

**Perceptions of Tennessee Principals of their Supervisors' Role in Developing their
Instructional Leadership Capacity**

A Doctoral Applied Research Presented for the

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Degree

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Chuck Arnold, who provided encouragement and support on this journey. Thank you for always cheering me on as I pursued this dream. Now, you can say that you are married to a doctor. To my children, Alex and Evan, for always believing in me. I have learned how to be a better person and mom. To my sister, Beverly Rooker, for cheering me on. Lastly, this study is dedicated to my parents, Jim and Treva Phillips, who continue to pray and encourage me.

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Finally, Praise Jesus!

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of Tennessee principals of their supervisor's role in developing their instructional leadership capacity. This basic qualitative study gathered the perspectives of elementary principals. The participants included ten Tennessee elementary principals. Principals in the five participating school districts participated in semi-structured interviews for the qualitative study. Data from the interviews was collected, transcribed, coded, and analyzed. The qualitative results found the themes: current direct support for principals; professional development; shifts in principal supervisor/principal structure, relationships, and communication; and coaching. Principals receive support; however, the support is unstructured and primarily focused on behavior instead of building their instructional leadership capacity. Implications for the study suggested using an instructional leader framework as a model for districts to create a structure for ensuring principals continue to receive professional development to increase their instructional leadership capacity. Additional districts within Tennessee and other states can use the findings from this study to develop the supervisor's role to develop the principal's instructional leadership capacity.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Effective principals are essential to a school's success, and school leadership matters (Turnbull et al., 2015). Grissom et al. (2021) asserted, "Effective principals are at least as important for student achievement as previous reports have concluded—and in fact, their importance may not have been stated strongly enough" (p. 91). School principals must have skills and proficiency in instruction, stakeholders, and organization to succeed. However, Darling-Hammond et al. (2022) and Grissom et al. (2021) "found that most principals reported having at least minimal access to important content related to leading instruction" (p. vi).

Improving principal leadership affects the students' and teachers' learning in a school building as principals build their content knowledge and provide feedback that is constructive to teachers. Principals are the leverage to change in a school as their effectiveness becomes more relevant (Goldring et al., 2018). Because the quality of the principal role is improving and evolving, the responsibility of the principal supervisor should change. Thessin (2019) found that a strong partnership between a principal and a principal supervisor resulted in trust and modifications in the principal's instructional practice of leadership. A principal supervisor plays a critical role as a leader of principals' learning and growth while also serving as an evaluator. It is not well-documented what central office administrators might do daily to encourage high-quality teaching and learning (Honig, 2008). Usually, central office personnel lead professional learning communities for principals to keep up principals' learning to strengthen their

instructional leadership; however, more research is required to further understand a principal's learning in professional learning communities and also central office leaders' ability to promote the process (Honig & Rainey, 2014).

School superintendents and principal supervisors can develop school leaders' instructional leadership capacity (Saphier & Durkin, 2011). The support public school superintendents and principal supervisors provide to principals is critical, but it needs improving (NIET, 2020). By providing coaching and feedback to principals, central office leaders can build a principal's instructional knowledge, which enables them to support teachers (Goff et al., 2014). Goff et al. (2014) argued that additional research is required to understand the frequency and intensity of leadership coaching and how it compares to the strength of principals' typical professional development experience.

Background to the Study

Historically speaking, the principal has been one of the most well-known figures in American education. Head or principal teachers were initially needed for clerical duties (Goodwin et al., 2005). Later, principals managed fiscal support, implemented policies, and created school organizational structures (Rousmaniere, 2013). Principals kept the building running from a managerial lens. The principal's role changed because of significant attempts to emphasize school improvement (Murphy, 1994). Furthermore, school improvement and evaluation processes have led to changes. School leadership is reshaping due to teacher observation policies (Neumerski et al., 2018). High-stakes accountability for student achievement and the revised teacher evaluation systems have increased the role's heightening (Grissom et al., 2021). The Tennessee teacher evaluation

process known as the Tennessee Educator Evaluation Model (TEAM) requires principals to be more involved in the instructional leadership role. To improve teacher competence, principals observe teachers' teaching and provide constructive feedback such as reinforcements and refinements. Race to the Top focused on teacher evaluation, while Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) centered around school improvement and using principals as the change lever (O'Shea et al., 2022). Over the years, the complex role of a principal has changed, but he has maintained a stable identity, such as the school leader.

In a school district, a principal is supervised by an instructional district leader, often made as a reference to the principal supervisor, and the position varies depending on the structure and size of the district. In a large district, the principal supervisor could be supporting multiple principals. In a smaller district, the supervisor could also be responsible for curriculum implementation, analyzing data, and testing procedures. Principal supervisors provide critical support for principals. Principal supervisors create learning-focused partnerships with principals to impact teachers' practice and deepen learning (Godden, 2019). These partnerships can encourage a positive relationship. Godden points out that building principals' instructional capacity can be a difficult task. In 2014, a shift occurred to revise the principal supervisor's position to prioritize leadership on instruction (Goldring et al., 2020). This shift enabled a pivot to high-quality instruction and instructional leadership. Goldring et al. found that principals' leadership capacity and understanding of their instructional leaders' positions increased.

Principal supervisors' jobs have changed from compliance officers and evaluators to instructional leaders who lead with principals and assist learning and support to

improve teaching and learning (Cieminski & Asmus, 2023). These changes require principal supervisors to build their capacity to support principals. Cieminski and Asmus concluded that meaningful and high-quality professional learning must be provided to improve principal retention.

Statement of the Problem

Conducive to principals becoming solid instructional leaders, principal supervisors must provide them with professional development to adequately build their instructional leadership capacity (Godden, 2019). Also, the expectations of principals to demonstrate adequate yearly progress due to high-stakes accountability increases the need for principal supervisors to build the principals' instructional leadership capacity (Grissom et al., 2021). Principal supervisors are often added to central office staff, but their role is primarily evaluative, and principal supervisors are not traditionally seen as leaders of professional learning. Principal supervisors must supply professional learning opportunities to support the principals based on their needs as campus leaders (Turnbull et al., 2015). Consequently, the principal supervisor's part needs to shift from a focus on evaluation to a role that provides instructional support and guidance for school principals (New Teacher Center, 2018). According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2022), principals want outstanding professional development, but access to it varies. Principal supervisors have devoted their time and attention to logistical and operational issues (Goldring et al., 2020). However, through professional development, principal supervisors must continuously build the principals' instructional leadership capacity (Bouffard, 2019).

Purpose of the Study

The qualitative study's purpose was to explore the perceptions of Tennessee principals of their supervisor's role in developing their instructional leadership capacity.

Research Question

The following research question was formulated for this basic qualitative study:

How do principals in Tennessee perceive their supervisor's role in developing their instructional leadership capacity?

Significance of the Study

As principals' roles have begun to shift from a focus on managerial operations to a focal point of instructional leadership, school district administrators' roles have changed too. So, they now focus less on the support of principals' management and more on improving student outcomes by supporting school leaders (Thessin & Louis, 2020). Hess and Kelly (2005) stated that there are various pathways to prepare principals for leadership and the characteristics of the individuals who seek these positions. In Goldring et al. (2020) study, *Changing the Principal Supervisor Role to Better Support Principals*, it was asserted that further research is needed to investigate the principal supervisor's role in providing support to principals in instructional leadership. Studies by Turnbull et al. (2013), Thessin (2019), and McKim et al. (2019) have been conducted in the North and Mountain West regions of the United States, but there are hardly any in Tennessee on principals' perceptions. There are limited qualitative studies where the principal is asked for their perception of their principal supervisor's role in growing their instructional leadership capacity once they are in a principal role.

Definition of Terms

In this study, the terms that were used are as follows:

School Leadership

School leadership is conceptualized as strengthening educational leadership to improve student growth (Harvey, 2013).

Instructional Leadership

Instructional leadership is considered to increase deep learning and pedagogical understanding to improve student achievement (Godden, 2019).

Principal Supervisor

A superintendent or central office district leader oversees supporting and expanding principals as a teacher of instructional leadership (Honig, 2012).

Delimitations

A delimitation of this study is that the supervisor of the principal's role varies at each school district. Therefore, the principal supervisor is responsible for multiple principals across grade bands. The focus of this study was only on the supervisor's role in growing the principals' instructional leadership capacity.

A study's second delimitation is that it only highlighted school principals' perceptions and did not include teachers' perceptions.

A third delimitation is that only public school principals in Tennessee will be considered in the study.

Summary

The function of the supervisors and their process of encouraging principals has changed over the years due to multiple factors, such as the need to improve student achievement. Education reform, school improvement, and accountability have also affected principals, principal supervisors, and superintendents, creating a sense of urgency in how principal supervisors support principals in building their instructional leadership capacity. Yet, principal pipelines are also systems across the district for supporting and training school leaders (Turnbull et al., 2015). Thus, the training and support that school leaders receive are key to principals and school effectiveness. Turnbull et al. point out that a district-wide support system needs to be consistent to improve teaching and learning. According to Thessin and Louis (2020), recent efforts to support the evolving role of principals focus on student academics. These supports require changes in roles as principal supervisors. In such a way, this study explores the perceptions of Tennessee principals of their supervisors' role in expanding their knowledge of instructional leadership; it may add clarity to the definition of the principal supervisor's position and responsibilities.

Organization of the Study

This study will be made up of five chapters. In Chapter One, I will discuss the purpose and problem, explain the significance of the study, state the research question, and define critical words. In Chapter Two, I will critique the literature on the supervisors' position in building principals' instructional capacity, central office structures, and the principal supervisor/principal relationship. Then, a literature review will provide how

principals are instructional leaders and need high-quality professional development through the framework of instructional leadership. Then, chapter three will detail the methodology, including the participants, instrumentation, data collection, and also data analysis. Then, Chapter Four will discuss the findings of my study and make connections to the framework. In conclusion, Chapter Five summarizes the study, implications for principal supervisor programs, and future research recommendations.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Review Methods

In Chapter II, I evaluated the literature on principals' instructional leadership, principal supervisors' instructional leadership capacity, and the problems that principal supervisors come across in helping with the instructional leadership of principals. To search for scholarly papers, the database searched was Google Scholar published between 2013 and 2023. The Google Scholar search also led to research on University of Tennessee databases, ERIC, and ProQuest databases. The references in the study also led to additional resources. Keywords used to find literature regarding principal supervisors were *principal supervisor*, *principal*, *instructional leadership*, *instructional leadership capacity*, *principals' perception*, and *capacity building*. From instructional leadership, the ideas of *instructional leaders*, *school leaders*, *principal development*, *leadership preparation*, *professional development*, *mentoring*, and *leaders of learning* emerged. From these concepts, other keywords included *relational mentoring*, *developmental mentoring*, *veteran*, and *novice*. The reference lists in the articles were used to find additional resources. Google Scholar linked books on principals as instructional leaders, which I also reviewed.

