the knowledge and value of each department's teachers while equipping them with the tools necessary to expand their role from one of managers to one that encompasses what is best for instructional practices. Data show that 80% of secondary schools use the department chair position and provide additional compensation (DeAngelis, 2013). Department chairs are ideal for assisting with meeting the growth and demands current school settings present.

Principals need to be willing to utilize a distributed framework to meet the demands of growing school accountability while efficiently managing and developing school leaders (Diamond & Spillane, 2016). Through a distributed leadership framework, content area specialists, like department chairs, can begin to improve educational practices (Diamond & Spillane, 2016). Literature has also mentioned distributed instructional leadership as a potential pathway to allow principals to develop teacher-leaders and improve instruction (Kelley & Salisbury, 2013).

Through department chairs as change agents, instructional leadership can take advantage of a teacher's relationship with the vision of department chairs as the instructional leader (Kelley & Salisbury, 2013). Accomplishing this requires one to understand the roles all individuals play with each department at the high school. Literature mentions tools such as a social network analysis (SNA) to uncover the realization of the faculty's understanding of their roles and responsibilities (Quardokus & Henderson, 2015). An SNA can also provide awareness of how relationships impact instructional practices (Quardokus & Henderson, 2015).

School schedules are developed, and resources are allocated to support an entire school; department chairs have set times to work with their departments in a formalized setting. PLCs allow for specific teams to collaborate and look at data and instruction, and department chairs are tasked with assuring teachers have the tools necessary to take advantage of their set time. Wilson (2016) noted that PLCs provide a unique platform for instructional leadership to empower teachers while allowing department chairs the opportunity to develop their teams to properly collaborate and analyze student data to create interventions and modify instruction (Watson, 2014). Department chairs, when provided the skills and competencies, can build a culture in their PLCs that will allow educators to stay current with the curriculum, have constructive

conversations, and collectively build reform to meet the needs of all students (Battersby & Verdi, 2015).

Instructional leadership has developed a pathway to visualize student assessment in innovative ways. Data from these assessments provide a snapshot of how students retain the material and their level of understanding. Department chairs need to develop and support their PLCs to create balanced and equitable assessments. As mentioned, teachers do not have the exposure to data and analysis techniques that are required from their preparation programs (Webber et al., 2014). Department chairs, through instructional leadership, can address this gap. Department chairs, through PLCs, can focus on collective efficacy and provide value for each teacher to implement their strengths for the collective whole (Donohoo, 2018). In doing so, teachers will have a more significant opportunity to positively impact student achievement with the confidence and assurance from their leadership while empowering them with the ownership of their students' learning (Donohoo, 2018; Mosoge et al., 2018).

Chapter 3: Methodology

In this qualitative study, I examined the perceptions and beliefs department chairs, administrators, and teachers possessed regarding department chair instructional leadership and their need for development. More specifically, I investigated perceptions and beliefs of department chairs, teachers, and administrators to gain a better understanding of the present reality concerning the department chair position. In this study, I gathered the perceptions and beliefs of department chairs, teachers, and administrators on effective instructional leadership and the potential roles department chairs could play. Based on the findings of this study, I provided recommendations to better utilize the leadership role of department chairs to enhance instruction in the classroom. Guiding this study were the following questions:

RQ1: What are the perceptions and beliefs of the participants regarding the role and responsibilities of department chairs?

RQ2: What are the perceptions and beliefs of the participants regarding distributed leadership in their school?

RQ3: What are the perceptions and beliefs of the participants on the impact of department chairs on collective teacher efficacy?

This chapter begins with the design, including the methodology utilized to answer the research questions. Following the design of the study, a description of the sampling method and selection is explained. I then explain the data and analysis methods of the findings and provide validity to the study. Finally, I conclude with a description of my role as researcher.

Research Design and Method

I utilized an exploratory single-case study focusing on the school community (Yin, 2018). More specifically, exploratory research of the department chair position was conducted to collect information on their activities and characteristics to make program improvements moving

forward (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018; Yin, 2018). Although many social scientists have viewed case study relevancy for exploratory use only, Yin (2018) noted that case studies are ideal for exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory purposes. Utilization of this type of qualitative study enabled me to investigate the circumstances and conditions of everyday situations regarding what the current reality of the department chair position is in this particular context and what participants perceive as the current reality (Yin, 2018). A case study approach also allowed for an in-depth analysis of a real-world context as it took place and is preferred because the behaviors that currently exist at the high school cannot be manipulated without district administrative approval (Yin, 2018). The school in this study is part of a large suburban district, and uniformity concerning systems and processes is key to ensuring alignment across the district.

The exploratory single-case study was emergent based on the design and timeline implemented to select the participants for data collection. By allowing for the evolution of the study to occur throughout, modifications were made to strengthen the data. Live semistructured online interviews of all the participants in this study were conducted using Zoom videoconferencing, which allowed for follow-up questions, inquiry changes, and the potential for more productive responses by the participants (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). Positionality and power dynamics were considered during the design. None of the live semistructured online interviews involved participants who are evaluated by me regarding job performance, and all participants were located at a different high school in the district. The choice of conducting the case study in a different high school was implemented to alleviate the possibility of researcher bias and power dynamics.

Population and Context

A large suburban high school was the location of this study. The school consisted of approximately 175 faculty and staff with approximately 2,000 students. There was one principal,

five assistant principals, one dean of instruction, one instructional coach, and six department chairs. Not including support staff, counselors, technology support, and special education, 111 teachers worked with the students daily. Each department chair, as listed previously, not only managed their teaching schedule but was also responsible for many instructors. Concerning this study, each of the six departments were included:

- science
- math
- social studies
- English
- language other than English (LOTE)
- career and technology (CTE)

Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) courses and Advanced Placement Capstone pathways were scattered throughout all the departments.

PLCs were built into the schedule based on major subjects listed for each of the departments. Those teachers who were responsible for other subjects did not have a set PLC time for their course. The school schedule was built upon a block format that consisted of four periods for A days and four periods for B days. Each class period was 1 hour and 30 minutes.

Department chairs were provided a conference period and a department chair PLC period every day to manage their departments, but this did not align with all the PLCs they oversaw.

Department chairs attended PLC meetings if time allowed, but this was not a current requirement from the district. As mentioned earlier, APs were tasked with attending as many PLC meetings as they could schedule. Department chairs did attend a school leadership meeting once a month that consisted of administrators, counselors, librarians, the dean of instruction, and

an instructional coach. The purpose of these meetings was to pass on information for the department chairs to disseminate to their teachers. Department chairs, as mentioned earlier, were primarily tasked with managerial capacities. Department chairs had begun to expand their roles with assisting teachers, but this had primarily been on a case-by-case basis regarding new teachers to the school. District facilitators for the four core departments were tasked with providing professional development in curriculum during district staff development days. District facilitators also relied on department chairs to gather information and concerns from their teachers to help build professional development during in-service days. Finally, department chairs were tasked with mentoring new-to-profession teachers who had been hired by the school. Teachers who had experience but were new to the district were not assigned a mentor. Department chairs, administrators, and teachers were ideal for this qualitative case study to provide insight and direction for how instructional leadership impacts the classroom. By including many individuals in this study, sufficient data were collected to address the purpose and research questions previously discussed.

Sampling

Purposive sampling was used in recruiting the department chairs, administration, and teachers from the departments, all of whom pertained to the high school (Grades 9–12), to investigate the participants' perceptions and beliefs on instructional leadership after the interviews. Regarding participants for this study, I sent an invitation via Google Forms. The email contained a brief description of the case study along with four questions:

1. Are you willing to participate in the case study?
2. Which department do you currently work under?
3. How many years have you been in education?
4. How many years have you been at your current school?

Teachers who were new to the profession or who had just been hired at the school for the upcoming year were not considered for this study. Once replies had been gathered, I selected 11 teachers to include in the interviews. I responded to the selected teachers via email to inform them they had been selected. I also assigned each teacher a number that I logged and utilized to maintain confidentiality throughout the remainder of the study. The semistructured online interviews provided insight and answers to the research questions. Those individuals who participated were provided acknowledgment through email and given more details, informed consent, and a time to ask clarifying questions in the following week. A working definition of instructional leadership guided the design of the online semistructured interviews and transcripts to provide the framework for the data collection process. Currently, there is no job description or selection criteria for the department chair position. After informed consent was collected from all parties involved in the interview process, I scheduled the interviews. Each participant was assigned a number to protect their identity, while three main categories were selected for group identification, which included administrators, department chairs, and teachers.

Data Collection

The qualitative case study incorporated semistructured interviews with open-ended questioning as the source of data collection for the department chairs, administration, and teachers. The online interviews followed a traditional interview protocol, which consisted of an opening script; a list of questions to guide the conversation, including open-ended questions; and a concluding script (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). Flexibility in questions and approach were taken into consideration, allowing the study to be emergent as new insights and opportunities presented themselves through the investigation (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). The number of interview questions was limited for two reasons. The first was that the parameters between the three participant groups were minimal. Second, limiting the number of interview questions allowed for

more control of the research while focusing on the results. All interviews were conducted online using Zoom videoconferencing because of the in-person contact restrictions from COVID-19. All interviewees had online access and equipment that included a laptop with a built-in camera and microphone. The interviewee also had access to Zoom videoconferencing through the school district, which allowed for recorded meetings. The Otter transcription application was used to transcribe responses for analysis. Table 3 shows a list of the interview questions used for this study.

Table 3

Interview Questions—All Participants

Interview question	
Q1.	How would you describe the role of department chair in your school?
Q2.	How do you envision the instructional leadership role of the department chair as it applies to subject area departments? (administrators)
Q3.	A. How do the department PLCs support professional growth and instructional practice to impact student performance? (department chairs) B. How do your department PLCs support professional growth and instructional practice to impact student performance? (teachers) C. How does your department PLC support professional growth and instructional practice to impact student performance? (administrators)
Q4.	What evidence do you observe of distributed leadership in your school?
Q5.	How does distributed leadership improve department efficacy and instruction?

Prior to beginning the interviews, two department chairs at my current school reviewed the questions and provided insight on their reliability and validity before sending them to the selected participants at the school of study. All participants were provided the questions beforehand to respect their time.

Data Management and Analysis

Data were collected using the Zoom recording feature and transcribed using the Otter application for all interviews. An external hard drive provided a backup of all data along with my computer. Hard copies of all transcripts were printed and kept in a locked file cabinet, along with being scanned into PDF forms for retention. All participants were assigned a number to maintain accountability and protect identity.

Qualitative Coding Software and Scheme

Dedoose software was purchased and incorporated for this study. Dedoose allowed for qualitative management through coding and analysis. The program also allowed for the integration of all interviews while being completely web-based. Being able to access the program from home was crucial as state quarantine protocol for COVID-19 required that the participants and I work together from different locations. Open coding was used for this study. Open coding utilized the participants' language as the symbol system for analysis (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). Open coding allowed for in-depth scrutiny of data by analyzing each word spoken by a participant (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). The Dedoose software has an open coding tool that assisted me in analyzing the transcripts collected during the online interviews. Dedoose contained a case study feature to help scaffold qualitative data in a meaningful format. Finally, Dedoose contained online demos and support that assisted me through the data collection and analysis process. Otter software was utilized to transcribe interviews for analysis. Pattern-matching logic was used for this case study. This technique allowed the discovery of how the departments were currently running and how they perceive the department chair role (Yin, 2018). Pattern matching also allowed me to determine if any threats to the logic were present (Yin, 2018). By developing more precise measures and relying on the patterns the coding scheme uncovered, robust data for the case study were produced (Yin, 2018).

