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The Relationship Between Servant Leadership and Teacher Retention and Student Achievement

David Earl Murphy

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SERVANT LEADERSHIP AND TEACHER RETENTION
AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

by

DAVID EARL MURPHY

(Under the Direction of Teri Denlea Melton)

ABSTRACT

This non-experimental quantitative study aimed to determine if servant leadership influenced teacher retention or student achievement and if teacher retention influenced student achievement. This study's respondents were 145 middle and high school teachers within a contiguous rural region of the Southeastern United States. Survey responses were received and analyzed during the late summer of 2020. Three research questions guided this study: Does servant leadership [high, low] influence teacher retention intention; What is the effect of servant leadership [high, low] on student achievement by categorical population groups as identified by the GaDOE; and lastly, What is the effect of teacher retention intention [stay, leave] on student achievement while controlling for servant leadership perception overall by categorical population groups as identified by the GaDOE? However, limited sample sizes impacted the statistical significance of the study. Nonetheless, small to moderated and moderate effect sizes existed across many of the variables. The associated analyses revealed three key findings. First, servant leadership held approximately 10% of the variance for teachers' retention intention. Second, teachers' perceptions of their school principals' servant leadership bore no relationships to student achievement. Third, teacher retention yielded a minimal positive association with English Language Arts and Social Studies and a relatively strong negative correlation in mathematics. This study provides educational leaders with the realizations that servant leadership offers an effective means to combat teacher attrition and focus their efforts on those issues within their spheres of influence.

INDEX WORDS: Servant leadership, Educational leadership, Teacher retention, Teacher attrition, Student achievement

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SERVANT LEADERSHIP AND TEACHER RETENTION
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DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is first and foremost dedicated to my best friend and wife, Tina Murphy, for the never-ending love, support, encouragement, and spiritual partnership that you show me. You continue to amaze me with the Proverbs 31 life you live in serving our daughters and me. You are indeed an example of a servant leader within our home, and I thank you immensely for the sacrifices that you have made, which afforded me the ability to fulfill this goal.

This dissertation is also dedicated to my two daughters: Zoe and Payton. I hope that this journey has provided you with an understanding that dreams and goals are always worth the effort needed to obtain them. Never sell yourselves short nor cheat yourselves of any dream or goal just because they may be challenging. To paraphrase John F. Kennedy, choose them because they are! I know this doctoral journey drew my time and attention away from you; yet, you both always understood. Thank you both, and I love each of you beyond measure.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Georgia's State Superintendent of Schools reported in February 2019 at a Joint Education Committee meeting two alarming statistics. First, 44% of Georgia's new teachers leave the profession within five years of employment, and second, only 2.7% of the 53,000 teachers surveyed recommend teaching as a profession to their students (Woods et al., 2019). However, this concerning trend is not limited to Georgia or even the United States. Teacher attrition is problematic across the globe, and many school districts are beginning to hire non-traditional and even non-certified individuals to fill classroom voids created by those either leaving the school or the profession entirely (McBrayer & Melton, 2018; Young, 2018; Zhang & Zeller, 2016).

The loss of teachers, both veteran and new, poses a negative impact on student achievement and the overall success of the instructional institution (Bressman et al., 2018; Torenbeek & Peters, 2017; Vagi et al., 2017). Furthermore, teachers who transfer from the school or leave the profession compromise valuable time and resources upon leaving, and all of the resources used to train them must be reinvested (Torenbeek & Peters, 2017). The economic and intellectual costs associated with teacher turnover, in turn, diminish student achievement.

Research exists related to the decreased outcomes teacher turnover places on student achievement (Ávalos & Valenzuela, 2016; Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Conroy et al., 2019; Dicke et al., 2019; Dunn et al., 2017; Torenbeek & Peters, 2017; Whipp & Geronime, 2015; Wright et al., 2019), which is the overarching purpose behind schooling. Furthermore, research has demonstrated the disproportionate impact teacher turnover generates for struggling schools, particularly, those with high populations of economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, and/or students of color (Ávalos & Valenzuela, 2016; Billingsley & Bettini, 2019;

Nicotera et al., 2017; Samuels, 2018). Research cites various reasons for teachers leaving the profession, such as inadequate teacher preparation programs, the stressful demands of the profession, loneliness, high-stakes testing, and a myriad of personal reasons, which are all well-noted in the literature. However, the lack of administrative support rises to the top of the list in a substantial number of the findings (Ávalos & Valenzuela, 2016; Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Bukhari & Kamal, 2018; Carlson, 2013; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Dicke et al., 2019; Dunn et al., 2017; Forseille & Raptis, 2016; Ozmen, 2019; Polatcan & Cansoy, 2019; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017; Somech & Bogler, 2019).