According to Garrard (2020), a matrix method organizes the literature into key points and concepts. A review matrix is a tool for organizing the literature, analyzing the text, comparing the literature, and writing a synthesis to critique it. The literature review

matrix includes four elements: the title, author, date, and key points from the article.

Table 1 illustrates an example of the matrix method I used for this literature review.

Introduction to the Literature

Traditionally, principal supervisors focused on the role of compliance and budget (Goldring et al., 2020). Pivotal events changed the education path as principals became more accountable for student achievement. For example, standardization, accountability, and achievement gaps became critical due to the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (2001) and new evaluation systems for teachers and principals were implemented (or required) (Grissom et al., 2018). NCLB emphasized reading and math by requiring all school districts to be proficient in these subjects by 2014. Due to Tennessee's Race to the Top (RTTT) (USDOE, 2009) reform, Tennessee was one of the first states to begin using the Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model (TEAM), which is a new mandatory principal evaluation system (Grissom et al., 2018). The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was put into effect in 2015. It includes student achievement-based measures. ESSA spotlighted the noteworthiness of the principal supervisor (Thessin, 2023). These laws caused a focus on ensuring success for schools and students, and more importantly, they created the need for school improvement. Federally, ESSA (U.S. Department of Education, 2016) emphasizes the role of supervisors and recommends Title IIA funds be used clearly for supporting supervisors of principals' professional learning. The funding should be used to support professional learning. Yet, school system changes require consistency in structure and policy, and they must be sheltered from the fast turnover

Table 1*Matrix Method Used for Organizing the Critique of the Literature Sample*

Title	Author	Date	Key Points
School leadership in uncertain times: identifying dimensions of effective principal leadership	Hayes & Derrington	2023	leadership practices; school principals; school crisis
Changing the Principal Supervisor Role to Better Support Principals: Evidence from the Principal Supervisor Initiative	Goldring, Clark, Rubin, Rogers, Laura, Grissom, Gill, Kautz, McCullough, Neel, & Burnett	2020	principal supervisor; principals; principal's perceptions
Empowering Principals: Three Ways Principal Supervisors Can Support Principals as Instructional Leaders this Fall- Whether In Person or Virtual	NIET	2020	visible, reflective lead learner, build capacity of others
Follow the Instructional Leader	McQueen	2021	time spent in classrooms, reflective learner, school-wide opportunities for leadership
How Principal Supervisors Build Principal Capacity for Instructional Leadership	Godden	2019	principal supervisor, principal, instructional leadership
Principal turnover is too high. Principal supervisors can help.	Cieminski & Asmus	2023	principal supervisor, professional learning, student outcomes

among superintendents that guided central office reorganizations and reprioritized funding initiatives.

As researchers started to understand the supervisor's role and result in building principals' leadership capacity, the principal's role shifted aside from transactional and also managerial responsibilities to improving learning and teaching in the classroom (Grissom & Loeb, 2013). Principals began to appreciate the significance of the principal supervisor's commitment to building their capacity (Huff et al., 2013). These shifts started due to studies such as The Wallace Foundation's Principal Pipeline Initiative in August 2011. Six districts were part of the initiative to determine how their current system worked and what structures and policies needed improvement. The Wallace Foundation's *Principal Pipeline Initiative* (Turnbull et al., 2013) highlighted the importance of several components: principal standards, partnerships with university programs, the hiring process, professional development for novice principals, and forming the instructional capacity of principal supervisors and mentors to support principals. The research showed that school leaders will need support to lead instructional improvement. In 2012, the Council of the Great City Schools began a study on principal supervisors called *Rethinking Leadership: The Changing Role of Principal Supervisors* (Corcoran et al., 2013). The two-part study included a survey and site visits in the Wallace Foundation's Principal Pipeline Initiative. In this report, principal supervisors began creating organizational structures and systems. The researchers studied the roles of the principal supervisor. The information listed recommendations for forming more successful principal supervisory systems and additional support for principal supervisors.

The researchers also recommended internal consistency, coherence, and focus on how the districts support principal supervisors.

Following the Principal Pipeline (Goldring et al., 2018) study, *A New Role Emerges for Principal Supervisors* (2018) reported five core components. The five components were the job description of the principal supervisor needed revising to pivot on instructional leadership, lessen their extent of control, training and growing their knowledge to support principals, grow structures to recognize and train new supervisors, and building up central office system structures to support changes in the principal supervisor's role as well as sustain them. By improving principal effectiveness, student learning and achievement can increase. Principal supervisors can be used as leverage to support and develop principals. Moreover, in 2019, Bouffard stated that principal supervisor initiatives put instructional leadership at the forefront when using the instructional framework, offering aligned professional development for principals, and making adjustments in a central office. According to the Wallace Foundation (Goldring et al., 2020), principal supervisors increase principals' leadership capacity by shifting their focus to developing and aiding principals. To support the shift, actions are taken at three levels: district leaders, principals, and principal supervisors. In addition, supervisors refined the perceptions of principals regarding their work and the effectiveness of the supervisor's effectiveness.

Similarly, a NIET (2021) study revealed that the complexity of the job has increased is and stressful. The researchers in this study highlighted the principal supervisor's untapped potential. Furthermore, the study described challenges for

principals and solutions/strategies for principal supervisors, describing how being a visible partner, developing a shared vision, providing feedback, and creating collaborative learning opportunities can create a culture of continuous improvement.

Through this literature review, I (a) discussed the principal supervisor's role, including their role as an instructional leader, principal supervisor professional development, the importance of the principal and principal supervisor relationship, and ways principal supervisors can provide professional development for principals; (b) discussed the role of the principal, including their role as an instructional leader, professional development, and evaluations; (c) discussed instructional leadership and explained the framework which is conceptual for this study.

Role of the Principal Supervisor

The central office's relationship with schools is key to the principal supervisor's role. Central office leadership practices can help principals improve their instructional leadership as they have a working presence in school leadership (Honig, 2012). Principal supervisors' presence in schools establishes a culture that teaching starts with central office leadership.

As central office leaders work closely with school leaders as a partnership, there is a shift from a managerial focus to a focus on learning and teaching. The central office's role in working with principals to develop them as instructional leaders toward an emphasis on education is a vital shift (Stosich, 2020). A focus on teaching is a crucial shift by principal supervisors. Central office team members improve their knowledge to support this teaching and learning. Principal supervisors' meetings with principals can be

seen as professional learning opportunities to create coherence and creditability (Zepeda et al., 2020). These meetings can focus on building the instructional leadership intelligence of the principals. According to Zepeda et al., central office leaders such as principal supervisors must work closely with each school.

Aladjem et al. (2021) found that principal pipeline districts work in seven connected domains. One of the domains focuses on the principal supervisor. This domain includes redefining the supervisor role to support principal growth and instructional leadership in conjunction with the central office. Baker and Bloom (2017) examined how professional learning communities build a coherent model of principal supervision. There was a shift from compliance to a coaching role. The principal supervisors' caseload decreased, allowing structured opportunities to coach and guide principal needs. Bouffard (2019) evaluated the role of the principal supervisor by interviewing a principal supervisor. The principal supervisor explained how their district acknowledged the need to shift roles and focus on instructional leadership.

The Council of the Great City Schools (2012) oversaw a study that was two parts. Then, in 2013, Corcoran et al. collected two-part findings in *Rethinking Leadership: The Changing Role of Principal Supervisor*. The report listed these findings:

1. Detail and communicate in the organization the role and required skills of principal supervisors.
2. Limit responsibilities and scope of control of principal supervisor.
3. Matching skills and expertise to the needs of schools as they critically choose and place principal supervisors,

4. Professional development is provided to the principal supervisors and coaching for new instructional leadership roles.
5. Create policies to share information or processes to ensure clear lines of communication and collaboration between principal supervisors and central office staff.
6. Provide initial and continued support to new principals through coaching.
7. Hold principals and principal supervisors responsible for their schools' progress and ensure a connection between the process and measures used to assess teacher, principal, and principal supervisor performance.
8. Provide understandable, prompt, and reachable evaluation data to principals.
9. Devote district and school resources and include external stakeholders in the method of growing future school and district leaders (p. 7).

Developing Principal's Instructional Leadership Capacity

NIET (2020) reports that principal supervisors can support principals as instructional leaders in various ways. Attending classroom walk-throughs or professional learning communities (PLC) allows them to be a visible partner. After attending a meeting or classroom, reflect. Principal supervisors can build principals' capacity and create leadership opportunities. Since No Child Left Behind, principal supervisors have begun to help principals in strengthening instructional leadership. They can do this through school visits and instructional-focused meetings (Thessin, 2019).

As change agents, principal supervisors must deepen their instructional leadership capacity to promote principals. Principal instructional leadership can be increased during

a mediating role with principal supervisors (Godden, 2019). A mediating role allows the principal supervisor the opportunity to coach the principals. As principal supervisors shift their role to coaching instead of compliance, collaborative professional learning and coaching can lead to influential instructional leaders. The shift can occur by asking reflection questions, providing feedback, and creating leadership opportunities (McQueen, 2021).

In *Changing the Principal Supervisor Role to Better Support Principals: Evidence from the Principal Supervisor Initiative*, one of the core components noted in the PSI is to revise the job description of the principal supervisor to center on high-quality instruction and instructional leadership (Goldring et al., 2020). Again, this focus can pilot improvement in principal effectiveness. As the principal supervisor's role is revised, a theory of change can occur that can provide ongoing support to principals.

According to research by Johnston et al. (2016), professional development, supervision, and mentoring are three types of support for school leaders and relate to instructional leaders. As instructional leaders, these supports are essential to school leaders when their principal supervisor makes it important. Johnston et al. point out that school leaders appreciated mentoring when it focused on instructional improvement.

In a book by West and Derrington (2009), they found that leadership skills and evidence of continuous learning were two crucial attributes for defining principals' competence. Instructional leadership impacts student learning and teachers' skills. Superintendents help principals learn continuously through constant learning. These

attributes support building principals' capacity through instructional improvement and professional development.

In 2016, Saltzman published a report titled *The Power of Principal Supervisor: How Two Districts Are Remaking an Old Role*, which describes school districts remaking the job of the principal supervisor. Remaking the supervisor position requires a shift for school districts. Saltzman expanded on how the position needed to center entirely on supporting principals to teach and learn. A participant in the study described the position as the main position in the district. Learning to be a principal supervisor involves training—a method called to train the trainer. The principal supervisor must balance the coaching role with the evaluator, which can be challenging.

Honig and Rainey (2019) observed that principal supervisors moved their focus from compliance to helping principals grow as instructional leaders. There was a research gap in which support helped principal supervisors make the shifts. Honig and Rainey addressed this gap using two research questions: (p. 446):

1. What do principal supervisors do when they work with principals in ways that support principals' growth as instructional leaders?
2. What conditions support principal supervisors in doing so?