Researcher's Role and Responsibilities

My desire to study the role of department chair as instructional leader and to investigate the feasibility of redefined leadership responsibilities for this role stemmed from two perspectives from my career. The first perspective was when I was appointed science department chair of a large suburban high school in 2013. The second perspective was when I became an AP in 2016. The realization of the role as department chair was managerial and required only budget management and dissemination of information for the teachers I served. The district prioritized the need for better instructional leadership regarding administrators, but the demands of a large suburban high school required leadership to become innovative in maximizing human capital to serve the school community. Our current administration is led by a head principal who envisions distributed leadership to ensure the development of all teachers while emphasizing capacities to enhance student learning and success.

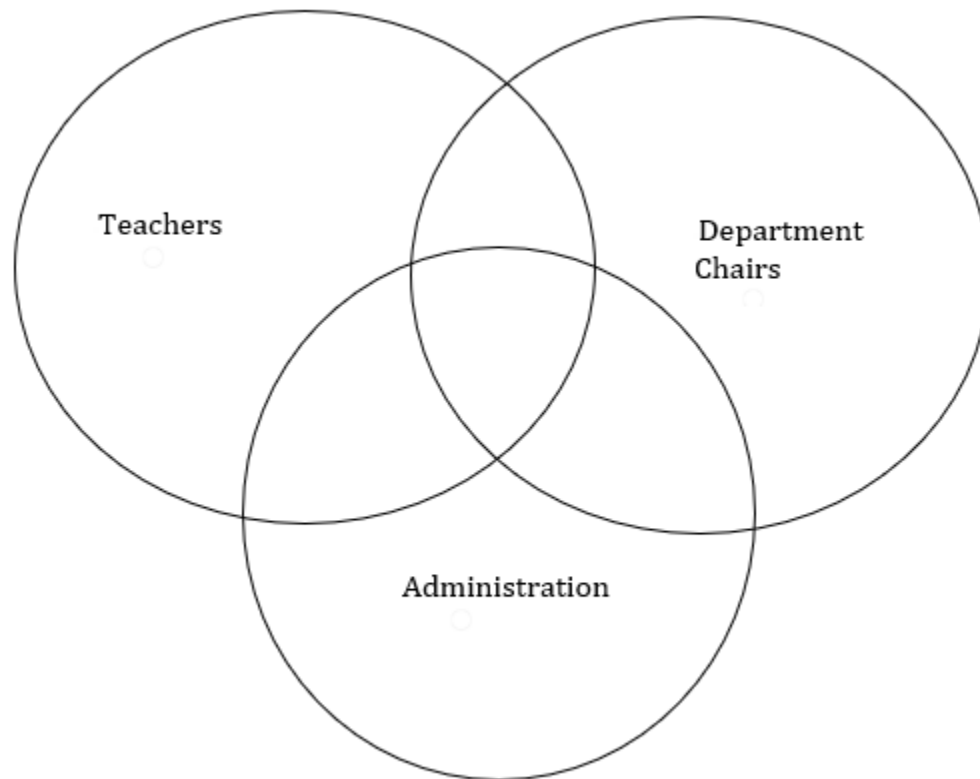
Transformational autonomy has equipped APs with the capacity to discover and apply innovative systems to allow teacher leaders the support and the ability to impact departments with instructional strategies. School leadership has realized the importance, as a means for increased instructional support, for department academic improvement in both teachers and students (Brent et al., 2014). Having been a former teacher, department chair, and one of six current APs, I felt that I had multiple experiences and perspectives to provide a better understanding to inform my study along with providing credibility through member checking, a rich description of the setting, and peer-reviewed research (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The insights also allowed me to maintain awareness of different biases throughout the research process. Collaboration with my dissertation chair and personal reflections were maintained throughout the entire study and data collection process. Although personal experience led to the

desire to study the department chair position, several aspects of school leadership demands were incorporated for this research.

Coinciding with my responsibilities as a researcher, ethics and trustworthiness must be discussed. It is my responsibility to ensure ethics is at the forefront of my study. Roth and von Unger (2018) stated that qualitative research is dynamic and emergent in nature and involves complex ethical responsibilities. I was tasked with ensuring that morally good practices were implemented while avoiding any harm to the participants during my study (Ngozwana, 2018). I developed several criteria to ensure ethical practices which I presented to the IRB committee for approval. The first focused on informed consent. I was clear in communicating the goals and objectives of my study and the expectations for participants if they chose to participate.

Participants must be at ease and treated ethically, so I stressed the importance of the interview protocols and the commitment to ethical practices. Finally, as mentioned earlier, I established and ensured confidentiality and anonymity. To accomplish this, I informed all participants that any identifying information was to be removed from the study and a system of codes would be utilized for identification purposes for myself and the dissertation committee (Ngozwana, 2018).

Trustworthiness is another mainstay of qualitative research. Amankwaa (2016) stated “All research must have ‘truth value’, ‘applicability’, ‘consistency’, and ‘neutrality’ in order to be considered worthwhile” (p. 121). To establish trustworthiness, I focused on four criteria. The first was credibility. Having been in the educational field for two decades, I showed confidence in the truth of my findings once the study was concluded (Amankwaa, 2016). To accomplish this, data triangulation was incorporated (Amankwaa, 2016). Triangulation was accomplished using a Venn diagram. Each group of participants was assigned a portion of the diagram and themes uncovered through the Dedoose software were placed in their circle. Figure 1 shows the Venn diagram template that was used:

Figure 1*Data Triangulation Model*

Note. The model provides a visual representation of the three data sources and common themes that emerged from responses.

Next, transparency was provided. I was thorough in my description and established proper themes through open coding that demonstrated the use of my findings in other contexts (Amankwaa, 2016). Confirmability was critical to trustworthiness of my study. All methodology was clear and triangulated using data source triangulation. Data source triangulation involved collecting data from different types of individuals to gain multiple perspectives (Carter et al., 2014). Through data triangulation from administrators, department chairs, and teachers, validity was established as this is vital to the research community (Amankwaa, 2016). Finally, dependability was secured. Using an inquiry audit approach, my dissertation committee provided

a platform for veteran researchers to review my processes and products to help determine accuracy and evaluate if my findings were supported by the data (Amankwaa, 2016).

Limitations

One major limiting factor was my position as a current administrator in the district. Understanding this, I selected a high school where I did not work or have administrative authority to conduct the study. A second limiting factor was the perceptions participants brought to the study, such as feeling overworked (Simon & Goes, 2013). A third limiting factor was that the case study may have been suggestive as participants were allowed to preview the questions (Simon & Goes, 2013). A final limitation was the COVID-19 pandemic. The county was in Stage 5 restrictions, limiting person-to-person contact. As a result, COVID-19 required me to modify my study. I was unable to meet with teachers face-to-face and had to conduct the study via Zoom during November of the 2020–2021 school year. I sent out an email to solicit volunteers from the school chosen for the study due to the continued COVID-19 protocols and uncertainty. It was understood that teachers might not be willing or able to participate.

Delimitations

As a current assistant principal, I chose to conduct this study to determine ways distributed leadership has been utilized, to include more stakeholders, and to alleviate the demands on administrations time. I wanted to improve instructional practices in the classroom while developing instructional leadership with department chairs. One delimitation of this study was the population. The qualitative case study focused on a large suburban high school, and participants were selected from the current administration, department chairs, and teachers. A second delimitation was the research questions. The question focused on the current perceptions and beliefs of department chairs, instructional leadership perspectives, and administrative leadership support. Third, only four department chairs were selected to increase anonymity. A

final delimitation was that participants were provided open-ended questions to allow for elaboration on their thoughts because I was unable to meet with them face-to-face. Close-ended questions would not have allowed participants to express many thoughts (Simon & Goes, 2013). Transparency and detailed communication were used to inform participants.

Assumptions

Assumptions were important to consider for my dissertation. The first assumption was that all participants would answer honestly. To reinforce this assumption, the study was conducted on another high school campus in the district. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured through the IRB process and protection of collected data. The second assumption was the identity of all participants was protected through a numbering system known only by me and the dissertation committee. Gender of all participants was not noted, to add to the confidentiality of the participants. Finally, it was assumed that a qualitative approach would reveal the reality of administrators', department chairs', and teachers' perceptions and beliefs in relation to instructional leadership development. Personal beliefs from embedded participants' experiences could be mediated through my own potential bias.

Summary

As previously stated, the purpose of this study was to determine the current perception and beliefs about department chairs with respect to instructional leadership. The school district has made it a priority to equip administrators with the training and tools to be effective instructional leaders. Demands on administrators' time and resources have increased-along with the school population and accountability requirements the state has placed on the success of all students. As I conducted this study of the department chair's current position in this aspect, it was critical to keep the purpose and goals in view. Three research questions were designed and

were the driving force behind this case study. I have listed the three research questions below as a reinforcement for this work:

RQ1: What are the perceptions and beliefs of the participants regarding the role and responsibilities of department chairs?

RQ2: What are the perceptions and beliefs of the participants regarding distributed leadership in their school?

RQ3: What are the perceptions and beliefs of the participants on the impact of department chairs on collective teacher efficacy?

A qualitative single-case evaluation study was implemented to answer the three research questions. Online semistructured interviews provided the means to collect data to determine the answers and provide recommendations moving forward. Pseudonyms, in the form of numbers, were assigned to all participants. A 2-week window was set to maximize the participants' time and conclude the data collection quickly. I conducted all the online interviews. The interviews were recorded and transcribed using Otter software. I uploaded the transcribed information into the Dedoose program to conduct open coding and analysis.