Leadership is an often-misunderstood concept reserved for those in the top ranks of the organization (Maxwell, 2008). In reality, leadership occurs anytime one individual moves another toward some thought or action; thus, influence exists throughout the entire organization (Maxwell, 2008). Unfortunately, far too many titled with leadership positions do not recognize the potential and lasting impacts of their actions, nor do they understand the limited traction their initiatives hold when others view them as fleeting or temporary fixes awaiting the next initiative or redirection (Ávalos & Valenzuela, 2016; Bressman et al., 2018; Joe et al., 2018; Somech & Bogler, 2019).

This realization is particularly essential within education because a society's future success rests upon the quality of its educational system. As stated by Leithwood and Louis (2012), educational leadership serves two primary purposes: “providing direction and exercising influence” (p. 4). Educational leadership, therefore, occurs over the entire expanse of the organization's interactions from senior-level leadership to classroom teachers.

Leaders and educators alike carry out their roles in some relation to two dichotomous views—“leader-first” or “servant-first” (Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership, 2016). The

individual's stance along the "leader-first" to "servant-first" continuum sets the perceptual tones others possess toward the individual and, by association, the organization as a whole. Hence, this perception affects the organization's climate within the classroom, throughout the building, and across the district.

Sergiovanni (2001) asserted that "neither the caring needed nor the learning needed can be easily packaged, scripted, [or] imported" (p. 79). These requisites must come from what the organization holds as its founding principles and the meaning found through its community. Unfortunately, leadership is not an "if-then" enterprise; it is seldom situational or calculated in its nature (Sergiovanni, 2001).

A style of leadership that invokes meaningful change is personal, relevant, and intentional. It is conscious; "it is power with, not power over, those they seek to lead" (Sisodia, 2018, p. 21). Educational leaders must continuously strive to recognize the impacts of their decisions, devote themselves to purposes larger than selfish ambition, and intentionally act accordingly if optimal student success is truly their goal. So, the educational leader would be wise to consider others before self, intentionally invest in the success of others, purposefully guide them to greater heights, and continuously hold them accountable for self-efficacy and continued growth—the foundational tenets of *servant leadership* (Sergiovanni, 2001).

Servant leadership, the theoretical framework for this study, "is an (1) other-oriented approach to leadership (2) manifested through one-on-one prioritizing of [individual follower's] needs and interests, (3) and outward reorienting of [the leader's] concern for self towards concern for others within the organization and the larger community" (Eva et al., 2019, p. 114). As such, "a servant-leader focuses primarily on the growth and well-being of people and the communities to which they belong... The servant-leader shares power, puts the needs of others

first, and helps people develop and perform as highly as possible” (Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership, 2016). However, limited research exists concerning the effects of servant leadership within P-12 education and, therefore, a gap exists within the literature, thus warranting further research.

Statement of the Problem

Limited information exists as to which of the numerous leadership theories best promotes teacher retention. Thus, school leaders possess minimal information on how to best support their faculty, staff, and students. However, leaders who better understand which leadership styles, characteristics, or traits provide the most significant opportunities for teacher retention, increased support, intentional practices, and academic actions will better serve those whom they lead and, more importantly, propagate future success through their leader-minded stewardship.

The harsh reality is that teacher attrition continues to impact P-12 education and the students served negatively. Many teachers identify ineffective and non-supportive leadership as the reason for their departure. The negative impact that teacher turnover holds on student achievement warranted further research. The constant turnover poses potential economic and academic concerns for schools in terms of increased training costs and decreased student achievement. Additional research, therefore, was still needed to fully understand how leaders might minimize teacher attrition and the adverse effects it poses for student achievement.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine the relationship between servant leadership, teacher retention, and student achievement. Therefore, the ultimate goal of this study was to assess servant leadership’s impact on student achievement, which would provide