This study's research findings revealed that principal supervisors who came into the role with prior knowledge of a teach-then-learn approach showed more principal growth. Being a continuing learner as a principal supervisor was important.

Professional Development for the Principal Supervisor

In the research, school leaders, specifically principals, after teachers, influenced students' learning outcomes (Leithwood et al., 2004). As districts change central office structures to support principal supervisors better, districts develop professional development for principals. However, supervisors also need training to build their capacity. Since changing roles requires changes in support and to develop their capacity for instructional leadership, principal supervisors give ongoing support to principals (Thessin & Louis, 2020). Principals benefit from ongoing professional learning, but the opportunities that the central office provides haven't been a focus.

To improve the successfulness of principals, in 2015, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) developed standards for supervisors. As part of these standards, it was stated that assistance is provided by principal supervisors to help principals grow as instructional leaders through professional learning strategies and principal evaluations and engaging in their development. The eight Model Principal Supervisor Standards can be grouped into three categories: educational leadership, district leadership, and instructional leadership. The lists below show the model principal supervisors' standards. Educational leadership centers on growing the capacity of principals. Again, district leadership joins principals with details and resources. In addition, instructional leadership highlights self-development to support principals better.

Educational Leadership Category

STANDARD ONE:

Principal Supervisors commit their time to supporting principals' growth as instructional leaders.

STANDARD TWO:

Principal supervisors instruct and guide principals individually and participate in successful professional learning strategies to improve principals' growth as instructional leaders.

STANDARD THREE:

Principal supervisors use proof of principals' effectiveness to decide needed developments in principals' applications, supporting students' diverse cultural needs through positive environments.

STANDARD FOUR:

Principals are guided by principal supervisors in the evaluation process in ways that guide instructional leaders.

District Leadership Category

STANDARD FIVE:

Principal supervisors promote and advise the organizational vision's coherence, strategies, and policies, to help student learning and schools.

STANDARD SIX:

Principal supervisors help to make sure the district and schools are responding to cultural and social needs with the right resources.

Instructional Leadership Category

STANDARD SEVEN:

Principal supervisors participate in developing and continuous improvement to keep helping principals grow as instructional leaders.

STANDARD EIGHT:

Principal supervisors deliberately make changes that constantly elevate school performance and sustain good programs based on education and opportunities in the district.

Mendels (2017) determined that principal supervisors could support the principal's strengths and challenges provided by mentoring and professional development. Principals wanted individual needs-based professional development. Professional development was an area that needed improvement. Mendels established effective professional development through evaluation and on-the-job support.

Principal Supervisor and Principal Relationship

Trust must be established between the principal supervisor and the principal as the foundation of effective communication, but it often needs to be corrected.

Communication expectations and relationships create vital leadership attributes (West & Derrington, 2009). An open and honest relationship can create a powerful team.

Developing a mutual trusting and understanding relationship through professional growth enables them to develop professionally (Hayes & Angelle, 2021).

The hierarchical nature of the principal supervisor/principal relationship provides a means to mentor principals. The Wallace Foundation study (Mitgang, 2007) on guiding suggests that principal mentorship should be provided for longer than a year to sufficiently support principals who are new as they progress from beginners to change

leaders. To provide high-quality training, local funding, as well as state funding for principal mentoring, should be adequate. In the end, the main intent is to put teaching and learning first; as principals become leaders of change, understanding and grit are provided.

Trust and respect deepen relationships by developing the principal supervisor/principal experience. During the Principal Supervisor Initiative, principals' perception of their supervisor's effectiveness improved (Goldring et al., 2020). By building trust, principals can have open conversations without feeling criticized. According to Farmer (2017), a principal shared the importance of a principal supervisor in building relationships and establishing trust with principals. Therefore, they can trust the principal to provide support, hold them accountable, and provide direct feedback.

Mentoring

Mentoring is a way to support beginner and seasoned principal leaders of learning and an essential position in the professional development of principals. Hayes & Mahfouz (2020) concluded that to encourage effective leadership, the length of time that the protégé and mentor have for mentoring sessions and the predefined selection criteria that determine the pairing affect the relationship. Hayes (2019) connected the role of mentoring in the professional development of novice principals and their mentors as learning leaders. As learning leaders, veteran principals can use developmental relationships to support novice principals. Principal supervisors provide professional development to principals to increase their ability to improve instruction (Turnbull et al.,

2013). Principal supervisors can set up quality mentoring programs for principals focusing on instructional leadership.

According to Shelton (2011), mentoring should be focused on student learning, and school leaders can gain from on-the-job mentoring. The mentoring allows networking, communication improvements, and opportunities to increase their knowledge. Shelton points out that high-quality mentoring is part of the state legislative role.

Coaching

Baker and Bloom (2017) reported that “principal supervisors spend more than half of their time in school buildings coaching, guiding, and assessing principal needs” (p. 63). NIET (2021) noted the importance of a district leadership coaching system as a difference-maker in providing school leaders support connected to daily issues and that the principal supervisor should limit the number of school leaders that they are supporting. NIET also states, “shifting the role of principal supervisors to a focus on coaching and support can help principals to address key instructional leadership challenges” (p. 4). Job-embedded coaching and feedback that aligns with the school leaders’ needs is a strategy to improve instructional leadership, which can be connected to the evaluation process.

Cieminski and Asmus (2023) stated that reflective questions should be asked to assist school leaders in building their capacity. Goldring et al. (2018) found that one-to-one coaching with a limited number of principals was an essential part of the revised role

of a principal supervisor. Principal supervisors can set up quality mentoring programs for principals focusing on instructional leadership.

Role of Principal

Instructional Leaders

The role of the principal has shifted from managerial to instructional leadership (Shelton, 2011); however, there are benefits to being an instructional leader (Brolund, 2016). Instructional leadership involves creating a vision, setting high expectations, and distributing leadership. Shelton notes that the state legislative plays a role in building the roles and responsibilities of school leaders.

According to King (2002), instructional leadership is able to be outlined as something leaders do to add to learning and teaching. In the end, the accountability of instructional leadership comes down to the school building leader, known as the school leader or principal. Furthermore, when considering the elements in a school, it is believed that principals come behind only teachers in their effect on student achievement (Seashore et al., 2010). However, the principal must understand that they need support from others. A principal, as an instructional leader, should expand a system within the building to build instructional capacity.

Gill (2013) pointed out that schools' success hinged on effective leadership, and those leaders needed ample support to achieve results. Principals can affect student achievement and growth. Researchers established that highly effective school principals significantly impact student achievement (Xianxuan, 2018).

Principal leadership emphasizes instructional leadership by making the success of academics for all students through a vision and improving instruction and processes to foster school improvement (Mendels, 2012). Additional research by Honig (2012) reports an association between school leadership and student achievement, and more attention is paid to principals as instructional leaders. Mendels (2012) mentions the new term “instructional leader” as a more contemporary term. Mendels elaborates on five pivotal practices that shape instructional leadership. One of the five practices is cultivating leadership in others. Cultivating leadership encourages others to step into leadership roles and responsibilities.

Professional Development for Principals

To be an influential instructional leader, school leaders need supervisors to provide professional development. In that case, the principals, to help gain a better understanding of data and how it can help make good school decisions, ought to participate in job-embedded high-quality professional development. Finding the time to analyze data and discuss the trends and use of the data is often a barrier in many cases (Reeves & Burt, 2006). If the principal struggles to use data to drive instruction effectively, they need help to support their teachers using student data. Novice principals receive ongoing professional development and mentoring to strengthen their ability to improve instruction.

Anderson (2016) and The Wallace Foundation reported that *The Principal Pipeline Initiative* called on districts to support rookie principals through high-quality professional development. Still, it appears districts focused more on building up

individual support from supervisors, mentors, or coaches than on group-based professional development. Districts offer professional development for principals, but the connection between identified principal needs and available professional development is yet to be made. These supports address needs identified in the individual's evaluation (The Wallace Foundation, 2013).

Evaluation

Standards-based accountability for student performance due to the new policies led to how principals are evaluated using student growth and achievement data (Scott, 2013). The Principal Pipeline Initiative called for developing school leader standards (Turnbull et al., 2015) and stated that standards weren't clear or used (Turnbull et al., 2016). Defining standards for coherence in school-to-district actions was a first step toward creating a solid principal pipeline, and Turnbull noted the importance of aligning evaluation with support. Evaluations help principal supervisors understand a principal's strengths and weaknesses. Support could be provided through principal supervisors to address the instructional leadership weaknesses. The lists of standards and indicators have constantly expanded and focus on the quality of principals' leadership. The CCSSO, or Council of Chief State School Officers, defined influential school leaders in the original Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC), a consensus document of many professional associations (Clifford et al., 2012). Derrington and Sharratt (2008) focused on superintendents who used the ISLLC standards to evaluate school principals. The standards aligned with school leaders' responsibilities and leadership.

The Tennessee Instructional Leadership Standards (TILS) symbolize the foundation of Tennessee's Leadership policy. Aligning with national leadership standards, the TILS standards include the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards for School Leaders. As stated by the Tennessee State Board of Education Policy 5.106 (2018), the TILS identifies core performance indicators of ethical and effective instructional leaders. The TILS standards are:

1. Standard A: Instructional Leadership for Continuous Improvement- An ethical and effective instructional leader facilitates professional practice that continually improves student learning.
2. Standard B: Culture for Teaching and Learning- An ethical and effective instructional leader collaborates with stakeholders to create and sustain an inclusive, respectful, and safe environment conducive to learning and growth for all.
3. Standard C: Professional Learning and Growth- An ethical and effective instructional leader develops the capacity of all educators by designing, facilitating, and participating in collaborative learning informed by multiple data sources.
4. Standard D: Resource Management- An ethical and effective instructional leader facilitates the development of a highly effective learning community through processes that enlist diverse stakeholders and resources.

The Tennessee Instructional Leadership Standards (TILS) and the Tennessee Administrator Evaluation Rubric (TEAM) are designed to help instructional leaders be

effective leaders through continuous improvement. The TEAM rubric is a tool the Tennessee State Board of Education approved to support school leaders. By setting high standards, instructional leaders can grow through all phases of their careers. Standard A of the TEAM rubric focuses on Instructional Leadership for Continuous Improvement.

Shelton (2011) examined the school leaders' evaluation process in several states. Due to legislative changes, some states made changes in their evaluation programs. In July 2011, Tennessee implemented the policy that fifty percent of principal evaluations would be based on student achievement data. Thirty-five percent would be based on student growth data from the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS), and fifteen percent would come from other options of student achievement.

The 2023 Tennessee Educator Survey (TES) and the Tennessee Education Research Alliance (TERA) at Vanderbilt University survey TN educators yearly. The survey for school leaders asks: (a) I feel well prepared for the work that I do; (b) I feel prepared to serve as an instructional leader within my school; (c) I receive adequate support from district leadership in my role as a school leader (TDOE website). According to the 2022 results, statewide, 28% of principals reported that a member of the central office, such as a principal supervisor, did not observe them during the 21-22 school year.