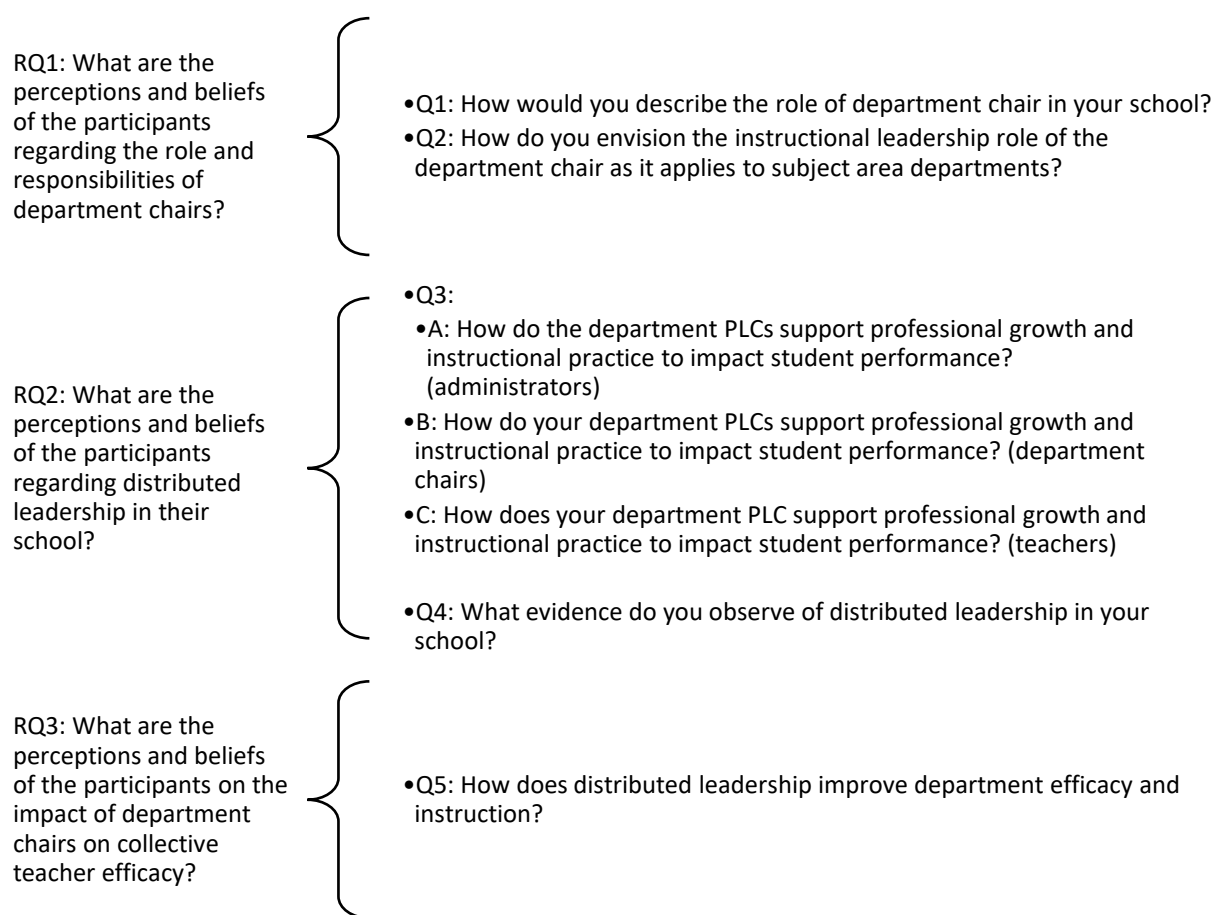
Open coding schemes were implemented to provide analysis of each participant's words, which led to universal themes and capacities for the department chair position regarding instructional leadership. The Dedoose program allowed all transcripts, which had been captured using Otter, to be uploaded for editing and analysis. Pattern matching allowed for threat determination to be identified along with the participants' preconceptions during the case study. Finally, the dissertation committee ensured that ethical standards were being followed along with sound validity and reliability within the study. No data collection took place until the Abilene Christian University IRB office had provided approval, informed consent had been collected from all participants, and the dissertation committee had given final approval.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the current perceptions and beliefs of department chairs, administrators, and teachers regarding instructional leadership. Three research questions guided this study. Each participant was asked five interview questions. The relationship of interview questions to each research question is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Relationship of Interview Questions to Research Questions



The three research questions provided the framework for the explanation of results for the case study. Descriptive coding was utilized to uncover themes consistently expressed throughout the interviews. The results of the data collection are listed and described throughout the remainder of this chapter. Based on the interview questions that were asked, descriptive themes

were uncovered. The major descriptive themes and total number of responses are listed in Table 4 as they pertain to all the interview questions. The descriptive themes were developed from the analysis of all the participants' responses and then consolidated into an overarching theme. The frequency shows the total number of times each group mentioned terminology to the descriptive theme throughout their responses to the interview questions.

Table 4

Major Themes

Theme	Frequency of responses to questions		
	Administration <i>n</i> = 8	Department chair <i>n</i> = 4	Teacher <i>n</i> = 11
Advocacy	37	24	49
Collaboration	44	31	63
Distributed leadership	31	19	39
Growth mindset	30	19	44
Instruction	35	17	63
Mentorship	29	20	33
Traditional management	33	24	56
Trust	32	25	55

Themes for Research Question 1

All participants were asked to give their perceptions and beliefs on the role of department chair. Two major themes were uncovered from the three groups interviewed, which included administration, department chairs, and teachers. Table 5 shows the three groups, the eight themes utilized throughout the data analysis, and the number of times each group mentioned a particular theme. Based on an analysis of the results of the semistructured interviews, traditional management and advocacy emerged as major themes.

Table 5*Themes Derived From Interview Question 1*

Theme	Frequency of responses to questions		
	Administration <i>n</i> = 8	Department chair <i>n</i> = 4	Teacher <i>n</i> = 11
Advocacy	9	6	16
Collaboration	13	0	2
Distributed leadership	5	1	1
Growth mindset	0	0	4
Instruction	5	4	2
Mentorship	3	1	3
Traditional management	18	8	18
Trust	0	0	2

Note. Responses to Interview Question 1 are related to Research Question 1: What are the perceptions and beliefs of the participants regarding the role and responsibilities of department chairs?

Traditional Management

As the parameters were established for this study, the traditional management theme was created to encompass the management aspect as the primary role of department chairs. As Zepeda and Kruskamp (2007) discussed, the department chair is tasked with managerial tasks such as logistics, information dissemination, and budget control. DeAngelis (2013) also mentioned that department chairs are tasked with professional development of their teachers and conducting meetings. The theme of traditional management, for the purpose of this study, included these responsibilities.

Administration. Administration mentioned traditional management 18 times. Of the 8 administrators interviewed, all expressed the traditional management role of department chairs. Administrator 3 stated, “They’re a good conduit for communication. They will disseminate information to their department based on what we talked about at the administration level.” The statement echoed what previous research discussed as the responsibility of disseminating

information from the top down. Administrator 8 stated that department chairs are sort of that grassroots, boots-on-the-ground feedback to the principal and help push out the mission and vision. They can hear directly from him what are some of our goals, so that it's not just us, you know—sort of like, the telephone game and, and how those perceptions or the way that we interpret something from the top down is conveyed to them.

Finally, Administrator 4 mentioned that department chairs are the liaison between admin and the teaching staff. Um, a lot of times, as an administrator, we don't have the time to be as hands-on with our departments, especially at the high school level so it's really important for me that department chairs are able to keep a pulse on the department and bring any concerns back to the administration.

Department Chairs. Concerning the department chairs who participated in the interview, 3 of 4 expressed the theme of traditional management as part of their role. Eight times, department chairs noted the importance of being the bridge between the administration and the teachers they serve. Department Chair 4 stated the department chair is “basically a communicator and connector. The department chair is a conduit between admin, to teachers, teachers to admin, sometimes parents and teachers, wherever we need a connection.” Department Chair 1 echoed this by mentioning the importance of disseminating information while facilitating communication between administration and teachers. Both participants reinforced previous research by Gaubatz and Ensminger (2015) and Peacock (2014) when they discussed how department chairs helped close the gap between administration and teachers regarding communication and school policy.

Teachers. Finally, teachers who participated in this study made known their perceptions and beliefs regarding the theme of traditional management. The traditional management theme

was mentioned 18 times. Each of the 11 teachers interviewed mentioned this theme. Teacher 5 stated that the department chair is “a communicator and facilitator.” Teacher 1 described the department chair as one who collates all the information from the administration in order to ensure that it gets to the teachers of each department. Teacher 11 shared that the department chair is part of the chain of command and their role is the step between administration and the teacher. Finally, Teacher 9 stated that the department chair “gives us the information that’s distributed, and we give them opinions and they share the feedback at department chair meetings along with ordering supplies for their teachers.”

Advocacy

A second major theme uncovered during this study was the importance of advocacy. The theme encompassed advocating for both the administration and teachers along with facilitating, or alleviating the demands required, for both entities. As discussed earlier, department chairs have a critical leadership opportunity due to their proximity between administration and teachers, leading to enhanced collaboration for growth (Gardner & Ward, 2018; Klar, 2013).

Administration. The administrators, 6 of 8 interviewed, expressed the theme of advocating. Administrator 1 stated that department chairs “are asked to guide administrative and district initiatives for the teachers and relay what is expected of them along with being an advocate for the teacher needs.” Administrator 3 discussed how the department chair is vital in informing administration of what is working well within the department, what needs the department has, and how initiatives are being received by the teachers. Administrator 7 noted that “department chairs are excellent at making sure that we organize and stay organized or like a lot of the things that we need to get out and get accomplished and making sure that those things are being taken care of.” Finally, Administrator 2 expressed that department chairs have common planning periods to meet with their teachers and have the pulse of what the teachers are doing

and what they need. The individual also mentioned that the department chair can ensure teachers are cared for while accomplishing what needs to be done in the classroom.

Department Chairs. When department chairs were interviewed, advocacy also played a major role in their responsibilities. All of the department chairs described the importance of advocating and facilitating for their teachers. Department Chair 3 stated that “it is our job to advocate and facilitate for our department.” Department Chair 1 added that it is a major priority to be the voice for the teachers. Department Chair 2 expressed that their position made them a feedback loop for their department. Finally, Department Chair 4 noted that “I am there to facilitate conversations that are productive.”

Teachers. Like administration and department chairs, the teachers highlighted the importance of the advocacy theme with regards to Question 1 of the interviews. Teachers, 10 of 11, noted that advocacy was crucial for the position of department chair. Teacher 3 described how the department chair “does a good job of making sure that the department has cohesiveness, in terms of unity within staff.” Teacher 2 said that the department chair does well about meeting the needs of the teachers and helping get things done. Teacher 9 expressed how the department chair ensures that vertical teams have time to meet to plan and meet the needs of students. Finally, Teacher 11 stated that the department chair is “good at being available, being open and listening and advocating for the teachers and being that line of communication.” Even though traditional management and advocacy were the two major themes uncovered regarding Question 1 of the interviews, Question 2 uncovered two additional themes of importance. Table 6 shows the three groups interviewed and the total numbers expressed for the themes of instruction and mentorship.

Table 6*Themes Derived From Interview Question 2*

Theme	Frequency of responses to questions		
	Administration <i>n</i> = 8	Department chair <i>n</i> = 4	Teacher <i>n</i> = 11
Advocacy	10	3	13
Collaboration	8	7	8
Distributed leadership	11	2	7
Growth mindset	3	5	3
Instruction	13	10	24
Mentorship	11	5	13
Traditional management	6	1	2
Trust	1	3	3

Note. Responses to Interview Question 2 are related to Research Question 1: What are the perceptions and beliefs of the participants regarding the role and responsibilities of department chairs?

Instruction

In Question 2 the participants were asked about their perceptions and beliefs concerning department chairs and instructional leadership. As a result, the theme of instruction was utilized, which encompassed curriculum knowledge and best teaching practices. Another factor driving this theme came from the literature when DeAngelis (2013) emphasized that department chairs are tasked not only with traditional management and advocacy but also with evaluating and mentoring the professional growth of teachers to impact classroom performance.

Administration. Each of the administrators discussed the theme of instruction in response to Question 2 of the interview. Administrator 1 expressed that department chairs should possess a depth of knowledge of their department subjects and not just the discipline they teach. Administrator 2 stated that

when we look at the instructional array, and when you look at our department chairs, most of the time, they are probably more experienced teachers than the teachers that are

under them. They get really good results from students in the classrooms.

