


LEADERS' PERCEPTIONS OF SELF-EFFICACY IN
LEADING HIGH-QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD CLASSROOMS

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LEADERS' PERCEPTIONS OF SELF-EFFICACY IN
LEADING HIGH-QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD CLASSROOMS

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LEADERS' PERCEPTIONS OF SELF-EFFICACY IN
LEADING HIGH-QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD CLASSROOMS

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By

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iii
LIST OF TABLES.....	vi
ABSTRACT	vii
INTRODUCTION	1
Problem Statement.....	4
Purpose of the Study.....	7
Research Questions.....	7
Significance of Study.....	8
Theoretical Framework.....	10
Definition of Key Terms.....	13
Limitations, Delimitations, and Assumptions	14
Design Controls	16
Summary.....	18
REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	20
Introduction	20
Theoretical Framework.....	22
Early Interventions	23
High-Quality Preschool Programs.....	25

School Readiness	37
Early Childhood Curriculum	42
Preschool Teacher Training.....	46
Leadership Effectiveness.....	47
Summary.....	57
METHODOLOGY	59
Introduction	59
Purpose of Study.....	60
Research Questions.....	60
Participants	60
Selection and Sampling	62
Research Setting	63
Research Design	63
Instrumentation.....	65
Data Analysis.....	67
Summary.....	69
FINDINGS.....	71
Introduction	71
Participants	73
Data Analysis.....	74

Coding	76
Participant Narratives	79
Themes.....	100
Summary.....	106
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	107
Introduction	107
Summary of Methods	108
Summary of Findings	109
Discussion.....	110
Professional Implications	115
Recommendations for Future Research.....	117
Conclusions	118
REFERENCES	120
APPENDICES	141
Appendix A.....	141
Appendix B.....	143
Appendix C.....	144

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	74
Table 2	75
Table 3	77
Table 4	78
Table 5	79

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to learn more about principals' feelings of self-efficacy when leading preschool programs in Missouri. There were three research questions that were addressed regarding the leaders' perception of efficacy to lead preschool teachers, define high-quality programming, and define school readiness. The researcher found a gap in prior research around the perceptions of building principals leading early childhood classrooms using the qualitative narrative case study approach. This study attempted to add to the literature in high quality early childhood education settings and principals' perceptions of leading preschool classrooms. Three major themes developed during this study were the need for continuous learning and collaboration for leaders and teachers, the holistic approach to preschool education, and the importance of early intervention and familial support in preschool programs.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

High-quality childcare is the foundation of kindergarten readiness (Ansari, Pianta, Whittaker, Vitiello, & Ruzek, 2019; Cobanoglu & Sevim, 2019; Fontaine, Torre, Grafwallner, & Underhill, 2006; Infurna & Montes, 2020; Thomas & Rajalakshmi, 2020). High-quality early childhood programs frequently impact academic and social success later in childhood, reducing the need for additional academic interventions (Cobanoglu & Sevim, 2019; Goncu, Main, Perone, & Tozer, 2014; Lin & Jones, 2019; Thomas & Rajalakshmi, 2020). Children who attend a comprehensive preschool program are prepared for kindergarten at a higher rate than their counterparts who are cared for by family members or friends (Fontaine, Torre, Grafwallner, & Underhill, 2006; Stucker, 2008), and especially compared to students who are not enrolled in any preschool program at all (Lonigan et al., 2015). Yet, the increasing costs associated with high-quality childcare enrollment are a barrier to some families (Jalongo et al., 2004; Kahn, 2014; Klaus & Siraj, 2020).

Jalongo et al. (2004) stated, “Any country and citizenry that truly believes attention to children’s care and education during the early years is of inestimable value to society would make every reasonable effort to invest in preschool education” (p. 143). The need for consistent funding for quality preschool programs has become more critical (Abel, 2019; Derman-Sparks & Moore, 2016). Numerous studies indicate that investing in early childhood education will result in recoupment of allotted funds and generate future savings for more intensive interventions (Brown, Feger, & Mowry, 2018). Despite extensive research concluding that early interventions provide a massive return on the investment in early childhood funding, many states still lack

funds to implement high-quality programs for accessibility to all students, even those living in poverty (Kahn, 2014).

Accountability and increased scrutiny of early childhood programs have grown as public funding has expanded nationwide (Lin & Jones, 2019). When considering programming for early childhood students, three fundamental principles must be met: availability, affordability, and quality (Jalongo et al., 2004; Sylva, 2014). As states expand funding for free preschool, making the experience available and affordable, the third principle falls on the school districts to ensure quality is achieved. Approximately 60 % of 4-year-old children attend preschool nationally (Infurna & Montes, 2020). School districts in the state of Missouri provided public preschool to approximately 37,394 students ages 3-5 in 2019-2020. These students were enrolled in any district-sponsored preschool or activity including early childhood special education. Further, approximately 66,000 kindergarteners arrive to begin school each year in Missouri.

Certification requirements for educators and leaders vary from state to state. Teachers must hold a valid certificate issued by the state in the area in which they are teaching for grades kindergarten through 12th grade. The same holds true for early childhood. Educators teaching early childhood special education or Title I preschool must hold an Early Childhood or Early Childhood Special Education certificate to teach in the state of Missouri (DESE, 2019b). Currently, there are no certification requirements for principals to obtain to supervise early childhood classrooms within their elementary school, beyond the elementary principal certification.

Leaders are one of the most influential people that impact student learning (Jalapang & Raman, 2020; Morgan, 2018). Research literature cites the potential effectiveness of early

childhood programs and the long-term effects for students who attend them (Ansari et al., 2019; Cobanoglu & Sevim, 2019; Delalibera & Ferreira, 2019; Infurna & Montes, 2020; Kahn, 2014; Klaus & Siraj, 2020; Lin & Jones, 2019; Thomas & Rajalakshmi, 2020). Effective leaders are some of the most influential contributors to student success in school (Jalapang & Raman, 2020; Morgan, 2018; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2019) and elementary school principals are vital to ensure preschool programs located in their buildings are effectively implemented (Fatima, 2017; Goncu et al., 2014; Jalapang & Raman, 2020; Morgan, 2018; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2019). Every building is unique and presents its own dynamic needs (Bowers, Shoho, & Barnett, 2016; Pijanowski & Lasater, 2020). Successful early childhood program leaders must have a clear understanding of early childhood development or pedagogical leadership (Abel, 2019; Fatima, 2017), administrative leadership, and general leadership characteristics (Abel, 2019; Pijanowski & Lasater, 2020).

The focus of this study was to describe a leader's perception of being efficacious in supervising early childhood teachers due to an increase in funding for early childhood programming. The significance of this study has grown over the last few years due to the increase in funding for public preschool. This study was completed by a researcher conducting interviews with principals who supervise early childhood programs to determine how efficacious they felt in leading these programs in their buildings. Finally, the outcome of this study will help determine the need for additional support to principals who are leading buildings where preschool programs are housed.

In Chapter One, the researcher states the problem for the study and the purpose of the study. Questions the researcher hopes to answer during this study are also found in this chapter. The theoretical framework is included along with the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations

the researcher faced throughout the study. Next, Chapter One contains the design controls for the study. Key terms are also included in this chapter to clarify terms for the reader. Finally, Chapter One concludes with an overview of the contents discussed and the upcoming content in future chapters.

Problem Statement

Childcare costs are impacting families in America (Reilly & Luscombe, 2019). Parents can lose up to 4 times their salary when looking at lifetime earnings, due to leaving the workforce to care for their children (Reilly & Luscombe, 2019). If parents pay for childcare, many are paying between \$9,000 to \$9,600 annually in the most affordable states, to as much as a year of public college tuition in the most expensive states (Reilly & Luscombe, 2019). Reilly and Luscombe (2019) found the birth rate in 2018 was the lowest it has been in 32 years and the main contribution was the lack of affordable childcare. Many states are expanding free early childhood programs in their schools to address the high cost of child care, but not all leaders have experience leading early childhood programs (Fatima, 2017; Reilly & Luscombe, 2019).

As childcare costs increase, school districts can help subsidize high-quality preschool programs to provide a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) for children who qualify for services. Missouri state law defines the need to provide funding for public schools in the state. This is accomplished by using a foundation formula. The foundation formula is how states distribute funds to public school districts. These funds typically pay the salaries of teachers working for the public school district. School districts will receive federal, state, and local funds, but the state funds distributed through the foundation formula are the largest contributor for most districts. The foundation formula is a complicated system developed to consider several factors that can contribute to the funding districts receive (DESE, n.d.-c). The state of Missouri fully

funded the foundation formula in 2017-2018. This enacted House Bill 1689, which enabled school districts to collect average daily attendance (ADA) on preschoolers qualifying for free and reduced lunch rates beginning in the 2018-2019 school year (DESE, 2019a). ADA is the amount of time a student attends a public school and the district is reimbursed for the amount of time they are actually in attendance (DESE, n.d.-a). Thus, adding more funding to early childhood education could increase the number of classrooms across the state.

As preschool programs and preschool funding evolve, school districts must define school readiness for their use to create consistency and clarity across the district (Kane, 2014; Lin & Jones, 2019; Stucker, 2008) and to professionalize the early childhood field (O'Neill & Brinkerhoff, 2018). When school districts define school readiness and assign leaders trained in early childhood, preschoolers are more likely to receive developmentally appropriate learning opportunities; preschool is not meant to push first-grade and kindergarten expectations down to preschoolers (Tilley, 2019). Conceptualizing school readiness can be difficult because definitions can vary by individual perspectives. Some might consider school readiness to be fixed, based on the maturation of the child and age-eligibility, and some might consider school readiness fluid based on the skillset the child has acquired (Cappelloni, 2013; Koçak & Incekara, 2020). According to Cappelloni (2013), models of readiness have evolved, with the latest model showing a shared responsibility of parents, schools, and the community.

The DESE uses the work of the ecological systems theory founded by Urie Bronfenbrenner to define school readiness categorized in four different lenses. First, the student lens consists of social and emotional, pre-academics, motor, health, and attitudes towards learning. Second, the family lens consists of understanding current student performance, encouraging continued growth and development, becoming a partner with the school district, and

having a general understanding of how the school system works. The third lens is for the school system. School readiness for schools would consist of creating an environment for students to feel safe and welcome. Teachers work diligently in a partnership with parents to support students' learning. Finally, the fourth lens consists of communities supporting of schools and families and acknowledging the importance of early learning (DESE, n.d.-b). The theory shows the interdependence between the individual, microsystem, exosystem, and macrosystem (Maharaj, 2021; Tudge et al., 2016; Twintoh, Anku, Amu, Darteh, & Korsah, 2021).

As a result of increased funding for early childhood, elementary school principals will likely add a preschool principal to their list of job duties as preschool programs expand across the state (Fatima, 2017). It is imperative for principals to have a strong foundation of early childhood grounded in early learning theory (Fatima, 2017). Principals need an understanding of early childhood curriculum, best practices, and current policies to effectively supervise early childhood staff (Fatima, 2017) and to ensure families, teachers, and the community are working together to achieve school readiness as defined by the DESE (n.d.-b). These leaders are a vital part of the success of high-quality early childhood program expansion throughout the state. However, there are no rating requirements for administrators similar to the expectations of teachers in the areas of professional development and qualifications to ensure leaders feel efficacious in leading early childhood programs.

The need for conducting this study is due to variance in studies about the outcomes of early childhood experiences. If there is a need for affordable, high-quality childcare and education for preschoolers, public schools are answering the call to support the education of preschoolers by increasing funding for preschool education. However, there is still the question about what constitutes high-quality education and the self-efficacy of elementary principals in

providing this programming in their school. The outcome of this study supports school districts, principal preparation programs, and agencies that support leaders through mentorship in determining if there are additional opportunities to provide information on leading high-quality early childhood programs. Chapter Two will provide more details about high-quality early childhood programs, defining school readiness, and how leaders impact the quality of those programs.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to describe a leader's perception of their self-efficacy for supervising early childhood teachers and providing high-quality programming following an increase in funding for Missouri preschools. With the expansion of funding the ADA for preschool students in 2018-2019, leadership for early childhood programs is on the rise. Some school districts will begin or expand early childhood programming. Elementary school principals will likely add supervision of these early childhood classrooms to the scope of their job duties. Currently, there are no other studies that address principals' perceptions on their efficacy to lead high-quality early childhood preschool programs in elementary school buildings.

Research Questions

The following central questions guided the study:

1. What perceptions do leaders have about their efficacy in leading preschool teachers/programs?
2. What perceptions do leaders have about their efficacy to provide a high-quality preschool program in their school?
3. What perceptions do leaders have about their efficacy in defining school readiness?

Significance of Study

The significance of this study has increased over the last few years due to the increase in funding for public preschools. As public schools begin serving or expanding early childhood programs, there is a ripple effect on various individuals. As principals begin to lead early childhood programs in their buildings, they must feel prepared to lead their youngest learners. Prior to free early childhood options in the school district, parents had to determine, based on the cost of childcare, if they could or could not work outside of the home (Reilly & Luscombe, 2019). As the topic of high-quality early childhood care continues to grow and funding is expanded to meet this need, families are freed of the financial barrier to entering the workforce. Early childhood is becoming more of a fundamental part of a child's education (Kleyn & Shaughnessy, 2012) especially as districts utilize expanded funding opportunities. Approximately 76.9% of preschool children spend 28 hours a week with nonparental caregivers, allowing parents to work or attend school (Infurna & Montes, 2020; Kahn, 2014; Meek & Williams, 2020). This time in a child's life is critical for their development as their brains develop substantially during their first 5 years of life; 80% of the brain has been developed by age 3 and 90% by age 5 (Cobanoglu & Sevim, 2019; Meek & Williams, 2020). Many low-income preschoolers are already significantly behind their wealthier peers by the time they enter school (Simpson et al., 2017; Yen & Lee, 2019). Therefore, preschool programs must provide a high-quality learning environment to ensure all students have the opportunity to work to their highest potential (Cobanoglu & Sevim, 2019; Infurna & Montes, 2020; Yen & Lee, 2019).

Students across the nation enter kindergarten at various ages. In Missouri, the age at which students are required to attend school begins at age 7 (DESE, n.d.-a). DESE (n.d.-a) summarized state laws, informing the public that 5- and 6-year-old children are not required by

the Compulsory Attendance Law to be enrolled in school. The state of Missouri expanded funding for free preschool and in 2019-2020, school districts provided public preschool to approximately 37,394 students ages 3-5. These students were enrolled in any district-sponsored preschool or activity including early childhood special education.

Due to the expansion of early childhood programming, there should be more training and requirements from principal preparation programs because many principals are not equipped to evaluate teachers or provide guidance in early childhood curriculum (Abel, 2019; Ansari & Pianta, 2019; Fatima, 2017). Principals who do not understand early childhood development may choose to create policies for preschool programs in their buildings based on the academic needs of current students in upper grades (Goncu et al., 2014). Therefore, state agencies and school districts need to consider developing certification and professional development requirements for leaders of early childhood programs due to the significant role these leaders will play as services are expanded to preschoolers.

One of the most influential factors of a child's development is dependent on the adult and their training and skill set (Fontaine, Torre, Grafwallner, & Underhill, 2006; Hall & Simeral, 2017). Elementary school principals are the most vital part of ensuring school-based preschool programs are effectively implemented in their buildings (Fatima, 2017; Goncu et al., 2014; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2019). With the research study completed, the findings will contribute to the current and future understanding of the impact the school principal's perception of self-efficacy has on leading the preschool programs in their buildings. Finally, the leader can ensure teachers have the best training, utilizing Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP), and implementing state-approved curricula and assessments.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical frameworks of this study were based on the theories of constructivism and self-efficacy. Constructivism was initially based on the work of Piaget (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969; Steffe & Gale, 2009). All learning is student-centered and constructed through the use of prior knowledge and new experiences or interactions (Clark, 2018; Demiral, 2018; Jaramillo, 1996; Mohammed & Kinyo, 2020; Morris, 2019; Piaget, 2011; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969; Ratcliff, 2016; Steffe & Gale, 2009; Xu, 2019). There are various forms or paradigms of constructivism, but some of the basic principles are consistently present in the varying theories (Mohammed & Kinyo, 2020; Ratcliff, 2016; Steffe & Gale, 2009; Xu, 2019). Ratcliff (2015) explored theorists whose work aligns with constructivism: Piaget fathered the cognitive development theory, Vygotsky was the father of the social development theory, Dewey developed the theory of learning by doing. Bruner developed a learning theory in which he believed prior knowledge helped learners actively construct new ideas (Jiang & Perkins, 2013).

Several principles in the constructivist theory were developed by the aforementioned theorists. One principle, based on Piaget and Dewey, is that the child has an active role as the learner, not a passive learner (Clark, 2018; Jaramillo, 1996; Mohammed & Kinyo, 2020; Morris, 2019; Ratcliff, 2016; Steffe & Gale, 2009; Xu, 2019). Constructivists focus on what is happening in the learners' minds more than the performance or what the learner can accomplish (Steffe & Gale, 2009). Constructivists, such as Piaget, believed learning could be sequential (Olson & Hergenhahn, 2016) while other constructivists, such as Bruner, believed learning could be achieved in nonsequential order (Jaramillo, 1996; Jiang & Perkins, 2013).

Another basic principle, supported by Vygotsky and Dewey, is that constructing knowledge is a social activity requiring interactions to help formulate understanding (Erciyas,

2020; Jaramillo, 1996; Mohammed & Kinyo, 2020; Vygotsky, 1962). Vygotsky developed the sociocultural theory that impacted the constructivist theory and curriculum (Jaramillo, 1996). Vygotsky's sociocultural theory is based on the idea that students' social experiences and interactions shape their learning and determine how social interactions influence peers as they construct new learning (Demiral, 2018; Erciyes, 2020; Jaramillo, 1996; Ratcliff, 2016; Vygotsky, 1962).

Another principle of constructivism is that learners are active participants in acquiring new knowledge. This basic principle is supported by constructivist theorists Dewey, Bruner, and Vygotsky. Learning is not always linear, and students are not empty vessels waiting for their learning to be poured in by the teacher (Jaramillo, 1996; Mohammed & Kinyo, 2020).

Individuals create their meaning of the world rather than from the world (Mohammed & Kinyo, 2020; Morris, 2019; Steffe & Gale, 2009; Vygotsky, 1962). The constructivist theory encourages children to engage in self-directed learning (Mohammed & Kinyo, 2020; Morris, 2019; Steffe & Gale, 2009; Vygotsky, 1962). As children learn to engage in self-directed learning, they become more empowered to solve real-world problems presented throughout childhood and into adulthood (Mohammed & Kinyo, 2020; Morris, 2019; Steffe & Gale, 2009).

Leaders can also be constructivists (Mohammed & Kinyo, 2020; M. Yildirim & Kaya, 2019). According to M. Yildirim and Kaya (2019), the constructivist leader should be recognized as a new type of leadership. The constructivist leader recognizes that the students and staff bring their own unique experiences to the classroom (Mohammed & Kinyo, 2020). Constructivist leadership parallels the constructivist theory; adults and children construct new knowledge through four principles: (a) learning, (b) inquiry, (c) hands-on participation, and (d) reflection (Mohammed & Kinyo, 2020).

The theory of self-efficacy proposes that people who have a high self-efficacy have qualities that continue to impact their success. Individuals with high self-efficacy are more likely to (a) challenge themselves, (b) set goals to motivate themselves, (c) self-regulate their feelings during stressful situations, and (d) secure resources and support from others (Bandura, 1977, 1993, 1997b). Principals who have a high self-efficacy can develop these abilities within themselves and encourage it in others as they understand more about Bandura's theory of self-efficacy.

Bandura (1993) theorized that self-efficacy is the belief in one's own ability. Bandura (1977, 1993) stated that individuals who possess the same knowledge and skillset can still experience varying outcomes due to how well some individuals can access the knowledge or apply the skillset during difficult situations based on their beliefs about their self-efficacy. Principals with a perceived high level of efficacy can greatly affect the learning environment created in their buildings (Bandura, 1977, 1993, 1994, 1997a).

Bandura identified four sources of influence that affect self-efficacy. These four sources are (a) mastery experiences, (b) vicarious experiences, (c) verbal/social persuasion, and (d) physiological and emotional arousal (Bandura, 1994). The four sources of influence each help the individual build a strong sense of efficacy (Bandura, 1994; Doennig, 2019). However, master experiences have the greatest effect, especially if failures occur after one has firmly established their sense of efficacy (Bandura, 1994, 1997a). Additionally, success must be meaningful, requiring effort and persistence; easy successes only add to the individual's expectation for a quick reward after limited work (Bandura, 1994, 1997a).

As an individual builds a strong belief from within, there are four psychological benefits that will be experienced; (a) cognitive processes, (b) motivational processes, (c) affective

processes, and (d) selection processes (Bandura, 1994). Leaders with a perceived high self-efficacy will be more likely to commit to setting challenging goals, be motivated to set challenging goals based on perceived outcomes, and take calculated risks (Bandura, 1994; Jalapang & Raman, 2020). The level of perceived self-efficacy influences how the leader approaches a difficult situation, either facing the threat head-on, or avoiding or giving up (Bandura, 1977, 1994; Doennig, 2019).

The constructivism and leader self-efficacy theoretical frameworks are interwoven throughout this study. Specifically, this study tied together the principles of learning through (a) constructing new learning based on the learner's experiences and background knowledge, (b) social interactions, (c) self-beliefs, and (d) hands-on opportunities. The research questions asked in this study reflect early childhood best practices and the perceived self-efficacy of the leader charged with supervising the early childhood classrooms. In Chapter Two, the literature review has the constructivism and self-efficacy theoretical frameworks woven throughout to show the alignment of constructivism and leaders' efficacy in leading early childhood classrooms.

Definition of Key Terms

Authentic Play. For the purpose of this study, authentic play was defined as open-ended activities chosen by the child (Rendon & Gronlund, 2017).

Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP). For the purpose of this study, Developmentally Appropriate Practice was the ability to set expectations for preschoolers that challenge, support, and stimulate them; while being sensitive to each student's needs (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], n.d.; Venn & Jahn, 2004).

Early Childhood Programs. For the purpose of this study, early childhood programs were defined as a program for children from birth to age 5 (LeeKeenan & Ponte, 2018).

Intellectual Virtues. Characteristics that effective leaders use were called intellectual virtues (Pijanowski & Lasater, 2020).

Preschool. For the purpose of this study, preschool was defined as a school that precedes entrance into a kindergarten or elementary school ages 3-5 (Ansari & Pianta, 2019).

Reflective Practice. For the purpose of this study, reflective practice is a tool used to provide insight and guide action for continuous learning, growth, and development (Wells & Herie, 2018).

School Readiness. The definition of school readiness provided by the DESE (n.d.-b, 2019a) was when students are prepared in multiple dimensions (i.e., social and emotional, language and literacy, cognitive, motor, physical wellbeing, and positive attitudes toward learning).

Self-Efficacy. The definition of self-efficacy is the belief in one's own ability to achieve at high levels of performance based on how the individual feels, thinks, and behaves (Bandura, 1993).

Limitations, Delimitations, and Assumptions

Limitations. Limitations are limits that can affect the outcome of the study in a negative manner but are outside the control of the researcher (Roberts, 2018; Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018).

1. School districts in this study had varying demographics of leaders, teachers, students, and size. If this study was replicated, results could differ as experiences, certification, and training vary within each participant.
2. Self-reported data create challenges in verifying the authenticity of the results.
3. The bias of the leader may show through the perceptual data collected.

4. Researcher bias is possible in a qualitative study.
5. Participants were only selected if the participation agreement was collected.
6. Sample size may be small due to the researchers' ability to access willing participants.
7. Interview completion may be inconsistent from person to person.
8. The researcher did not consider the Coronavirus pandemic that occurred in Spring 2020.

Delimitations. Delimitations are the parameters of the study that were consciously determined by the researcher; they are considered neither positive or negative (Roberts, 2018; Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018).

1. The theoretical framework of this study was based on the work of Piaget's constructivist theory and Bandura's self-efficacy theory.
2. The study was limited to asking about perceptions of leaders using the characteristics of high-quality preschool program described by Fontaine, Torre, Grafwallner, and Underhill (2006).
3. The researcher limited the selection of principals who currently supervise both elementary and preschool teachers.
4. The study was limited to principals supervising in a public school.
5. This study was limited to the state of Missouri.

Assumptions. Assumptions are not necessarily factual but are presumed factual (Roberts, 2018).

1. Participants provided honest answers based on their perceptions.
2. Public schools have both elementary and preschool students.
3. The complete interview process was fulfilled by each participant.
4. The sample size was representative of the state of Missouri.

Design Controls

According to Roberts (2018), a qualitative study measures a person's perspective about their experiences. This qualitative narrative case study was designed to collect perceptions of leaders in school districts in Missouri with early childhood programs in elementary school buildings. The interviews were conducted to answer research questions and to gain an in-depth understanding of how leaders perceived their self-efficacy to lead early childhood programs. There were some limitations that impacted the study. For example, the researcher asked for demographic data regarding the participants' experience in education and leadership, certification, and training. The researcher was unable to regulate any of those individualized experiences for each participant. Additionally, the researcher could not completely limit the impact of the participants' answers and conversation that ensued during interviews, nor could the researcher require principals to participate if they had not volunteered. These limitations could indirectly impact the results of the study, but they were outside of the researcher's control.

There were some delimitations that could also have impacted the results of the study that were inside the researcher's control. For example, the researcher only initiated interviews with principals who were currently supervising teachers in both early childhood and elementary grades. Additionally, the researcher delimited the study by asking questions of quality programming by using characteristics from Fontaine, Torre, Grafwallner, and Underhill (2006). These delimitations could have impacted the results of the study.

During the completion of the study, the researcher made some assumptions about the individuals who agreed to participate in the work. First, the researcher assumed the participants would provide honest answers and would complete the process once they agreed to participate. Second, the participants led schools that had students in preschool grades and higher. Finally,

the sample size of willing participants was representative of the entire state of Missouri. These assumptions could have impacted the outcomes of the study.

Participants in the interviews were principals who worked in a public-school setting to ensure some consistency in the type of services provided across the state. These participants were separated into two groups: principals with early childhood certification who lead early childhood classrooms and principals without early childhood certification who lead early childhood classrooms. Principals not included in this study were those who had not supervised early childhood classrooms in the last year and those who only supervised preschool teachers. Finally, the researcher used characteristics of high-quality early childhood programs to inquire about principals' perceptions of feeling efficacious to lead early childhood teachers described by Fontaine, Torre, Grafwallner, and Underhill (2006). The researcher found a gap in prior research around the perceptions of building principals leading early childhood classrooms using the qualitative narrative case study approach.

The study focused on demographic data collected to determine in which of two groups participants would be placed. The participants holding a degree or certificate in early childhood and having supervised an early childhood classroom in their elementary building were placed in one group. Participants who did not have an early childhood degree or certificate and supervised an early childhood program were placed in the second group. Elementary schools were omitted from the study if they did not have an early childhood classroom housed at that building.

Procedures were communicated to all participants prior to the initial interview. The researcher surveyed principals regarding demographic data. Then, focus groups were conducted to gather additional information around the areas of self-efficacy in leading early childhood teachers or early childhood programs, creating a high-quality early childhood program, and

defining school readiness. Researcher bias was addressed by setting aside any personal thoughts and feelings and depending solely on the research. Additionally, the researcher preplanned questions to ask every participant. Those questions were consistently asked in each interview.

Summary

Providing a high-quality early childhood experience for preschool children can impact their kindergarten achievement academically, socially, and eventually success later in life (Cappelloni, 2013; Derman-Sparks & Moore, 2016; Kahn, 2014; Klaus & Siraj, 2020; Lonigan et al., 2015; Ramey & Ramey, 2004; Stuber & Patrick, 2010; Sylva, 2014). Therefore, it is imperative that school districts define high-quality preschool for their specific district rather than allowing the academic needs of kindergarten to define programming expectations in preschool. However, there is still more to learn about the type of preschool learning environment (curriculum, organization, management, etc.) that most impacts student development (Lonigan et al., 2015). Teachers and leaders must ensure students have access to a learning environment that allows students to construct their own learning through experiences that are based in the theory of constructivism. Teachers must be adequately trained in early childhood principles and developmentally appropriate practices, and leaders must have the ability to make decisions regardless of their background knowledge. The research will contribute to filling in the gap in the literature review to determine how principals perceived their efficacy for leading early childhood programs.

The purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to describe a leader's perception of their self-efficacy for supervising early childhood teachers and providing high-quality programming, following an increase in funding for preschools (Ansari & Pianta, 2019). In the 2018-2019 school year, the state of Missouri began funding the ADA for preschool

students. Due to the expansion in funding, some school districts will begin or expand early childhood programming. Elementary school principals will likely add supervision of these early childhood classrooms to the scope of their job duties. Currently, there are no other studies that address principals' perceptions on their efficacy to lead high-quality early childhood preschool programs in elementary school buildings.

Chapter One provided a general introduction including the importance of the role of the building leader in ensuring preschoolers have a high-quality early childhood experience. There was an overview of the problem and purpose of this study. Chapter One provided key terms and the theoretical framework used for this study. Finally, the limitations and the design controls that were used to complete this study were outlined in this chapter.

Chapter Two completes a thorough review of the literature around the importance of early interventions, providing high-quality preschool, school readiness, the lack of funding for high-quality programming, and preparation for the teacher and administrator of early childhood programs. Chapter Three describes the methodology for collecting and analyzing the data required for answering the research questions addressed in Chapter One and the instrumentation for conducting the study. Chapter Four contains data collected during the study, a review of the data, and a summary of results from the study. Finally, Chapter Five includes a summary of the process, the research questions, findings from the data, and the recommendations for future research after completing the study.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Kindergarten was invented in Germany by Freidrich Frobel in 1837 (Allen, 2006; Cantor, 2013). The purpose of Frobel's kindergarten was to help the child transition from learning at home to learning in school (Allen, 2006; Riek, 2019). Kindergarten was meant for building, drawing, and learning how to share with others (Russell, 2018). However, Frobel's concept was rejected by the male educators in Germany due to the pedagogy being rooted in play rather than academic learning (Allen, 2006). In turn, Frobel successfully proposed the idea to female intellectuals about using women as kindergarten teachers in a profession that was predominately male (Allen, 2006).

Elizabeth Peabody was a renowned leader for her role in the kindergarten movement in the United States. Peabody promoted early learning by opening the first English-language kindergarten in 1860 and nurturing the expansion of kindergarten during her lifetime (Allen, 2006; Cantor, 2013). According to Cappelloni (2013), since the opening of the first kindergarten, classroom expectations have morphed as the expectations of student achievement have changed and become more demanding. As classroom expectations change, preschools are also transforming in dramatic ways and becoming an integral part of a child's education (Kleyn & Shaughnessy, 2012).

Funding for early childhood has been a priority for a number of years (Brown et al., 2018; Daily, Burkhauser, & Halle, 2012). Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama made early childhood education a priority by creating programs and providing funding to support the advancement of young children (Daily et al., 2012). In 1960, President Lyndon Johnson's War

on Poverty created the Head Start program (Brown et al., 2018). Head Start is one of the largest and most noteworthy preschool programs funded by the federal government. The establishment of Head Start was so significant because the program was considered an intervention rather than a right for children considered “at risk” (Brown et al., 2018). The federal and state government have earmarked funding for other preschool programs to support young children. Public school systems provide early childhood programming with monies from Title I, Special Education, Head Start grants, and local funds (Brown et al., 2018). This funding helps subsidize programs to make them affordable for families.

Each dollar spent on early interventions provides a massive return on the investment in early childhood funding (Kahn, 2014; Yen & Lee, 2019), however, the system is fragmented (Kahn, 2014). Many states still lack funds to implement high-quality programs for accessibility to all students (Kahn, 2014). Derman-Sparks and Moore (2016) stated, "Cheap high-quality early childhood education is an oxymoron" (p. 89) but “The short- and long-term benefits of high-quality early childhood education and care for the individual participants, their families, and society has [*sic*] been well documented by numerous researchers" (Kahn, 2014, p. 424).

The purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to describe a leader’s perception of their self-efficacy for supervising early childhood teachers due to an increase in funding for early childhood programming. Due to the expansion in funding, some school districts will begin or expand early childhood programming. Elementary school principals will likely add supervision of these early childhood classrooms to the scope of their job duties. Currently, there are no other studies that address principals’ perceptions on their efficacy to lead early childhood preschool programs in elementary school buildings.

The review of literature will spotlight five areas impacting the quality of preschool programs: (a) engaging environments, (b) parent involvement, (c) a balance of student and teacher-directed learning, (d) allowing children to learn by using hands-on learning, and (e) focusing on all areas of child development including the social-emotional development (Ratcliff, 2016). This chapter provides a thorough review of early interventions and the short- and long-term benefits many children experience after accessing high-quality preschool programs. Finally, Chapter Two will examine school readiness through the four lenses of students, families, schools, and communities and leader self-efficacy, which contribute to the success of school leaders.

Theoretical Framework

Constructivist theory. There are many theorists whose work aligns with constructivism; Piaget, Vygotsky, Dewey (Ratcliff, 2016), and Bruner developed a learning theory in which they believed prior knowledge helped learners actively construct new ideas (Jiang & Perkins, 2013). The belief that constructivism is a student-centered approach to learning where students construct their understanding of a topic based on prior knowledge and new experiences came from Piaget and Dewey (Clark, 2018; Demiral, 2018; Mohammed & Kinyo, 2020; Morris, 2019; Piaget, 2011; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969; Xu, 2019). Similar to students constructing their learning through experiences, principals can develop their self-efficacy through Mastery Experiences, those situations that are their own or through observing others being successful in certain situations (Bandura, 1994; Gebauer et al., 2020; Orsini & Coers, 2022). Some early childhood curriculum and instruction are grounded in constructivism and the beliefs of Bruner and Piaget where the focus is on the process of learning versus the outcome (Jiang & Perkins, 2013; Ratcliff, 2016; Steffe & Gale, 2009). Bruner, Dewey, and Piaget believed the child is the

individual doing the work in the classroom (Clark, 2018; Mohammed & Kinyo, 2020; Morris, 2019; Ratcliff, 2016; Steffe & Gale, 2009; Xu, 2019).

Self-efficacy theory. The theory of self-efficacy proposes that people who have a high-self efficacy are more likely to (a) challenge themselves, (b) set goals to motivate themselves, (c) self-regulate their feelings during stressful situations, and (d) secure resources and support from others (Bandura, 1977, 1993, 1997a). Bandura (1993) theorized that self-efficacy is the belief in one's own ability. Bandura (1977, 1993, 1997a) stated that individuals who possess the same knowledge and skill set can still experience varying outcomes due to how well some individuals can access the knowledge or apply the skillset during difficult situations based on their beliefs about their self-efficacy. In fact, leaders with high self-efficacy can take stressful situations and have more success in turning them into more favorable experiences (Bandura, 1977, 1993, 1997a). Principals with a perceived high level of efficacy can greatly affect the learning environment created in their buildings (Bandura, 1977, 1994, 1997a). This study will intertwine the two theories of constructivism and self-efficacy to explore principals' feelings of self-efficacy in leading early childhood programming. In this chapter the researcher provided alignment between constructivism and the five areas impacting high-quality early childhood education and the researcher provided an overview of the self-efficacy theory and the role self-efficacy had on the school principal.

Early Interventions

Students receiving early interventions during their preschool years receive benefits of an ongoing intervention that lasts until the third grade and sometimes longer due to their participation in preschool (Gardner, Melnick, Melroy, & Barajas, 2019; Infurna & Montes, 2020; Kahn, 2014; Lin & Jones, 2019). These benefits include academic achievement, social

development, and positive health outcomes (Yen & Lee, 2019). Students who enter kindergarten without social-behavioral skills such as the ability to manage behaviors, follow directions, solve problems, or to comply with instructions and rules, are greatly at risk of retention and/or additional services to support the missing skills (Bettencourt, Gross, & Breitenstein, 2019). Preschool programs can make a big impact on student achievement, even in students with significant risk factors (Ansari & Pianta, 2019; Cappelloni, 2013). Additionally, there are a few landmark studies showing the long-term impact from participating in a preschool program (Derman-Sparks & Moore, 2016; Fontaine, Torre, Grafwallner, & Underhill, 2006; Yen & Lee, 2019).

The Perry Preschool Project focused on 3- and 4-year-old students and provided them with comprehensive care (Fontaine, Torre, Grafwallner, & Underhill, 2006). Intentionality and professionalism among teachers, attitudes, relationships (teacher to child and teacher to parent), curriculum and funding, and resiliency of the child paired with empowerment are factors that contributed to the long-term positive outcomes of the Perry Preschool Project (Derman-Sparks & Moore, 2016). A study from Kansas supports the notion that students who have had early interventions in preschools show considerable outcomes that continue to third grade (Stuber & Patrick, 2010).

Additionally, the Abecedarian Study from North Carolina found that students who were in the treatment group outscored the students in the control group by 14 IQ points (Ramey & Ramey, 2004; Yen & Lee, 2019). Children in the treatment group who were provided an ongoing preschool intervention were less likely to qualify for special education or have grade retention before the age of 15 (Ramey & Ramey, 2004). Additionally, the children in the treatment group were less likely to have a child while in high school (Ramey & Ramey,

2004). Finally, these same students were 3 times more likely to attend a 4-year college (Fontaine, Torre, Grafwallner, & Underhill, 2006; Ramey & Ramey, 2004; Yen & Lee, 2019).

Early interventions can prepare students for the larger academic demands that occur in kindergarten (Ansari & Pianta, 2019; Cappelloni, 2013; Klaus & Siraj, 2020). Although there are many various theories about how children learn best, theorists agree that early interventions are the most effective ways to promote children's learning and development (Bay & Bay, 2020; Kahn, 2014; Klaus & Siraj, 2020). Classrooms grounded in the constructivist theory developed by Vygotsky and Dewey encourage students to learn through social interactions and play. Children are able to build new learning through the classroom activities and interactions they experience in the classroom (Clark, 2018; Pardjono, 2016; Vygotsky, 1962). Building upon prior knowledge to construct new learning is a main principle in constructivism and the work of Bruner (Ratcliff, 2016).

High-Quality Preschool Programs

High-quality childcare is the foundation of kindergarten readiness (Fontaine, Torre, Grafwallner, & Underhill, 2006; Gardner et al., 2019). High-quality early childhood programs often impact academic and social success later in life, reducing the need for additional academic interventions (Alford, Rollins, Padron, & Waxman, 2016; Ansari & Pianta, 2019; Setodji, Schaack, & Le, 2018). According to Alford et al. (2016), there is a great variance in the quality of interactions when the majority of instruction is provided to a whole group of students. Furthermore, teaching for a majority of the day in a whole group setting discounts the range of learners within that group, removing the teacher's ability to differentiate and provide developmentally appropriate practice. The constructivist theory developed by Piaget, Bruner, and Dewey encourages students to learn by doing and being an active learner rather than waiting

for a teacher to share the adult's knowledge with the student (Clark, 2018; Cooke & Francisco, 2021; Vygotsky, 1962). In order for students to achieve at higher levels, they must take an active role in their learning rather than be a passive participant (Alford et al., 2016; Colker, Koralek, & Trister-Dodge, 2018). Alternatively, a report by Heneghan, Cronin, and McCabe (2020) provided an alternative perspective of the constructivism protagonists who believe that free exploration does not benefit all students. In fact, when teachers provide direct instruction based on student need, there are greater outcomes (Heneghan et al., 2020; Nonaka, 1994).

Teachers are there to help facilitate learning in high-quality programs (Colker et al., 2018) and to encourage their students to take risks in their learning (Cooke & Francisco, 2021). Principals can have the greatest impact when they are effective (Grissom, Egalite, & Lindsay, 2021). The building leader can greatly affect the learning environment created in their buildings when they have a perceived high level of efficacy (Bandura, 1977, 1993, 1994, 1997a).

High-quality programs must consider all aspects of the development of young children, not just academics. In addition to using a developmentally appropriate curriculum, instruction, and assessments for the students enrolled, programs must also consider the social-emotional development of children (Colker et al., 2018; Maharaj, 2021; Russell, 2018). According to Kahn (2014), high-quality preschool programs help promote well-being, school readiness, and can narrow gaps in school readiness. Jalongo et al. described quality programs as:

- (1) Have sound philosophies and goals;
- (2) provide high-quality educational environments;
- (3) reflect developmentally appropriate and effective curriculum and pedagogy;
- (4) attend to children's needs, both basic and special;
- (5) respect families and communities;
- (6) employ professional teachers and staff, and
- (7) implement rigorous program evaluation practices. (p. 143)

Specific characteristics of high-quality preschool programs include the following: (a) engaging environments, (b) parent involvement, (c) a balance of student and teacher-directed learning, (d) allowing children to learn by using hands-on learning, (e) focusing on all areas of child development including the social-emotional development (Ratcliff, 2016), and (f) well-prepared and high-quality teachers (Fontaine, Torre, Grafwallner, & Underhill, 2006; Gardner et al., 2019). One indicator to measure quality could be from the bottom-up; asking children their perception of the quality of the program on a daily basis should give programs insight to how well they are doing (Rodríguez-Carrillo, Mérida-Serrano, & González-Alfaya, 2020).

When considering programming for early childhood students, three fundamental principles must be met: quality, availability, and affordability (Jalongo et al., 2004; Sylva, 2014). The cost of early childhood programming is often a deterrent. Impoverished students are less likely to attend high-quality early childhood programs (Kahn, 2014; Simpson et al., 2017; Sylva, 2014). Many studies have shown that students who need the intervention most, often come from backgrounds of low socioeconomic status, and are not showing the long-term benefits like their wealthier peers (Alford et al., 2016; Lonigan et al., 2015; Sylva, 2014). Most children from wealthy families are exposed to 5 times as many words by the age of 4 than those on welfare assistance (Sylva, 2014). Sylva (2014) believed vocabulary development is a crucial part of academic growth and many children living in poverty will enter kindergarten at a disadvantage compared to wealthier peers.

According to Saçkes, Trundle, and Shaheen (2019), some studies show quality early childhood programs should be solely child directed where free play is at the center of the preschool day. Child-directed learning is a constructivist approach to learning (Clark, 2018; Vygotsky, 1962). On the contrary, there are other studies that show children in the early years

are capable of learning more academic skills where the learning is teacher centered and the focus is on mathematics and literacy. Additionally, parents tend to put a greater emphasis on academics than social emotional development, contrary to most preschool teachers in the study (Saçkes et al., 2019). When children learn in a constructivist approach, there is nonlinear development that occurs throughout the child's exploration of materials and social interactions (Piaget, 2011; Vygotsky, 1962).

Engaging environments. The development of a child's brain is dependent upon the environments to which the children are exposed (Fontaine, Torre, Grafwallner, & Underhill, 2006; Karlidag, 2021; Rimm-Kaufman & Jodl, 2020). Therefore, it is imperative that childcare and preschool programs create engaging environments (Ansari & Pianta, 2019; Karlidag, 2021; Stacey, 2018). Many times, hands-on learning can appear to be free play to those entering the classroom for a snapshot of the day (Gronlund & Rendon, 2017; Karlidag, 2021; Kemple, 2017). Yet, the constructivist theory encourages the student to lead their learning through play by engaging with a variety of materials to construct new learning (Jaramillo, 1996; Stacey, 2018; Vygotsky, 1962).