In an article, *Principals' Perceptions Regarding Their Supervision and Evaluation*, principals were asked,

How does your principal evaluation and supervisory feedback improve your performance as a leader?" One principal stated that an ideal evaluation would include "specific feedback on ways to improve instructional leadership" and

“identify areas for improvement.” The specific feedback should be targeted on improving instructional leadership “no matter how many years you have been in the position.” (Hvidston et al., 2015, p. 24).

The article investigated principals' perceptions concerning principal evaluation and supervisory feedback. Principals commented that supervisors should be highly trained in supervision and cognitive coaching. Hvidston et al. (2015) discovered four elements that the principals recognized as a complete evaluation: an instructional leadership focus, professional growth, identified responsibilities, and student achievement.

Derrington and Campbell (2015) noted that principals benefited from supervisor support more than state support. After superintendents began communicating with principals about the evaluation process, there was a shift from compliance-focused to an assistance role. West and Derrington (2009) revealed that superintendents provided principals with support through communication and instructional-focused talk. Principals reported that supervisors developed a knowledge of the evaluation process.

Conceptual Framework

For this study, I use an instructional leadership framework to explore Tennessee elementary principals' perceptions of their supervisor's role in developing their instructional leadership capacity. The framework looked at through the lens of supervisor support for principals and how the supervisor builds instructional capacity. There is an expectation that “principals should be instructional leaders” and “are expected to engage closely with teaching and learning” (Neumerski et al., 2018, p. 270). The role of the

supervisor pivoted to support principals in succeeding as instructional leaders (Turnbull et al., 2016).

There are numerous definitions and frameworks offered to explain instructional leadership. The most cited framework was developed by Hallinger and Murphy (1985). Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) presented an instructional leadership framework has three main components: (1) defining the school mission, (2) managing the instructional program, and (3) creating a positive school climate. These components frame the school goals, communicate, supervise, and coordinate curriculum, monitor progress, and support the culture through visibility, protect instructional time, and provide professional development opportunities for teachers. Based on the theories, frameworks, and dimensions given in the literature, the instructional leadership idea was explained as a vision, shared leadership, leading a learning community, use of data, and curriculum and instruction.

I considered Hallinger and Murphy's frame but based on the research question focusing on the supervisor's role, I chose the framework developed by The Center for Educational Leadership at Washington University. The Center for Educational Leadership (2014) defines four dimensions of instructional leadership: (a) culture building, vision, and mission; (b) improving instructional practice; (c) allotment of resources; and (d) managing people and processes. According to Center for Educational Leadership (2014), the dimensions strengthen the five core beliefs of this framework and build on the concept that "instructional leadership is a critical aspect of school leadership" (p. 1). Through evidence, leadership attempts result in improving student

learning and teaching practices. The Center for Educational Leadership (2021) details a union between school system leaders and principals in the Principal Support Framework. The framework provides central office leaders with a vision to improve the conditions and to support leadership practices across their systems. The four action areas are: (a) foster an inclusive leadership culture focused on creating equitable experiences and outcomes; (b) co-create a shared vision of principals as leaders of equitable schools; (c) create a system of support for principals to grow as equitable schools and (d) develop a strategic partnership between the central office and principals.

The study, Central Office Transformation for District-wide Teaching and Learning Improvement (Honig et al., 2010), examined central office transformation efforts. The efforts altered the central office into a system that supported teaching and learning. These efforts are grouped into five dimensions:

- (1) learning-focused partnerships with school principals to deepen principals' instructional leadership practices;
- (2) assistance to the central office-principal partnerships;
- (3) reorganizing and reculturing of each central office unit to support the central office-principal partnerships and teaching and learning improvement;
- (4) stewardship of the overall central office transformation process;
- (5) use of evidence throughout the central office to support continual improvement of work practices and relationships with schools.

Building and sustaining a district and school vision correlates to the mission and shifts in the supervisor/principal role. Principal leadership emphasizes instructional

leadership by creating an academic success vision for all students and improving instruction and processes to foster school improvement (Mendels, 2012). To improve the successfulness of principals, in 2015, standards were developed by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) for supervisors. Under the district leadership strand, standard five states principal supervisors advocate for and inform the coherence of organizational vision, policies, and strategies to support schools and student learning.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODS

This basic qualitative study explored Tennessee principals' perceptions of their supervisor's role in developing their instructional leadership capacity. I wanted to understand by what means principals perceive how their principal supervisor develops their instructional leadership capacity, how they build their capacity, and what support they continue to need. In this chapter, I discuss my research methods, the research design, the study context, participants, instrumentation, and data collection, along with an analysis, trustworthiness, positionality statement, and a summary.

The research question guiding this study was:

How do principals in Tennessee perceive their supervisor's role in developing their instructional leadership capacity?

Research Design

I conducted a basic qualitative study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) on the perception of principals in Tennessee of their supervisor's role in developing their instructional leadership capacity. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explain that a basic qualitative study consists of purposeful sampling, data collection via interviews, and findings in themes/categories. I chose a basic qualitative study because I was not bound to a specific context. I conducted semi-structured interviews that used a purposeful sample of principals to explore the perceptions of multiple principals across multiple districts in Tennessee about their principal supervisor's role in building their instructional leadership capacity.

Context

This study explored the perception of elementary principals in Tennessee's East and Southeast regions. The Tennessee Department of Education has a department known as the Office of Statewide Support (Tennessee Department of Education, n.d.). The Office of Statewide Support divides the state into eight regional centers for academic support. The regions are called Centers of Regional Excellence (CORE): First, East, Southeast, Upper Cumberland, Mid Cumberland, South Central, Northwest, and Southwest.

The East and Southeast CORE regions of Tennessee consist of thirty-five school districts: Alcoa City, Anderson County, Athens City, Blount County, Bradley County, Campbell County, Claiborne County, Cleveland City, Clinton City, Dayton City, Etowah City, Grainger County, Grundy County, Hamilton County, Jefferson County, Knox County, Lenoir City, Loudon County, Maryville City, McMinn County, Meigs County, Marion County, Monroe County, Morgan County, Oak Ridge City, Oneida, Polk County, Rhea County, Richard Hardy Memorial School, Roane County, Scott County, Sequatchie County, Sevier County, Sweetwater City, and Union County. The focus was the school districts in the East and Southeast regions.

Participants

Of the 147 Tennessee public school districts, the East and Southeast regions of Tennessee consist of thirty-five school districts. Ten principals of five school districts participated in this study to share their experiences as elementary principals in Tennessee. Two men and eight women participated. A purposeful sampling technique was used to

select the school districts and participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The beginning criteria for this sample were districts in the East and Southeast regions of Tennessee. These two regions were chosen due to similarities within the regions. Some additional criteria were the number of students enrolled, schools in the district, and the number of elementary school principals (Hays & Singh, 2012). Eight Tennessee school districts were chosen. Out of the eight chosen districts, five districts received superintendent approval. The original eight districts are referred to as Districts A through H. The demographics are explained in Table 2.

In Table 2, each district is identified by an alphabet letter to protect the confidentiality of the districts. The information was obtained from a public site on the the Tennessee Department of Education Report Card website. The total number of elementary principals in the eight districts was 50.

After completing the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval process, I emailed the eight approved school districts seeking authorization from the school's directors to conduct research (see Appendix A). Six of the eight directors of schools approved my request. The director of schools completed a district-approved authorization form (see Appendix B). After the district-approved authorization forms were submitted to the IRB, participants were recruited via IRB-approved e-mail communication. An example of the principal recruitment communication is provided (see Appendix C). I obtained the emails from the district or school websites. All the forty-two principals received the email asking for their participation and to spell out the purpose of the study.

Table 2

TN East and Southeast District and School Demographic Data

District	Total Student Enrollment	Number of Schools in District	Number of Elementary School Principals
A	6,091	19	9
B	10,098	22	14
C	5,014	16	8
D	1,740	8	3
E	3,777	12	4
F	2,042	7	3
G	4,031	7	4
H	2,455	7	5

I only sent the email to the elementary principals in the approved districts. The IRB set a limit of sixteen principals. I also received IRB approval to recruit principals in the Tennessee Principals Association (TPA) (Appendix D). IRB approved recruitment through list-serv. The TPA would only post the recruitment blur in their newsletter. Therefore, no principals were recruited through the Tennessee Principals Association. Fortunately, principals from the original individual school districts responded. Ten principals responded out of the forty-two from five different school districts. Two were male, and eight were female principals. A consent form (Appendix E) was emailed to each participant and signed before the interview. Principals were informed that their names would be kept confidential. To protect their identity, I assigned them a pseudonym. Table 3 shows the demographics of the study's participants using their pseudonyms.

Data Collection

Instrumentation

Based on my research question, I created a semi-structured interview protocol (Kvale, 1996) (see Appendix F) to collect information about principals' perceptions of their supervisor's job in developing principal's knowledge of instructional leadership. I informed the principals that I would be verbally asking them questions about how supervisors build their instructional leadership capacity. I used the semi-structured interview protocol because I could adapt to the interview and feel more comfortable starting with specific questions. I used the protocol and began my interview with the ten scripted questions. Some other questions/topics arose during the open ended portion of

Table 3*Participants of the Study Demographics*

Study Participant Name (Pseudonym)	Sex
Ruby	F
Claire	F
Charles	M
Harper	F
Nancy	F
Jacqueline	F
Alex	F
Rose	F
Brooke	F
Evan	M

the interview. I could ask some clarifying questions and summarize the participant's main points during the conversation. I was the one who collected the data. Interviews were conducted online via Zoom, using audio and video. The interviews lasted between thirty and sixty minutes. I recorded the interviews and transcribed them via Zoom. The semi-structured interview questions are presented in Table 4.

Interviews

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews of participants in the study. I identified my target participants and emailed them. I emailed each principal to explain the purpose of my research and asked for their participation. I gave them about a week to respond and then sent a reminder email. If they responded, I emailed them to confirm their willingness to participate, along with a copy of the consent form. We agreed on a day/time for the interview through email. I sent a calendar invite and Zoom link for the virtual interview. I chose Zoom because of its recording and transcribing features. Only the participant and I logged into Zoom via the link on the interview day. I verbally reminded them of the consent form, and they agreed to participate in the study. The principals emailed me a signed copy of their consent form before the interview. We discussed the confidentiality of the information that they would share. I wanted them to feel free to share with me without judgment. This also allowed them to share more information about additional stakeholders involved. All the participants chose to have their video on. I began to ask my structured questions from the interview protocol. I was able to pose some follow-up questions. After interviewing ten principals, data saturation had been met (Guest et al., 2020). A second interview had been approved but was

Table 4

Semi-structured Interview Questions

-
1. What has been your main contact for support from your principal supervisor, such as instructional leadership, student behavior, budgeting, etc.?
 2. What shifts have you seen in the principal supervisor/principal structure?
 3. Describe how you build your instructional leadership capacity.
 4. Why would it be important to build your instructional leadership capacity?
 5. Describe how your principal supervisor currently builds your instructional leadership capacity.
 6. How might your principal supervisor improve their skills to build your instructional leadership capacity?
 7. How are principal supervisors focusing more on instruction compared to the evaluation process?
 8. Has the principal supervisor used a specific coaching approach with you? If so, describe it.
 9. How has the principal supervisor provided one-to-one ongoing professional development?
 10. How has the principal supervisor built a relationship and trust with you?
-

optional.