Building upon this, Administrator 8 described that the department chair, instructionally, has a role that emphasizes engaging teachers and implementing strategies. Administrator 8 also felt that department chairs should possess personalities that are conducive to allowing their teachers to feel comfortable going to them for help when they are struggling in the classroom. Finally, Administrator 5, concerning the expectations of department chairs, stated, “We expect collaboration across curriculum, and within the department, they do observations within the department and sit down and discuss what they saw while asking for feedback from the teacher.”

Department Chairs. Department chairs also addressed the importance of the instruction theme. All department chairs mentioned the instructional theme during their response to Interview Question 2. Department Chair 4 stated, “There’s multiple ways to get to kids and a bunch of ways to build our toolbox. We discuss a lot about having multiple ways to teach something because not every child is going to connect with a certain method.” Department Chair 2 discussed the need for a department chair to be proactive with instruction. Department Chair 2 also mentioned, “I would volunteer to pilot things or try out new things and then come back to my department. I would then give my input or things like that while modeling different strategies. Through our department meetings. I can model that.” Finally, Department Chair 1 described the importance of knowing proven instructional strategies and then facilitating collaborative discussion on how best to implement those strategies through leading by example for their teachers.

Teachers. Upon asking teachers Question 2, 9 of 11 teachers mentioned the theme of instruction a total of 24 times. Regardless of the discipline that the teachers were a part of, department chairs’ relationship to instructional leadership was apparent. Teacher 8 discussed that the department chair’s role is advocacy and instruction. Teacher 8 also stated that the department

chair “develops your strong teachers and your teachers who may need a little more assistance.” Teacher 6 felt that a department chair should be “somebody who was certified in everything and knew every subject and had the experience. Especially with the virtual setting that we’ve had to go to this year, that could be a great resource.” Teacher 6 also felt that in the virtual setting that COVID has produced, these attributes were important. Teacher 2 and Teacher 8 discussed how department chairs can let teachers explore different things such as training along with empowering teachers to do their jobs more effectively through ownership and leadership in their classrooms. Teacher 11 noted that a department chair should be in constant review of content while facilitating dialogue among teachers to focus on best practices.

Two participants noted that the role of department chair does have obstacles when it comes to their disciplines. Teacher 6 stated that, based on instruction, “I don’t see them in this role and part of this is because we’re so specialized and teachers are certified in different branches.” Teacher 7 echoed this when they discussed that in disciplines such as languages, although they are very different, understanding best practices such as grammatical construction, subject-noun agreement, and subject-verb agreement are issues seen in languages, and a department chair should have the tools to aid teachers in best practices for their implementation.

Mentorship

The theme of mentorship was utilized as a term that included supporting teachers, possessing content expertise, and setting an example for their department. As mentioned in Chapter 2, principals looked at ways of distributing leadership with school growth (Brent et al., 2014). Also, specialized curriculum and instructors evolved (Gaubatz & Ensminger, 2017).

Administration. Administrators, 5 of 8, discussed the theme of mentorship in their responses to Interview Question 2. Administrator 8 stressed “the department chair needs to be a strong instructional leader, or even a strong teacher.” Administrator 8 also stressed that the

department chair should be the example of what they expect their teachers to be doing instructionally in the classroom. Administrator 4 discussed how a department chair should be at the forefront of their department by setting the example for their teachers. Administrator 1 echoed being an example when they mentioned that a department chair should be the one who beta tests new strategies and systems for their departments. Administrator 3 again mentioned how the department chair should be an example along with demonstrating and facilitating team collaboration. Two participants mentioned obstacles that department chairs faced regarding instructional leadership. Administrator 4 expressed how department chairs are also teachers and therefore, cannot always be hands-on with other teachers due to scheduling constraints. Administrator 1 also reiterated that departments have specialized subjects, so as a department chair, “having the depth of knowledge is key to provide instructional leadership for their teachers.”

Department Chairs. Department chairs, like administrators, addressed the theme of mentorship in their responses. Department chairs (3 of 4) expressed the importance of not only being an example but also stepping out and leading with innovation. Department Chair 1 stated, “I should lead by example.” Department Chair 4 expressed the importance of knowing what was coming up with the department’s curriculum. Department Chair 2 discussed the importance of being willing to try new things while modeling different strategies and best practices. Department Chair 2 also noted the importance of collaboration and modeling how these interactions should take place while highlighting an obstacle one should consider with innovation such as being open to feedback. Department Chair 2 also conveyed that as a department chair, they understand that information from administration can be received with apprehension. As a department chair, it is crucial to disseminate that information and give it to only those who need to hear it. As a result, Department Chair 2 felt information is then more positively received.

Teachers. As with administrators and department chairs, mentorship was discussed by 6 of 11 teachers. Teacher 4 mentioned, “Sometimes, there’s even demonstration of skills where they’ll demonstrate a new software, or they’ll demonstrate something in their classroom that they’ve been working on, and have other teachers do, like, walkthroughs.” Teacher 4 also talked of how the department chair mentors others when there is an issue and shows them how to fix it. Teacher 8 mentioned how a department chair should be competent in evaluating subjectively through classroom visits to assess strengths and areas for growth of their teachers. Teacher 3 viewed the department chair as an individual who should possess resources for teachers, while Teacher 7 echoed this by stating a department chair “knows the tools.” Teacher 3 discussed an obstacle in one of their responses. Teacher 3 felt that a department chair needs to have some flexibility and training when it comes to acclimating a new teacher to campus in their department.

Themes for Research Question 2

Interview Questions 3 and 4 were designed to address Research Question 2. Both interview questions addressed perceptions and beliefs of PLC and distributed leadership. All participants were asked about PLCs and the impact on professional growth and student performance. Interview Question 3 was worded in three ways based on the participant’s position in the school. Table 7 shows the responses of all three groups.

Table 7*Themes Derived From Interview Question 3*

Theme	Frequency of responses to questions		
	Administration <i>n</i> = 8	Department chair <i>n</i> = 4	Teacher <i>n</i> = 11
Advocacy	11	11	6
Collaboration	15	13	31
Distributed leadership	7	5	9
Growth mindset	6	2	12
Instruction	12	10	21
Mentorship	1	0	2
Traditional management	2	3	4
Trust	6	3	9

Note. Responses to Interview Question 3 are related to Research Question 2: What are the perceptions and beliefs of the participants regarding distributed leadership in their school?

Administrators were asked about their overall perceptions and beliefs about how the school PLC supported professional growth of their teachers while impacting student performance. Department chairs and teachers were asked the same interview question but focused on their specific PLC in their department. Based on an analysis of the results of the semistructured interviews, collaboration and instruction emerged as major themes for all three groups. The theme of advocacy was the third theme for administration and department chairs, while growth mindset was for the teachers.

Collaboration

The theme of collaboration encompassed department chairs creating a culture of communication with the focus on professional development of all participants involved while looking at what is needed to improve student performance.

Administration. All administrators discussed the importance of collaboration regarding Interview Question 3. Previous research also pointed out the importance of addressing this topic when Burns et al. (2018) emphasized that PLCs provided an atmosphere that is intended to focus

on teacher collaboration and the analysis of student data. Administrator 1 discussed how department chairs are in position to analyze teachers to properly place them in subjects to build cohesiveness of the PLC and maximize student performance. Administrator 2 pointed out that department PLCs are charged with analyzing student data while using the PLC to collaborate and bounce ideas off one another. Administrator 4 stated that PLCs are tasked with “really looking at those different student groups and how they’re performing on those assessments.” Finally, Administrator 3 noted, referencing department chairs,

It’s not just about you either. And it’s not just about your own growth; it’s about you helping develop other people on campus. So, you know, putting those people in that role is, I think it’s a—it’s good and valuable because it gets them out of that mindset too and requires them to help other people and to facilitate that, you know—facilitate that collective strength and that collective group.

One major obstacle was pointed out by Administrator 4. Time is a roadblock that limits the ability of PLCs to go back and analyze student data for intervention. Administrator 4 felt that the timelines for curriculum implementation caused teachers to spend little time on this aspect for fear of not getting everything taught in a given school year.

Department Chairs. Department chairs responded highly to the collaborative theme. All department chairs referenced collaboration in their responses. Department Chair 2 highlighted the importance of collaborating daily, ensuring a culture of communication is constant and utilizing data analysis to drive instruction in the classroom. Department Chair 2 echoed collaboration when they stated that “this year has been a whole new rearrangement of material and planning and all that stuff, but they (PLCs) get together and they decide, you know, okay, now we’re on this subject. What are we going to teach?” Finally, Department Chair 3 addressed both parts of Interview Question 3 when they noted, “We’ve got to be able to talk about—how

can we help as teachers? Keep an eye out for that and support those students. So that's one of the ways, and then the other way, I think, that we work as a PLC to support them is at a district level."

Teachers. Teachers also dove into the theme of collaboration. As with administration and department chairs, every teacher discussed the collaborative theme in their responses. Teacher 3 was quick to point out that the PLC is a forum to get together with colleagues and talk about what is going on in the department. Teacher 3 also mentioned that the PLC is a space to ensure that everyone is on the same page, regarding instruction while boosting morale when times are difficult. Teacher 5 stated that the PLC brings

that kind of cooperation and looking at stuff is kind of the biggest way that we see that instructional practice, I think, impacting student performance. And I think that goes along with professional growth too, is that, you know, idea of improvement and that idea of being willing to try new things and being willing to listen to the perspective of different people and to incorporate that into your own class.

Administrator 2 responded with how novice teachers bring value to the PLC with new strategies and strength in their knowledge of technology. Teacher 9 brought up how the PLC is a place to ask questions and get answers, and it provides a safe place.

Although collaboration was a strong theme uncovered in Interview Question 3, teachers did mention obstacles. One such obstacle was time. Teacher 9 mentioned that time constraints really limited the amount of instructional growth that can take place for the teachers. Teacher 8 pointed out that inconsistency of set meeting times can negatively impact teachers' professional growth. Teacher 8 emphasized that the PLC is designed to build comradery to support teachers, and inconsistency of meeting times can lead to poor collaboration. Finally, Teacher 7 addressed the lack of PLC development for teachers who teach a specialized course. Teacher 7 mentioned

that being specialized led to being on a PLC that was districtwide and not campus specific, which created obstacles for those teachers to meet consistently.

Instruction

The theme of instruction was prevalent in all three groups. Instruction, for this study, encompassed curriculum knowledge and best teaching practices. Prior research by Rigby (2014) emphasized that instruction must be current with the times and department chairs are crucial in this aspect.

Administration. All administration discussed instruction in their response to Question 3. Administrator 3 stressed that collaboration in PLCs allows for teachers to share best practices with one another. Administrator 5 stated that PLCs allow departments to discuss “where they’re going, what has worked, what . . . we need to improve upon.” Administrator 5 also expressed that PLCs must have clear expectations that entail looking at curriculum and best practices. Regarding administrators’ view of instruction and department chairs, Administrator 8 felt that these leaders need to engage in structured conversations to focus on curriculum and drive for better instruction in the classroom.

Department Chairs. Department chairs discussed the theme of instruction throughout their responses to Interview Question 3. All department chairs highlighted the instructional themes in several areas. Like administrators, the department chairs universally mentioned analyzing teaching strategies and analysis of student data. On top of that, Department Chair 1 and Department Chair 2 felt that PLC efficiency was vital for success. Due to time constraints to conduct formal meetings, both participants emphasized that having set agendas built on teacher input created a forum for improved instructional collaboration. When it came to placement of teachers, Department Chair 4 stated, “We want our best teachers in the low courses, the teachers with the biggest buckets of tools.” Department Chair 3, regarding student performance, felt that

department chairs should be intentional on equipping teachers with strategies to increase student accountability on coursework. Department Chair 3 built upon this response by mentioning that teachers must be intentional in establishing clear expectations for students and facilitating their growth with increased accountability and support.