When teachers acknowledge the principles of constructivism developed by Dewey, Bruner, and Vygotsky by incorporating play in the learning, students build understanding across disciplines (Campbell, 2021; Gronlund & Rendon, 2017; Karlidag, 2021; Riek, 2019). There are different types of play, and depending on who initiates the play, the work can be characterized as guided or free play (Gronlund & Rendon, 2017; Kemple, 2017). Play initiated by the adult and directed by the child is considered guided play; conversely, work initiated by the child and directed by the child is free play (Gronlund & Rendon, 2017; Kemple, 2017). Teachers must be aware of the various types of play because active play is more important than passive stimulation

(Gronlund & Rendon, 2017; Kemple, 2017; Stacey, 2018). As pressure continues to mount on preschool teachers and parents to get children prepared for school, play is often removed from preschool daily schedules (Campbell, 2021). Yet, play is a complex construct (Stacey, 2018) much like teaching literacy (Campbell, 2021). Many times, it is assumed that teachers and parents can successfully provide rich experiences in the areas of play and literacy, but fall short of successfully executing both (Campbell, 2021).

Constructivist theorists Dewey and Vygotsky believed interactions between the adult and child are also important (Bay & Bay, 2020; Colker et al., 2018; Infurna & Montes, 2020). When acknowledging a principle of constructivism and the work of Piaget and Dewey, the adult acts as the facilitator for learning (Colker et al., 2018; Ratcliff, 2016). Teachers and paraprofessionals should interact with students within the play space the student has created (Epstein & Hohmann, 2012; Karlidag, 2021). The teacher, as the facilitator, must plan for the content, students, and environment when completing lesson plans (Qiu, 2019). The teacher as a facilitator, or as Carl Rogers described, the guide on the side, is an important role. This role is especially important when students are engaged in hands-on, self-directed learning (Demiral, 2018; Ingleby, Oliver, & Winstone, 2015; Karlidag, 2021).

Fontaine, Torre, Grafwallner, and Underhill (2006) described core elements that contribute to a student's development; the core elements develop students' independence in mind and body. First, the element of safety and care of students is closely monitored by teachers during the completion of developmentally appropriate activities. These activities should be appropriate for each child's ability. Also, materials should be developmentally appropriate and varied (Colker et al., 2018; Fontaine, Torre, Grafwallner, & Underhill, 2006; Russell, 2018). Next, the element of health care of students is considered throughout the day. Teachers

should provide activities that encourage healthy habits: rest, healthy snacks and meals, and self-help skills such as toothbrushing (Colker et al., 2018; Fontaine, Torre, Grafwallner, & Underhill, 2006). Third, the element of intentional instruction impacts student achievement when teachers are using developmentally appropriate practice (Alford et al., 2016; Russell, 2018). Fourth, the environment is conducive to building trusting relationships between children and teachers through communication and social interactions. Last, the classroom structure encourages children to learn independence and cooperation skills in order to have positive relationships with peers that improve social-emotional skills (Alford et al., 2016; Colker et al., 2018; Fontaine, Torre, Grafwallner, & Underhill, 2006).

Dewey explained that children had the human right to a learning environment that was organized and enjoyable (Lindsay, 2015) and Piaget stressed the importance of materials (Ratcliff, 2016). Since children are spending 6 hours or longer in a childcare setting, they must be in engaging and high-quality environments to ensure students reach developmental milestones (Fontaine, Torre, Grafwallner, & Underhill, 2006; Stacey, 2018). Teachers should provide an environment where there are open-ended learning opportunities embedded throughout (Colker et al., 2018; Rendon & Gronlund, 2017). According to Kleyn and Shaughnessy (2012), children will learn through playing in early childhood classrooms. Children benefit from attending preschool to interact with materials that are unique and may not be found in their home (Kleyn & Shaughnessy, 2012).

Parent involvement. Parent involvement is a key piece to quality preschool programs (Bay & Bay, 2020; Campbell, 2021; Kasprzak et al., 2020; Maharaj, 2021). Parents are the child's first teacher and the most consistent adult in the child's life (Bettencourt et al., 2019). Students who are read to each night by a parent will excel on their reading assessments in third

grade (Kartal, Balantekin, & Bilgin, 2016; Puccioni, 2018; Stuber & Patrick, 2010). When teachers fully understand the constructivist theory from Vygotsky, they account for the variety of background knowledge and experiences each student brings into the classroom, such as being read to each night or the absence of those interactions (Mohammed & Kinyo, 2020; Morris, 2019; Vygotsky, 1962). High-quality early interventions have lasting effects on children, but interventions that support the economic success of the family unit can greatly increase the impact (Derman-Sparks & Moore, 2016; Simpson et al., 2017).

Students are indirectly affected by their parents' socioeconomic status, causing the child to be considered at risk (Bay & Bay, 2020; Ghongkedze, 2018; Puccioni, 2018). According to Cappelloni (2013), many 4-year-old children with a low socioeconomic status can show delays compared to their same-age peers by up to 18 months. Additionally, Puccioni (2018) identified that many families with a lower socioeconomic status engage less frequently in these learning experiences, which contributes to those students being less ready for kindergarten entry. Fontaine, Torre, and Grafwallner (2006) stated parents of at-risk children need the support of the community to contribute to their child's development. Schools offer parent education, family literacy and math nights, and orientations. However, schools can create a more meaningful opportunity for parents to participate in their child's learning by asking parents to provide input to teachers about their child's interests and their family dynamic to make the child's learning more meaningful (Colker et al., 2018; Fenech, 2013; O'Neill & Brinkerhoff, 2018). Puccioni (2018) reported parent involvement is much more meaningful when parents engage in literacy activities because the outcomes of those efforts impact numeracy and literacy skills of young children.

Parents may need more support to increase their learning about parenting and how to support their child as they learn (Colker et al., 2018; Fenech, 2013; Maharaj, 2021). Teachers may need to share how learning through constructivism and hands-on learning looks in the classroom and how it might look at home (Colker et al., 2018; Vygotsky, 1962). Fenech (2013) reported one of the most essential components in early learning is for the school to provide a variety of parent education or training opportunities to help them encourage students to learn at home in an effective manner. Kleyn and Shaughnessy (2012) stated that most parents want their child to be successful in school, but they are not equipped with the understanding of basic human growth and development. Many times, the importance of how students learn through doing or playing and the stages therein are overlooked by parents (Campbell, 2021; Kleyn & Shaughnessy, 2012). Parents have so much knowledge about their child and can support teachers in constructing their knowledge of their students if there is an opportunity for parents to engage in the learning process (Maharaj, 2021; Singh & Zhang, 2018).

Families should feel welcome to participate in the program (Colker et al., 2018; Kleyn & Shaughnessy, 2012; Maharaj, 2021). An open-door policy helps to create a sense of acceptance and warmth. Establishing a parent advisory committee or parent-teacher association, where families can participate in decision-making, helps them feel part of the learning process in a meaningful way (Colker et al., 2018). As the relationship is being built between the school and the family, communication is especially important (Colker et al., 2018; Kleyn & Shaughnessy, 2012). Additionally, some parents need the school's support to help equip them with the information needed to contribute to their child's learning at home (Bay & Bay, 2020; Kleyn & Shaughnessy, 2012; Fenech, 2013). Therefore, building trust to collaborate in meaningful ways will be crucial for students to succeed (Kleyn & Shaughnessy, 2012). Teachers can share the

philosophy of educating students using a constructivist theory with parents. This may support parents as they look for indications of achievement from their child.

Student and teacher-directed learning balance. In order for children to benefit the most from the curriculum, there should be teacher-led and student-led activities (Campbell, 2021; Derman-Sparks & Moore, 2016; Epstein, 2007). The humanist pedagogical theory developed by Carl Rogers and the constructivist theory of Piaget and Dewey shifts the center of learning from the teacher, as the sage on the stage, to the learner with the teacher as a guide on the side or facilitator of learning (Ingleby et al., 2015; Ratcliff, 2016; Vygotsky, 1962). Also, the constructivist theory and the work from Bruner noted that students are intrinsically motivated to learn due to their curiosity (Ingleby et al., 2015; Jiang & Perkins, 2013). Therefore, students learn best when they are organizing and assimilating the information as they construct new learning through experiences and observations, making sense for themselves with adult or peer support (Clark, 2018; Vygotsky, 1962; Yen & Lee, 2019).

Some high-quality preschool programs utilize a constructivist theory that is a child-centered approach to increase on-task behaviors that impact student learning (Alford et al., 2016; Epstein & Hohmann, 2012; Lindsay, 2015). When teachers begin the planning process, they begin by choosing which state standard they are planning to teach during the lesson. Then, the teacher considers how to incorporate students' natural interests into the lesson. Students construct their knowledge through the development of plans that are founded on their interests (Clark, 2018; Erciyas, 2020; Vygotsky, 1962). Campbell (2021) believed in the importance of teachers to plan and provide direct instruction, then allow for student-initiated play. While children are playing, the teacher makes observations and asks questions to engage the students in the topic. When students begin to show curiosity and have questions about the topic, teachers

scaffold thinking by asking students to explain their thinking and then expand on the conversation (Donovan, Sekeres, & Kerch, 2020; Epstein, 2014). Teachers who provide high-quality interactions with students use strategies that grow the students' curiosity by asking them how and why things are the way they are. Simply giving students facts and expecting them to memorize those facts is not considered best practice; providing students with open-ended activities and questions allows the teacher to act as the facilitator of learning (Ingleby et al., 2015). Additionally, teachers should provide opportunities for students to initiate a plan for how they will learn. Therefore, teachers must be flexible and encourage student autonomy and leadership during learning (Epstein, 2014). Heneghan et al. (2020) suggested that free exploration does not benefit all students and direct instruction can be beneficial for student outcomes.

Hands-on learning. Public preschools must choose curricula that meet the needs of their students and the staff's philosophy of educating young children and providing active learning inside and outside the classroom (Lindsay, 2015; Slater, Sanghera, Herrera, & Chriqui, 2020; Stacey, 2018). Young children need to work with their hands and have teachers who are in tune with their social-emotional needs while providing learning experiences (Derman-Sparks & Moore, 2016; Lindsay, 2015). In constructivist classrooms grounded in the work by Piaget, Bruner, and Dewey, students learn by doing and being an active learner rather than waiting for a teacher to share her knowledge with the student (Clark, 2018; Pardjono, 2016; Vygotsky, 1962). Some of the best lessons are not as effective as the lessons that are grounded in concrete experiences for students to build upon (Ingleby et al., 2015; Piaget, 2011). Students who are kinesthetically engaged in activities are more likely to be on-task and engaged in their learning (Alford et al., 2016; Erciyas, 2020). Some hands-on activities include students playing with

formal materials like blocks, Legos, and paintbrushes. Hands-on materials can also include materials found in nature (i.e., pinecones, acorns, leaves, etc.) to allow the students to actively engage with the learning (Şeker, 2020).

Whole child. Educating the whole child means that schools consider academic, social, and emotional needs of students (Raymond, 2019; Russell, 2018; Sidhu, 2020). When a school uses a whole child approach, teachers use multiple types of assessments to ensure progress is made in all aspects of the students' development (Dodge & Copp, 2018; Slade, 2020). In a constructivist classroom, when teachers think about the whole child, they consider the needs of the child outside of the four walls of the school (Ansari & Pianta, 2019; Charles & Stone, 2019; Sidhu, 2020). Whole child models encompass the social, health and well-being, and emotional development of a child, not just academic growth (Griffith & Slade, 2018; Raymond, 2019; Yen & Lee, 2019). Constructivist theorist Dewey stressed the importance of the whole child, and when integrating the principles of cognitive development from Piaget and the social development from Vygotsky, educators are considering both the academic and social needs of the child (Ratcliff, 2016; Vygotsky, 1962).

The Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) has developed a whole child approach based on Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Griffith & Slade, 2018; Raymond, 2019; Sidhu, 2020). According to the ASCD (n.d.), the school needs to provide education for students in the areas of health, safety, academics, social, and emotional learning from their current age and needs, as well as lifelong needs. The main tenets of ASCD's whole child approach are in the areas of health, safety, engagement, support, and challenges. The area of health supports the child's health inside and outside of the school walls by teaching lifelong healthy lifestyles of exercising and selecting healthy foods (ASCD, n.d.; Raymond, 2019). The

area of safety is about maintaining a safe learning environment for students, both physically and mentally (ASCD, n.d.; LeeKeenan, & Ponte, 2018). In the area of engagement, students and stakeholders have many opportunities to meaningfully engage in the learning process; engagement also includes extracurricular activities (ASCD, n.d.). Parents have the most information about their child and can support teachers in constructing their knowledge of their students if there is an opportunity for parents to engage in the learning process (ASCD, n.d.; Maharaj, 2021; Singh & Zhang, 2018). In order to adequately support students, teachers are expected to personalize learning, utilize a variety of assessments, and provide timely feedback to support student learning, including the area of challenges where students will have access to challenging curriculum and teachers will hold students accountable to high expectations (ASCD, n.d.).

One tenet cannot be missing from the whole child approach (Griffith, 2019; Griffith & Slade, 2018). Darling-Hammond, Cook-Harvey, Flook, Gardner, and Melnick (2019) reported all aspects of the child must be considered when making decisions about his or her academic achievements. Additionally, each student must be an active participant of their growth (ASCD, n.d.; Sidhu, 2020). According to Griffith and Slade (2018), “ASCD’s whole child approach is an effort to transition from a focus on narrowly defined academic achievement to one that promotes the long-term development and success of all children” (p. 37). When schools use a whole child approach, the student is able to move from Maslow’s lowest level of basic needs being met to the highest level of self-actualization (Kochhar-Bryant & Heishman, 2010). The critical piece for educators and schools to ensure students are able to learn in this manner is that the school must adjust to the needs of the student, not that the student must adapt to the environment in which

they are learning (Kochhar-Bryant & Heishman, 2010; Raymond, 2019; Rimm-Kaufman & Jodl, 2020).

School Readiness

A family's socioeconomic status plays a part in the level at which students are prepared for kindergarten (Bay & Bay, 2020; Lumaauridlo, Retnawati, Adi Kistoro, & Putranta, 2021; Yen & Lee, 2019). Students rely on their parents, preschool teachers, and kindergarten teachers to experience a smooth transition into kindergarten (Jarrett & Coba-Rodriguez, 2019). Preschoolers living in low socioeconomic status households often enter kindergarten lacking readiness skills other students, from wealthier backgrounds, have developed (Lonigan et al., 2015; Yen & Lee, 2019). Preschools do not enroll half of 3- and 4-year-old children living in poverty, but if they are afforded this intervention, they benefit more than peers from an advantaged background, reducing inequities (Kahn, 2014). Teachers implementing the constructivist theory and the work of Bruner help ensure all students gain new experiences and build new learning upon students' background knowledge to increase their school readiness (Mohammed & Kinyo, 2020; Morris, 2019; Vygotsky, 1962). Piaget's work on the cognitive development theory informs teachers that children must be developmentally ready to transition to the next level of development before they can move on (Pardjono, 2016; Piaget, 2011; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969).

Each year approximately 3,000,000 kindergarteners enter school, each with their strengths and weaknesses in academics and social-emotional development (Daily et al., 2012). The DESE created a system for school readiness for a child based on the ecological systems theory founded by Urie Bronfenbrenner. The theory shows the interdependence between the individual, microsystem, exosystem, and macrosystem (Ansari & Pianta, 2019;

Kasprzak et al., 2020; Twintoh et al., 2021). When using this framework, the individual is the student, the microsystem is the family, the exosystem is the community, and the macrosystem is the school. The family, community, and school all impact the individual's school readiness (Ansari & Pianta, 2019; Bay & Bay, 2020; Kasprzak et al., 2020).

Children, families, schools, and communities are named as key parts in the four-lenses definition. Children need to be prepared physically (Bay & Bay, 2020; Kane, 2014), mentally, emotionally, and behaviorally (Bay & Bay, 2020). Families must be prepared to work with the schools to develop a partnership to motivate and challenge students based upon their current level of development. Schools and communities must support families and support the partnerships needed to ensure student success (Bay & Bay, 2020; Lumaurreidlo et al., 2021).

School readiness–Students. School readiness for students consists of readiness for learning and ready for the structure of school (Lumaurreidlo et al., 2021); areas include social and emotional development, foundational understanding of general pre-academics, fine and gross motor skill development, physical and mental health of the child, and having positive attitudes towards learning (Bay & Bay, 2020; Cappelloni, 2013; Koçak & Incekara, 2020). Most children spend the majority of their day in a childcare setting before kindergarten enrollment (Keys et al., 2013). Development of physical, academic, and social skills is greatly determined by the quality of the early childhood settings in which children have spent a majority of their day (Cappelloni, 2013; Fontaine, Torre, Grafwallner, & Underhill, 2006; Keys et al., 2013). Skills required by students to be prepared for kindergarten include academic, motor skills, social skills (Bay & Bay, 2020; Kleyn & Shaughnessy, 2012; Koçak & Incekara, 2020), language, behavior, and attitude towards learning (Bay & Bay, 2020; Fontaine, Torre, Grafwallner, & Underhill, 2006; Koçak & Incekara, 2020).

Teachers believe students should be able to recognize and write their name, sit still, follow directions, and take care of their personal needs to be prepared for kindergarten entry (Campbell, 2021; Kleyn & Shaughnessy, 2012; Koçak & Incekara, 2020). Teachers observe the effects of students being ill-prepared for school when they are too hungry to concentrate, are absent from school due to illness, and are falling asleep during class. They must consider the students' needs outside the four walls of the school because those needs affect their ability to learn while at school (Ansari & Pianta, 2019; Charles & Stone, 2019). Finally, students need to be physically prepared (i.e., healthy, well-rested, and nourished) when considering school readiness (Kleyn & Shaughnessy, 2012; Kane, 2014; Koçak & Incekara, 2020).

School readiness–Families. Constructivists understand that children bring their own unique background knowledge and experiences from home, which impacts the type of interactions they have in the classroom with other children (Vygotsky, 1962). School readiness for families consists of understanding what their child is currently able to achieve and how they can work with their child on developing skills toward the next step (Cappelloni, 2013; Kartal et al., 2016). Also, there is a need for parents to become a partner with the school district, which requires them to have a general understanding of how the school system works (Campbell, 2021; Darling-Hammond et al., 2019). According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2019), building trust between families and schools impacts the learning of students. Some parents need the school's support to help equip them with the information needed to contribute to their child's learning at home (Bay & Bay, 2020; Campbell, 2021; Fenech, 2013).

The effect of high-quality preschool is greater on students of parents with less education. Parents who have low levels of education can have a negative impact on their child's school readiness (Bay & Bay, 2020; Sylva, 2014). Also, families with a low socioeconomic

status can benefit from high-quality early childhood programs but are often denied access to educational opportunities due to financial restrictions. As a result, students from marginalized backgrounds are kept from excelling in academics compared to wealthier peers (Yen & Lee, 2019). Teachers must partner with parents to ensure school readiness is accessible because parents play such an important role in their child's development (Vygotsky, 1962). In addition, parents who feel more confident in their ability to support their child's development will see the positive effects on their learning (Bandura, 1977).

Schools can learn a lot from the families they serve (Long, Souto-Manning, & Vasquez, 2016). They can gain a deeper understanding of the needs of the student and family unit when there is a commitment to spending time with families who have a different background than their own (Day & Dotterer, 2018; Long et al., 2016). The information teachers gain from their experiences outside of the classroom walls can appear inside the classroom through art, music, and stories planned by the teacher (Long et al., 2016). This cultural representation within the schools is important for diverse learners (Long et al., 2016).

School readiness–Schools. School readiness for schools consists of creating an environment for students to feel safe and welcome, similar to their home environment (Ansari & Pianta, 2019; Cappelloni, 2013; Demiral, 2018). Environments that are created with the whole child in mind and that meet the safety and security of the student impact student learning (Griffith & Slade, 2018; Raymond, 2019; Sidhu, 2020). Schools or facilities that create a family environment and allow for social interactions increase the child's ability to use critical thinking skills (Demiral, 2018).

Preschool teachers and kindergarten teachers may not always be working toward the same goals; therefore, curriculum alignment would help create a unified understanding of what is

expected at the preschool level and what is expected in kindergarten (Kane, 2014; Koçak & Incekara, 2020). Preschool programs should not pressure students to perform activities that are not deemed developmentally appropriate to appear to meet a high-quality standard (Jalongo et al., 2004). Preschools have one of the most significant effects on school readiness (Ansari & Pianta, 2019; Bay & Bay, 2020). Stucker (2008) found that preschools were perceived, by kindergarten teachers, as the most beneficial setting for students to learn and prepare for kindergarten, thus expanding preschool experiences is important for all students to have the opportunity to access a high-quality program.

The principal is considered one of the most effective roles within the schools in ensuring preschool programs are meeting their fullest potential for impacting students' social and academic future (Abel, 2019; Grissom, et al., 2021; Pijanowski & Lasater, 2020). Leaders with high self-efficacy believe that they have the skills necessary to complete the task at hand (Bandura, 1977, 1994, 1997a; Doennig, 2019). The school principal must provide instructional leadership and administrative leadership (Abel, 2019; Abel, Talan, Pollitt, & Bornfreund, 2016; Grissom, et al., 2021). Additionally, the leader needs to understand the developmental stages of students in preschool because numerous milestones are hit during a child's preschool experience (Fontaine, Torre, Grafwallner, & Underhill, 2006; Goncu et al., 2014). Because play in the early childhood setting can appear purposeless at times, teachers and leaders must understand how to observe the learning that is occurring as a result of the open-ended learning opportunities presented in the classroom setting (Campbell, 2021; Rendon & Gronlund, 2017).