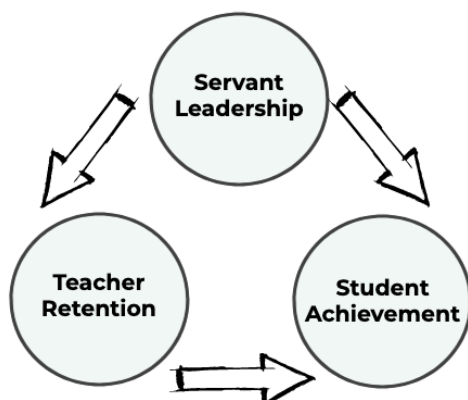
educational leaders with information to improve their academic stewardship and the molding of future leaders and teachers.

Teachers were asked to provide their perception of the school principal's leadership through the Servant Leadership Questionnaire: SL-7 (Adapted; see Appendix B) developed by Liden et al. (2015). Also, teachers answered three questions related to their intentions to remain in the school or even remain in education. The researcher used the SL-7 results, the three additional intended retention questions, and the associated school's student achievement data found through the Georgia Department of Education's (GaDOE) *College and Career Readiness Performance Index* (CCRPI) to gather insight to the following overarching research question: What is the relationship between school leaders' level of servant leadership as perceived by teachers, teacher retention expectations within the school, and student achievement? To further assist in this understanding, the following equally weighted research questions (RQ) were employed:

1. Does servant leadership [high, low] influence teacher retention intention?
2. What is the effect of servant leadership [high, low] on student achievement by categorical population groups as identified by the GaDOE?
3. What is the effect of teacher retention intention [stay, leave] on student achievement while controlling for servant leadership perception overall by categorical population groups as identified by the GaDOE?

The researcher hypothesized that a high servant leadership score will positively correlate with both teacher retention intention and student achievement.

Figure 1.1: Conceptual Framework



Significance of the Study

The loss of quality teachers negatively impacts student achievement, and many educators report ineffective and non-supportive leadership as the reason for leaving the profession. The root cause may be attributed to the leadership itself. An additional consideration, therefore, must be given to the various leadership models and their associated leadership characteristics. The understood qualities and characteristics of servant leadership counter many of the complaints seen in the literature. Because servant leadership seeks to empower and cultivate the follower through the leader's support, it seemed reasonable that effective teachers would choose to remain in the profession and, more importantly, in the school when they perceive their leader as one who honestly attempts to support them, not for the leader's benefit but rather for the teachers' growth and professional development.

Student achievement may also exhibit positive gains when experienced teachers are supported and remain in the profession. Although increased student achievement may not be initially present, the potential exists for servant mindedness to trickle down to the teaching staff and manifest under the servant leader's guidance and modeled practice. When classroom teachers and administrators embrace the servant leader mindset, the student is no longer seen as a

product of the process but rather as its purpose, which may positively influence student achievement.

This study also aimed to add to the limited understanding of best educational leadership theories and characteristics by providing evidence concerning servant leadership. Each of the traits attributed to a servant leader, although in varying degrees, exists in other prominent leadership theories, but only servant leadership views the leader's role through humanistic compassion. This study provided an added component of the follower's perceived care by the leader that most other leadership theories fail to address.

Procedures

The setting for this study was a contiguous region of middle and high schools from seven small rural school districts located in the southeastern United States. All of these schools work within the same *Regional Education Service Agency* (RESA) collaborative, and all but three of the districts report more than 50% of their students as being economically disadvantaged (ED). Additionally, each of the participating school districts posted similar per-pupil expenditures (Georgia Department of Education, 2019).

This study employed a quantitative design using the existing multidimensional servant leader survey, the SL-7, created by Liden et al. (2015), three additional researcher-developed questions, and Georgia's *College and Career Readiness Performance Index* (CCRPI). A total of approximately 920 teachers in the associated districts were invited to complete an anonymous online survey regarding their opinion of the servant leadership behaviors of their school principals as well as each individual's intention to remain in the school and the teaching profession. The survey was administered via Qualtrics®, a link to which was sent to participants via email.

This quantitative correlational study employed descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation, a one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) for both RQ1 and RQ2, and a one-way multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) for RQ3. However, this study was a dissertation in practice with noted geographic and ethnographic limitations; therefore, the study may not possess robust enough findings for generalizability or transferability. Nonetheless, adequate descriptions are provided so that the reader may make those determinations for repeated research or citation.