Teachers. Teachers also emphasized the importance of the instructional theme in their responses. Teachers, 9 of 11, included this code in their answers. Teacher 1 stated that through their PLC “we are trying new software programs; we are into trying to integrate a lot of visual group work that is hands-on, including software that you can manipulate and move around and restructure.” Teacher 9 reinforced this concept by noting that their PLC is a platform to try new things and build off each teacher’s strengths. Teacher 7 felt that ensuring vertical alignment was key for PLC when it comes to instruction. As with department chairs, Teacher 4 emphasized the need for PLCs to be efficient in order to maximize their time together while improving instruction for students. Although consistency in participants’ answers was observed, one challenge was mentioned as an area of concern. Teacher 3 discussed how several teachers in their department were veterans and were set in their methods of performing instruction. Teacher 3 felt that creating a culture of openness to new strategies and practices needs to be in place along with methods to support veteran teachers on how best to acclimate new methodology with their current styles. Unlike Interview Questions 1 and 2, which showed consistency in the three groups regarding themes, Interview Question 3 uncovered a third theme that was in alignment for both administration and department chairs but was different for teachers.

Advocacy

The third major theme uncovered for Interview Question 3 that was consistent for administration and department chairs was advocacy. The theme of advocacy, for this study,

encompassed being the voice of departments and facilitating the needs of teachers to help them grow and improve instruction.

Administration. Administrators, 3 of 4, felt that advocacy was an important part of a department chair's position. Administrator 1 discussed how they sent their department chairs to PLC leadership training to improve their ability to guide their departments and improve efficiency. Administrator 3 mentioned that administrators should be focused on assisting their department chairs on ways to support teacher growth that they can take back and implement in their departments. Administrator 8 focused on how administration allows department chairs to survey their teachers to gain knowledge of what is working, what needs the teachers have, and what issues are being seen in the classrooms. Based on that feedback, Administrator 8 said that the administration can then support the department chair and facilitate their ability to address the feedback.

Department Chairs. Department chairs viewed the theme of advocacy with great importance as all the participants discussed this in their responses. Department Chair 1 made it clear that they used their planning period to go visit their teachers and advocate for their needs. Department Chair 1 felt that this also allowed them to see teachers during instruction while allowing them to evaluate what is or is not effective in the classroom. Department Chair 4 expressed that setting clear expectations by administration has provided a framework on how to best lead the instruction in their department. Department Chair 4 also noted that facilitating which teachers are part of their PLCs has allowed them to increase efficiency as personalities are positioned to increase collaboration. Finally, Department Chair 2 stressed that a department chair must be efficient in the department curriculum so that they see the big picture and then facilitate their PLCs with the different aspects unique to their subject.

Although department chairs felt their ability to advocate was apparent, several challenges were discovered through their responses. As mentioned earlier, specialty courses present a unique challenge. Department Chair 2 discussed how teachers of specialty courses do not always have a campus PLC and it is vital to be in collaboration with those teachers to advocate for their needs. Department Chair 1 noted that because department chairs are also teachers, “scheduling can make it hard to get into all their teachers’ classrooms.” Department Chair 1 felt that the PLC must be efficient when this obstacle comes into play. Finally, Department Chair 2 addressed that even though departments meet as their own PLC, the variety of subjects in those departments can lead to ambiguity when clear expectations and facilitation are not in place.

Growth Mindset

Teachers. Although administration and department chairs were consistent on their second major theme in response to Interview Question 3, teachers believed that the theme of growth mindset was important. The theme of growth mindset, highlighted by 8 of 11 teacher participants, encompassed focusing on goals and being willing to take risks for both professional growth and improvement in student performance. Teacher 9 expressed that their PLC and department “definitely allow and encourage us to look at different things.” Teacher 11 noted that their department chair does not tell teachers what they need for growth but instead collaborates and then advocates to allow teachers to go out and attend trainings they desire to participate in. Teacher 6 felt that as teachers grow, they provide a network of resources that can be brought back to the PLC for discussion. Teacher 1 echoed growth mindset by saying that when department chairs allow teachers to collaborate on their strengths, it builds other team members’ tools for instruction. Finally, Teacher 8 emphasized that the PLC needs to be a platform for department chairs to facilitate while allowing teachers the opportunity to collaborate and grow based on the strengths of each team member. Even though the theme of growth mindset is valued

among teachers, Teacher 4 felt that their department did not emphasize this theme. Teacher 4 expressed that their PLC is collaborative when it comes to ensuring efficiency in their processes; they did not feel that encouraging teachers to grow was evident.

Interview Question 4 targeted the participants' perceptions and beliefs on distributed leadership in their school. As with Interview Question 3, two major themes were discovered for each of the groups, with a third theme consistent for administration and teachers and a different theme for department chairs. The theme of growth mindset has already been discussed. Table 8 shows the responses of all participants for Interview Question 4.

Table 8

Themes Derived From Interview Question 4

Theme	Frequency of responses to questions		
	Administration <i>n</i> = 8	Department Chair <i>n</i> = 4	Teacher <i>n</i> = 11
Advocacy	0	3	4
Collaboration	5	1	4
Distributed leadership	33	14	30
Growth mindset	13	4	11
Instruction	0	4	2
Mentorship	1	3	2
Traditional management	2	6	5
Trust	18	4	14

Note. Responses to Interview Question 4 are related to Research Question 2: What are the perceptions and beliefs of the participants regarding distributed leadership in their school?

Distributed Leadership

The theme of distributed leadership was built on the foundation provided from previous research conducted by Shava and Tlou (2018), who discussed the shift of educational settings toward the distribution of tasks and responsibilities to teachers. The distributed leadership theme, for this study, encompassed participants seeing and understanding the distribution of roles and responsibilities throughout their school.

Administrators. Administrators expressed this theme in response to Interview Question 4. All the administrators felt that the school culture was conducive and provided evidence of leadership responsibilities and opportunities being distributed to department chairs and teachers. Administrator 3 expressed that in a large school, administrators must spread responsibilities to many stakeholders or the school would not be effective. Administrator 7 stated, “One of the most important roles that we have is giving people the opportunity to really shine. I mean, it gives them a chance to experience things, and sometimes they have great ideas that they can share with everybody else.” Administrator 5 noted that one of the most important roles as an administrator is to provide opportunities to grow leadership within teachers. Administrator 4 built upon this by expressing,

At high school there are just so many things going on that there are constantly opportunities for people to assume leadership roles, and I think our job is such that everyone on the campus is a leader. So, getting everyone from the principal down to understand that kids are looking to them every single day they walk in the building is important.

Finally, Administrator 2 mentioned that by delegating responsibility teachers are encouraged to take it and modify it to make it work for their settings.

Department Chairs. Department chairs were also quick to discuss the theme of distributed leadership. Every one of the participants explained the importance of allowing their teachers to lead and grow to impact both their development and their students. Department Chair 4 discussed how they rely on their PLC leads to take information and discuss it with their teachers. Department Chair 3 pointed out that by distributing leadership, more teachers demonstrate buy-in. Department Chair 3 also mentioned that department chairs must be intentional by distributing leadership based on their teachers’ strengths and passions. Department

Chair 2 highlighted that even though there are traditional roles such as PLC and team leads, many other opportunities are available such as committee chairs or club sponsors. Finally, Department Chair 1 built upon additional opportunities by discussing how teachers can lead professional development if they feel they have something of value that the department can benefit from.

Teachers. Teachers were also vocal regarding the theme of distributed leadership, with 9 of 11 participants discussing this theme in their responses. Teacher 1 stated, “Administration gives lots of opportunities for us to volunteer to be responsible for different clubs, to be responsible for different activities within our school, and if people want to be leaders, they have the opportunity.” Teacher 4 noted that school leadership allowed them to shadow and attend many different meetings to gain a different perspective of how schools operate. Teacher 3 elaborated on how administration sets expectations for those who want to be leaders and then allows teachers to take on those responsibilities under the guidance of those expectations. Finally, Teacher 8 explained how distributed leadership through PLC and team leads has the potential to lead teachers to pursuing a department chair or an administrative role in the future.

Challenges were also mentioned by teachers regarding distributed leadership. Teacher 2 expressed how department chairs can inhibit leadership opportunities if they are hesitant or unwilling to relinquish control. Department Chair 12 contended that some department chairs feel that by distributing leadership to their teachers, if things do not work out, the department chair will be reprimanded. Department Chair 12 also mentioned that some department chairs are hesitant to distribute leadership for fear that teachers will become overwhelmed. Finally, echoing this sentiment, Teacher 1 felt that some teachers view leadership opportunities as a means of more work.

Trust

Both administration and teachers specified the importance of trust. The theme of trust encompassed trust, value, and empowerment. Regarding administration, all participants voiced this theme.

Administrators. Administrator 1 stated, “I think any time somebody has a passion or interest or background, or all of the above and stuff—if they’re able to take that and run with it and contribute to the improvements in the campus.” Administrator 4 cited that when trust is established individuals feel validated and are more open to exploring different roles and sharing ideas. Administrator 3 reverberated trust by discussing how increased value leads to better relationships and thus collaboration and growth. Finally, Administrator 7 reflected on the theme of trust by discussing how trust leads to individuals feeling more accountability and putting the needs of others before themselves.

Teachers. Like administration, teachers reiterated the importance of trust. Sixty-four percent of teachers felt trust was essential in their position. Teacher 9 stated, “If you trust me, then you are willing to let go of the reigns.” Teacher 5 cited that when trust is present, teachers feel confident in what they are doing. Teacher 5 also expressed that they are the leaders in their classroom and have the credentials to teach, so by instilling trust, they are free to do what they feel is in the best interest of the classroom and students. Teacher 4 stated that teachers are the boots on the ground and know what is really happening in the classroom, so they must be trusted to make decisions and lead their students. One challenge that participants brought up was the lack of trust and a relationship. Teacher 7 noted that if trust and respect is not present, teachers will do the bare minimum to satisfy leadership. Teacher 7 also mentioned that lack of trust meant that they were not free to do the job they were hired for. Finally, Department Chair 2 expressed

how when teachers are not trusted, they avoid leadership opportunities making it more difficult to get things done.

Traditional Management

Department Chairs. Although administration and teachers demonstrated consistency in the theme of trust, department chairs reinforced the theme of traditional management from earlier interview questions. Traditional management encompassed the traditional management role of disseminating information and managing budget along with setting clear expectations. All participants felt that the traditional management theme was a huge part of their role. Department Chair 1 stated, “My job is to facilitate the communication between the departments . . . and the PLCs.” Department Chair 1 also expressed that they control the budget and submit work orders if things need repair. Department Chair 3 noted that when they speak to their departments it is as if the administration is speaking. Reinforcing Department Chair 3, Department Chair 4 specified that after the leadership meetings, they take the information and send it to the PLC leads based on their subject. Finally, Department Chair 2 cited how they are in communication with administration and know which administrator is over curriculum and textbooks, and more so they know who to approach when a teacher has a need.