School readiness–Communities. Finally, communities must provide safe environments for students to learn and grow into positive contributors to society (Cobanoglu & Sevim, 2019). When children have a safe and nurturing environment in which to learn and grow, both

parents can work; this impacts the workforce in the community (Cobanoglu & Sevim, 2019). Community leaders can work together with each of their own agency's goals and objectives in mind to create a cross-boundary network for students, especially those who are under resourced (Sanders, Galindo, & DeTablan, 2019). When schools and communities partner together, students benefit, in addition to the family and community benefiting. A community school provides wraparound services for students on the school campus, or the school officials can provide a referral to the off-site agency (Blank & Villarreal, 2015). Wraparound services can include on-site health and medical services for students and staff, counseling and mental health services for students and staff, nutritional services, and physical education services (Neumann et al., 2017). Communities support school readiness for children by offering a variety of educational experiences and fostering positive relationships with families, school leaders, and teachers (Vygotsky, 1962). Leaders can have a greater impact on the entire collective system when they are motivated and energized by their feelings of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997a; Doennig, 2019).

Early Childhood Curriculum

Fontaine, Torre, Grafwallner, and Underhill (2006) reported over 60% of children 5 years of age and younger are enrolled in full-time childcare. Dewey advocated for curricula to be selected with students' interests (Lindsay, 2015) and as schools continue to become more integrated and diverse, the NAEYC program standards urge curricula to be selected with children's ethnicities and cultures in mind (Long et al., 2016). Curriculum can be universally designed for all students regardless of ability or disability (Ornes, Patterson, McMillan, & Thomas, 2017). Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework that curriculum writers use to make the curriculum accessible to all students (Arduini, 2020). UDL allows for flexibility

in the outcome of the learning based on students' interests and strengths, similar to the work of Bruner and Dewey (Jiang & Perkins, 2013; Ratcliff, 2016).

A newborn's brain is already at 25% of its approximate weight as an adult (Fontaine, Torre, Grafwallner, & Underhill, 2006) and nearly fully developed by kindergarten entry (Cobanoglu & Sevim, 2019; Meek & Williams, 2020). There are significant developmental milestones that are achieved from birth to kindergarten entry. It might seem insignificant to add one more grade level to the elementary school building, however, decisions can have a significant impact on student growth and development if they are not grounded in developmentally appropriate practices (Goncu et al., 2014). The curriculum must be developmentally appropriate for the students who will participate in the learning. DAP is the ability to set expectations for preschoolers that challenge, support, and stimulate them, while being sensitive to each student's needs (Ansari & Pianta, 2019; Venn & Jahn, 2004). Educators using the constructivist theory to determine the types of materials to use and lessons to create will consider the work of Piaget around the cognitive ability to acquire the learning, and Vygotsky in understanding the Zone of Proximal Development (Ansari & Pianta, 2019; Clark, 2018; Ratcliff, 2016). The Zone of Proximal Development is the distance between what a learner can do independently and what the learner can do with assistance from a more knowledgeable person (Eun, 2019).

Curricula selected for implementation should be based on theory and researched to prove that the curriculum works (Castner, 2020; Epstein, 2007). Programs piecemealing various resources together can have a negative impact. Epstein (2007) warned that preschool resources can have contradicting philosophies, causing confusion for students and staff about how the learning occurs within the classroom. When using a resource to supplement the curriculum,

teachers should look for materials that are designed to enrich the existing curriculum (Epstein, 2007). Preschool curriculum must be well-rounded and meet each student's needs in all areas of the child's development (Castner, 2020; Epstein & Hohmann, 2012). Some of the most influential work are the conversations that happen to help scaffold students from their lower, independent level within a given schema to higher levels of understanding (Donovan et al., 2020; Epstein, 2014).

Students ages 3-5 years old learn best in a positive, social environment where there are caring adults and peers (Epstein & Hohmann, 2012). Students represent their learning through dramatic play, art, symbolic representations, and oral communication (Epstein & Hohmann, 2012). All children learn and develop at different stages (Epstein & Hohmann, 2012). Some students are better prepared to share or initiate play with their peers when they enter the preschool setting, while other students struggle to interact with other children and staff (Epstein & Hohmann, 2012). Caregivers need to provide a variety of interesting materials students can safely explore and learn with the guidance and assistance of an adult (Epstein & Hohmann, 2012).

Opportunities for children to play should be embedded in the preschool curriculum (Larimore, 2019; Venn & Jahn, 2004). Defining "play" can be difficult because there are so many forms. Play is found across every nation and every continent that allows students with little or no language, or English Language Learners to be able to engage in play with one another. Constructivists contend that play is at the center of learning for young children and can be found in the lives of teenagers and adults (Rendon & Gronlund, 2017). According to Rendon and Gronlund (2017), play adds spice to the lives of those engaged in play. A natural way to

explore and learn about how things work can be done through play. When a student engages in certain types of play, children learn at a deeper level (Rendon & Gronlund, 2017).

An area that is crucial for development in early childhood is the area of social-emotional learning. Preschoolers need to develop their understanding of their feelings and those of others, and how to express their feelings (Bierman, Heinrichs, Welsh, & Nix, 2021; Venn & Jahn, 2004). Eighty percent of the preschool child's brain has been developed by age 3 and 90% by age 5 (Cobanoglu & Sevim, 2019; Meek & Williams, 2020). The brain creates neural pathways during play, making the child's amygdala and prefrontal cortex stronger, which are responsible for children's ability to know how to respond during a fight-or-flight situation (Rendon & Gronlund, 2017). In addition to the social-emotional development that is key for preschoolers, there are cognitive and language skills that are continuing to develop (Bierman et al., 2021).

Many state departments focus on the academic gains made by students each year. They are focused on rigorous curriculum rather than child-centered learning that is utilized in many early childhood curricula (Castner, 2020). Constructivism emphasizes the importance of having student-led learning with hands-on exploration (Vygotsky, 1962). Teachers' voices must be elevated to share their concerns about the educational reform initiatives that push academics over developmentally appropriate practices in the early childhood setting (Castner, 2020).

Communication from the school to parents and community members is important as it relates to the learning in early childhood classrooms. Communication may need to vary based on the parents' ability to support their child by extending the learning that is occurring at school. There may need to be more detailed communication for parents who do not understand the importance of developmentally appropriate practice (Maharaj, 2021).

Other theories, such as the organizational knowledge creation theory, developed by Nonaka, describe how students create knowledge by doing (tacit) and by explicitly being told through words or pictures (Heneghan et al., 2020; Nonaka, 1994). According to Yeung, Ng, Qiao, and Tsang (2020), children increase the number of vocabulary words at a higher rate when taught explicitly versus implicitly. This theory does not encourage students to construct their own learning through experiences (Mohammed & Kinyo, 2020; Morris, 2019; Vygotsky, 1962). School district leaders must be aware of the different learning theories and look for curricula that align with the district's philosophy of how students should learn in the classroom.

Preschool Teacher Training

Two influential factors of a child's development are dependent on the adult skill set and available training (Fontaine, Torre, Grafwallner, & Underhill, 2006; Gardner et al., 2019; Hall & Simeral, 2017). The teacher's level of education and teacher-to-student ratios are factors that are associated with a high-quality preschool program (Kahn, 2014). Fontaine, Torre, Grafwallner, & Underhill (2006) stated that teacher training is more effective than years of service when comparing language, concepts, and caregiving. The expectations for early childhood teachers vary from state to state (LeeKeenan & Ponte, 2018). Regardless of the educational background, teachers with a high self-efficacy will begin to set higher goals (Bandura, 1994). As teachers meet the goals they have set for their students and themselves, they will become more motivated to take risks for positive outcomes (Bandura, 1994).

As funding continues to grow for public preschool programs, so does the accountability of what occurs inside the preschool classroom (Lin & Jones, 2019). Certified teachers must meet professional development requirements to renew their certificates (Kleyn & Shaughnessy, 2012). However, ongoing, quality training about early childhood theory and best practices is difficult to

find (Alford et al., 2016). Continuous learning expectations vary, but there is usually a minimum requirement for annual training (LeeKeenan & Ponte, 2018).

Adults must know the proposed outcomes before they begin learning; they are highly motivated to learn more about the content when it directly involves the work they are currently doing (Storey & Wang, 2017). This is similar to the constructivist theoretical framework where teachers must consider students' experiences and background knowledge upon which to build new learning (Mohammed & Kinyo, 2020; Morris, 2019; Vygotsky, 1962). Much of the curriculum training is conducted before the teacher begins working with students. This can be problematic for those teachers who have not had any early childhood coursework and are relying on curriculum training to bring them up to speed on the philosophy and best practices to incorporate in the classroom setting. Curriculum training that is provided throughout the year will allow teachers the ability to practice within the classroom setting before completing the training in its entirety.

Leadership Effectiveness

Over the past few decades, the role of the principal has changed from solely a school manager to an instructional leader in addition to the school manager (Grissom, et al., 2021; Fatima, 2017; Teo, 2016). Many leaders of early childhood programs face a multitude of challenges each day from curriculum and instruction to racial inequities (Abel, 2019; Alford et al., 2016; Long et al., 2016). Leaders may be overwhelmed with the need to create a positive school culture while setting and clarifying goals, and providing resources to support teachers. Many of those tasks get pushed aside to attend to managerial tasks of staff absences and respond to the needs of children and families (Masterson, Abel, Talan, & Bella, 2019).

Each early childhood, elementary, and secondary school building is unique and presents its own dynamic needs based on climate/culture, student demographics, staff, and policies (Bowers et al., 2016; Pijanowski & Lasater, 2020). Elementary school principals are the most vital part of ensuring school-based preschool programs are effectively implemented in their buildings (Fatima, 2017; Jalapang & Raman, 2020; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2019). School leaders must be able to address issues that arise from a multitude of stakeholders based on the needs in their building and usually with criticism from those in the community (Pijanowski & Lasater, 2020; F. Yildirim & Dinc, 2019). Leaders are supported for success when they attend a preparation program that is standards or skills based, and they also need to have intellectual virtues or leadership essentials (Abel, 2019; Pijanowski & Lasater, 2020). Leaders can be proactive to become more efficient by creating a clear vision and setting goals they hope to achieve, monitoring their time for certain tasks to plan their future work, and reflecting on the effectiveness of their work (Masterson et al., 2019).

Leadership development. Building the capacity of the leaders in an organization is one definition of leadership development (Marwansyah, Sastrawan, Suciyan, Oktavia, & Midiyanti, 2022; Nguyen, 2016). Leadership development can be acquired through the traditional classroom learning environment, through action learning (Bandura, 1997b; James & Arnold, 2022; Marwansyah et al., 2022), or through coaching (James & Arnold, 2022). There is a relationship between leadership development and leader self-efficacy and resilience (Marwansyah et al., 2022). As leaders develop through coaching, mastery experiences, and research, their self-efficacy is strengthened (Bandura, 1997b).

Abel (2019) described an early childhood leadership gap. This gap is most notable between early childhood administrators and elementary school principals who supervise

preschool classrooms (Abel, 2019; Castner, 2020; Fatima, 2017; Lieberman, 2017). Strehmel, Heikka, Hujala, Rodd, and Waniganayake (2019) discovered benefits for leaders of early childhood programs to observe other leaders in action. But, for elementary school principals, states require more formal education than early childhood administrators. Additionally, very few states require any early childhood or child development coursework for administrators of state-funded preschool programs (Abel, 2019; Abel et al., 2016; Lieberman, 2017). States require administrative licenses depending on the varied levels of enrollment for the preschool site administrator, depending on the site's enrollment. For centers with 20 or fewer students, the director must hold a Child Development Associates (CDA), which is 120 actual hours of training. If the center serves 100 or more students, 24 college credit hours in a child-related field are required in addition to 4 years of teaching experience. However, if the preschool program is housed within a school, principal certification is required (Abel, Talan, & Magid, 2018).

The NAEYC has been working on a movement for bringing awareness to the early childhood profession in the areas of (a) career pathways, (b) knowledge and competencies, c) qualifications, (d) standards, and (e) compensation (Abel, 2019). According to Abel (2019), although this work has been helpful, "...it does not address similar issues regarding the professional preparation and continuing education of early childhood program administrators" (p. 50). Early childhood administrators should have a specialized formal education in administration and their bachelor's degree should include coursework in early childhood and development (Abel, 2019).

Elementary principals complete a graduate program where the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) are woven throughout their coursework. The 10 PSEL standards guide states and leadership preparation programs in effectively preparing school leaders,

providing mentoring opportunities, and offering on-going professional development (Fatima, 2017; National Policy Board for Educational Administration [NPBEA], 2015). They are interdependent upon one another for the leader to create a learning environment that is conducive to the success of the students, families, and staff. The following PSEL standards were developed by the NPBEA (2015):

(1) mission, vision, and core values; (2) ethics and professional norms; (3) equity and cultural responsiveness; (4) curriculum, instruction and assessment; (5) community of care and support for students; (6) professional capacity of school personnel; (7) professional community for teachers and staff; (8) meaningful engagement of families and community; (9) operations and management; and (10) school improvement. (p. 3)

The PSEL standards encompass instructional leadership, professional, moral, and ethical leadership expectations (Young, Anderson, & Nash, 2017). Leaders must have a balanced perspective between pedagogical leadership, administrative leadership, and leadership essentials when leading (Abel, 2019; Masterson et al., 2019; Teo, 2016); this is called whole leadership (Abel, 2019; Masterson et al., 2019). There are three leadership domains in the Whole Leadership Framework that early childhood administrators must possess to lead an effective early childhood program: (a) pedagogical leadership, (b) administrative leadership, and (c) leadership essentials (Abel, 2019; Masterson et al., 2019).

Administrative leadership. An administrative leader is the manager of the program (Abel, 2019). They will establish a mission, vision, and collective commitments, and develop the school's climate and culture (Abel, 2019; Raza & Sikandar, 2018). Leadership is the key to a successful preschool program (Teo, 2016). Leaders are responsible for providing quality

services for preschoolers. This can be accomplished through creating a school vision based on shared values, for what the staff hope to provide for their students (Teo, 2016).

Administrative leaders are strategic in their efforts to mobilize staff to improve the organization and help it grow. The leader must advocate for early childhood education at the local, state, and federal levels. Early childhood leaders must be involved with parents and members in the community, in addition to managerial tasks that must be completed on a daily basis (Vijayadevar, Thornton, & Cherrington, 2019). Finally, the administrative leader is an ambassador for families, children, and quality, and collaborator within the community on behalf of the children and families served by the program (Abel, 2019; Masterson et al., 2019; Vijayadevar et al., 2019). Leaders can build their perceptions of self-efficacy in the area of administrative leadership through vicarious experiences they have had with their own administrators who developed a strong mission and vision (Bandura, 1977; Gebauer, McElvany, Bos, Köller, & Schöber, 2020).

Pedagogical leadership. The importance of early childhood pedagogical practices is becoming more prevalent as states are providing funding for preschool expansion (Abel, 2019; Alford et al., 2016; Masterson et al., 2019). The pedagogical leader focuses on the teacher's instruction and the assessments used to determine student growth and development. Instructional leaders must understand the curriculum and how it impacts student learning (Abel, 2019; Jalapang & Raman, 2020; Masterson et al., 2019; Raza & Sikandar, 2018). Instructional leaders have a great impact on student achievement (Jalapang & Raman, 2020; Morgan, 2018). According to Epstein (2007), the preschool curriculum must be based on theory and researched to prove that the curriculum works. This is beneficial for children, and it demonstrates that school district administrators are practicing due diligence for using federal, state, and local funds

to purchase curriculum and training materials (Epstein, 2007). A pedagogical leader will know the importance of having families engaged in the education of their child (Abel, 2019; Masterson et al., 2019). The pedagogical leader contributes to the teacher's self-efficacy by taking them through a systematic reflection of processes and practice, adjusting their practice, and documenting improved outcomes (Lindsay, 2015).

It might seem easy to add one more grade level to the elementary school building; however, early childhood programs have different curricula, and assessments, and there are significant developmental milestones that are achieved during this period of time (Fatima, 2017; Goncu et al., 2014). The source of self-efficacy of a pedagogical leader could be from Mastery Experiences. Leaders who have experienced success of their own in the classroom as a teacher can influence their perceptions of self-efficacy as a pedagogical leader (Bandura, 1977; Gebauer et al., 2020). The role of a pedagogical leader and the role of an administrative leader can sometimes conflict with one another. The leader must provide leadership in both roles, but sometimes time can be a barrier to completing both roles effectively (F. Yildirim & Dinc, 2019).

The lack of early childhood and child development coursework could have a negative impact on early childhood classrooms in states that do not provide mandates requiring elementary school principals to have coursework in early childhood education (Abel, 2019; Fatima, 2017; Goncu et al., 2014). Preschool programs should not pressure students to perform activities that are not deemed developmentally appropriate in order to appear to meet a high-quality standard (Jalongo et al., 2004). However, pressure from school administrators has shifted the purpose of kindergarten from play-based to emphasize preparation for schoolwork: "...Frobelian pedagogy was rapidly abandoned in favor of practical exercises designed to teach English and work skills" (Allen, 2006, p. 187). Principals may choose to create policies for

preschool programs in their buildings based on the academic, accountability-centered learning that occurs in grades kindergarten through Grade 12 because they do not hold positive presumptions about play (Alford et al., 2016; Goncu et al., 2014).

Leadership essentials/intellectual virtues. Leadership essentials are considered street smarts for school leaders and are seen as innate rather than taught (Pijanowski & Lasater, 2020). These essentials are considered the core competencies for leadership; they are the foundation for being an effective leader (Abel, 2019; Pijanowski & Lasater, 2020). Reflective practice is necessary to develop these essentials as a leader. Through the reflective practice process, leaders will develop self-efficacy, empathy, creativity, humility, transparency, and adaptability (Abel, 2019; Masterson et al., 2019; Wells & Herie, 2018). According to Pijanowski and Lasater (2020), there are 10 characteristics developed that effective leaders use called intellectual virtues. Certain skills cannot always be applied to all situations; intellectual virtues provide leaders with the means for the intended outcome (Pijanowski & Lasater, 2020). Examples of intellectual virtues are these: (a) wonder, (b) humility, (c) autonomy, (d) attentiveness, (e) carefulness, (f) thoroughness, (g) open-mindedness, (h) courage, (i) tenacity, and (j) honesty (Pijanowski & Lasater, 2020). When a leader exhibits these 10 intellectual virtues, they will build a positive connection and relationship with students, staff, and parents. In turn, leaders are able to reduce the negative physiological or emotional stress that might occur if these relationships are not strong and the virtues are not part of the leader's character (Gebauer et al., 2020). Self-regulation, reflection, organization, and being proactive are all part of human agency, one facet of Bandura's social cognitive theory (Morgan, 2018). Leaders are capable of their own growth and development; therefore, they are capable of controlling the way they behave (Morgan, 2018). Leaders with high perceived self-efficacy have a positive outlook on

their job and utilize many of the Intellectual Virtues (Pijanowski & Lasater, 2020; Touloupis & Athanasiades, 2020).

Impact on leadership efficacy. A formal education is required for building leaders to hold their position as a principal. However, their perception of efficacy will significantly impact their overall outcomes as a leader. Leaders with a high level of self-efficacy will experience an increase in motivation to complete difficult tasks. This is due to the intrinsic motivation that is heightened when an individual feels a sense of accomplishment after working hard and experiencing a positive outcome (Bandura, 1994; Doennig, 2019; Groves, 2021). Leaders should be equipped with the skills necessary to be an instructional leader for preschool programs by focusing on assessment, instruction, and curriculum (Fatima, 2017; Lieberman, 2017; Young et al., 2017). There is a need for leaders to be prepared for what is currently happening in schools and for them to anticipate unknown issues that might arise in the future (Young et al., 2017). Leaders with a strong sense of self-efficacy believe they have the ability to achieve personal and professional goals (Morgan, 2018).

Starting with strong beliefs in self-efficacy can have a greater impact on the growth of the individual, due to the effect self-efficacy beliefs have on acquiring new learning (Bakar, Maat, & Rosli, 2020; Groves, 2021; Morgan, 2018). Bandura's self-efficacy theory stated that if a person has a perceived high self-efficacy, they will believe in themselves (Bandura, 1993, 1997b; Doennig, 2019; Groves, 2021) and be able to (a) challenge themselves, (b) set goals to motivate themselves, (c) self-regulate their feelings during stressful situations, and (d) secure resources and support from others (Bandura, 1977, 1993, 1997b). These actions will likely result in a positive outcome (Bandura, 1977). Leaders can build skills as they build their self-efficacy (Orsini & Coers, 2022). Leaders can build their self-efficacy through (a) mastery experiences,

(b) vicarious experiences, (c) verbal/social persuasion, and (d) physiological and emotional arousal (Bandura, 1994).

Mastery experiences. Mastery experiences are one of the greatest ways a leader can build their sense of efficacy. This is when they experience a challenging situation and believe they can successfully accomplish the work after they persevered through obstacles (Bandura, 1994). Mastery experiences are considered the most powerful source of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994; Gebauer et al., 2020; Orsini & Coers, 2022). As individuals experience success, they feel more successful and able to accomplish even greater success (Gebauer et al., 2020; Orsini & Coers, 2022). On the contrary, as leaders experience failure or underachievement, a decrease in their perceptions of self-efficacy can occur (Orsini & Coers, 2022; Salanova, Rodríguez-Sánchez, & Nielsen, 2022; Shipherd, Renner, Samson, & Duncan, 2021). As the leaders build skills and experience positive outcomes in their work, they build intrinsic motivation and their perceptions of self-efficacy increase (Bandura, 1994; Doennig, 2019).

Vicarious experiences. Vicarious experiences are the second most powerful source of self-efficacy. Bandura (1977) defined vicarious experiences as an individual learning by observing. Observation of self, comparison, and observation of others are included in vicarious experiences (MacAfee & Comeau, 2020). As leaders observe in environments similar to their own, their perceived self-efficacy and their motivation increase (MacAfee & Comeau, 2020). Leaders who observe difficult situations without experiencing any negative consequences feel they can continue to learn and work hard, and they will also experience positive outcomes (Lyons, 2019).