Definition of Key Terms

For this study, the following key terms are defined as follows:

Autocratic Leadership – This is a leadership mentality that requires leaders to maintain complete control over the situations and subordinates. This approach works quickly and is frequently applied in times of crisis where directions need following without delay (Ahmad & Dilshad, 2016).

College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI) – Georgia adopted this annual accountability tool to determine instructional effectiveness in Georgia's districts and schools. The CCRPI includes five primary components: Achievement, Progress, Closing Gaps, Readiness, and Graduation Rate for high schools only; (Georgia Department of Education, 2019).

Democratic Leadership – This leadership mentality allows for group input for both the process and decision-making. However, democratic leaders still most often maintain the ultimate authority throughout the process and have the final say. This type of leadership has been demonstrated to increase the subordinates' feelings of satisfaction (Ahmad & Dilshad, 2016).

Laissez-faire Leadership – This leadership approach applies a hands-off approach to leadership that gives the subordinates the bulk of the responsibility and decision-making authority. The laissez-faire leader works to support the subordinates but believes that the afforded autonomy will create a better outcome (Ahmad & Dilshad, 2016).

Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) – This is a leadership theory that conceptualizes the dyadic relationship between the leader and the follower. Furthermore, LMX considers that followers exist according to two classifications: *in-group* and *out-group*. Those identified as in-group frequently receive additional support from the leaders, while out-group subordinates receive only those supports which are contractually required (Northouse, 2018).

Regional Education Service Agencies (RESAs) –Georgia has 16 RESAs serving the needs of Georgia's school districts, which were established in 1966 to gain leverage by combining resources across district enrollment lines. All 16 of Georgia's RESAs provide services in the areas of research and planning, professional development, curriculum and instruction, assessment and evaluation, technology, health, and school improvement. Often, RESAs will meet specific needs requested by their governing board, comprised of the superintendents of the districts served (*Georgia Regional Educational Service Agencies (RESAs)*, 2019).

Servant Leadership – This leadership theory “is an (1) other-oriented approach to leadership (2) manifested through one-on-one prioritizing of [individual follower’s] needs and interests, (3) and outward reorienting of [the leader’s] concern for self towards concern for others within the organization and the larger community” (Eva et al., 2019, p. 114). As such, “a servant-leader focuses primarily on the growth and well-being of people and the

communities to which they belong... The servant-leader shares power, puts the needs of others first, and helps people develop and perform as highly as possible” (Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership, 2016).

Student Achievement – The amount of learning growth students obtain within a specified timeframe. This achievement is frequently reported according to the time attributed to the instruction under a particular teacher’s care (Tygret, 2017). For this study, student achievement relates to the overall and content specific Content Mastery scores on Georgia’s annual *College and Career Readiness Performance Index* (CCRPI) used to measure student, school, and district performance.

Teacher Retention – For this study, teacher retention is viewed according to three possible outcomes: remaining within the school, remaining within the profession at another school, or leaving education altogether. Improving teacher retention is paramount because “researchers have constantly recognized teachers as the single-most-important within-school predictor of a student’s future academic success” (Fitchett & Heafner, 2018).

Transformational Leadership – This leadership theory seeks to empower employees in accomplishing tasks that maximize the organizations' processes and goals. This leadership mentality aims to address and is concerned with the subordinate's ethics, values, and goals. "As its name implies, transformational leadership is a process that changes and transforms people" (Northouse, 2018, p. 163).

Chapter Summary

Servant leadership has received renewed recognition that promotes it as a viable leadership style. This study’s findings foster the need for a closer look into the educational

outcomes related to servant leadership. Educational leaders must begin to identify which leadership processes most greatly impact teacher retention if we ever hope to maximize student achievement.

Thus, the purpose of this correlational study was to determine the relationship between servant leadership, teacher retention, and student achievement. The study requested middle and high school teachers from superintendent-approved school districts in the Rural RESA to answer questions from an existing servant leadership survey along with three additional questions related to retention intent. These ratings were then used in conjunction with CCRPI student achievement data to determine if a meaningful relationship existed. The results of this study will hopefully aid educational leaders in better supporting their teachers and, ultimately, their students.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Although leadership holds similarities across various contexts and purposes, each enterprise requires unique applications and approaches for optimal efficacy. Schools, therefore, require “special leadership because schools are special places” (Sergiovanni, 2000, p. 165). A school’s stakeholders are vested with personal connections both in convention and concept. As a result, educators seek to provide a quality education that parents expect and students deserve.