Themes for Research Question 3

During the interviews conducted for this study, all participants were asked about the impact of department chairs on teacher efficacy. Interview Question 5 was designed to answer this research question. Table 9 shows the responses from all three groups. All groups reiterated previous themes such as collaboration, growth mindset, and distributed leadership. The theme of trust was also revisited, but unlike with Interview Question 4, where only administration and teachers discussed the importance of this theme, department chairs highlighted the importance of trust when responding to Interview Question 5.

Table 9*Themes Derived From Interview Question 5*

Theme	Frequency of responses to questions		
	Administration <i>n</i> = 8	Department chair <i>n</i> = 4	Teacher <i>n</i> = 11
Advocacy	4	2	3
Collaboration	6	7	18
Distributed leadership	12	4	12
Growth mindset	7	6	12
Instruction	1	2	7
Mentorship	1	1	3
Traditional management	1	0	0
Trust	32	10	35

Note. Responses to Interview Question 5 are related to Research Question 3: What are the perceptions and beliefs of the participants on the impact of department chairs on collective teacher efficacy?

Trust

Administration. Providing the foundation for Interview Question 5, research from Mosoge et al. (2018) discussed the importance of leadership in developing collaborative spaces for teachers to have constructive dialogue built on trust. Cansoy (2020) also mentioned that through effective leadership, teachers can be granted autonomy and can be empowered to control their learning environments through strengthening their instructional practices to positively impact student performance. Administrator 1 felt that through distributed leadership, morale improves through trust and confidence for all department personnel. Administrator 6 added to the theme of trust by expressing that when administration distributes leadership and trust the department chair, teachers see this and may be willing to trust the department chair also. Administrator 2 felt that by providing trust to department chairs and teachers, accountability increases, and the department is more effective.

Department Chairs. All department chairs emphasized the importance of trust through distributed leadership when explaining department efficacy. Department Chair 3 stated, regarding departments and the theme of trust, that it

impacted the way that they feel comfortable to open up to fail, and so I think you have to ask, whether a department chair or whether it's a department AP, [they] have to be able to build positive relationships and trust with your department to where teachers feel comfortable.

Department Chair 3 also mentioned that trust has empowered teachers to take risks and to go into levels that they may not have been willing to. Department Chair 2 reinforced these statements by also saying, "If everybody's empowered, then they are more likely to take risks."

Department Chair 4 felt that trust allowed everyone to be part of the decision-making process, and in return, department efficacy improved. Finally, Department Chair 1 stated, "So if you feel as a teacher that you're valued, then you feel more willing to give your advice and your opinion and share your thoughts and your ideas." Department Chair 3 brought up two challenges that had been observed. The first was leadership taking on more responsibilities for others to alleviate the workload on teachers. Department Chair 1 explained how the current state of the workplace, with virtual learning and protocols, had limited district leadership's ability to provide value to teachers. Department Chair 1 felt that this had led to teachers being more conservative in their practice in order to just make it through the day.

Teachers. Although teachers had several responses that tied into efficacy while answering Interview Question 3, teachers also discussed the importance of trust in more detail when responding to Interview Question 5. Teacher 3 explained how they viewed their class as a small business, and as the leader, they must be trusted to teach in an effective manner to get productivity out of their students. Teacher 6 felt that if they were trusted, then they were free to

do what is best for their students and increase their effectiveness. Teacher 6 also stated, “We need to be able to feel like, as long as I’m covering the material that I’m supposed to cover and it’s effective, then trust me.” Teacher 8, when discussing efficacy, emphasized that when a teacher feels trusted, they are more confident in their communication to colleagues and students, which improves effectiveness.

Reiterating teachers’ responses from Interview Question 3 through a lens of efficacy, Teacher 9 discussed the need for feeling valued and trusted to improve the effectiveness of PLC collaboration. Teacher 7 also explained that trust allows them to get out of their comfort zone and try new things that can benefit the PLC. Teacher 2 felt that the department chair was the first person they could go to when they had questions or concerns about their classroom because they trust the leadership and value their PLC team. Finally, Teacher 1 explained how their department chair trusts PLCs to distribute tasks to increase PLC effectiveness by ensuring equity in the workload so teachers are not overloaded.

Teacher 10 did express concern because they felt trust and autonomy had been taken away in their department as a result of the district taking more control over the curriculum. Teacher 10 felt they were being told what and how to teach, leading to a lack of trust and decreased effectiveness since some students need differentiation to master content. Teacher 1 explained how the lack of trust made teachers feel they had no control, which could potentially impact the effectiveness in their classroom. Finally, Teacher 3 felt that a lack of trust was often parallel with micromanagement, which hindered a teacher’s ability to run an efficient learning environment.

Summary

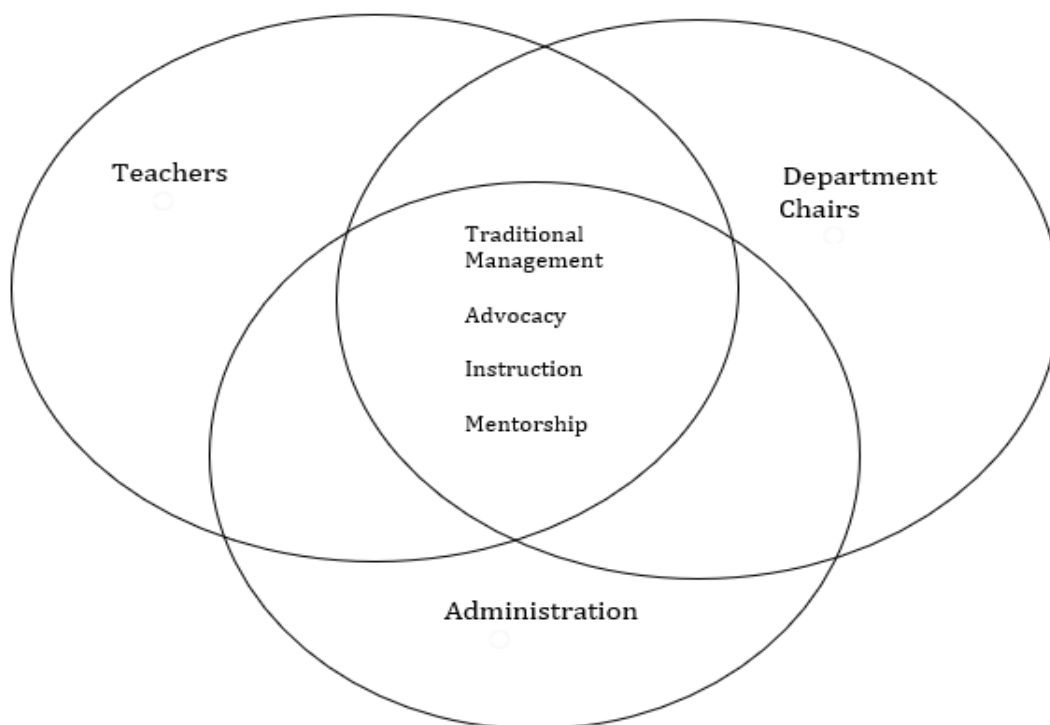
In the qualitative case study, I explored the perceptions and beliefs of administration, department chairs, and teachers concerning the role of department chairs, instructional

leadership, and department efficacy. Descriptive coding of the data led to the acknowledgment of major themes discussed by the participants to answer the three research questions. Venn diagrams were constructed for each of the research questions to illustrate all three groups, the total number of themes each group mentioned, and the major themes that were consistent throughout the three groups of participants.

Themes uncovered for Research Question 1 were consistent for all three groups. Figure 3 delineates the common themes for all three participant groups in relation to Interview Questions 1 and 2.

Figure 3

Themes Derived From Interview Questions 1 and 2

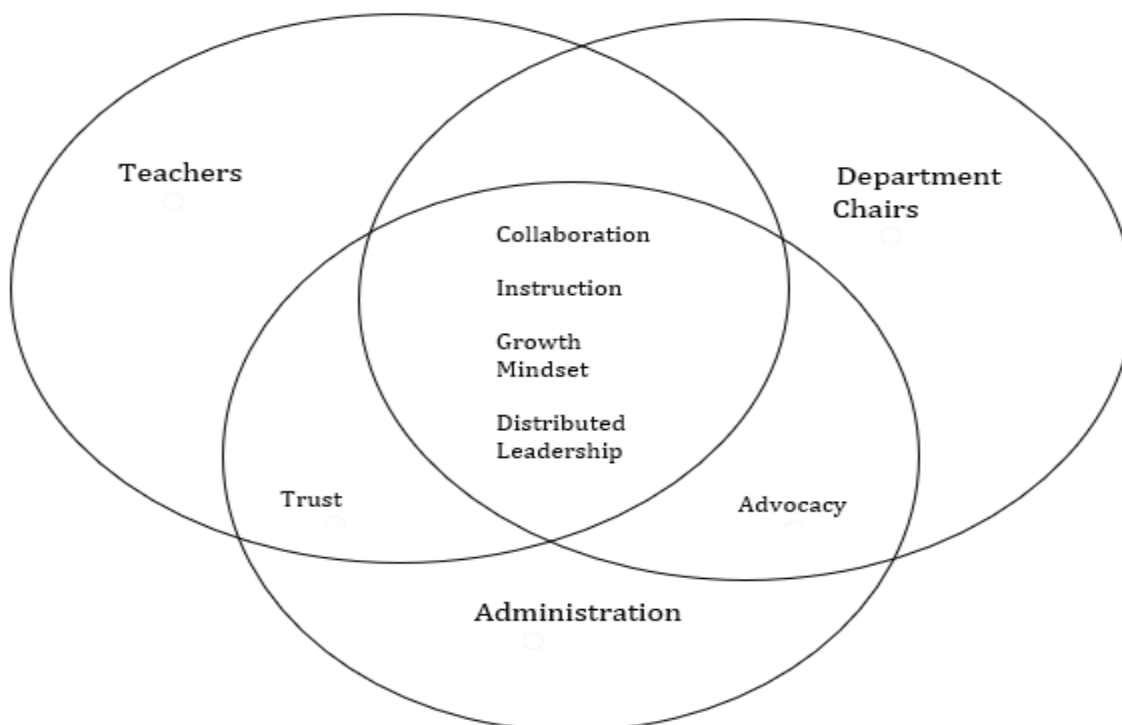


Note. Themes to Interview Questions 1 and 2 are related to Research Question 1: What are the perceptions and beliefs of the participants regarding the role and responsibilities of department chairs? Administration, $n = 8$; department chair, $n = 4$; teacher, $n = 11$.

Themes discovered for Research Question 2 showed consistency for four themes, with advocacy being important for administrators and department chairs. The theme of trust was crucial for both administrators and teachers. See Figure 4 for the themes derived from Interview Questions 3 and 4.