Data Analysis

The data was examined by using qualitative analysis. According to Saldaña (2021), “a code in qualitative analysis is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (p. 5). Interview transcripts could be the data used for this process. The amount of text that is analyzed can vary. I used the entire semi-structured interview transcripts of each participant. They repeated the process until all ten transcripts had been analyzed.

According to Saldaña (2021), “coding is not a precise science; it is primarily an interpretive act” (p. 7). So, to begin my first coding cycle, I began coding manually using highlighters. I began going line by line to discover emergent themes within the data (Saldaña, 2016). I highlighted repeated words and concepts. As I was highlighting, I also wrote some repeated words on paper. Saldaña (2016) refers to this as analytic memo writing. Saldaña states, “Personal field notes are potential sites in which rich analysis may occur” (p. 59). I reflected on my notes, which helped me realize the emerging big concepts or themes. I coded each transcript manually until all ten were completed. I reread the transcripts and highlighted them in a different color. I also listened to portions of the interviews for clarity and accuracy.

Through my second cycle, I also used eclectic coding. Furthermore, Saldana describes eclectic coding as “when qualitative data can be appropriately coded using a repertoire of methods simultaneously” (p. 223). I remained open-minded to emerging

themes. As I re-read each transcript, I noted any additional data. I identified the themes by listing the main words/statements from the transcripts and my notes on a chart and making connections. I used the main words to create more minor themes and then significant themes and concepts. I then identified patterns that I merged into themes to address the research question.

Trustworthiness

To achieve trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), a researcher must be engaged in triangulation, which is described by Merriam and Tisdell (2016, p. 245) as using sources of data such as "interview data collected from people with different perspectives." Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest sharing the report with the participants. In qualitative studies, member checking is used to show correct findings. Member checks provide the participants an opportunity to check their responses and intentions. I used member checking by emailing participants a copy of their transcript so they could review it and offer feedback if needed. They had an opportunity to evaluate the transcript. "Trustworthiness of a qualitative study also depends on the creditability of the researcher" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 265). All the interviewees signed a consent form and verbally agreed to the recorded interview via Zoom. Then, it was transcribed. Then, I checked for accuracy. For confidentiality, pseudonyms were used, and constant comparison was made throughout the process. I used quotes from participants to create an audit trail.

Role of the Researcher

I came to this study with a unique background. After twenty-three years in education, which includes four school systems and ten schools, as a math consultant and data analyst, I carry my own bias and perspective to this study. Also, I have my perspectives on public school principal supervisors and principals that might influence my research. As a teacher, I taught in Title 1 schools, including students with low socioeconomic status and behavior issues. I have experienced differences in leadership and the need for more communication, especially concerning instructional purposes and how it affected student achievement. I have a connection to this due to my current work. I see a disconnect in the support that principals receive from the principal supervisor concerning instructional leadership. Principals are expected to increase student achievement but often need more opportunities for professional development. When teachers are trained on new instructional materials, such as new high-quality math materials, principals are not included in the learning, but teachers are. Therefore, they need more knowledge of the curriculum to support teachers. The principal supervisor often checks to see if documents are turned in for compliance issues. In addition, I disclosed my role, used member checking, and clarified biases such as reflexivity that might influence the data results (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Finally, I thought about my biases and knowledge of the district structures throughout the process.

Summary of Chapter III

Using a basic qualitative study allowed me to develop semi-structured questions and collect interview data. I was able to analyze the data to generate themes. Saldana

(2021) agreed that data analysis is more than coding and that an outcome of coding is themes. By interpreting and analyzing the data, I was able to (a) understand the professional development support that principals currently receive from principal supervisors to build their instructional leadership capacity, (b) determine additional supports that the principals would like to have from principal supervisors, and (c) discover the perceptions of principals as an instructional leader of their building. Through the data collection and analysis process, I addressed trustworthiness. The data methods resulted in valid findings and were researcher bias.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Through this study, I explored Tennessee principals' perceptions of their supervisor's role in developing the instructional leadership capacity of the principal. I used a basic qualitative research design to address the following research question:

How do principals in Tennessee perceive their supervisor's role in developing their instructional leadership capacity?

I conducted a basic qualitative study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) on the perception of elementary principals in Tennessee of their supervisor's role in developing their instructional leadership capacity. I desired to determine how principals perceive the support they receive from their supervisors, the shifts they have seen in their roles, and how the instructional leadership capacity is being developed. The chapter shows the qualitative findings from the semi-structured interviews of Tennessee elementary principals. I discuss the findings through the instructional leadership framework and the following themes: current direct support, shifts in principal supervisor/principal structure, professional development, how the principal supervisor builds instructional leadership capacity, relationships, communication, and coaching. Following is a discussion of each of the themes supported by principals' quotes gathered from the transcripts from the Zoom recorded interviews. Filler words, such as "um" or repeated words, have been removed for clarity.

Current Direct Support

When initially asked who their primary contact for support from their principal supervisor is, the principals immediately began describing why they contacted their supervisor. The support came from the principal reaching out to the supervisor. The principal would text or call the principal, asking for advice on how to handle a situation or topic. Unplanned situations or situations requiring clarification led to the principals reaching out. As the principals shared their experiences, the direct support that they were receiving became evident.

Ruby stated that the most significant issue she is currently having is behavior. She explains “.....”. She communicates a lot with the supervisor on how to address the behavioral needs of specific students. Harper mentioned that “disciplinary issues is the one thing that I’ve probably sought out the most when I reached out to a supervisor.” Alex shared that her main form of support from her supervisor is “phone conversations regarding behavior”.

Nancy stated,

The money is normally needed for instructional materials such as the English curriculum.....I do understand that I need to be the person ultimately responsible that for instruction, that if my teachers aren’t doing what they’re supposed to be doing. Then my kids are suffering. It’s just again the time management because you still have to do the budget. The behaviors deal with parents, deal with teachers upset.

Jacqueline noted,

At some point people are gonna have to realize we don't have time to do everything. And then once you start stretching people so thin they're not gonna do all of the things as well as they should because you just little time here a little time here, and you can't do it all, so I think that's part of the problem with the instructional strategies. You know, much of our time is going to actually get to be focused in that group because the other stuff has to happen. You have to discipline. You have to deal with the parents who show up. You have to make sure your budget is correct. I mean, you know, can't go to jail. So I just feel like that's an easy thing that can fall where the other stuff can't.

Claire described the support for the principals as “monthly Principal PLCs that are led by... the elementary director.” Charles mentioned that they are “constantly in the data.”

Shifts in Principal Supervisor/Principal Structure

The elementary principals described the shift in their principal supervisors' support. They shared how supervisors are beginning to spend more time in the school building and classrooms instead of only at the central office. They also emphasize the use of curriculum instead of managerial duties. The use of the Instructional Practice Guide (IPG) and walkthroughs has been a factor in the shift.

Ruby shared that,

Being in a small district, there has not been a lot of turnovers in our leadership.

District supervisors are getting into the schools more and taking more active roles

in visiting classrooms and seeing what is happening within the walls of the building. That has been a big shift.

Claire said,

I was an academic coach for years, so I attended the principal coach PLCs in a different manner than this, so I got to see both sides of it. I do believe over the last few years it's become more structured on getting the principals to feel more like a coach.

Harper said, "They want us in the classroom 60% of the day. Our prior role was just maintaining the school." A shift that Nancy has seen is that "they want us in the classroom 60% of our time. And that has been a very big challenge for me because I have to deal with so many other things in the day." Jaqueline described that "the biggest issue is just the change in personnel and what is expected by that new person." She gave an example, such as being required to respond to every email the director sends, and commented, "When it's changing above us, we have to change to them." Alex stated that the structure has been the same, but "they have recently added a central office kind of liaison that is supposed to be bridging some of the gaps between our school and central office."

Professional Development

The findings from the ten principals revealed their various experiences of professional development to build their instructional leadership capacity. Even seasoned principals need ongoing training. Some of them have monthly meetings centered on building instructional leadership and knowledge of the curriculum. The principals

identified a lack of time to attend professional development opportunities, a lack of opportunities provided by their district, and a shift to be more of an instructional leader due to the IPG and walkthroughs. Based on the participants of larger districts, there was a structure in place to provide support. The effectiveness of the support varied.

Nancy voiced,

Walkthroughs where we go in and just look at teacher, and we compare our notes on what we saw and didn't see with the rubrics the walkthrough rubrics and things like that. Like she sees things that I don't see sometimes. And we, you know, we discuss that, and it opens my eyes to things.

Nancy also noted that they "sent me to the NIT ELA literacy network which is help support my instructional leadership capacity.

When asked if they were included in any professional development concerning new English materials,

Ruby stated,

I know that we were invited to those sessions, but I do not know if it was necessarily required. I felt like that is important for me to be part of that because I need to understand what is supposed to take place in the classroom with the new materials and understand it and be able to follow along as well.

Ruby attends conferences and online webinars and participates in PLCs with her instructional coach.

Claire said,

I completed a Principal's Academy, which focused on the IPG, but she also attended a Solution Tree training to learn about the structures of PLCs. Claire added, "to build not only myself but to build the leaders within my school." She attends monthly principal PLCs led by the elementary director; if the director does not know, she brings people in to lead it. An outside source came in to provide training. Principals went into classrooms at the school, did an observation based on the IPG, and discussed what they saw. She stated, "Becoming more structured on getting the principals to feel more like a coach and continued learning of principals."

Jacqueline said,

I feel like we are changing into instructional leaders. I try to do a lot of extra webinars and different things. Just so that I am more current," and mentioned that she feels like "it is hard being an instructional leader and a principal in the building. That is often the thing that slips off."