When the observation performed is successful, the skill is enhanced in the observer, thus their perceptions of self-efficacy will increase due to these observations (Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy,

2000). The individual is able to learn without the risk of failing (Bandura, 1977; Gebauer et al., 2020). The most beneficial opportunity for leaders to use this source of self-efficacy is when they are able to observe in an educational setting similar to their own (Goddard et al., 2000).

Verbal/social persuasion. Self-talk, encouragement or negative messages, and feedback can be a form of verbal persuasion (MacAfee & Comeau, 2020; Masterson et al., 2019).

Encouragement or negative messages and feedback can be provided to leaders or teachers from a variety of individuals (Lyons, 2019). Feedback is when a leader identifies and highlights the positive behaviors and addresses any negative behaviors to make sure they are corrected (Liu & Gumah, 2020). Feedback enhances self-efficacy due to when individuals receive positive feedback, their perceptions of self-efficacy increase (Liu & Gumah, 2020; MacAfee & Comeau, 2020; Masterson et al., 2019). Transformational leaders activate self-efficacy through encouraging staff to overcome difficult situations and by providing feedback to support the personnel (Salanova et al., 2022). Additionally, transformational leaders encourage staff to try new ways to solve problems (Salanova et al., 2022). When staff members share their beliefs of self-efficacy with other staff members, that can play a role in building the self-efficacy in others (Salanova et al., 2022). Additionally, staff who perceive their leader believes in their work will also benefit from the effects of self-efficacy (Salanova et al., 2022).

Physiological and emotional arousal. The leader has the ability to influence the staff's emotional well-being and affect by the mood the leader exhibits (Salanova et al., 2022). As educators have an increased perception of self-efficacy and their work environment is positive, including positive working relationship, their willingness to complete tasks increases (Jalapang & Raman, 2020). The leader's ability to build a positive climate and culture actually can impact the self-efficacy of staff (Jalapang & Raman, 2020; Salanova et al., 2022).

Alternatively, there are other leadership theories that might not support the social cognitive theory and self-efficacy. Situational leadership is a leadership theory that explains how leaders are most effective when they collaborate with their followers and provide a great deal of flexibility (Walls, 2019). The three most important pieces of situational leadership are the leader, the follower, and the situation (Munir & Akhter, 2021). The situational leader is highly regarded as effective since they consider the production or task, and they consider the needs of the followers, making decisions more complex (Munir & Akhter, 2021; Walls, 2019). Finally, situational leadership theorizes the maturity of the leader also makes a difference in the effectiveness of their work (Munir & Akhter, 2021; Walls, 2019).

High levels of teacher self-efficacy will impact student achievement in elementary and preschool classrooms, regardless of the age of the student (Reyhing & Perren, 2020). This is also true of high levels of leadership self-efficacy; when the leader believes they have the tools and resources needed to be successful, they are able to impact teacher capacity and student outcomes (Nguyen, 2016). There is a lack of research about the implications of leader self-efficacy in the preschool years. This gap in literature will be addressed through this study.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to describe a leader's perception of their self-efficacy for supervising early childhood teachers due to an increase in funding for early childhood programming. Currently, there are no other studies that address principals' perceptions on their self-efficacy to lead early childhood preschool programs in elementary school buildings. In this literature review, the researcher described the challenges that are presented when children enter kindergarten. School readiness is not a simple concept, but a multifaceted issue. The researcher uncovered some of the issues that impact school readiness: this includes students,

families, schools, and communities being ready. These issues may include how the administrator develops the early childhood program by means of curricula, materials/environment, and early childhood philosophies on instruction. The leader can have a positive or negative impact on the preschool program depending on their self-efficacy as an early childhood leader.

Additionally, the researcher found that high-quality early childhood programs impacted student learning, with both short- and long-term results. Although many studies show early childhood programs can have a lasting impact when they are high in quality, there are still arguments about what constitutes a high-quality program. The researcher found that high-quality programs create a highly engaging environment where students and teachers direct the learning, and learning is centered on the whole child, not solely on academics. Finally, the researcher found a lack of funding for high-quality preschool programs that are widely available for all families. After this review, the researcher uncovered the importance of having a quality leader in place to ensure the effective implementation of a high-quality program.

Chapter Two described the importance of early interventions, providing high-quality preschool, school readiness, and the importance of the leader's perceived self-efficacy. Chapter Three describes the methodology for collecting and analyzing the data required for answering the research questions addressed in Chapter One and the instrumentation for conducting the study. Chapter Four contains data collected during the study, a review of the data, and a summary of results from the study. Finally, Chapter Five includes a summary of the process, the research questions, findings from the data, and the recommendations for future research after completing the study.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

High-quality childcare is the foundation of kindergarten readiness (Cobanoglu & Sevim, 2019; Fontaine, Torre, Grafwallner, & Underhill, 2006). High-quality early childhood programs impact a child in all aspects of their life, into adulthood. Attending high-quality early childhood programs prepares students for kindergarten at a higher rate than students who were cared for by family or friends, reducing the need for additional academic interventions for students in attendance (Cobanoglu & Sevim, 2019; Delalibera & Ferreira, 2019; Fontaine, Torre, & Grafwallner, 2006; Goncu et al., 2014; Kahn, 2014; Lonigan et al., 2015; Stucker, 2008). The state of Missouri has expanded funding for free preschool; approximately 37,394 3-, 4-, and 5-year-old students were served in 2019-2020 while approximately 66,000 kindergarteners enter school each year.

Currently, there are no certification requirements for principals to obtain to supervise early childhood classrooms within their elementary school, beyond the elementary principal certification in the state of Missouri (Abel et al., 2016). However, elementary school principals must ensure preschool programs located in their buildings are effectively implemented so students get the most benefit from attending preschool (Goncu et al., 2014). In order for new leaders to be successful in leading early childhood programs, they need to have a clear understanding of early childhood development or pedagogical leadership (Abel, 2019).

In this chapter, the researcher explains the methodology of the study. The types of participants who were invited to participate in the study were included in this chapter. Additionally, the setting, design, instrumentation, and analysis of the data were all included.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to describe a leader's perception of their self-efficacy for supervising early childhood teachers and providing high-quality programming, due to an increase in funding for early childhood. In the 2018-2019 school year, the state of Missouri began funding the ADA for preschool students. Due to the expansion in funding, some school districts will begin or expand early childhood programming. Elementary school principals will likely add supervision of these early childhood classrooms to the scope of their job duties. Currently, there are no other studies that address principals' perceptions on their efficacy to lead high-quality early childhood preschool programs in elementary school buildings.

Research Questions

The following central questions guided the study:

1. What perceptions do leaders have about their efficacy in leading preschool teachers/programs?
2. What perceptions do leaders have about their efficacy to provide a high-quality preschool program in their school?
3. What perceptions do leaders have about their efficacy in defining school readiness?

Participants

The participants targeted for this qualitative narrative study included elementary principals in Missouri public schools. Specifically, the principals were selected if they supervised a preschool program in their elementary building. A list of school districts with elementary buildings including preschool programs was provided by the DESE. This list was used to distribute surveys to collect basic demographic data about the leaders and the school they

supervised. This information helped determine if an interview was needed for further information.

The researcher selected all public-school districts with a preschool program housed at an elementary school site in the state of Missouri. The request for participation is located in Appendix A. Structured interviews were conducted with principals after initial demographic surveys were returned that suggested a need to collect more information. The researcher obtained consent to record the interviews in order to accurately capture the conversations with school leaders. If the school leader did not consent to the recording, the researcher took copious notes in order to record the major themes that surfaced during the interview.

Principals have a variety of experiences and certifications. Principals can obtain their principal certification by completing an accredited school leadership program earning a master's degree or specialist degree. Then, they must pass a school principal exam. There is a school leader certification for kindergarten through 12th grades, but it does not include preschool. There is no early childhood principal certification for public school leaders. The researcher selected all participants who were willing to participate and encouraged leaders with various backgrounds to be represented in the study. Participants of the study were unable to remain anonymous due to the need to follow up with additional questions during the interview process. However, all school district information was eliminated once a personal connection could be made by the researcher. All participants completed an informed consent form to opt into the study. Demographics such as principal race, age, or gender were not delimiting factors for this study.

Selection and Sampling

Using the database on the DESE website, the researcher compiled a list of public schools in the State of Missouri that included at least one prekindergarten classroom. A list of names and e-mail addresses of the elementary school principals was collected from the database on the Missouri Comprehensive Data Systems website (<https://apps.dese.mo.gov/MCDS/home.aspx>). Principals from the list were sent invitations by e-mail to obtain permission to conduct the study if they were an elementary site notating a prekindergarten classroom. In the demographic section, a question separated the participants into two groups. The first group was leaders certified in early childhood and the second group was leaders who were not certified in early childhood. Additionally, there were eight female participants and two male participants for a total of 10 participants.

In the spring of 2023, the Research Review Board (RRB) gave approval for the interviews to be conducted in person or on the Zoom platform. The researcher contacted potential participants from a list provided by the database on DESE website to request consent. The researcher contacted each individual on the list by phone or e-mail to determine the level of interest for participating in the study (Appendix A). Then, a request for informed consent would be sent to each willing participant (Appendix B). It is essential for responses of participants to be confidential to protect them from embarrassment or stress (Butina, 2015). Therefore, the researcher provided confidentiality and anonymity by not identifying the participants or schools by name. Transcripts were managed by labeling each transcript P1, P2, and P3. Additionally, each principal was labeled to help maintain confidentiality.

Research Setting

Approximately 77% of preschool children spend 28 hours a week in childcare (Infurna & Montes, 2020; Kahn, 2014; Meek & Williams, 2020) at the most critical time for their brain development (Cobanoglu & Sevim, 2019; Meek & Williams, 2020). There was an increase in funding for public preschools over the last several years to increase affordability of childcare for families. Many of these classrooms are being added to elementary school buildings. Principals need to feel efficacious as they begin leading early childhood programs in their buildings.

The setting of this research was limited to school districts in the state of Missouri. Missouri had 518 school districts and there were 1,229 elementary schools within those school districts. The researcher sent surveys to 199 school districts with an elementary school principal in a preschool to fifth-grade building to complete the additional demographic survey and to determine which principals should be interviewed for more information. The elementary principals selected supervised a public preschool program within the elementary school building in which they worked. Then, the researcher selected respondents with early childhood classrooms in their buildings to elaborate on their responses during an interview. Qualitative research suggests the research to be conducted in person in order for the researcher to understand the scope of the experiences the participants are sharing (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). However, due to the distance between all participants and the researcher, the researcher conducted interviews via a video conferencing platform or telephone. The duration of the study concluded after one month of data collection.

Research Design

The purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to determine the extent to which elementary principals perceived their efficacy in leading early childhood programs in their

building. The researcher sought to discover reasons that might contribute to principals with higher perceptions of self-efficacy than others. This qualitative approach allowed the researcher to explore and understand the perceptions of each participant's experience and the current reality of experiences surrounding early childhood. A qualitative study can include interviews to collect perceptions of the participants and observations of the current reality (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The research design was structured to ensure the study was valid and reliable.

The researcher contacted principals by phone and e-mail to obtain permission to conduct the study. An e-mail (Appendix A) was sent to each potential participant explaining the study and requesting informed consent (Appendix B). The initial phase of basic research design was to conduct interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). When completing semi-structured interviews, the researcher used questions (Appendix C) to guide the conversation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). A semi-structured interview is an interview style where the researcher asks predetermined questions with the flexibility to explore certain topics more in-depth based on the participant's responses. Questions are open-ended, there is flexibility within the questions, and the researcher uses the interview as a guide rather than a script. During the interview process, conversations may shift as new topics emerge based on the answers from the interviewee (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In order to collect the data, the researcher used semi-structured interviews followed by open-ended questions (Appendix C). An online transcription service, Otter.ai, was used for analysis of the interviews and recordings to increase accuracy of the data and to prevent bias by the researcher.

After collecting data through interviews, the researcher used a narrative thematic analysis to look for patterns within the data (Butina, 2015; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Using narrative thematic analysis, the researcher organized and prepared the data by transcribing the interviews.

Next, the researcher read through the data to obtain a general sense of the information collected through the interviews by reviewing the transcripts. Third, the researcher coded the transcripts from the interviews and identified categories or themes that surfaced across the entirety of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Saldana, 2011). Themeing the data was used to create extended phrases or sentences that captured the topics each participant shared during their interviews (Saldana, 2011). Finally, the researcher provided a description of the themes, detailing information about people, places, or events (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher used a triangulation method to cross-verify the data, utilizing the participants responses, participants area of certification, and leader coursework to ensure a more comprehensive perspective. Triangulation is the use of multiple data-collection techniques to cross-verify the same phenomenon (Kawamura, 2020).

One of the primary purposes of this study was to determine the perceptions of elementary principals in leading preschool programs that were housed inside the elementary school building. The researcher compared principals' answers based on the number of years they had led early childhood programs and early childhood certification status to compare how efficacious they felt to lead the early childhood programs in their buildings. Finally, the researcher completed a thorough review of the interviews by reviewing the transcripts and recording of each interview and notes taken during the interview.

Instrumentation

The overall purpose of this study was on the perceptions of leaders' efficacy to lead early childhood programs. The study focused on how well-prepared the leader was to help support and ensure the program was implemented using best practices in order for students to gain the benefits of participating in an early childhood setting. The researcher was the primary source to

collect each participant's story through the interview process. Using structured interviews to collect data is an effective way to gather attitudes and opinions from a smaller sample of a larger population when conducting research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher used purposive sampling to select participants who were able to provide information to answer research questions regarding the supervision of early childhood classrooms. The study began with a qualitative survey to determine general demographic information about each principal. Then, a follow-up semi-structured interview with open-ended questions to prompt the opinions of participants was established to gather further information (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Interviews were conducted by phone or video based on the individual's preference. The literature review in Chapter Two guided the researcher when developing interview questions. In order to reduce researcher bias prior to the study, a committee reviewed the questions for neutrality. The researcher interviewed participants with diverse experiences to ensure a variety of experiences was captured. This also provided assurance for the reliability of the results. The researchers conducted a pilot test to review the questions and used a neutral tone. During the interview the researcher followed the list of questions in order and using the same tone for each question, took notes. Finally, the researcher monitored and noted personal body language and emotions during the interview. The final step in the process was to complete a full review or audit of the data that were collected.

Interview questions were vetted by a pilot test group for content, time management, and to identify any gaps that exist. Conducting a pilot test to establish content validity and consistency and improve questions is important to qualitative research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher recorded the entire process in order to transcribe the information gained during each interview. This process was followed with each participant to ensure valid and

reliable results. Valid results in a qualitative study means the researcher checked for accuracy of the results regardless of the perspective, researcher, participant, or the reader (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher reviewed the transcripts from the recordings and compared them to the notes taken by the researcher during the interviews. For further validity, the researcher used the procedure Creswell and Creswell (2018) referred to as member checking; the researcher completes the final reporting on themes back to those who participated in the interviews to ensure the report is accurate. Triangulation of data further validated the study by examining the evidence from interviews, areas of certification and coursework from the participants.

Reliable results in a qualitative study means the researcher determined if their approach to the study was consistent (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Trustworthiness and credibility of the results of the narrative study were accomplished by checking the accuracy of the transcripts and coding (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher considered positionality during this study. Positionality is incorporation of the researcher's own personal experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Data Analysis

Data analysis serves several purposes and is crucial for generating meaningful insights and understanding the lived experiences of individuals in a narrative study. Researchers from a variety of disciplines have increased the utilization of qualitative methodology for gathering human experiential data (Meraz, Osteen, & McGee, 2019). Narrative data analysis studies help researchers identify recurring themes and help make sense of complex stories through interviews with participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The process of collecting data and analyzing it is

not a step-by-step process; the researcher will identify emerging hunches or other insights as the initial interviews are in progress (Butina, 2015).

After completing the interview process, the researcher used a narrative thematic analysis of the data (Butina, 2015). Narrative thematic analysis is a qualitative research method used to analyze and interpret the themes or patterns within the stories shared by participants (Butina, 2015). Butina (2015) described a multistep process for conducting qualitative research: (a) organizing and preparing of the data, (b) obtaining a general sense of the information, (c) the coding process, (d) categories or themes, and (e) interpretation of the data. This process is not linear and many times analyses can begin during the interview and can influence the trajectory of the interview (Butina, 2015; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Other researchers have completed narrative thematic analysis using different processes.

First, the researcher organized and prepared the data through the utilization of an online transcription service, Otter.ai, and by reviewing the researcher's notes taken during the interview process as themes began to emerge. Second, the researcher obtained a general sense of the information collected through the interviews by reviewing the transcripts provided. The researcher assembled the transcripts to provide to participants for review and to ensure accuracy of information. All identifiable participant identification was redacted from the transcripts sent to participants to ensure complete confidentiality. Participants were asked to confirm the information was accurate and to provide any additional information to clarify an idea or statement. Next, the researcher began coding the transcripts from the interviews and identified categories or themes that surfaced across the entirety of the study. Coding is the process of re-reading the transcript multiple times to find reoccurring words, ideas, or patterns generated from the data (Butina, 2015).

Otter.ai was able to transcribe the interview as well as identify some themes. When themeing the data, the researcher selects extended phrases or sentences that summarize the apparent and underlying meanings of the data (Saldana, 2011). The researcher must read and re-read the transcripts to define and refine themes that emerge in each of the interviews. After initially reading the transcript, the researcher looked for broad themes that occurred in all the participants' interviews. Some themes the researcher looked for were part of the predetermined questions, such as kindergarten readiness, principal self-efficacy, and leading preschool teachers. The researcher also looked for other themes that emerged from the participants. Next, the researcher read the transcripts for subordinate level themes based on the answers from the participants and may only be from a certain group of participants with similar backgrounds. During these readings of the transcript, the researcher also checked field notes to add codes used during the interview process.

Coding can include notes in the margin in all capital letters, boldface, italics, or by identifying the most often used words throughout the entire transcript. It was important for the researcher to set aside themes that were off-topic or could be added to a later chapter for further research in the future. Finally, the researcher interpreted the results of the data by the completion of the data coding, analyzing any additional comments made by the participants after their review of the transcripts, and making meaning of each of the themes and subthemes that surfaced from the coding.

Summary

In this chapter, the researcher provided information about the methodology for collecting and analyzing the data required for answering the research questions addressed in Chapter One and the instrumentation for conducting the study. Chapter Two described the importance of

early interventions, providing high-quality preschool, school readiness, and the importance of the leader's perceived self-efficacy. Chapter Three described the methodology for collecting and analyzing the data required for answering the research questions addressed in Chapter One and the instrumentation for conducting the study. Chapter Four contains data collected during the study, a review of the data, and a summary of results from the study. Finally, Chapter Five includes a summary of the process, the research questions, findings from the data, and the recommendations for future research after completing the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Introduction

Effective leaders are some of the most influential contributors to student success in school (Jalapang & Raman, 2020; Morgan, 2018; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2019). Specifically, the building principal impacts student learning (Jalapang & Raman, 2020; Morgan, 2018). More specifically, elementary school principals are vital to ensure preschool programs located in their buildings are effectively implemented (Jalapang & Raman, 2020; Morgan, 2018; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2019). In addition, teachers have an important role in facilitating student learning. They help children learn in an environment with a variety of materials (Colker et al., 2018). The building leader can greatly affect the learning environment created in their buildings when they have a perceived high level of efficacy (Bandura, 1977, 1993, 1994, 1997a).

The focus of this study was to describe a leader's perception of being efficacious in supervising early childhood teachers due to an increase in funding for early childhood programming. The significance of this study has grown over the last few years due to the increase in funding for public preschool. This study was completed by a researcher conducting interviews with principals who supervised early childhood programs to determine how efficacious they felt in leading these programs in their buildings. Finally, the outcome of this study will help determine the need for additional support to principals who are leading buildings where preschool programs are housed.

Chapter Two began by reviewing the importance of early interventions, providing high-quality preschool, school readiness, and the importance of the leader's perceived self-efficacy. Chapter Three described the methodology for collecting and analyzing the data required for

answering the research questions addressed in Chapter One and the instrumentation for conducting the study. Chapter Four contains data collected from individuals who participated in interviews, a review of the themes that surfaced about leader perceptions, and a summary of results from the study.

The research was theoretically grounded using the work of Piaget, Vygotsky, Dewey, Bruner, and Bandura. Piaget, Vygotsky, Dewey, and Bruner developed a learning theory in which they believed prior knowledge helped learners actively construct new ideas (Jiang & Perkins, 2013). Bandura's work focused on self-efficacy. More specifically, Bandura proposed that people who have a high-self efficacy are more likely to (a) challenge themselves, (b) set goals to motivate themselves, (c) self-regulate their feelings during stressful situations, and (d) secure resources and support from others (Bandura, 1977, 1993, 1997a). Bandura (1993) theorized that self-efficacy is the belief in one's own ability. Principals with a perceived high level of efficacy can greatly affect the learning environment created in their buildings (Bandura, 1977, 1994, 1997a).

The interviews for this study were conducted virtually using the Zoom website due to the participants living in various locations across the state. Since the study was to explore leaders' perceptions of self-efficacy for leading early childhood classrooms, the interviews and resulting data were as valid and reliable as if the interview sessions had been conducted in person. The analysis of the data was separated into four sections with the first section identifying the participants of the study. The second section described the process used to verify the methods and the trustworthiness of the research. Subsequently, the third section explored the categories and themes that evolved from the interviews, demographic data about participant certifications,

and formal education as an early childhood educator or leader. Finally, the fourth section discussed the data regarding the research questions.

Three overarching research questions were used for this narrative qualitative study.

1. What perceptions do leaders have about their efficacy in leading preschool teachers/programs?
2. What perceptions do leaders have about their efficacy to provide a high-quality preschool program in their school?
3. What perceptions do leaders have about their efficacy in defining school readiness?