Figure 4

Themes Derived From Interview Questions 3 and 4



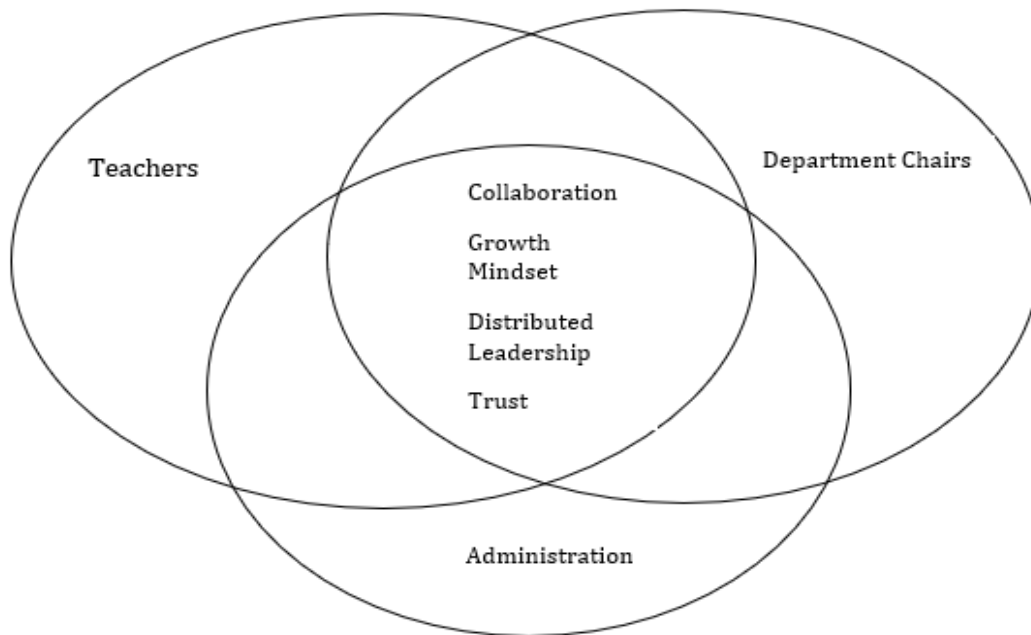
Note. Themes to Interview Questions 3 and 4 are related to Research Question 2: What are the perceptions and beliefs of the participants regarding distributed leadership in their school?

Administration, $n = 8$; department chair, $n = 4$; teacher, $n = 11$.

Research Question 3 highlighted three consistent themes, with the theme of trust being important for department chairs. Figure 5 shows the distribution of themes for Interview Question 5.

Figure 5

Themes Derived From Interview Question 5



Note. Themes to Interview Question 5 are related to Research Question 3: What are the perceptions and beliefs of the participants on the impact of department chairs on collective teacher efficacy? Administration, $n = 8$; department chair, $n = 4$; teacher, $n = 11$.

The analysis of the participants' responses, along with the major themes discovered, led to recommendations in the final chapter of this study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

As schools have grown, distributing leadership is crucial for maximizing efficiency in high schools while ensuring strong instruction to impact student performance. Department chairs provide an ideal leadership component as an avenue to establish teacher professional development and student success in the instructional leadership practices. Reinforcing this statement, Gardner and Ward (2018) found that department chairs' proximity to their teachers and students impacts both collaboration of teachers and student success. In the current qualitative case study, the purpose was to understand the perception and beliefs of administrators, department chairs, and teachers concerning department chairs as instructional leaders.

The research questions that guided this study focused on the perceptions and beliefs of the current role of department chair, an understanding of distributed leadership in the school, and the impact the role has on collective teacher efficacy. Data analysis from the semistructured online interviews provided understanding to the three research questions. The research questions for the study were as follows:

RQ1: What are the perceptions and beliefs of the participants regarding the role and responsibilities of department chairs?

RQ2: What are the perceptions and beliefs of the participants regarding distributed leadership in their school?

RQ3: What are the perceptions and beliefs of the participants on the impact of department chairs on collective teacher efficacy?

I discuss in this chapter the findings from the data analysis and their relationship to the three research questions. I also discuss the limitations observed from the study along with recommendations for future research.

Discussion of the Findings

The findings from this qualitative case study provided significant descriptive themes that were consistent with all three groups of participants along with themes that individual groups felt were vital for their role.

Findings for Research Question 1

Administration. Regarding the perceptions and beliefs of the role of department chair, the traditional management theme was discussed. Historically, the department chair role was viewed as a managerial position that handled items such as budget, information dissemination, and teacher assignments (DeAngelis, 2013; Zepeda & Kruskamp, 2007). Administrators were quick to highlight how department chairs are a vessel to relay information from the top down and bottom up. Bimonthly meetings involving administrators and department chairs provide a platform for current information to be exchanged. Administrators also expressed how department chairs are the gatekeeper for department budgets and ensuring teachers have the supplies they need to run their classrooms, which has been acknowledged in research from Gaubatz and Ensminger (2017).

Administrators discussed the theme of advocacy in relation to Research Question 1. Being the voice for the teachers is an expectation that administrators feel a department chair should continually demonstrate as part of their position. Advocacy included bringing concerns teachers have to the administrators along with ideas and training teachers are wanting to accomplish. The theme of instruction showed that administrators expected department chairs to be involved in curriculum and best practices for their teachers. Historically, department chairs or head teachers demonstrated planning and evaluation of teaching practices, which supports this finding (Akram et al., 2018). Although no formal training nor clear competencies have been established for the role of department chair, administrators treat the department chair as the

department expert and rely on them to assist APs in driving instruction to impact student performance. Finally, the theme of mentorship was expressed as important for the role of department chairs by administration. The expectation is that the department chair is the example for how the department should function. Mentorship also provides department chairs with more opportunities to serve the school (Arnett, 2017). Whether a teacher is struggling or is showing success in the classroom, department chairs should be intentional in collaborating with teachers to ensure curriculum alignment is being done while supporting teachers with assimilation of the curriculum with their teaching styles. Reinforcing this idea, Arnett (2017) concluded that teacher mentors and a supportive principal are critical influences on how teachers experience the profession.

Department Chairs. Department chairs echoed the theme of traditional management as their main responsibility concerning their role. The traditional management concept echoed previous work by Brent et al. (2014) which explained that department chairs manage the organization, operations, and resources for their learning environments. Department chairs clearly understood that they provide a link to ensure information is passed in both directions from the top down and bottom up. DeAngelis (2013) discussed this as one of the managerial aspects of the role of department chair. Department chairs also emphasized their role as a budget manager to equip all teachers with the supplies they need to run a successful classroom, which supported findings from Gaubatz and Ensminger (2017), which discussed department chairs' role in department budgeting and oversight. Regarding the theme of advocacy, department chairs were quick to point out that they are the voice for both administration and the teachers. As Coggins and McGovern (2014) explained, department chairs need to gauge the climate of their departments along with minimizing negativity from their teachers by acknowledging their concerns and taking them to administrations for support. Especially in the current educational

environment, which COVID-19 has impacted, department chairs felt that they must keep the administration informed of teachers' concerns not only in the classroom but also in their personal lives to ensure their well-being.

The theme of instruction was imperative for department chairs when it came to logistical planning for each school year. Although administration did not specifically mention department chairs' involvement in scheduling, department chairs did discuss how they provided input on teacher placement to ensure all classes are covered and strong PLCs can be developed to help drive instruction. The concept of teacher placement, as mentioned by department chairs, supports the findings of DeAngelis (2013), who discussed teacher assignments as part of managerial responsibilities. Department chairs also mentioned that many of their subjects are specialized and felt the theme of instruction required them to be more of a supportive role in assisting teachers with their needs but not necessarily best practices for a specific area of content. Specialization of subjects and teachers aligns with previous research from Gaubatz and Ensminger (2017), which pointed out that departmentalization led to specialized curriculum and teachers. The department chairs did highlight that more training in universal best practices would be a benefit to allow them to have more of an instructional impact on their teachers. As Bredeson (2013) expressed, principals need to focus on teacher leaders to handle the academic requirements for the school. Finally, the theme of mentorship was decisive for department chairs. All felt that one of their roles was to assist new teachers and continue to provide an example for veteran teachers with changes that the district and school administrators want to implement. Previous research by Gaubatz and Ensminger (2015) and Peacock (2014) highlighted a gap that exists between administration and teachers and the need for department chairs to close this space. The department chairs implicated that their role, based on their experience and knowledge, was to be

an avenue for teachers to continually communicate with them for continued growth as a teacher to impact their students.

Teachers. Teachers, like their leadership counterparts, clearly acknowledged and understood the theme of traditional management regarding information dissemination and budget control. All teachers expressed this role as their first response to Interview Question 1. The theme of advocacy was also apparent when teachers discussed the role of department chair in an instructional capacity. Teachers mentioned that they are on the frontlines and want the ability to be innovative and rely on the department chair to advocate on their behalf. Lai and Cheung (2014) noted this in their research, explaining that educational change requires teachers' participation in school development. Teachers also felt that the department chair was their first line to navigate obstacles that appear in the classroom such as classroom management or poor student performance. Department chairs' ability to navigate obstacles aligns with Peacock's (2014) research that pointed to department chair leadership encompassing subject-related issues based on experience and teacher characteristics.

The theme of instruction was important to teachers, but department responses varied. Some teachers expressed how their department chair understood best teaching strategies that could be implemented regardless of the subject, paralleling a study by Akram et al. (2018) stressing department chairs should provide instructional strategies for their teachers. Other teachers did not see the department chair as a main component of instruction. Finally, the theme of mentorship proved to be a common expectation for department chairs in the eyes of teachers. Klar (2013) and Smith et al. (2017) emphasized that a department chair is vital for building and supporting teachers. As teachers pointed out, when new colleagues are hired, the understanding is that the department chair is in the forefront with ensuring acclimation to the department. Teachers also felt that department chairs possess a level of knowledge and experience or, as

Diamond and Spillane (2016) described, the expertise that allows them to address issues that may arise while providing guidance to move forward.

Findings for Research Question 2

Administration. Regarding distributed leadership in the school, administration expressed the importance of expanding the ownership of tasks to many stakeholders to increase ownership and alleviate demands on school leadership. Brent et al. (2014) discussed how school growth, state accountability, and departmentalization challenged principals to find ways to distribute leadership to accomplish these demands. Administrators pointed out that although department chairs assist them in many of these aspects, PLCs and school sponsorships allow teachers to position themselves in ways to develop as leaders while supporting student success. PLCs provide a platform for teachers to utilize the theme of collaboration. As Watson (2014) discussed, PLCs should possess shared values and collective responsibility. Administrators emphasized that the expectation is that PLCs meet consistently while analyzing student data for intervention, focusing on results and to drive future instruction, as Burns et al. (2018) emphasized. PLCs also allow for the theme of instruction to a formattable practice employing teachers' perceptions and beliefs on what is best for their students.

The theme of growth mindset was essential, according to administrators, as they expressed how they expect department chairs and teachers to be innovators and be willing to take risks to better their abilities in the classroom. PLCs provide a platform to develop roles to enhance teacher growth and leadership (Wilson, 2016). The concept of distributed leadership also provides teachers with a way to pursue growth through opportunities such as PLC leads or the position of department chair. Some administrators did voice that with no limits being set for either of these roles, once they are filled, it can be difficult for an aspiring teacher to gain access to these positions. Administrators, regarding Research Question 2, did mention the theme of

advocacy as a means to emphasize a platform to identify and recruit teachers to positions of leadership. Finally, administrators felt that the theme of trust was crucial when implementing distributed leadership. Mutual trust and respect are essential for cultivation of teacher growth (Watson, 2014; Wilson, 2016). Acknowledging teachers as an avenue to address increased demands on the school while developing ownership and value involves teachers feeling that they are trusted based on their knowledge and performance moving forward (Watson, 2014).