Rose mentioned, "I cannot understand what they are going through unless I have been through it myself." Rose participates in PLCs led by an instructional coach, learning about using the IPG. She stated they are conducting walkthroughs in the building with a person outside of the district to see what is happening in the classrooms with our instruction. She also participates in online learning and webinars and attends conferences to help her get information that she can bring back and share with her staff. Charles wants to learn more and be in the moment and the classroom. He stated, "I will not hold this position if I am not doing my best....You should have a growth mindset and be willing to

learn.” Harper said they have monthly meetings, and a component of instructional leadership is usually included. However, the district did not fill her professional development bucket. So, she began to seek additional opportunities on her own. Instructional leadership capacity is developed by setting the tone for the vision, mission, and culture of the building. Ruby believes it is to improve student learning, but that test scores play a huge part in what is happening. Claire says, “to make sure we are doing what is best for our kids. To keep up with the trends and to keep current, and to basically not get left behind.” She said, “If you stop learning, it is time to hang it up and go home.” Charles says, “Fake it till you make it – I do not believe in that. That is not worthy in education.” Principals continue to be learners. Harper mentioned, “We are instructional leaders. If I am not knowledgeable in growing myself in that, then how can I best support my teachers as a principal. We are gonna do what’s right by kids on our building.” Brooke also stated, “I want my school to be successful. I feel like that has a lot to do with the leadership. I want my teachers to feel supported, be successful, and feel like I have knowledge.” Evan feels strongly about relationships. He said, “I still think relationships is kind of at the core of what we do. To offer something to help improve a teacher and help improve student learning, the relationship piece must be there first.”

Charles said,

We are here to help kids. To help me become a stronger instructional leader; I want to learn more; our kids are our priority; “everybody in this building is an educator because they support the success of students, both presently and in the future.

How the Principal Supervisor Builds Instructional Leadership Capacity

The ten elementary principals' findings indicated that their supervisors struggle to support them in building their instructional leadership capacity. The larger districts had a structure for intentional monthly training on curriculum or tools, while the small districts did not. Due to their supervisors' lack of support, the principals mainly shared what they do to build their capacity and what they do as leaders of their building to build teachers' capacity.

Ruby affirmed,

I feel that he holds me accountable for test scores. Because unfortunately, that is one of the things that really drives us nowadays, which I kinda hate....but I'm held accountable for our building scores and also through an evaluation process as well. Here in our district, we use Project COACH, and so I'm meeting with them.

Claire said,

We went up to central office met with her to look at data. We had done some data digging and some trends, and so then we just had a conversation. It's not punitive. It was, I mean, very conversational, like, what are you thinking?I think it boils down to communication is the key to all of this.

Charles said,

We have principals' meetings once a month. That's in person that usually pertains to do something that helps us with it could be ELA. It could be math. It could be policy, or anything that might help us at the school level.

Nancy mentioned,

I try to get in the classrooms and do walkthroughs and observations.....it would also be helpful if we had an instructional coach in every building. They want us in that role, too, and that's hard. Being a principal because I've got so many other things. I have to try and manage so being in every meeting that I'm supposed to be in and all the trainings and everything they pull you for like that pulls from that, being unable to go in the classrooms and do that and be that instructional person for the teacher.

Rose said, "The professional learning communities that we do are the biggest piece that helps."

Relationships

The ten elementary principals' findings revealed that principals and supervisors need a strong long-term relationship. The principals identified a need to feel comfortable and have transparency with their supervisors. Trust and respect contribute to the growth of the relationship. Relationships were the center of communication structures, professional development effectiveness, and the support principals were receiving.

Alex stated,

He is very supportive in anything that we do. He backs us up with parents and families. He's very respectful of us. He wants us to do well. He wants us to make our own decisions, but if he feels like that we do something that isn't exactly correct I mean, he'll let us know. But he's nice about it, and you know will coach us, through most of those issues.

Ruby pointed out, “We started at the same school. You must have the ability to trust one another. I have felt very comfortable. The relationship fosters the trust that you have.”

Rose stated, “I have felt very comfortable and could go to them with any type of problem I have. He trusts me to figure it out and get it done. Through the interview, Rose added, “She’s got my back” and “She has a strong relationship with all of us, and I know I know that she’s very confidential like I know everything I say will not be spread around.”

Brooke said, “there is whole lot of history there that really built that trust.” Evan said, “My relationship with her has progressed professionally.”

Communication

The findings of the ten elementary principals revealed that communication was necessary for the principal's supervisor's/principal's support. The principals described how they communicate with their supervisor and the reasons why they reach out for support. Open communication and compassion were important factors. Principals received communication from supervisors through emails or at monthly informational meetings. If the principal needed the supervisor, they would call or text them.

Charles expressed,

I could just pick up the phone and call, and I do that. They do that with me. So, we have a really good communication chain where we can just throw ideas off of each other....there is an open door policy.

Claire said, “I think it boils down to communication, which is the key. You know we are not on an island. Pick up the phone and call.”

Harper explained,

There's always this open line of communication all the way up to our director....I can reach out to them. I mean any time of the day if I needed them, honestly, even in the evening..I feel like if I've messed up on something like I messed up on one thing this week. The policy I goofed on. I forgot it had changed recently, and nothing horrific, but like they had to call me on it and coach me through it, but they didn't slap my hand. They gave grace and know that we all make mistakes.

So I think that builds trust as well to know that we're human.

Jacqueline described, "We can text each other individually, you know....a lot of times before we call a supervisor, we'll often call each other, you know. Have you had this issue come up? What did you do?"

Alex explained,

We are super close with one another. So, we have a little team that, I mean, we've got a constant email thread text thread, and we really rely on each other to help one another, and we are trying to unite.

Rose stated,

She'll be in a meeting and if I call her she may not be able to answer, but she'll text and say I'm in a meeting. Do I need to step out, or can I call you back those kinds of things? So, it's immediate and it's good.

Brooke commented,

I feel like they have an open door. I can call them on their cell phone, and they can call me. It's very easy to communicate with them and get a hold of them.....very good open lines of communication.

Evan said, “Our communication is good. I feel like because there can be times where I just call and be like, hey, I’ve got a this you know. Here’s a problem...”

Coaching

The findings from the ten elementary principals revealed that principals receive some coaching from the supervisor especially if using the Project COACH evaluation system. The principals described how the coaching felt more like a conversation than intentional structured support.

Evan expressed that his observations are “always very intentional. I think Project COACH can lend itself to being like more intentional, with at least the feedback side of things.”

Rose noted,

that they use the coaching model evaluation system....I’ll evaluate myself, and then I’ll figure out what my biggest area of need is, and I meet with my supervisor and the director of schools..... We meet in the beginning, middle, and end. And they’ll say, well, that is your area that you’re working on. How’s it going?

Alex voiced that she would “like a similar approach to how we’re evaluated. You know, similar to ..how like we’re coaching the teachers.” Nancy commented, “She meets with us three times a year for evaluation part.”

Harper shared,

That’s come about with us shifting to this observation model. It’s more authentic...You know they’re focused on spending time and providing that

coaching feedback....They're really there to coach me up and to provide feedback to support me....district believes in using a coaching framework.

She also added, "The policy I goofed on. I forgot it had changed recently, and nothing horrific, but like they had to call me on it and coach me through it, but they didn't slap my hand."

Findings through the Conceptual Framework

Through the study, I explored Tennessee principals' perceptions of the supervisors' role in developing the capacity of their instructional leadership. I used an instructional leadership framework developed by The Center of Educational Leadership at the University of Washington as the conceptual framework to address how supervisors build instructional leadership knowledge of the principals. The Center of Educational Leadership's framework is more applicable to my study as it connects my findings to building a vision, shared leadership, leading a learning community, using data to make instructional decisions, and monitoring curriculum and instruction as components of building instructional leadership capacity.

The principals' perceptions of their supervisor's role in developing their instructional leadership may guide their point of view toward being more involved in classroom instruction. That is to say, principals' perceptions determine their mindset and the culture in the building around instructional leadership. Their mindset around the position of an instructional leader affects how involved they become in curriculum and instruction. They feel the pressure of being a manager, completing compliance tasks, and following policies.

Generally, the ten elementary Tennessee principals in the study were passionate about increasing their instructional leadership capacity, as shown by their statements.

Participants responses included:

- “You should have a growth mindset and be willing to learn.”
- “If you stop learning, it is time to hang it up and go home.”
- “Fake it till you make it – I do not believe in that. That is not worthy in education.”
- “We are instructional leaders. If I am not knowledgeable in growing myself in that, then how can I best support my teachers as a principal. We are gonna do what’s right by kids on our building.”
- “We are here to help kids. To help me become a stronger instructional leader; I want to learn more; our kids are our priority.”

Through this study, I found that while principals wanted to continue learning, they shared how their supervisors struggled to meet their learning needs. The principals want to be included in professional development opportunities to improve their instructional leadership capacity, but they often do not have time or are not included.

Summary

Chapter IV introduced data results from semi-structured interviews with ten principals. The chapter represented the perceptions of principals who serve as Tennessee elementary principals in five different school districts. The research question was answered, resulting in four themes. Supervisor support for principals was an overarching theme connecting to the instructional leadership framework along with subthemes. Thus, for a school district

to engage with a principal to build instructional leadership capacity, a supervisor must build relationships, recognize a need for knowledge, and provide structures for targeted support for growth and improvement.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of the Study

This basic qualitative study investigated Tennessee elementary principals' perceptions toward supervisors and instructional leadership. The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of Tennessee principals of their supervisor's role to develop their instructional leadership capacity. This was achieved through a basic qualitative study that addressed the following research question:

How do principals in Tennessee perceive their supervisor's role in developing their instructional leadership capacity?

Participants from the study included ten Tennessee elementary principals from five school districts.

In Chapter I, I introduced the problem that shaped this study, the purpose of the study, the research question, the significance of the study, definitions, and participant delimitations. In Chapter II, I conducted a literature review of keywords using Garrod's matrix method to focus on the main terms. I discussed the conceptual framework of instructional leadership. Chapter III included the research design, study content, participants, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, and role of the researcher. In Chapter IV, I revealed the findings of the participants; Chapter V discussed an overview of the study, implications, and recommendations for future research.

Discussion of the Findings

Effective principals are essential to a school's success, and school leadership matters (Turnbull et al., 2015). I gained more insight into the principal perceptions of their supervisors and how those perceptions affect their role as instructional leaders. The role of the supervisor and the role of the principal varied in each district. The data revealed a difference between principals' perceptions of the support they currently receive and the support they receive from supervisors to build their instructional leadership capacity. These findings reinforced the study by Thessin (2019) that a strong partnership between a principal supervisor and a principal resulted in trust and changes in the principal's instructional leadership practice. There is trust. However, changes are slow and depend on the structure of the district. In 2014, a shift occurred to revise the job of the principal supervisor to center on instructional leadership (Goldring et al., 2020). Principals in this study shared that they are beginning to see a shift in their principal supervisor's role to support them in instructional leadership due to the Instructional Practice Guide (IPG) tool and the Coach evaluation system. However, nothing is being taken off their plate. They focus on the immediate situations while in the building and work on clerical items later. Following is a deep discussion of each of the themes.