Participants

This qualitative narrative study involved conducting interviews with 10 participants from six different school districts in Missouri. Participants were selected by using a list of current principals of preschool through fifth-grade buildings that had been obtained by DESE. Interviews were conducted during the months of February and March 2024. Anonymity of participants was guaranteed to all participants and in order to maintain confidentiality, names, personal information, school districts, and all other potential identifying factors were scrubbed from recordings, transcripts, and the final manuscript. The principal participants were identified as P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, and P10.

A delimitation set by the researcher was to only interview principals who were currently supervising teachers of both preschool and classrooms up to fifth grade. Limitations that were identified by the researcher were about the demographics of each principal as noted in Table 1. Eight of 10 participants were female, 5 out of 10 participants had early childhood certification, but only 3 out of 10 had a formal education as an early childhood educator. Finally, the

researcher also limited the participants to only those who were leading in a public school in the state of Missouri.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Data

Participant	Gender	Early childhood certification	Formal early childhood education	Length supervising preschool
P1	Female	Yes	No	5
P2	Female	Yes	Yes	6
P3	Female	No	No	12
P4	Male	No	No	1
P5	Female	No	No	1
P6	Male	Yes	Yes	6
P7	Female	No	No	3
P8	Female	Yes	Yes	16
P9	Female	No	No	1
P10	Female	Yes	No	3

Data Analysis

The goal of the researcher was to capture the perceptions of each participant’s experiences as a principal of preschool classrooms. These perceptions of self-efficacy in the area of preschool can inform other educators, researchers, and policy makers for the improvement of preparation programs for leaders of preschool classrooms. Although principals seemed to be transparent about their feelings of self-efficacy and willing to identify strengths and weaknesses in each area, participant interview lengths varied; some participants’ interviews were brief when providing their answers as seen in the interview length in Table 2.

Qualitative research is an evolving process including three activities: data collection, data analysis, and summary of findings. These occur simultaneously throughout the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher made notes during interviews, coded interview notes during multiple readings of transcripts, and identified themes that surfaced from the data collection and analysis process to interpret the data. After the data were interpreted, the themes provided a

holistic understanding of the interviews with the use of visual tables and figures (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

After reviewing Table 1 and Table 2, the data indicated that 5 out of 10 participants lacked early childhood coursework and certification had experience ranging from 1 year to 12 years as principals. Interview time lengths ranged from 38 minutes to 1 hour and 3 minutes, and transcriptions varied in length from seven pages to 12 pages. One interview out of 10 had three interruptions from building staff entering the principal’s office and a phone call. Three out of 10 participants had formal coursework and certification in the area of early childhood had varied experience from 6 years to 16 years as principals. Interview lengths ranged from 37 minutes to 50 minutes, and transcriptions varied slightly from eight pages to 10 pages. Finally, 2 out of 10 participants lacked formal coursework in the area of early childhood but held early childhood certification and had experience ranging from 3 years to 5 years as principals. Interview time lengths ranged from 41 minutes to 54 minutes, and transcripts were both eight pages in length.

Table 2

Descriptive Interview Table (February & March 2024)

Participant	Interview length	Transcript length
P1	41:40	8 pages
P2	37:41	8 pages
P3	59:04	11 pages
P4	1:03:44	10 pages
P5	49:57	10 pages
P6	50:47	10 pages
P7	53:10	12 pages
P8	42:34	8 pages
P9	38:31	7 pages
P10	54:05	8 pages

Interviews were conducted and recorded with participant permission using the Otter.ai transcription service. Detailed transcripts of each interview were reviewed by each participant to

verify accuracy of the information captured. The researcher edited and scrubbed Otter.ai transcriptions to ensure anonymity during multiple readings. The researcher made notes during and after the interview to capture general thoughts and to address researcher bias. Validity and reliability of the study were achieved through triangulation of the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Triangulation was achieved due to the researcher's use of digitally transcribed interviews, leader college transcripts, and areas of certification.

Coding

Otter.ai transcriptions must be reviewed by the researcher to ensure accuracy. The researcher made edits to remove identifiable information about the participants. For example, the names of school districts, elementary schools, and participants were all removed. The researcher also removed redundant terms that were general and unnecessary to the research (Peoples, 2021). Specifically, the researcher removed teachers, students, kids, child(ren), early childhood, school, principals, kindergarten, and class(room) from the list due to their high-frequency use in all interviews. The researcher created a spreadsheet of most spoken terms, excluding the high-frequency terms removed by the researcher, and organized the terms by participant in Table 3.

Table 3

Most Used Coded Participant Terms from Interviews

Participant	Most used word	Second most used word	Third most used word	Fourth most used word
P1	Support	Learn	Centers	Transition
P2	Time	Families	Learn	Help
P3	Feel	Know	Developmentally Appropriate	Impact
P4	Need	Feel	Academic	Differentiate
P5	Differentiate	Ability	Learn	Want
P6	Learn	Experience	Ability	Build
P7	Play	Families	Feel	Engagement
P8	Learn	Families	Focus	Teacher- Directed
P9	Need	Time	Behavior	Engagement
P10	Learn	Need	Families	Feel

After reviewing the terms in Table 3, the researcher determined the need to review terms used by all participants to analyze and interpret the results with all 10 participants at once. After reviewing Table 1 and Table 3, the data suggest that none of the participants consistently employed the same high-frequency words, which indicated a diverse range of vocabulary and expression among them. Specifically, 5 out of 10 participants who lacked formal coursework and certification in early childhood utilized various words during their interviews, while 3 out of 5 of these participants frequently used the word *feel*. Conversely, all three participants with formal coursework and certification in early childhood consistently used the word *learn*, and similarly, both participants with early childhood certification but no coursework also used learn consistently. Overall, 6 out of 10 participants identified learn as one of their most frequently used words.

Table 4

Combined Terms From Participant Interviews

Coded terms	Total times used	Number of participants
Ability	60	8
Academic	100	10
Advocate	9	3
Affordability	9	5
Assessment	16	6
Balance	16	6
Behavior	35	9
Build	36	9
Centers	6	2
Coach	14	7
Collaborate	34	9
Communication	85	9
Consistent	13	5
Curriculum	27	8
Developmentally Appropriate	30	8
Differentiate	32	6
Emotions	45	10
Engagement	36	8
Environment	13	5
Experience	36	6
Families	86	9
Feel	46	7
Focus	18	8
Help	40	7
Impact	45	4
Important	39	9
Know	194	5
Leadership	46	9
Learn	89	10
Need	59	10
Play	88	8
Quality	7	5
Social-Emotional	61	8
Student-Centered	11	3
Support	39	10
Teacher-Directed	12	3
Time	47	9
Transition	9	4
Whole Child	26	7

The researcher created a second spreadsheet of terms from all participants, the number of times the term was used in total, and the participants who used the term as shown in Table 4. In creating Table 4, the researcher noted the top 25% most frequently used terms: ability (60 times), academic (100 times), communication (85 times), families (86 times), know (194 times), learn (89 times), need (59 times), play (88 times), and social-emotional (61 times). After reviewing the terms in Table 4, the researcher determined the need to hone in on the most frequent terms by a majority of the participants. The researcher created a spreadsheet to analyze the most frequently used terms to understand the significance of the words used by the most participants (Table 5). The most used terms captured the barriers and factors in feeling efficacious in leading preschool classrooms. The three major themes that emerged during interviews are aligned with the words used in Table 4 and Table 5.

Table 5

Terms by Number of Participants

Used by 10 participants	Used by 9 participants	Used by 8 participants
Academic	Behavior	Ability
Emotions	Build	Curriculum
Learn	Collaborate	Developmentally Appropriate
Need	Communication	Engagement
Support	Families	Focus
	Growth	Play
	Important	Social-Emotional
	Leadership	
	Time	

Participant Narratives

Participants were interviewed virtually using the Zoom website due to the participants living in various locations across the state. Participants provided consent electronically (Appendix B) and verbally prior to beginning the interview process (Appendix C). Participants were notified of the potential risks and agreed to record their interview. Otter.ai was used to

create transcripts of each interview. A general summary of each participant's interview was organized by research questions that focused on the leaders' perceptions of self-efficacy in leading preschool classrooms, providing high-quality programming, and defining school readiness. Each narrative started with general background information about the participant. After collecting, combining, and analyzing all data from participant narratives, certifications, and participant coursework, overall themes were developed. Triangulation was used to increase reliability and validity of the study.

Participant 1. Principal 1 (P1) was a female who had served as a principal for 5 years. During this time, she had been supervising preschool programs along with the kindergarten through fifth-grade classroom teachers. Despite having early childhood certification, P1 did not undergo any formal coursework specifically related to early childhood education.

Research Question 1: Leading. P1 perceived her efficacy in leading preschool teachers/programs as influenced by her level of experience and understanding of early childhood education. P1 expressed a lack of confidence due to her limited experience in the classroom and the developmental differences between early childhood and kindergarten. She acknowledged the importance of learning from teachers who are experts in the field and valued collaboration with early childhood leaders. Over time, there was an improvement in collaboration and support, with efforts to provide guidance and resources for effective leadership, including input from experts and utilizing data analysis tools. This reflected a belief in shared leadership and the recognition of the importance of seeking expertise beyond one's own knowledge.

Research Question 2: High-Quality Programming. P1 perceived her efficacy in providing a high-quality preschool program at her school as contingent on several key factors. She emphasized the importance of clear communication of learning outcomes, including both

academic and social-emotional development. She highlighted the significance of structured lessons that support growth, particularly focusing on areas like phonological awareness and foundational math concepts to prepare students for kindergarten. P1 advocated for a shift towards play-based centers and intentional questioning to build vocabulary and experiences. She stressed the use of small group and one-on-one support tailored to students' learning goals, aiming to fill gaps and enrich learning experiences. Additionally, she emphasized the engagement of teachers in maintaining high expectations for student learning and creating a welcoming environment for families. P1 prioritized student-centered learning, emphasizing the importance of understanding individual student needs, scaffolding learning appropriately, and incorporating play-based learning to enhance achievement. She also emphasized the implementation of strategies like Conscious Discipline to support students' emotional regulation and the incorporation of activities that promote fine and gross motor skills and sensory exploration. Overall, P1 viewed effective preschool programming as holistic, encompassing academic, social-emotional, and physical development, with a strong focus on meeting the needs of individual students.

Research Question 3: School Readiness. P1 perceived her efficacy in defining school readiness through various lenses. She prioritized social-emotional development, emphasizing the importance of handling big emotions and navigating transitions effectively. Additionally, she considered academic preparedness, focusing on areas like literacy and numeracy skills, and addressing learning gaps or the need for additional support services. P1 stressed the significance of attendance and parental involvement, recognizing that education starts as soon as children enter school and extends into future academic and career success. She advocated for clear communication between early childhood and kindergarten settings to ensure a smooth transition for students. Collaboration with local community agencies was also highlighted as essential in

promoting preschool enrollment and providing support both within and outside the classroom. Overall, P1 recognized the multifaceted nature of school readiness and emphasized the importance of addressing social-emotional, academic, and community-based factors to support students' overall readiness for kindergarten and beyond.

Participant 2. Principal 2 (P2) had had 8 years of experience in the role, with 6 years specifically spent supervising preschool. She was a female educator with early childhood certification and held a bachelor's degree in early childhood education.

Research Question 1: Leading. P2 perceived her efficacy in leading preschool teachers and programs as influenced by her background and experiences. Positive aspects included prior experience teaching kindergarten in high-poverty settings, which provided insight into meeting children's developmental needs. However, P2 acknowledged deficits, such as lacking formal training in programs like Conscious Discipline and not having worked in public school preschools. These gaps impacted her ability to effectively support new teachers and address structural challenges. P2 emphasized the importance of staying informed about early childhood practices, seeking guidance from knowledgeable colleagues, and continually learning from experiences. Overall, P2 highlighted the support of knowledgeable colleagues, which contributed to her overall effectiveness in leading preschool programs. P2 acknowledged room for improvement and recognized the importance of adapting to the needs of each group of children.

Research Question 2: High-Quality Programming. P2 perceived her efficacy in providing a high-quality preschool program at her school as dependent on several key factors. She emphasized the importance of a developmentally appropriate curriculum that addresses both social-emotional and academic needs. P2 recognized the significant role of adults in guiding children through social-emotional learning, highlighting the need for one-on-one guidance and

support. She stressed the importance of using data to inform decision-making and the vital role of community support, including relationships with parents and collaboration with external organizations like Parents as Teachers. P2 emphasized the balance between teacher-directed and student-directed learning, due to the value of allowing children to explore and develop critical thinking skills through play while also providing direct instruction and guidance. She highlighted the integration of Conscious Discipline principles throughout the program, fostering a supportive and connected learning environment. Additionally, P2 advocated for a holistic approach that addresses the whole child, including academic, social-emotional, and motor skill development, while also accommodating individual student needs through flexible teaching strategies and partnerships with other grade levels. Overall, P2 prioritized creating a nurturing and engaging preschool environment that supports the diverse needs of young learners and prepares them for future academic success.

Research Question 3: School Readiness. P2 perceived her efficacy in defining school readiness as multifaceted and not simply black and white. She recognized that each child has unique strengths and areas for growth, emphasizing the importance of social-emotional skills alongside academic readiness. P2 stressed the need for children to develop social skills such as communication, collaboration, and problem-solving, which can be fostered through interactions with peers and adults in various settings. She highlighted the role of parents in preparing children for kindergarten, encouraging activities that promote social interaction and communication, such as family conversations and community events. Additionally, P2 advocated for community support systems that address societal issues impacting school readiness, such as access to prenatal care and resources for families in need. She emphasized the importance of collaboration and collective responsibility in ensuring all children have the support they need to succeed.

Participant 3. Principal 3 (P3) had been in the role for 12 years, was female, and supervised preschool for the same duration. However, she lacked early childhood certification and had not pursued formal coursework in early childhood education despite her extensive experience in overseeing preschool programs along with her kindergarten through fifth-grade classroom teachers.

Research Question 1: Leading. P3 perceived her efficacy in leading preschool teachers as influenced by her education and training background. While formal education might not have extensively covered preschool, she leveraged her experience as an administrator and background in psychology to understand child development. She acknowledged the necessity of ongoing self-directed learning and attending professional development opportunities to enhance her knowledge of preschool education. She emphasized the importance of collaboration and teamwork in making curriculum decisions, valuing input from teachers who work directly with students every day. P3 prioritized the needs and feedback of teachers, ensuring that curriculum decisions align with state requirements and meet the needs of the students. She recognized the value of teacher expertise and involvement in decision-making processes, emphasizing a collaborative approach to leadership in preschool programs.

Research Question 2: High-Quality Programming. P3 perceived her efficacy in providing a high-quality preschool program at her school as reliant on various factors. She prioritized a holistic approach that considers the whole child, including social, emotional, and creative aspects of learning. She emphasized the importance of engaging parents and the community in the educational process to create a supportive environment for students. P3 acknowledged the evolving nature of preschool education, noting changes in her own philosophies and expectations over time. She recognized the importance of adapting to these

shifts while maintaining a focus on meeting the needs of her students and staying true to her educational standards. P3 prioritized providing diverse learning opportunities, including outdoor activities, creative expression, and social interaction, to cater to the diverse needs of her students. She emphasized the difference between a preschool program and daycare, highlighting the educational focus and the importance of meeting the emotional and physical needs of students to provide a high-quality program. Additionally, P3 valued the expertise and collaboration of their teachers, recognizing her contributions to the success of the preschool program. She also highlighted the importance of early intervention for students with disabilities or developmental delays, emphasizing the need for continued support and resources to ensure long-term success. Overall, P3 was committed to providing a high-quality preschool program that prepares students for future academic and personal success, while also addressing the individual needs of each child.

Research Question 3: School Readiness. P3 perceived her efficacy in defining school readiness as a multifaceted process that involves utilizing various assessment tools and considering different factors. She acknowledged the importance of assessments in gauging students' readiness for kindergarten, but also recognized the limitations and challenges associated with implementing new assessment methods. P3 emphasized the significance of teacher reports and observations, valuing the insights and professional perspectives of preschool teachers who have extensive experience working with young children.

In addition to formal assessments, P3 stressed the importance of providing students with exposure to diverse experiences and opportunities that foster social, emotional, and physical development. She advocated for prioritizing activities that promote physical activity, creativity, and social interaction and a need to decrease screen time. P3 recognized the impact of social-

emotional support on students' readiness for school, highlighting the importance of addressing students' emotional and psychological needs to create a conducive learning environment.

Additionally, P3 emphasized the role of community involvement in supporting students' readiness for school. She expressed appreciation for businesses and community members who contribute to school initiatives and events, acknowledging the value of partnerships in promoting student success. However, she also acknowledged the challenges associated with sustaining community involvement due to budgetary constraints and stressed the importance of businesses finding meaningful ways to show appreciation that “gives value to the school, but also gives value to those businesses...”

Overall, P3 perceived school readiness as a holistic concept that encompasses academic, social, and emotional dimensions. She emphasized the importance of using multiple assessment methods, prioritized student well-being, and fostered community partnerships to support students' successful transition to kindergarten.

Participant 4. Principal 4 (P4) had had 13 years of experience in leadership roles. He was male and had been supervising preschool for one year. However, he lacked early childhood certification and had not undergone any formal coursework in early childhood education.

Research Question 1: Leading. P4 perceived his efficacy in leading preschool teachers and programs as a continuous learning process; he acknowledged both his progress and areas for improvement. He recognized the unique challenges and needs of preschool educators, particularly in terms of curriculum alignment and social-emotional support. P4 emphasized the importance of understanding and supporting the specific needs of preschool teachers, even if it means seeking collaboration and guidance from other early childhood leaders and specialists within the district.

P4 prioritized providing tailored support to preschool teachers; he recognized the differences between preschool and school-age classrooms. He requested feedback and guidance from experienced early childhood educators and leaders to better understand the developmental stages and educational priorities of preschool-aged children. P4 also valued collaboration with specialists in areas such as Conscious Discipline and behavior interventionists to address the diverse needs of preschool students effectively.

Additionally, P4 emphasized the importance of fostering a collaborative environment where preschool teachers feel supported and empowered to implement effective teaching strategies. He highlighted the significance of leveraging expertise from various stakeholders, including district-level administrators, early childhood specialists, and experienced teachers, to address the unique needs of preschool programs.

Overall, P4 perceived his efficacy in leading preschool teachers and programs as contingent upon his ability to understand and respond to the specific needs and challenges of early childhood education. He prioritized collaboration, feedback, and ongoing professional development to support preschool teachers in providing high-quality early childhood education experiences.

Research Question 2: High-Quality Programming. P4 perceived his efficacy in providing a high-quality preschool program at his school as centered around addressing the holistic needs of the children, encompassing both academic and social-emotional development. He emphasized the importance of recognizing and supporting children's diverse needs, including social-emotional skills like conflict resolution and emotional regulation. P4 acknowledged that preschool lays the foundation for children's future academic success and focused on ensuring that

children are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge, such as recognizing letters, colors, and shapes.

P4 highlighted the significance of creating a positive and inclusive school culture. Ensuring preschool students are integrated into the broader school community was important for the prolonged engagement of families. He prioritized collaboration with parents and involved preschool students in school-wide activities and initiatives, fostering a sense of belonging and engagement from an early age.

Additionally, P4 recognized the importance of balancing teacher-directed instruction with student-directed learning opportunities in the preschool classroom. He emphasized the progression towards more student-centered approaches as children develop confidence and independence. P4 stressed the importance of ongoing observation, goal-setting, and intentional planning to track children's progress and provide targeted support.

Overall, P4 perceived his efficacy in providing a high-quality preschool program as reliant on how the teacher created a supportive learning environment, fostered collaboration, and continuously adapted teaching practices to meet the evolving needs of preschool students. He prioritized the development of foundational skills and strived to instill a love for learning in preschool children, setting them on a path for future academic success.

Research Question 3: School Readiness. P4 perceived his efficacy in defining school readiness as multifaceted, encompassing both academic and social-emotional aspects. He emphasized the importance of observing and assessing children's skills and behaviors to determine his readiness for kindergarten. Academically, P4 focused on essential skills such as letter recognition, understanding colors and shapes, and name writing. However, he also recognized the significance of social-emotional readiness, including skills like conflict

resolution, emotional regulation, and following directions without exhibiting aggressive behaviors.

P4 stressed the importance of involving parents in the readiness process, acknowledging them as crucial partners in his children's education. He believed that a collaborative approach between schools and families can better support children's development and prepare them for kindergarten. Furthermore, P4 highlighted the need for a balanced approach to readiness, cautioning against rushing children into academic instruction without considering his developmental readiness. He advocated for a holistic view of readiness that acknowledges each child's unique needs and circumstances, including factors like trauma, family dynamics, and parental availability.

Overall, P4 perceived his efficacy in defining school readiness as reliant on comprehensive assessment, collaboration with parents, and a balanced approach that prioritizes both academic and social-emotional development. He emphasized the importance of early intervention and familial support to ensure that all children have the best possible start to their educational journey.

Participant 5. Principal 5 (P5) had served as a principal for 6 years and was female. She supervised preschool for one year but lacked early childhood certification and had not undergone any formal coursework in early childhood education.

Research Question 1: Leading. P5 perceived her efficacy in leading preschool teachers and programs as multifaceted, relying on her instructional expertise, collaboration with other leaders, and ongoing professional development. P5 emphasized the importance of good instruction, highlighting that effective teaching skills are transferable across different grade levels, including preschool. She prioritized understanding the preschool curriculum, recognizing

both similarities and differences with other grade levels, which allows them to provide valuable feedback and coaching to preschool teachers.

P5 also stressed the significance of collaboration with other early childhood leaders. She engaged in regular communication and collaboration with principals and instructional coaches from other schools serving preschool-aged students, leveraging her expertise and experience to enhance her own understanding of preschool education. These collaborative efforts included discussions on assessment data, instructional strategies, and outcomes for preschool students.