Department Chairs. Department chairs discussed distributed leadership in their school through several themes. Collaboration was an important component that all departments and PLCs must have in place and maximize to ensure student success. The commitment to collaboration supports the findings of Burns et al. (2018) that a successful PLC must exhibit an ability to work collaboratively. Department chairs expressed that they must be intentional in creating PLCs and employing PLC leads to allow for cohesiveness while building colleague relationships through trust, respect, and openness for members to express their ideas (Watson, 2014). Department chairs also echoed the importance of teachers having a growth mindset as the profession of education is in constant evolution and teachers must continue to grow along with their students through self-reflection, development, and refinement of teaching practices (Colmer, 2017).

Although some department chairs expressed that the theme of growth mindset is present, having the training and tools to meet the needs of teachers' aspirations would be beneficial to allow them to be a change agent (Melville et al., 2016). Department chairs also specified that the ability to advocate was necessary to properly distribute tasks for their teachers with the knowledge that the teachers have been equipped with the competencies to be successful with new responsibilities.

Teachers. Teachers were very vocal in their perceptions and beliefs of collaboration at both the department and PLC levels. Teachers felt that their PLCs were their foundation to drive instruction but discussed lack of clearly defined roles of the PLC lead. Some teachers saw their PLC lead as more of a facilitator, while others visualized them as an individual who was responsible for all aspects of the PLC. The differences in understanding illustrate the point by Burns et al. (2018) that PLCs should have clearly defined expectations of what a successful PLC exhibits. Teachers also mentioned that the PLC should be a place of safety to ask questions that challenge district and school expectations.

The theme of growth mindset was a mainstay for teachers' responses as they expressed that the need to refine their craft was a continuous process. Having a clear understanding that they can be innovative and take risks was stressed as a direct reflection of their department chair. The concept of innovation, based on the findings, echoes Battersby and Verdi's (2015) study that challenged schools to become more innovative. Although some teachers felt their department chair had clearly informed teachers that this was acceptable, others felt that the example of the department chair led them to be more closed off. Some teachers felt their department chair was not willing to allow others to take on different tasks for lack of trust or consequences of failure to accomplish goals. For distributed leadership to be effective, administration must empower department chairs to share ownership of responsibilities (Hans & Gupta, 2018).

Findings for Research Question 3

Administration. The theme of collaboration was a priority for administrators regarding Research Question 3. Donohoo (2018) emphasized the importance of the collective whole over the individual for both the growth of teachers and positive student performance. As the administrators pointed out, collaboration was an expectation for all departments and PLCs. The idea of constructive dialogue over best practices and intervention should be a constant in all

meetings. Administrators felt, through collaboration, a gateway to teachers having a growth mindset would result. Administrators were very clear that teachers should be innovative and take risks to reach all types of students, as Donohoo (2018) and Mosoge et al. (2018) concluded but pointed out that each department did this in different ways based on the subjects. Administrators also felt that distributing leadership allowed for department chairs and teachers to demonstrate ownership due to their relationship to the students while strengthening their discipline (Cansoy, 2020). Finally, some administrators felt that distributing leadership should be revisited annually to ensure that all teachers can develop leadership but did note that this was not a common practice in the present.

Department Chairs. The theme of collaboration took the lead regarding department efficacy. Once again department chairs mentioned the need to be intentional in developing PLCs and placing teachers who had compatible personalities to allow for maximum PLC performance regardless of the subject the teachers were selected to teach. Department chairs highlighted that in many departments, except for CTE and foreign languages, teachers are composite certified, allowing them to teach multiple subjects. Composite certifications allowed department chairs to build collaborative teams that would allow teachers to express their strengths while impacting student performance.

Although the themes of collaboration, growth mindset, and distributed leadership were apparent with department chairs, the theme of trust was vital. Department chairs noted that teachers must trust them to do what is best for the department to demonstrate efficacy and positive student growth. Graham (2018) mentioned that for distributed leadership to be effective, trust must be the priority. Through constructive dialogue, department chairs emphasized that teachers could better understand why they have been positioned in the PLCs and subjects they teach. Mosoge et al. (2018) voiced that the end goal is student success and the collective whole

of all teachers' knowledge and experience is needed to make this happen. The theme of trust is how department chairs felt this would be accomplished.

Teachers. Teachers once again expressed the importance of the theme of collaboration in conjunction with Research Question 3. Teachers' responses validated the need for collaboration through department and PLC platforms to enhance collective efficacy through shared ideas. Teachers also explained how department and PLC efficacy can positively impact student performance (Kim & Seo, 2018). In addition, teachers conveyed that a forum that is safe and allows for individuals to share their ideas and beliefs increases not only efficiency but impacts teacher value and student achievement (Donohoo, 2018; Mosoge et al., 2018).

Teachers also indicated the importance of having a growth mindset, which is in alignment with Cansoy (2020), who explained the need for teachers to be continually strengthening their ability to impact student performance. A growth mindset also supports teachers embracing the need to improve their efficiency in delivering instruction through training and support (Mosoge et al., 2018). Finally, teachers understood the theme of distributed leadership and its relationship to efficacy. Past research from Lekwa et al. (2019) discussed how instruction and management go hand and hand in influencing student performance. As teachers noted, distributing tasks can increase a sense of value and ownership while ensuring that the workload is equitable for all so that students do not experience negative consequences from instructors that are overloaded (Lekwa et al., 2019).

Limitations

Several limitations need to be discussed concerning this qualitative case study. The first was the COVID-19 pandemic. State and district protocols were put in place to ensure that the participants' health and well-being were a priority. In-person contact limited the ability to have face-to-face interviews. Also, continuous quarantining by school administration led to variation

of the location and time of the online Zoom interviews. A second limitation was time. As a result of COVID, teachers were taxed with lesson revisions and conversions to a digital format. Also, the district implemented a 2-hour planning period to aid teachers in this endeavor. Finally, the sample size proved to be affected by the COVID pandemic. Throughout the time period set to conduct the study, attendance of teachers was not consistent due to quarantines and employee leave. In response to this limitation, the sample size of 10% (11 out of 111) was chosen. Also, the sample size had to be limited because the qualitative interview design would have been overwhelming.

Recommendation for Practice

Department chairs have a unique role to alleviate demands on administration while providing a unique opportunity to enhance instruction in the classroom through instructional leadership development. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are provided for department chair development at the district level:

- A department chair leadership development program should be conducted at the end of each school year during summer in-service training times. The training should be conducted with the oversight of the area superintendents, district curriculum specialist, and principals. The major themes from this study should be utilized to create the foundation for department chair growth. Current APs can be utilized to instruct this program based on their knowledge and training of instructional leadership and practices from district administration.
- District administration, district human resources, school leadership, and department chairs should collaborate and develop a set list of criteria and competencies concerning the role of department chair that is consistent throughout the district. Along with this, district and school administration should develop an interview

protocol for the selection of future department chairs for those individuals who have expressed interest in the position and have successfully completed the district training program for the role.

- District and school leadership should develop a school year plan that focuses on how the role of department chair can maximize their leadership role concerning the beginning of the school, instructional leadership throughout each semester, and the end-of-year reflection and development plan to drive training for the summer to demonstrate department growth for the upcoming school year.
- District and school leadership should look at ways to build a department chair instruction period that coincides with all of their department teachers instructing during that time. Doing so will allow the department chair to spend time in each teacher's classroom for observation and analysis to drive instructional leadership. Along with this, department chairs and teachers should have a unified PLC period that would allow department chairs to be a part of each PLC to collaborate on instruction for the department. With a block schedule, district and school leadership should consider separating these on A and B days.
- District and secondary discussion on setting guidelines for term limits on the role of department chairs and PLC leads should allow for more growth opportunities for teachers in the future.

Recommendations for Future Research

The qualitative case study findings propose areas for future research consideration. Although the research sample was small, the findings did show that the role of department chair is a pivotal position that could be expanded to incorporate more instructional leadership training and implementation. Conducting the qualitative study over the remaining five secondary

campuses in the district could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the department chair role in regard to the three research questions. Furthermore, the comprehensive data collected could uncover more attributes to align across the district level.

Another recommendation would be to monitor and evaluate the impact of the department chair leadership program throughout the year once it has been implemented. Monthly department chair meetings and biannual teacher surveys could provide the means to collect data to determine the effectiveness of the department chair position based on the defined job description. Finally, a districtwide survey could be utilized to collect data on the interest of teachers regarding different positions of leadership. Based on the results, district personnel could look at the concept of leadership term limits for the positions of department chair and PLC leads. As the findings of this study pointed out, distributed leadership is recognized, but access to available positions can be limited, presenting an obstacle for teachers who desire to grow through leadership opportunities.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the current perceptions and beliefs of department chairs, administrators, and teachers regarding instructional leadership. The study findings support the need to increase the capacity of the department chair position regarding instructional leadership. The major themes uncovered from this study provide a framework, based on perceptions and beliefs of all three groups, to develop the instructional leadership capacity of department chairs. Also, the results contribute to the body of knowledge on the position of department chair as an integral part of teachers' growth and student performance at the secondary level. As a result, the continued development of the department chair position is needed for the overall well-being of the school community.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Protocol	Interviews
Number of participants	23
Provide questions beforehand	Yes
Facilitator	Researcher
Location	Zoom
Introduction	Yes
Structure	Semistructured
Collection method	Audio and Video

Directions: Introduce myself and state the purpose of the Zoom meeting. Put the interviewee at ease. Remind them that the interview is being recorded and transcribed for a research study. Assure them that the responses are confidential and will be coded so individual respondents will remain anonymous. Tell them they will have an opportunity to review the transcribed responses.

Ask the questions in the same order and using the same wording for each interview. Use the probes provided to ensure understanding of the question or to gather more detailed responses.

You may repeat a question upon interviewee's request.

Interview Questions:

- Q1: How would you describe the role of department chair in your school?
- Q2: How do you envision the instructional leadership role of the department chair as it applies to subject area departments?
- Q3: A. How do the department PLCs support professional growth and instructional practice to impact student performance? (administrators)
- B. How do your department PLCs support professional growth and instructional practice to impact student performance? (department chairs)
- C. How does your department PLC support professional growth and instructional practice to impact student performance? (teachers)
- Q4: What evidence do you observe of distributed leadership in your school?
- Q5: How does distributed leadership improve department efficacy and instruction?

Example probes to get more complete answers if interviewee is providing very brief responses, to clarify responses, or to explore beliefs and perceptions.

Obtain more detail:

1. Tell me more about that.
2. Could you give me an example of that?

Clarify:

3. Why is that important?
4. How so?
5. It sounds like you are saying...?
6. Say what you mean by....?

Beliefs or Perceptions:

7. Why do you think you noticed that?
8. Why does that matter?
9. What influenced your thinking on that?

Concluding Script: I want to thank you for your time and willingness to be a participant in this study. I want to remind you that confidentiality and ethical practices is my highest priority. Once again, thank you for your time and have a great rest of your day.

Appendix B: IRB Approval Letter

ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY
Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
320 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 29103, Abilene, Texas 79699-9103
325-674-2885



Dear Michael,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled

(IRB# 20-144) is exempt from review under Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects.

If at any time the details of this project change, please resubmit to the IRB so the committee can determine whether or not the exempt status is still applicable.

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

Megan Roth

Megan Roth, Ph.D.
Director of Research and Sponsored Programs