Instructional Leadership

Current Direct Support

Analyzing the current support helped to get a clear picture of current structures from the principal's perspective. Their first responses when asked about the support they receive from their supervisor were not related to instructional leadership. To determine

the current state of support in this study, principals were asked about the support to gain a perspective on their current structure. In The Wallace Foundation study, Principal Pipeline Initiative (2011), six districts were part of the initiative to determine how their current system worked and what structures and policies needed improvement. In the five districts of this study, the direct support principals receive connected back to their role as managers. Principals are managing behavioral issues, new policies, and budget issues. According to Cieminski & Asmus, principal supervisors' jobs have changed from compliance officers and evaluators to instructional leaders who lead with principals and facilitate learning and support to improve teaching and learning (2023). Shelton (2011) also noted that state legislation affects the principal's roles and responsibilities. Principals in this study are still receiving support from supervisors based on immediate need or situation. They are beginning to see the importance of principals being in the classroom and having knowledge of the instruction but really having to handle all the responsibilities. Nothing is being taken off their plate. New situations and policies have been implemented that are taking up their time, such as behavior and trauma situations. The literature review showed that in history, principals were needed for clerical duties (Goodwin et al., 2005), and principals managed fiscal support, implemented policies, and created school organizational structures (Rousmaniere, 2013). Principals in this study continue to have these same previous responsibilities, such as clerical duties and implementing policies. The principals often cited the reality of a principal's role as continuing to balance managerial duties and adding on the instructional leadership expectations.

Instructional Leadership

Participants feel the pressure for their school, teachers, and students to be successful. All of them shared how they value continuing to learn and grow as leaders. The principal is responsible for the teaching and learning occurring in their building. A school's success rests on effective leadership (Gill, 2013). The principals loved sharing about their school and were so passionate about it. They have a desire to continue to learn. There are two parts to the instructional leadership concept: principals as instructional leaders and supervisors building the instructional leadership capacity of principals. This was evident in the findings of this research and the previous research by Goldring et al. (2018) in the literature review.

Professional development is developing the principal's instructional leadership capacity. The district provides some of the professional development during professional learning community (PLC) meetings or monthly principal meetings. Often, the principals seek professional development from outside the district, or vendors come into the district to provide the support.

In 2019, Bouffard stated that principal supervisor initiatives put instructional leadership at the forefront when using the instructional framework, offering aligned professional development for principals, and making adjustments in a central office. Supervisors can be the leverage to support and develop principals. Principals began to understand the importance of the principal supervisor's responsibility to build capacity (Huff et al., 2013). These shifts started due to studies such as The Wallace Foundation's Principal Pipeline Initiative in August 2011. Six districts were part of the initiative to

determine how their current system worked and what structures and policies needed improvement. The Wallace Foundation's *Principal Pipeline Initiative* (Turnbull et al., 2013) highlighted the importance of several components: principal standards, partnerships with university programs, the hiring process, professional development for novice principals, and building the capacity of principal supervisors and mentors to support principals.

Consequently, the responsibility of the principal supervisor needs to shift from a focus on evaluation to a role that provides instructional support and guidance for school principals (New Teacher Center, 2018). Based on the findings, principals were not given differentiated support centralized on their development as leaders. One principal mentioned that he didn't think his supervisor had a plan, but she did ask him every year what was a goal that he had. None of the principals were aware of a formal, structured plan of differentiated support. Goldring et al. (2018) found that one-to-one coaching with a limited number of principals was an essential part of the revised role of a principal supervisor. Some districts are using an evaluation model called Project COACH. The Project COACH has allowed the supervisor to begin to "coach" the principal in an area of need instead of the traditional evaluation rubric.

Principal supervisors' meetings with principals can be seen as professional learning opportunities to create coherence and creditability (Zepeda et al., 2020). Principals in one of the districts shared that they have monthly principal meetings that are led by the curriculum supervisor. During these monthly professional learning opportunities, they have learned about new instructional strategies and the Instructional

Practice Guide (IPG) that is being used to conduct walkthroughs in the classrooms. This requires collaboration between the supervisor and principal and increasing supervisor visibility in the school because the principal and supervisor visit the classrooms together. One-to-one coaching with a limited number of principals was an essential part of the new role for supervisors, according to Goldring et al. (2018). However, finding the time to bring all the principals together or meet to meet with a supervisor was mentioned as an issue. If the structure was in place, it could be powerful and have positive effects. NIET (2021) revealed that the supervisor's potential has been untapped.

The principals resorted back to professional development opportunities that were either provided by the district, such as PLCs and walkthroughs, or their evaluation process. Therefore, no consistent structure or process was described by all ten principals. The principals referred to an evaluation process called Project COACH. Claire and Evan described how the support is conversational and through the coaching lens. They learn from each other. Charles, Alex, and Jaqueline described monthly principals' meetings, during which they give them the information they need for the next month. The structure operates more on an as-needed basis. Brooke has regular district-level principal meetings where they share updates and information and will pass along professional developments they can attend. Due to implementing the IPG tool, principals are in the classrooms more than in the past. Based on the reported data, the findings indicate that the shifts in principal supervisor/principal structure have changed due to an increase in walkthroughs using the IPG tool.

Principals offered suggestions to what degree the principal supervisor could improve instructional leadership capacity skills to provide the principals with adequate support. The main topic was to be visible in the schools and classrooms. They wanted constructive feedback and to improve communication. Ruby shared that despite having much experience, there are more challenges now, and she needs guidance. Alex suggested that she thought having more roundtable talks with them would be much more beneficial. Harper brought up the point that being in the buildings more, being in the trenches, keeping their knowledge fresh on what is going on in our buildings, and having a realistic perspective of what is happening is essential. Harper elaborated on how important it is for the supervisors to be in the buildings because if she goes to them with a concern or question, they are not so out of touch that they do not know what I'm asking.

Relationships

Relationships were another theme that emerged from the findings. In the previous literature, a principal shared the importance of a principal supervisor to build relationships and establish trust (Farmer, 2017). In the findings, principals shared how having trust and long-term relationships with the supervisor created a pathway for communication. The relationship allowed the principals to feel comfortable contacting the supervisor for support. They knew the supervisor would help them. The positive culture that had been created was essential to the relationship. Learning is promoted by developing and sustaining a continuous improvement culture in the central office. The role of supervisor and central office leadership practices can help principals strengthen their instructional leadership as they have a working presence in school leadership

(Honig, 2012). Principals repeatedly mentioned the importance of the supervisors being in the building and being visible in the classrooms. A strong partnership between a principal supervisor and a principal resulted in trust and changes in the instructional leadership practice of the principal (Thessin, 2019). In addition, the findings from this study showed that trust between the principal and supervisor not only enabled open and accessible communication but was necessary to foster relevant structured knowledge.

By improving practices and relying on each other as support, structures for principals to collaborate will be developed. Participants in this study expressed a desire to be connected to other principals and their supervisors. The principals discussed how they have text chat groups to communicate quickly with each other for questions or needed information. Sometimes, they need a thought partner or clarification. This communication has built trust among the principals and deeper relationships. In the previous literature, West and Derrington (2009) reported that communication expectations and relationships create vital leadership attributes. Hayes and Angelle (2021) noted that developing a mutual trusting and understanding relationship through professional growth enables them to grow professionally. Through the supervisor/principal experience, relationships deepen and create a hierarchical nature that leads to growth.

Communication

Finally, communication was connected to all the other themes and was noted through the analysis. There must be communication to build relationships and trust. There must be communication to develop the supervisor and principal's role, build instructional

leadership, and foster professional development. Principals want and need communication from the supervisor and each other. These findings confirmed previous literature by Corcoran et al. that highlighted communication in the report *Rethinking Leadership: The Changing Role of the Principal Supervisor* (2013). One of the findings was establishing information-sharing communication procedures between supervisors and the central office. The principals discussed how most communication from supervisors is now sent through email, such as upcoming meetings, new policies, and updated information. Their main form of communication with their supervisor is calling or texting. The principals mentioned how the communication needs to be intentional and transparent. Most shared that the communication could be improved and more transparent. They often reached out to other principals for clarification on emails or expectations. The importance of a communication structure begins with the supervisor.

Discussion of Findings through the Conceptual Framework

This study explored Tennessee principals' perceptions of their supervisors' role in developing their instructional leadership capacity. The instructional leadership framework was the conceptual framework used to address how supervisors build principals' instructional leadership capacity. The semi-structured interviews concluded with four themes about principals' perceptions of strengthening their instructional leadership capacity.

Using the instructional leadership framework by the Center of Educational Leadership, a theme of current direct support was developed. Principals spend much of their time on behavioral issues and policies. They reach out to their supervisor for advice

on discipline problems and policies related to behavioral issues. The support does create coherence between the supervisor and principal but takes away time and other responsibilities or priorities. Principals shared how they understand why they should build their instructional leadership capacity but struggle to do so.

The second theme was professional development. As supervisors and principals led learning communities, principals shared their desire to continue to be learners themselves. There has been a shift in principals and supervisors being more visible in the classrooms due to the IPG and walkthroughs. Principals are trying to intentionally conduct walkthroughs to be more engaged in classroom instruction. The supervisors conduct the walks, too, and then they can have a coaching conversation. Larger districts had a structure in place to have monthly instructional support for principals, whereas the smaller districts did not.

The third theme was relationships. Relationships and trust enabled the supervisor and principal to connect. Having a previous or long-term relationship helped principals feel like they could share anything with the supervisor without being judged or criticized. The district leadership affected the relationship and culture.

The final theme was communication. Open communication and the option to contact the supervisor at any time allowed more interaction and built trust. The principals often texted or called the supervisor. They felt that it was important to be able to communicate with the supervisor no matter the topic. Most of the time, the communication was not related to curriculum or instruction. Unless the district was using

the Project COACH evaluation system, it created an opportunity for supervisors to coach principals on instructional leadership components.

The instructional leadership framework shapes the structure and mindset that impacts principals' behaviors to become involved in instructional leadership activities. The instructional leadership framework is beneficial in focusing on the support from the supervisor.

Implications

Implications for the qualitative study include those to be considered by the Tennessee Department of Education, additional state education agencies, and school district supervisors. The Tennessee Department of Education must support district-level supervisors with instructional leadership and increase principals' knowledge. Therefore, a principal supervisor framework is required to prepare supervisors to support principals adequately with leadership skills around instruction. The framework would create a structure to guide the support. In addition, the department could create a principal supervisor network to support the collaboration and networking of principal supervisors across the state. Furthermore, due to the various sizes of the districts, the Tennessee Department of Education must find ways to differentiate the support.

The study also has implications for additional state education agencies. First, state education agencies could understand how building the supervisor's instructional leadership capacity can lead to the principal's capacity building and how a framework needs to be in place to support the learning. In addition, supervisors across states would

network together to collaborate and network on ideas and training to promote leadership practices.