Additionally, P5 actively engaged with preschool teachers through frequent classroom visits and observations. She utilized these opportunities to observe effective teaching practices, identify areas of strength in individual teachers, and model new approaches or strategies when necessary. By fostering a culture of continuous improvement and learning, P5 empowered preschool teachers to refine her instructional techniques and positively impact student outcomes.

Overall, P5 perceived her efficacy in leading preschool teachers and programs as reliant on her instructional knowledge, collaboration with other leaders, and ongoing professional growth. She prioritized creating supportive learning environments for both teachers and students. These environments ensured preschool teachers can thrive and continuously improve her practice to benefit the development of young children.

Research Question 2: High-Quality Programming. P5 perceived her efficacy in providing a high-quality preschool program at her school through several key elements aimed at ensuring readiness, engagement, and holistic development among students. P5 prioritized identifying and addressing the diverse needs of her preschool population. She recognized the importance of effective screening processes to identify students with developmental delays and ensure they received the necessary support and services. Additionally, P5 emphasized the

provision of resources such as free busing and full-day programs to maximize students' access to early education opportunities. By focusing on early intervention and equitable access, P5 aimed to lay a strong foundation for students' future academic success.

P5 acknowledged the importance of ongoing learning and professional development in her role. While she may not consider herself a master of preschool curriculum after just one year, she actively sought to deepen her understanding and leveraged the expertise of colleagues and instructional coaches. By continually learning and refining her leadership skills, P5 strived to create an environment conducive to high-quality preschool education.

P5 emphasized hands-on activities and child-driven learning experiences to create an engaging environment for preschool students. She recognized the value of hands-on activities and manipulatives in stimulating curiosity and fostering cognitive development. Additionally, P5 advocated for child-driven instruction, where students take an active role in their learning and teachers scaffold their support accordingly. P5 sought to create thriving classrooms where all students can succeed through engaging, developmentally appropriate instructional practices.

Additionally, P5 prioritized family involvement and communication to support student learning and development. She utilized online platforms to facilitate communication between teachers and parents, ensuring families felt included and informed about their child's education, recognizing the importance of building strong partnerships between home and school. This involvement included the educational growth of students as well as school events and fundraisers.

Overall, P5 perceived her efficacy in providing a high-quality preschool program through a comprehensive approach. This approach addresses the diverse needs of students, fosters engagement and holistic development, prioritizes ongoing learning and professional

development, and promotes family involvement and communication. By embracing these principles, P5 created a supportive and enriching preschool environment where all students could thrive and succeed.

Research Question 3: School Readiness. P5 perceived her efficacy in defining school readiness through multiple indicators that encompass both academic and social-emotional aspects. One significant factor was the maturity level of students, including their ability to follow directions, respect boundaries, and engage independently in classroom activities without relying heavily on adult facilitation and redirection. Additionally, P5 emphasized the importance of students being able to recognize letters and numbers, indicating foundational academic readiness for kindergarten.

P5 recognized the value of pre-K programs in preparing students for kindergarten, as these programs provide opportunities for socialization, skill development, and exposure to a structured learning environment. Socialization with peers was not something that may be fully replicated at home. By enrolling students in pre-K programs, parents can ensure that their children receive comprehensive preparation for kindergarten, including exposure to academic benchmarks and opportunities for social and emotional growth.

Additionally, P5 emphasized the importance of partnerships between schools, families, and community organizations in supporting school readiness. By involving families in classroom activities and fostering connections between home and school, P5 hoped to create a seamless transition for students and ensure that learning experiences are reinforced both at school and at home. P5 actively looked for partnerships with community organizations to provide additional resources and support for students, recognizing the impact of outside influences in enriching students' educational experiences. Through these collaborative efforts, P5 strived to create a

supportive ecosystem that nurtures school readiness and sets students up for success in kindergarten and beyond.

Participant 6. Principal 6 (P6) was a male principal with 6 years of experience who supervised preschool for the same duration. P6 held early childhood certification, possessed a bachelor's degree in early childhood, and had previous experience as an early childhood teacher.

Research Question 1: Leading. P6 perceived his efficacy in leading preschool teachers and programs due to his background and experience in early childhood education. With prior teaching experience in preschool and kindergarten, P6 felt comfortable providing guidance and feedback to early childhood educators. P6 understood the importance of supporting teachers in implementing developmentally appropriate practices.

P6 recognized the unique challenges faced by early childhood educators, especially those in satellite preschool programs within elementary schools. Preschool programs within elementary schools may not have the same amount of support available as teachers in early childhood centers. He advocated for professional development opportunities tailored to the needs of preschool teachers and emphasized the importance of equitable experiences across all grade levels.

Collaboration with other leaders, particularly those overseeing early childhood centers, was seen as essential for supporting and advocating for preschool teachers. P6 prioritized consistent walkthroughs, feedback sessions, and facilitation of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to ensure ongoing support and professional growth for preschool educators. He advocated for resources and support for preschool programs, demonstrating his commitment to early childhood education and its vital role in preparing students for success.

Research Question 2: High-Quality Programming. P6 perceived his efficacy in providing a high-quality preschool program based on his journey as an educator and his understanding of developmentally appropriate practices. He emphasized the importance of real-world experiences and thematic approaches as the baseline for quality preschool education. Additionally, he advocated for progressing towards project-based learning, where students have a voice in their learning and explore topics of interest.

P6 recognized the need for teacher support and professional development, especially for new educators, to ensure meaningful and comprehensive learning experiences. He emphasized the importance of understanding child development and providing a supportive environment that recognized the unique needs of young learners. He recognized the need for professional learning for preschool teachers around how to provide Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and a supportive classroom environment. SEL instruction helps students learn how to interact socially with their peers and teachers and emotionally, how to handle frustration and failure when learning new skills. He emphasized the integration of subjects throughout the day including SEL and the importance of play-based learning in early childhood settings to achieve academic growth in content areas. P6 actively involved families in the preschool program, seeking to include them in various school activities and providing opportunities for engagement and participation.

Research Question 3: School Readiness. P6 described his efficacy in defining school readiness as good and he described his definition as students' independence and comfort in the school environment rather than purely academic achievements. He emphasized the importance of students feeling safe, comfortable, and familiar with the school setting, demonstrating behaviors such as confidently navigating the school building or following routines independently. P6 prioritized these social-emotional aspects of readiness, considering students' excitement for

school and their readiness for transitions to higher grades as indicators of success. Academic readiness was not the sole focus, but rather a holistic view of students' overall preparedness for the school environment.

Participant 7. Principal 7 (P7) had had 5 years of experience in the role, during which she had supervised preschool for 3 years. Despite her experience, she lacked early childhood certification and had not completed any formal coursework in early childhood education. Additionally, P7 was identified as female.

Research Question 1: Leading. P7 perceived her efficacy in leading preschool teachers as initially challenging due to a lack of familiarity with the curriculum, standards, the balance between play and instruction, and the academic focus appropriate for preschoolers. She felt like a "fish out of water" when discussing topics like Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), reteaching, and data collection. However, she found support from experienced preschool teachers who guided her through these challenges. She relied on training sessions, informal conversations with program directors, and her background in parent education to understand age-appropriate practices, engaging children in play, and providing effective feedback.

Research Question 2: High-Quality Programming. P7 perceived her efficacy in providing a high-quality preschool program as a work in progress, rating herself around a 5 or 6 out of 10. She emphasized the importance of honoring each child's background and ensuring every child makes a year's worth of growth, recognizing that growth will vary from child to child. P7 prioritized both academic and social-emotional experiences, valuing play as a significant component of learning. Collaboration with families was viewed as essential, in an effort to empower parents to be active participants in their child's education. However, P7 acknowledged her limitations in understanding age-appropriate practices fully, recognizing that

more experienced early educators may have a deeper understanding. She strived to create engaging environments that fostered student-directed learning while also providing guidance and structure when necessary. Collaboration with families was prioritized through various events and communication channels. P7 encouraged her preschool teachers to provide hands-on experiences and to create a balance between teacher-directed and student-centered approaches, recognizing the challenge of aligning curriculum requirements with student choice. P7 focused on assessing foundational academic skills as primary measures of success in preschool due to the difficulty in measuring the whole child during the preschool years.

Research Question 3: School Readiness. P7 perceived school readiness as encompassing social-emotional skills more than academic readiness. She emphasized the importance of children being able to advocate for themselves, communicate basic needs, share, take turns, and self-soothe. P7 believed that preparing children for school readiness involves daily activities such as reading together, playing games that teach winning and losing, and practicing decision-making. She stressed the significance of early communication with families to provide guidance on supporting her child's development well before kindergarten. This could involve hosting preschool family events and engaging families in school activities. Additionally, P7 viewed her role as advocated for students, encouraging positive interactions with families and supporting them in preparing her children for school. She recognized the need for understanding and patience in dealing with challenging behaviors while also promoting positive interactions with children, even in busy or stressful situations.

Participant 8. Principal 8 (P8) had had 15 years of experience as an early childhood principal and was female. She had supervised pre-kindergarten through fifth grade for one year.

Additionally, she held early childhood certification and possessed a bachelor's degree in early childhood education.

Research Question 1: Leading. P8 felt more confident in leading preschool teachers and programs compared to kindergarten through fifth grade due to having preschool certification and experience as a preschool teacher. This experience in a preschool setting increased her understanding of early childhood standards, curriculum, and developmentally appropriate practice, which enabled her to provide more effective feedback for preschool teachers. Additionally, her participation in various training programs such as the Class Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), Cognitive Coaching, Conscious Discipline, and her coursework toward earning her bachelor's degree contributed to her sense of efficacy in leading preschool programs.

Research Question 2: High-Quality Programming. According to P8, high-quality preschool programming entailed developmentally appropriate practices that prioritized mastery of essential learning standards through guided play. A well-designed classroom environment should be student-driven yet have clear expectations and boundaries established through routines and curriculum choices. There should be a balance between teacher-directed and student-centered learning. Teachers employed at her school operated at different places along the continuum of student-led to teacher-directed. Essential standards were intentionally selected to address mastery while considering the whole child approach. Teachers with a constructivist mindset tend to focus on the whole child approach, while those emphasizing direct instruction may prioritize individual academic skills over holistic development. Additionally, providing parent engagement activities for families of preschoolers through fifth grade was a recognized area of efficacy, although not her strongest.

Research Question 3: School Readiness. P8 shared ways to help students be prepared for school by fostering autonomy and independence in children and engaging in genuine conversations with them rather than just giving commands, especially at an early age. She emphasized the importance of talking with children rather than at them to extend their vocabulary and communication skills. P8 recognized that a holistic approach was essential, considering various factors to support children's development. She emphasized the significance of approaches to learning and social-emotional skills as crucial predictors of future academic success. Finally, P8 shared a way to engage families and support the transition of children into kindergarten. According to P8, effective kindergarten transition plans should provide families and students with the necessary tools for success, while schools and teachers should be equipped with their understanding of developmentally appropriate practices to meet kindergarteners' needs regardless of their starting points.

Participant 9. Principal 9 (P9) had had 3 years of experience in her role and supervised preschool for one year. She was female and lacked early childhood certification, with no formal training in early childhood education.

Research Question 1: Leading. P9 acknowledged that her focus was primarily on K-5 education, with less involvement in preschool programs due to district leadership responsibilities and the urgency she felt to address K-5 academic and behavioral needs. She interacted with early childhood leaders and received resources to support her learning. However, she felt less confident in selecting preschool curriculum and assessment tools compared to K-5. She expressed a lack of knowledge about preschool curriculum and assessments, relying on district resources for guidance.

Research Question 2: High-Quality Programming. P9 emphasized the importance of high-quality programs ensuring student safety and teacher engagement, with teachers providing effective instruction and remaining attentive to students rather than being distracted by technology and managerial tasks in the classroom. She mentioned the significance of teacher skill level in creating engaging environments. Interactions with families often revolve around classroom behavior. While chaotic student-centered classrooms appeared disorganized to P9, she emphasized the need for teachers to maintain control to help prepare students for kindergarten by teaching them to follow directions and be accountable for their behavior and academics.

Research Question 3: School Readiness. P9 emphasized that students are ready for kindergarten if they possess certain academic and social skills such as knowing letters and numbers, sharing, following directions, sitting attentively during instruction, and listening to authority. She also highlighted the importance of community investment in schools to support kindergarten readiness efforts. P9 did not directly share her level of efficacy but answered questions quickly and concisely.

Participant 10. Principal 10 (P10) had served as a principal for 3 years, was female, and had supervised preschool for one year. Despite having early childhood certification, she lacked formal coursework in early childhood education.

Research Question 1: Leading. P10 expressed confidence in leading preschool teachers, and attributed her proficiency to previous experience as a preschool classroom teacher and instructional coach. She highlighted the importance of tools like CLASS observation tool and training in SEL practices such as Conscious Discipline to support her understanding of early childhood best practices. Additionally, she emphasized the value of on-the-job training gained from her experience as a classroom teacher. The selection of curriculum was typically done by

district leaders. P10 valued expertise of school leaders when seeking guidance or support in various areas related to preschool or K-5 education.

Research Question 2: High-Quality Programming. P10 emphasized the importance of high-quality preschool programs incorporating student-led learning through play and hands-on activities, with a balance between novelty and consistent schedules. She expressed a high level of efficacy in her approach to engaging students and adjusting activities to meet diverse learning needs. P10 advocated for inclusivity in school-wide events, while also recognizing the potential for differentiation to better engage families of preschool-aged children. She stressed the importance of maintaining a balanced approach in the classroom, with a focus on both student-centered learning and teacher-directed instruction to ensure safety and direction. Additionally, she underscored the holistic nature of education, aiming for social, emotional, and academic growth in preschoolers to prepare them for success beyond kindergarten.

Research Question 3: School Readiness. P10 perceived school readiness as encompassing more than just academic skills like knowing the alphabet and numbers. She emphasized the importance of children being excited about learning, curious, and able to communicate and resolve conflicts appropriately. P10 encouraged families to read to their children and engage in social activities to help prepare children for kindergarten. She recognized the need for flexibility in accommodating the diverse needs of incoming students and advocated for community support to ensure access to affordable preschool programs.

Themes

The purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to describe a leader's perception of their self-efficacy for supervising early childhood teachers and providing high-quality programming following an increase in funding for Missouri preschools. With the expansion of

funding for the ADA for preschool students in 2018-2019, leadership for early childhood programs was on the rise, especially to those already leading kindergarten through fifth-grade elementary schools. There were three research questions that were addressed regarding the leaders' perception of efficacy to lead preschool teachers, define high-quality programming, and define school readiness.

The researcher reviewed transcripts to ensure accuracy, scrubbed the content for anonymity, and condensed the information to identify the major themes that emerged. Finally, the researcher contacted participants for verification of the accuracy of the information collected during interviews. The researcher reviewed participant coursework, interviews, and current certification for each participant as a means to triangulate the information and to increase reliability and validity of the study.

When reviewing Table 4 and Table 5, the words used by all participants were in alignment with the themes that emerged during the interviews. Three major themes emerged from the interviews from the participants regarding their efficacy in leading preschool programs, defining high-quality early childhood programming, and defining school readiness. First, continuous learning and collaboration was a theme identified by 7 out of 10 participants. Nine out of 10 participants mentioned collaborate (34) with others and learn (89). The second theme that surfaced was the holistic approach to preschool education by 10 out of 10 participants. All participants used the words academic (100) and emotions (45), to which they each spoke when discussing the emphasis for a holistic learning environment. Finally, the theme of early intervention (6 out of 10 participants) and familial support (9 out of 10 participants) was identified for this study. Nine out of 10 participants mentioned families (86) and communication (85).

Continuous Learning and Collaboration. All leaders interviewed expressed a sense of efficacy at various levels as they led preschool teachers and programs, which was influenced by their background, experience, and ongoing professional development. They acknowledged both strengths and areas for improvement, and emphasized the importance of continuous learning and collaboration with experts in the field. Seven out of 10 leaders shared how they sought out collaborative conversations with other early childhood leaders to enhance their feelings of efficacy in leading early childhood classrooms. When discussing the effect of collaboration with other early childhood leaders, P1 stated, “It makes me feel more competent when I go into a classroom to know what the look-fors are of a high-level pre-K classroom.” P5 stated about their own growth from collaboration, “Each time I have those collaborative conversations, I get a little bit more out of it.”

A commitment to continuous learning and improvement was evident across responses, with leaders actively seeking opportunities for professional development and collaboration to enhance their efficacy in leading preschool programs. They recognized the evolving nature of early childhood education and strived to stay informed about best practices and research in the field. Specifically, P2 stated she felt efficacious in providing feedback to staff due to their knowledge and experience: “Well, I think definitely, just my philosophy and staying up on early childhood practice.”

Eight out of 10 leaders recognized the unique challenges faced in leading preschool programs, including the need to understand early childhood education standards, curriculum, and developmental practices. They prioritized addressing these challenges through professional development, collaboration with experienced educators, and leveraging resources to support preschool teachers effectively. P8 shared some challenges of district professional learning

claiming, “It's difficult because professional learning does not always apply to early childhood. So, you'd have to be able to filter the information that's coming at you and how it might apply to early classrooms.” P3 stated, “I spent a lot of time in classrooms, spent a lot of time just researching and learning on my own about young child development, and what that looks like in an educational setting.”

There was a strong emphasis on supporting teachers through professional development, coaching, and collaboration. Five out of 10 leaders recognized the importance of providing resources and training to help teachers implement effective instructional strategies, integrate social-emotional learning, and create engaging learning environments. P4 shared his approach to providing preschool teachers with the resources they need:

I'm helping understand what her needs are to where I can then help support her needs throughout that. So, recognizing who are the people in the district that can help her. Are there resources available? Then how can I help match or give her opportunities and then connect with those individuals?

Holistic Approach to Preschool Education. All leaders perceived their efficacy in providing high-quality preschool programs as varied, and 3 out of 10 mentioned that it was an ongoing process of learning and adaptation. Two out of 10 participants had low feelings of self-efficacy in leading high-quality programs. These two participants lacked early childhood certification and coursework. Three out of 10 participants had feelings of high self-efficacy when leading high-quality programs. One of these participants lacked any coursework and certification, one participant had coursework and certification, and one participant had no formal coursework, but had early childhood certification. Five out of 10 participants reported leaning

on the current classroom teachers to support their own understanding of high-quality preschool programs.

All leaders prioritized a holistic approach to preschool education, recognizing the importance of addressing both academic and social-emotional development. They emphasized the need for developmentally appropriate practices, play-based learning, and creating supportive environments that cater to the diverse needs of preschool-aged children. P5 shared the importance of considering the academic aspects of learning, "...but we do look at the social emotional as well." P10 shared a similar belief: "We are not only focused on student academic growth... We want to make sure socially they're learning... considering all aspects of the child." P3 summarized their belief about preschool classrooms: "I think it has a developmentally appropriate curriculum that is meeting the social emotional needs of learning school, as well as the academic."

There was an acknowledgment for the need for a balanced approach to instruction, incorporating both teacher-directed and student-centered learning strategies. Nine out of 10 leaders strived to strike a balance between structured lessons and opportunities for exploration and play, ensuring that learning experiences were tailored to meet the individual needs of each child. P7 shared their beliefs of children needing a balanced approach to school readiness by honoring where they come from and what they need, individually, to be successful. P7 stated, "Recognizing that kids have lots of different backgrounds and experiences and perspectives on school... honoring that and meeting kids where they are when they come in." Additionally, P7 stated,

...also to giving kids the social emotional experiences, to be able to interact with peers and adults appropriately when they're in a school. That's almost more important than the

academic piece to me that they can learn to share [and] that they know when to ask for a drink.

Nine out of 10 leaders emphasized the need for a balanced approach to school readiness that considers both academic and social-emotional development. They cautioned against rushing children into academic instruction and advocated for holistic views of readiness. P9 shared some concerns about student-centered classrooms looking chaotic and the need for teachers to ensure safety and take charge. P9 stated, “Student centered classrooms are chaotic. So, the teacher needs to be in charge.” Other leaders spoke to the powerful learning that occurs when children direct their own learning. P3 stated,

I think if you lack the student directed, you're missing the point of early childhood because that's the biggest bang for your buck is allowing them to explore and begin those critical thinking skills in their exploration for play, but the teacher has to pre-plan...what to put out so that the kids have the correct choices to dive into.

Early Intervention and Familial Support. Leaders emphasized the importance of early intervention (6 out of 10 participants) and familial support (9 out of 10 participants) to ensure that all children have the best possible start to their educational journey. They advocated for comprehensive assessment, collaboration with parents, and tailored support to address the diverse needs of students. They cautioned against rushing children into academic instruction. P7 shared ways that they pushed down some curricular resources from kindergarten to preschool. Conversely, P1 emphasized that parents should “sign them [their child] up for early childhood,” to help their child be prepared for kindergarten.

There was a strong emphasis on the significance of social-emotional skills in defining school readiness. Leaders stressed the importance of children being able to handle big emotions,

navigate transitions effectively, communicate, collaborate, problem-solve, and regulate their emotions. P3 believed “the best thing is teaching them to learn to work with other people” and learning how to deal with frustration and failure by “letting them lose at Candyland and talking through those things.”

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to learn more about principals’ feelings of self-efficacy when leading preschool programs in Missouri. Chapter Four provided information regarding the experiences of current principals leading preschool classrooms and their feelings of self-efficacy by reviewing data collected through interviews of 10 participants, all of whom served as principal of a preschool through fifth-grade elementary school in Missouri. Three major themes emerged from the interviews from the participants regarding their efficacy in leading preschool programs, defining high-quality early childhood programming, and defining school readiness. First, continuous learning and collaboration was a theme identified by 7 out of 10 participants. The second theme that surfaced was the holistic approach to preschool education by 10 out of 10 participants. Finally, the theme of early intervention (6 out of 10 participants) and familial support (9 out of 10 participants) was identified for this study.

Chapter Five concludes this study with the thoughts and findings of the researcher, based on the experiences and feelings of current principals in Missouri. The researcher will provide possible implications for public schools and graduate programs for school leaders. Finally, the researcher will provide recommendations for future study.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

High-quality childcare and early childhood programs help prepare children for kindergarten and beyond (Cobanoglu & Sevim, 2019; Fontaine, Torre, Grafwallner, & Underhill, 2006). These programs have been shown to positively impact all aspects of a child's life, extending into adulthood. Children who attend high-quality early childhood programs are better prepared for kindergarten compared to those who receive care from family or friends, thus reducing the need for additional academic interventions (Delalibera & Ferreira, 2019; Goncu et al., 2014; Kahn, 2014; Lonigan et al., 2015; Stucker, 2008).

In response to the recognized benefits of early childhood education, the state of Missouri has expanded funding for free preschool, serving thousands of children each year. However, despite this expansion, there remains a gap in certification requirements for principals overseeing early childhood classrooms within elementary schools. It is crucial for these principals to ensure effective implementation of preschool programs within their schools to maximize the benefits for students (Goncu et al., 2014). To support the success of new leaders overseeing early childhood programs, it is essential for them to possess a clear understanding of early childhood development and pedagogical leadership (Abel, 2019).

The purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to learn more about principals' feelings of self-efficacy when leading preschool programs in Missouri. The three research questions focused on the leaders' perception of self-efficacy in leading preschool programs, defining high-quality early childhood programming, and defining school readiness. The

researcher brought in the theories of constructivism and self-efficacy as she conducted interviews with principals at 10 elementary schools serving children in preschool to fifth grade.

Chapter Five concludes this study with the thoughts and findings of the researcher, based on the experiences and feelings of current principals in Missouri. The researcher will provide possible implications for public schools and graduate programs for school leaders. Finally, the researcher will provide recommendations for future study.

Summary of Methods

The researcher identified 10 participants with a variety of experiences, certifications, and formal coursework in early childhood education. The researcher emailed building principals who supervised classrooms ranging from preschool to fifth grade (Appendix A). Principals were contacted via email to set up an interview and were asked to complete a consent for participation in this study (Appendix B). Furthermore, the researcher organized a pilot to review the interview protocol for clarity and provide feedback. Following the feedback received from the pilot group, the interviews were conducted using Zoom and transcribed using Otter.ai transcription service (Appendix C).

Once the interviews were completed, data were collected, scrubbed for anonymity and clarity, and then coded. Coding procedures consisted of the researcher analyzing interview transcripts and demographic-related information to better understand the data more holistically. The researcher reviewed the most frequently used terms across all participants and identified the three major themes. The researcher then compared each of the three major themes to the three research questions in this study.

Summary of Findings

This qualitative narrative study was created with three research questions regarding school leaders in Missouri public schools. The answers to the questions helped the researcher understand the lived experiences of building leaders who supervised preschool through fifth-grade teachers. The researcher interviewed 10 principals who were currently supervising at least one preschool teacher along with teachers of grades kindergarten through fifth.

Principals from a building list provided by DESE were sent invitations by e-mail (Appendix A) to obtain permission to conduct the study (Appendix B) if they were an elementary site notating a prekindergarten classroom. Furthermore, the researcher organized a pilot group to review the interview protocol for clarity and feedback. Due to the distance between all participants and the researcher, the researcher conducted interviews via a video conferencing platform. An online transcription service, Otter.ai, was used for analysis of the interviews and recordings. After cleaning, transcripts were sent to participants, who were allowed to clarify any information in their transcript. No requests for clarification were received by the researcher.

The researcher reviewed the transcripts and notes documented during the interview multiple times to holistically understand the answers provided by the participants. The researcher utilized Otter.ai to surface initial high-frequency words and themes, then utilized Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, tables, and graphic organizers to visualize the themes that emerged from the transcripts. The researcher provided a space for opinion and bias to be collected, through the use of notes and reflection, and set aside from the facts that were presented during the interview. The researcher used information from the participants' coursework in college in conjunction with certifications and transcribed interviews to achieve triangulation.

Research themes and findings surfaced during the study. Themes were compared to triangulated data. The first theme was about participants feeling the need for continuous learning and collaboration for themselves and for teachers. Second, the holistic approach to preschool education emerged as a theme. This theme was about the expectations leaders have for preschool children to learn about academics in conjunction with other developmental areas, such as motor, health, social, and emotional areas. Finally, early intervention and familial support was a theme that emerged due to participants sharing their perceptions on the impact early childhood education has on children and their families.

Discussion

The constructivism and leader self-efficacy theoretical frameworks were interwoven throughout this study. Specifically, this study tied together the principles of learning through (a) constructing new learning based on the learner's experiences and background knowledge, (b) social interactions, (c) self-beliefs, and (d) hands-on opportunities. The research questions asked in this study reflect early childhood best practices found in the review of literature and the perceived self-efficacy of the leader charged with supervising the early childhood classrooms.

Research Question 1. Research Question 1 asked, "What perceptions do leaders have about their efficacy in leading preschool teachers/programs?" As the data from each participant were analyzed, the researcher identified two major themes from Research Question 1. The first theme was about participants feeling the need for continuous learning and collaboration with other experts in order for them to feel efficacious as they lead preschool programs. Seven out of 10 leaders shared how they felt their self-efficacy increase after attending training or meeting with early childhood experts. From Research Question 1, the researcher concluded leaders know their limitations on leading early childhood teachers/programs. As with other opportunities for

growth, leaders can seek training or collaboration with experts. Two leaders (P2, P3) shared they considered the early childhood experts they would seek out to collaborate with were the preschool teachers in their building. Other leaders (P1, P4, P6, P7, P8, P9) named early childhood department leaders as the experts they would seek out for collaboration.

In the theory of self-efficacy there are four sources that influence self-efficacy. Mastery experiences have the greatest effect, especially if failures occur after one has firmly established their sense of efficacy (Bandura, 1994, 1997a). Other influences are (a) vicarious experiences, (b) verbal/social persuasion, and (c) physiological and emotional arousal. A basic constructivist principle, supported by Vygotsky and Dewey, is that constructing knowledge is a social activity requiring interactions to help formulate understanding (Erciyas, 2020; Jaramillo, 1996; Mohammed & Kinyo, 2020; Vygotsky, 1962). Collaboration and mentorship with other highly effective leaders can provide opportunities for leaders to construct new learning and increase their feelings of self-efficacy. Therefore, the researcher concludes that regardless of background, experience, certification, or coursework, leaders experience feelings of an increase in self-efficacy from networking and learning with other leaders in similar roles.

The second theme was about the holistic approach to preschool education. All participants (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10) referred to the need to provide a whole child approach to educating preschool-age children. Educating the whole child means that schools consider academic, social, and emotional needs of students (Raymond, 2019; Russell, 2018; Sidhu, 2020). When a school uses a whole child approach, teachers use multiple types of assessments to ensure progress is made in all aspects of the students' development (Dodge & Copp, 2018; Slade, 2020). Both constructivism and self-efficacy theories support the education

of the whole child by emphasizing active learning, and the integration of academic, social, emotional, and physical aspects of learning.

There were some participants (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P10) who further described the classroom as teacher-directed and student-centered, in conjunction. One participant (P9) shared some hesitations about having student-centered classrooms due to the chaos observed in those classrooms. This did not completely align with the constructivist theory. Constructivism theorizes that all learning is student-centered and constructed through the use of prior knowledge and new experiences or interactions (Clark, 2018; Demiral, 2018; Jaramillo, 1996; Mohammed & Kinyo, 2020; Morris, 2019; Piaget, 2011; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969; Ratcliff, 2016; Steffe & Gale, 2009; Xu, 2019). However, the review of literature does align more closely with the participants' beliefs. The humanist pedagogical theory developed by Carl Rogers and the constructivist theory of Piaget and Dewey shift the center of learning from the teacher, as the sage on the stage, to the learner with the teacher as a guide on the side or facilitator of learning (Ingleby et al., 2015; Ratcliff, 2016; Vygotsky, 1962).

Research Question 2. Research Question 2 asked, “What perceptions do leaders have about their efficacy to provide a high-quality preschool program in their school?” As the data from each participant were analyzed, the researcher identified two major themes from Research Question 2. These themes were the same as Research Question 1, but the participant answers were inclusive of both questions. The first theme was about participants feeling the need for continuous learning and collaboration with other experts in order for them to feel efficacious as they define high-quality programming for preschool-aged children. Seven out of 10 leaders shared how they felt their self-efficacy increased after attending training or meeting with early childhood experts. From Research Question 2, the researcher concluded leaders expressed their

limitations on providing a high-quality preschool program and many shared that they do not make the decisions regarding what curriculum or assessments to use in the preschool classroom. When considering the commonalities from Research Questions 1 and 2, leaders provided similar concerns regarding their limitations in providing a high-quality program as they did with their ability to lead preschool programs.

When discussing high-quality programming, one participant (P6) specifically said they reached out to other principals to discuss the specifics about what was happening in the preschool classroom in the other district building to try and compare the programming that was occurring in their building. However, all other participants (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P7, P8, P9, P10) shared they relied on their district early childhood department for support with curriculum and assessments. Two participants (P1, P6) felt confident enough to add additional curriculum resources and assessments to the preschool classrooms, especially once they had experience with implementing it in the kindergarten classrooms. According to Bandura's theory of self-efficacy, mastery experiences and vicarious experiences explain why leaders might feel confident to add their own curriculums to the early childhood programs, even though they were not responsible for making those decisions. Mastery experiences is when they experience a challenging situation and believe they can successfully accomplish the work after they persevered through obstacles (Bandura, 1994). As individuals experience success, they feel more successful and able to accomplish even greater success (Gebauer et al., 2020; Orsini & Coers, 2022). Vicarious experiences are the second most powerful source of self-efficacy and defined as an individual learning by observing.

The second theme was about the holistic approach to preschool education. All participants (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10) referred to the need to provide a whole-

child approach to educating preschool-age children. Participants used words frequently to describe a high-quality program including academic (100), balance (16), play (88), student-centered (11), teacher-directed (12), developmentally appropriate (30), and whole child (26). This second theme, and the first theme in providing a high-quality program, depend on each other because leaders also stated how staff must know what high-quality programming looks like and how to implement those strategies. Therefore, there must be continued learning and collaboration for classroom staff as well as building leaders. Research suggests that comprehensive early childhood programs must prioritize all facets of children's development, not solely academics. Alongside employing a developmentally appropriate curriculum, instruction, and assessments, programs should also address the social-emotional growth of children (Colker et al., 2018; Maharaj, 2021; Russell, 2018). Constructivist theory advocates for children's active participation in self-directed learning (Mohammed & Kinyo, 2020; Morris, 2019; Steffe & Gale, 2009; Vygotsky, 1962), empowering them to tackle real-world challenges from childhood through adulthood (Mohammed & Kinyo, 2020; Morris, 2019; Steffe & Gale, 2009).

Research Question 3. Research Question 3 asked, “What perceptions do leaders have about their efficacy in defining school readiness?” As the data from each participant were analyzed, the researcher identified one major theme from Research Question 3. The theme was about participants emphatically sharing the importance of early intervention and familial support to impact school readiness. Nine out of 10 participants (P1, P2, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10) mentioned both social emotional and academic skills were needed for children to be ready for kindergarten. Some participants (P1, P2, P4, P6, P7, P8, P10) specifically said parents had a pivotal role in supporting their child to be ready for kindergarten by teaching them at home, including participation in Parent Teacher Associations (P1, P4) and Parents As Teachers home

visitation program (P1, P10). The research showed students receiving early interventions during their preschool years receive benefits of an ongoing intervention that lasts until the third grade and sometimes longer due to their participation in preschool (Gardner et al., 2019; Infurna & Montes, 2020; Kahn, 2014; Lin & Jones, 2019). These benefits include academic achievement, social development, and positive health outcomes (Yen & Lee, 2019). Leaders have had experience in identifying students who were prepared for kindergarten during their experience as a principal. Bandura's theory of self-efficacy tells us that vicarious experiences are when an individual learns by observing. This includes comparison during the observation (MacAfee & Comeau, 2020). As leaders observe in environments, their perceived self-efficacy and their motivation increase (MacAfee & Comeau, 2020). From Research Question 3, the researcher concluded leaders felt efficacious in naming skills children need when entering kindergarten to be classified as kindergarten ready.

Professional Implications

The purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to describe a leader's perception of their self-efficacy for supervising early childhood teachers and providing high-quality programming following an increase in funding for Missouri preschools. With the expansion of funding the ADA for preschool students in 2018-2019, leadership for early childhood programs is on the rise. Some school districts will begin or expand early childhood programming. Elementary school principals will likely add supervision of these early childhood classrooms to the scope of their job duties. Currently, there are no other studies that address principals' perceptions on their efficacy to lead high-quality early childhood preschool programs in elementary school buildings. The study researched traits of a high-quality preschool program

and ways leaders increase feelings of self-efficacy when leading preschool teachers in their buildings.

Much of the research conducted through participant interviews resulted in similar information previously discovered in the review of literature. Information gleaned solidified and deepened the findings of previous researchers. Through the combination of the literature review and participant interviews of this qualitative study, the researcher will make recommendations for practitioners in the field of early childhood education.

An implication for elementary schools with preschool classrooms providing high-quality programs in Missouri is the need for collaboration between leaders who have similar building types. This includes conversations and learning around the area of early childhood. Participants in the study shared their appreciation and emphasized the need for collaboration, but not all leaders collaborated with others about early childhood topics, including curriculum, assessment, or instruction. Making time for collaboration and learning together with peers can offer a deeper understanding of early childhood best practices and feelings of self-efficacy.

Additional recommendations for school districts would be to have a future leadership program where future potential building leaders could experience success as they construct their own learning in a social environment. The school district would have a voluntary program to allow future leaders and current leaders to partner together to collaborate and learn about the principalship. Principals who have a high self-efficacy can develop these abilities within themselves and encourage it in others as they understand more about Bandura's theory of self-efficacy. As principals support the growth in others within the future leadership program, they strengthen their own skills.

Finally, universities that provide graduate studies for building principals might consider adding early childhood learning opportunities for new leaders who attend their programs. If universities begin considering early childhood programs part of the kindergarten through 12th-grade system, they could begin influencing the belief system of many educators.

Recommendations for Future Research

The purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to better understand a leader's perception of their self-efficacy for supervising early childhood teachers and providing high-quality programming following an increase in funding for Missouri preschools. While interviewing 10 participants was acceptable for the study, further gains could be made by continuing the study with more participants. The participants in this study had varied backgrounds and experiences. Considerations for further expansion of the study could be the limitation of participants to only select those who were in their first year of leading preschool teachers. Or, other researchers could limit the participants to those without any early childhood coursework or certifications. More information might be gleaned from the feelings of self-efficacy in leading preschool teachers compared to leading kindergarten through fifth-grade teachers.

Further expansion of this study could be advanced with interviewing more diverse participants. Although there were two male participants who volunteered to interview, it would be an area to expand the study. Other areas to expand the study would be to consider the limitation of the size based on the school districts and to only include schools with classrooms that span from preschool to any grade level. Allowing for any building with a preschool classroom might provide additional information that was not gleaned during this study.

Additional considerations that might be made during further research are the types of data to use for achieving triangulation. There are new assessments required by the state of Missouri for kindergarten entry. The assessments measure students' readiness in a variety of areas. The achievement of students could be used as another data point to achieve triangulation in the future. Data of this type can inform future professional learning for teachers and administrators.

Conclusions

The purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to learn more about principals' feelings of self-efficacy when leading preschool programs in Missouri. There were three research questions that were addressed regarding the leaders' perception of efficacy to lead preschool teachers, define high-quality programming, and define school readiness. Guiding the study were two bodies of research, constructivism and self-efficacy, which served as the theoretical frameworks for this study. Constructivism theorizes that all learning is student-centered and constructed through the use of prior knowledge and new experiences or interactions (Clark, 2018; Demiral, 2018; Jaramillo, 1996; Mohammed & Kinyo, 2020; Morris, 2019; Piaget, 2011; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969; Ratcliff, 2016; Steffe & Gale, 2009; Xu, 2019). The theory of self-efficacy is grounded in the belief that people who have a high-self efficacy are more likely to (a) challenge themselves, (b) set goals to motivate themselves, (c) self-regulate their feelings during stressful situations, and (d) secure resources and support from others (Bandura, 1977, 1993, 1997a).

Constructivism and self-efficacy theories along with the participant interviews shared the belief that leaders who collaborate and construct their own learning based on their experiences and prior knowledge have a higher level of self-efficacy. With the researcher's

recommendations in place, the state of Missouri may shift from a K-12 system to a pre-K-12 system, providing a more inclusive and high-quality experience for all children.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Elementary Principal E-mail

Dear Colleague,

My name is Christy Davis, and I am the Director of Early Childhood in Springfield, Missouri. I am currently a doctoral candidate with Southwest Baptist University, and I am conducting research to explore the efficacy of elementary principals leading in a building with early childhood classrooms.

I would like to invite you to participate in this study as you can provide valuable insight and knowledge of your own experiences leading early childhood programs. Your school has been selected to participate in this study by having classrooms Pre-K to fifth grade in one building. If you elect to participate, please note the following:

- Your participation is completely voluntary.
- You may choose to withdraw from the study at any time.
- There is no penalty for not participating or choosing not to answer all questions. All responses are anonymous.
- No information identifying you, individually, or your school, will be reported. Responses will be compiled and reported anonymously.

This project has been reviewed by the Southwest Baptist University Research and Review Board for research and research-related activities involving human subjects, (417) 326-1659. The committee believes the research procedures adequately safeguard the subjects' privacy, welfare, civil liberties, and rights.

Please respond to this e-mail if you consent to participate. For questions about your participation or to receive a copy of the results of this study, please contact me by phone at (417) 496-5013 or by e-mail at christyjdavis@yahoo.com. Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Christy Davis

Springfield Public Schools

Doctoral Candidate, Southwest Baptist University

417-496-5013

christyjdavis@yahoo.com

Appendix B
Informed Consent

Dear Participant,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this basic narrative qualitative study exploring elementary principals' self-efficacy in leading early childhood programs in the state of Missouri.

Please note the following:

- Your participation is completely voluntary.
- You may choose to withdraw at any time.
- There is no penalty for not participating or choosing not to answer all questions. All responses are anonymous.
- No information identifying you individually or your school will be reported. Responses will be compiled and reported anonymously.

In order to participate in the interview, informed consent is required. If you agree to allow me to use your interview responses for research purposes, please sign below.

Signature of Participant

Signature of Researcher

Appendix C

Interview Questions

Instructions:

Interview data will be audio recorded for digital transcription upon completion of the interview. The interview should not exceed one hour in length. Questions should be asked as provided in the interview protocol. Follow-up questions may be asked to clarify participant responses.

Prompts for more information:

- A. What else do you wish to add?
- B. Can you tell me more about your thinking on this?
- C. What are some other things that come to mind?
- D. What specifically occurred?
- E. Are there any other issues involved?

Introduction:

Thank you for meeting with me today. My name is Christy Davis and I am the Director of Early Childhood in a school district in southwest Missouri. I am currently a doctoral candidate with Southwest Baptist University and I am conducting research to explore principal self-efficacy when leading preschool programs. If you are ready, we will begin. Do not hesitate to stop me if you need clarification or more information during the interview. Prompts may be used if additional information is needed after you answer a question.

Informed Consent:

Participation in this interview is completely voluntary and you may back out of the study at any time. Your name will not be used in the study and your information will be kept strictly

confidential. The entire transcript can be provided for your review. If you see any errors or find any part of your responses that need to be changed, please let me know. The interview transcriptions will not be published but will be used to identify emergent themes related to the research questions. There are four topics we will cover during the interview. We will start with general questions about your experience as a leader and then move into questions about (a) leading preschool teachers, (b) providing high-quality preschool programming, and (c) defining school readiness.

Questions:

1. Leader Experience

- A. How many years have you been a principal?
- B. What other leadership experiences or roles have you filled?
- C. What educational certifications do you currently hold or have previously held (would you please share your transcripts with me)?
- D. How many years have you served as a leader of preschool classrooms?
- E. What do you enjoy most about being a principal?

2. Leading Preschool Teachers

- A. During your first year leading preschool teachers, describe your ability to lead preschool teachers compared to elementary K-5 teachers.
- B. What examples of training have supported your ability to provide feedback for best practices in preschool classrooms?
- C. Are you responsible for making decisions about curriculum and assessments in your preschool classrooms?
 - (1) What process was used to select curriculum?

(2) What process was used to select assessment tools?

(3) How efficacious do you feel in making decisions about curriculum and assessments?

D. In what ways do you collaborate with other leaders?

(1) How does this improve your ability to lead preschool teachers?

(2) How do you determine potential collaborators?

3. Providing a High-Quality Preschool Program

A. From your perspective, what does high-quality preschool programming look like?

(1) How efficacious do you feel in defining a high-quality preschool program?

B. What factors contribute to an engaging environment for all preschool students?

(1) How efficacious do you feel in your ability to identify factors that contribute to an engaging environment for all preschool students?

C. In what ways do you promote family involvement for preschool-aged students?

(1) How efficacious do you feel in your ability to engage families in parental involvement activities for preschool-aged students?

D. Preschool classrooms may be student-centered and/or teacher-directed.

(1) Share your beliefs.

(2) Share the current practice in the classrooms you supervise.

E. Preschool classrooms may consider the development of the whole child.

(1) In what ways does your classroom support the development of the whole child?

(2) How do you measure this support?

4. Defining School Readiness

- A. What indicators tell you that students are ready for Kindergarten?
- B. From your perspective, what can families do to prepare their child for Kindergarten?
- C. In what ways can schools help prepare for incoming Kindergarteners?
- D. From your perspective, what might it take for communities to ensure children are ready for Kindergarten?

Closing:

Thank you for your participation in this study. As previously discussed, your responses will not be connected to any identifiable information.