Third, school district principal supervisors need training to lead this support and sustain the work. The supervisors must value continuing to build the principals' instructional leadership capacity and the impact the work could have on teachers and students. Last, supervisor training programs must lay out a continuous, purposeful plan with set outcomes to sustain the work and see an impact.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings presented in this study lead to recommendations for future educational research that will further expand the literature on principal supervisors building principals' instructional leadership capacity. Research in principal supervisors building principals' instructional leadership capacity in Tennessee is somewhat limited. The data taken from this study lays the initial groundwork for future studies. Potential areas of interest include continued research with a larger sample size or adding school districts across Tennessee. By continuing to research the impact of supervisors building principals' instructional leadership, the state department and school districts can use information gained to inform state-wide practices. Researchers outside Tennessee might consider a comparison research study to compare current district structures to school districts in other states. Additionally, researchers in other states might consider a pilot study that could provide interesting data for state agencies and district leaders to implement processes on a small scale. Last, one might wish to research principal

supervisor support through instructional leadership versus similar support provided by outside sources of professional development opportunities.

Summary

This basic qualitative study sought to gather Tennessee principals' perceptions of their supervisor's role to develop instructional leadership capacity. One question was researched for this study. The question investigated how principals perceive their supervisor's support to develop their instructional leadership capacity. Four themes emerged in response to the question. The themes were current direct support, instructional leadership, relationships, and communication. The data supported the principal wishing to develop their instructional leadership capacity through support from their principal supervisor must come from structured professional development.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A: District Approval E-mail

Dear {Director of Schools},

I hope this email finds you well. I am requesting permission in writing to contact elementary principals in your district. I am a doctoral candidate working on my dissertation for an Ed.D. degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

I want to contact principals to interview for a research study on the perceptions of Tennessee principals of their supervisor's role in developing their instructional leadership capacity.

I will gather email addresses from their school websites if given the opportunity. Please let me know if you require any further information. I look forward to your response as soon as is convenient.

This is the email that will be sent to principals:

I am emailing to ask if you would be willing to have a virtual conversation about your experiences in developing your instructional leadership. In the interview, I will ask you to discuss your experiences and the district procedures and processes on how principal supervisors build your instructional leadership capacity. The interview will take approximately 60 minutes and will be scheduled at your convenience over the next several weeks, and an optional 30-minute second interview (if needed) to clarify information. Finally, please know that your responses are confidential; neither individuals nor schools will be identified in the study results.

If you agree to participate in the study, then I will send you a consent form so you will have more information about the study. If you have five or more years of experience as a principal and are willing to participate, please reply to this email to let me know, and we can schedule an interview. Thank you in advance for your consideration. I genuinely appreciate how valuable your time is right now.

Sincerely,

Brandie Phillips Arnold | Ed.D. Candidate
Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
University of Tennessee - Knoxville

Appendix B: School District Authorization

School District Authorization to Conduct Research

Date: {enter date}

Dear Institutional Review Board:

The purpose of this letter is to inform you that I give Dr. Sonya Hayes and Brandie Arnold permission to conduct the research titled **Perceptions of Tennessee Principals of their Supervisors' Role in Developing their Instructional Leadership Capacity** at Campbell County Schools. We have agreed to the following study procedures <insert procedures that the district has agreed to> .

This also serves as assurance that this district complies with requirements of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and will ensure that these requirements are followed in the conduct of this research.

Sincerely,

<Name of Signatory>

<Title of Signatory>

Appendix C: Participant Recruitment E-mail

Dear {Participant},

I hope this email finds you well. Your district shared your name with me so I may contact you for a research interview for a study on the perceptions of Tennessee principals in their supervisor's role in developing their instructional leadership capacity.

I am emailing to ask if you would be willing to have a virtual conversation about your experiences in developing your instructional leadership. In the interview, I will ask you to discuss your experiences and the district procedures and processes on how principal supervisors build your instructional leadership capacity. The interview will take approximately 60 minutes and will be scheduled at your convenience over the next several weeks, and an optional 30-minute second interview (if needed) to clarify information. Finally, please know that your responses are confidential; neither individuals nor schools will be identified in the study results.

If you agree to participate in the study, then I will send you a consent form so you will have more information about the study. If you have five or more years of experience as a principal and are willing to participate, please reply to this email to let me know, and we can schedule an interview. Thank you in advance for your consideration. I genuinely appreciate how valuable your time is right now.

Sincerely,

Brandie Phillips Arnold | Ed.D. Candidate
Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
University of Tennessee - Knoxville

Appendix D: Recruitment Email for Tennessee Principals Association Newsletter

For Tennessee Principals Association (TPA) Newsletter

Research Participants Needed

I am conducting research interviews for a study on **Perceptions of Tennessee Principals of their Supervisor's Role in Developing their Instructional Leadership Capacity**.

In the virtual interview, I will ask you to discuss your experiences, district procedures, and processes on how principal supervisors build your instructional leadership capacity. The interview will take approximately 60 minutes and will be scheduled at your convenience over the next several weeks, with an optional 30-minute second interview (if needed) to clarify information. Finally, please know that your responses are confidential; neither individuals nor schools will be identified in the study results.

If you agree to participate in the study, I will send you a consent form so you will have more information about the study. If you have five or more years of experience as a principal and are willing to participate, please email me at bphill50@utk.edu, and we can schedule an interview. Thank you in advance for your consideration. I genuinely appreciate how valuable your time is right now. Dr. Sonja D. Hayes is the chair of my committee/principal investigator. You may contact her at shayes22@utk.edu if you have questions.

Brandie Phillips Arnold | Ed.D. Candidate
Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
University of Tennessee - Knoxville
bphill50@utk.edu

Appendix E: Standard Informed Consent Form

Consent for Research Participation

Research Study Title: Perceptions of Tennessee Principals of their Supervisors' Role in Developing their Instructional Leadership Capacity

Researcher(s): Brandie Arnold and Dr. Sonya Hayes, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Department

Why am I being asked to be in this research study?

We are asking you to be in this research study because you are a principal in Tennessee.

What is this research study about?

The purpose of the research study is to explore the perceptions of Tennessee principals of their supervisor's role in developing their instructional leadership capacity.

How long will I be in the research study?

If you agree to be in this study, your participation will include one virtual interview over the course of four months with the option of a second interview (if needed). The first interview will last no more than 60 minutes, and the second interview will last no longer than 30 minutes.

What will happen if I say "Yes, I want to be in this research study"?

If you agree to be in this study, we will ask you to electronically sign this informed consent form. We will then ask you to participate in a one-on-one interview with one of the researchers via ZOOM. This interview will last no more than 60 minutes. We will schedule a follow-up second interview (if needed) after our initial data collection to clarify any information or follow up on additional information, and this interview will last no longer than 30 minutes.

What happens if I say "No, I do not want to be in this research study"?

Being in this study is up to you. You can say no now or leave the study later.

Either way, your decision won't affect your relationship with the researchers or the University of Tennessee.

What happens if I say "Yes" but change my mind later?

Even if you decide to be in the study now, you can change your mind and stop at any time.

If you decide to stop before the study is completed, please email Dr. Sonya Hayes at

shayes22@utk.edu informing her of your intention to withdraw from the study. Any data collected prior to your withdrawal will be destroyed.

Are there any possible risks to me?

It is possible that someone could find out you were in this study or see your study information, but we believe this risk is small because of the procedures we use to protect your information. These procedures are described later in this form.

Are there any benefits to being in this research study?

We do not expect you to benefit from being in this study. Your participation may help us to learn more about how principal supervisors build principals' instructional leadership capacity. We hope the knowledge gained from this study will benefit others in the future.

Who can see or use the information collected for this research study?

We will protect the confidentiality of your information by securing all data on a secure server at the University. We will redact any identifiable information from the transcripts and assign a pseudonym to you as a participant. The only individuals who will have access to the data will be Dr. Sonya Hayes and Brandie Arnold. All identifiable data will be kept on a secured UT server and destroyed after five years. If information from this study is published or presented at scientific meetings, your name and other personal information will not be used.

We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information or what information came from you. Although it is unlikely, there are times when others may need to see the information, we collect about you. These include:

- People at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville who oversee research to make sure it is conducted properly.
- Government agencies (such as the Office for Human Research Protections in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services), and others responsible for watching over the safety, effectiveness, and conduct of the research.
- If a law or court requires us to share the information, we would have to follow that law or final court ruling.

What will happen to my information after this study is over?

We will not keep your information to use for future research and publications. Your name and other information that can directly identify you will be deleted from your research data collected as part of the study.

We will not share your research data with other researchers.

What else do I need to know?

If we learn about any new information that may change your mind about being in the study, we will tell you. If that happens, you may be asked to sign a new consent form.

Who can answer my questions about this research study?

If you have questions or concerns about this study, or have experienced a research related problem or injury, contact the researchers, contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. Sonya Hayes, shayes22@utk.edu.

For questions or concerns about your rights or to speak with someone other than the research team about the study, please contact:

Institutional Review Board
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville
Phone: 865-974-7697
Email: utkirb@utk.edu

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I have read this form and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the chance to ask questions and my questions have been answered. If I have more questions, I have been told who to contact. By signing this document, I am agreeing to be in this study. I will receive a copy of this document after I sign it.

Name of Adult Participant

Signature of Adult Participant

Date

I also understand that individual interviews will be conducted via Zoom, and these interviews will be recorded via audio and video recordings. I also understand that only the researchers will have access to these recordings. By signing this document, I agree to both audio and video recordings of my interview(s).

Researcher Signature (to be completed at time of informed consent)

I have explained the study to the participant and answered all of his/her questions. I believe that he/she understands the information described in this consent form and freely consents to be in the study.

Name of Research Team Member

Signature of Research Team Member

Date

Appendix F: Interview Protocol

- 1.What has been your main contact for support from your principal supervisor, such as instructional leadership, student behavior, budgeting, etc.?
2. What shifts have you seen in the principal supervisor/principal structure?
- 3.Describe how you build your instructional leadership capacity.
- 4.Why would it be important to build your instructional leadership capacity?
- 5.Describe how your principal supervisor currently builds your instructional leadership capacity.
- 6.How might your principal supervisor improve their skills to build your instructional leadership capacity?
- 7.How are principal supervisors focusing more on instruction compared to the evaluation process?
- 8.Has the principal supervisor used a specific coaching approach with you? If so, describe it.
- 9.How has the principal supervisor provided one-to-one ongoing professional development?
- 10.How has the principal supervisor built a relationship and trust with you?

VITA

Brandie Phillips Arnold is the oldest child of James and Treva Phillips. She graduated from Anderson County High School in 1994 in Clinton, TN. She received her Bachelor of Science degree in Pre-teaching Elementary Education in 1998 and a Master of Science degree in Elementary Education in 1999, both from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. In 2004, she received her Educational Specialist degree in Instructional Leadership from Tennessee Technological University. She has worked with the Tennessee Department of Education since 2019. In 2024, Brandie completed her Doctor of Education degree in Educational Leadership at the University of Tennessee. She currently works as a data analyst for the Tennessee Department of Education. After graduation, she plans to pursue work in higher education or policy studies.