The harsh reality, however, is that many educators are leaving the profession for various reasons rooted both within and outside of the teaching profession (Ávalos & Valenzuela, 2016; Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Carlson, 2013; Lindqvist et al., 2014; Somech & Bogler, 2019). Regardless of why teachers leave, their exodus frequently proves detrimental to student achievement. Nevertheless, an antidote exists to combat some of the issues related to teacher attrition—effective leadership (Thibodeaux et al., 2015; Vari et al., 2018). Educational leaders must work toward mitigating those detrimental factors that rest within their spheres of influence such as valuing time, looking for efficiencies, empowering creativity, and attempting to accommodate for and support their faculty and staff during those times when external detractors weigh heavy on them.

For this reason, the following review of literature will examine three sequential themes within education that align with this study. The first theme relates to the adverse effects of teacher attrition and its negative impacts on student achievement. The second theme connects the impacts of leadership with the final goal of increased student achievement. More specifically, it will review the educational implications of quality instruction, teacher attrition, student

achievement, leadership, educational leadership, and conclude with an overarching review of the third theme, servant leadership.

Although the literature concerning servant leadership is becoming more prevalent, particularly in Middle Eastern and Asian studies, the preponderance of that research pertains to for-profit organizations and utilizes statistical calculations based on a holistic servant leadership score. Two distinct gaps exist for the application of servant leadership within schools—first, the value of servant leadership within educational institutions and second, the identification of which, if any, individual servant leadership’s characteristic traits improve teacher retention and student achievement. Thus, this review of the literature will include quality instruction, teacher attrition, student achievement as related to teacher retention, leadership, educational leadership, and servant leadership, the theoretical framework of this study.

Literature Search

The search for literature was initially conducted through the Georgia Southern library’s online search tool, Discover@GeorgiaSouthern to access both ERIC and EBSCOhost databases. Google Scholar also provided access to some content during specialized searches. Additionally, search terms and phrases such as *servant leadership*, *educational leadership*, *leadership*, *leadership styles*, *teacher retention*, and *student achievement* narrowed the search even further. Furthermore, the Discover@GeorgiaSouthern searches were further constrained by selecting academic journals that were available, online, scholarly/peer reviewed, and within the last five years options. This search process prompted the use of various databases, such as Academic Search Complete, EconLit, Professional Development Collection, Science Direct, Social Sciences Citation Index, and multiple academic journals.

However, the search strategy changed to a more direct and intentional approach following the initial search. The change in strategy required the researcher to identify relevant references from the original peer reviewed articles and then search for them through the Discover@GeorgiaSouthern search feature for further review. This approach provided a strategic focus aligned to each of the following review of literature headings.

Quality Instruction

“Quality education has three beneficiaries: ... students, stakeholders, and society” (Paraschivescu, 2016, p. 9), and countries across the globe have been searching for ways to improve academic achievement for students at all academic levels in their care (Azigwe et al., 2016; Bekalu, 2019; Farah, 2017; Gil-Izquierdo & Cordero, 2017; Paraschivescu, 2016; Wang & Xie, 2018), and teachers rest at the heart of quality instruction. However, the unfortunate, and often, truth is that “financial pressures force [teacher preparation] programs to remain generic... [and] emphasize knowledge and practices approved by experts and state agencies” (Kuriloff et al., 2019, p. 62). Furthermore, the rapid advancement of the information age has antiquated more than a few of those practices because educational organizations have evolved dramatically over the past several decades (Paraschivescu, 2016, p. 12).

Twenty-first-century education has moved beyond rote learning and textbooks to the expectation that students must now create information rather than simply take it in (Paraschivescu, 2016). In fact, “long-term learning is not about recalling discrete facts but rather in mastering complex skills that can be performed outside the teacher's presence” (Fischer et al., 2018). Therefore, students must learn to integrate information and ideas through collaborative reasoning, engagement, struggle, and reflection (Boston et al., 2017; Eshuis et al., 2019; Fischer et al., 2018; Rollins, 2017). Thus, the most effective teachers now act as facilitators who guide

students along their educational journeys.

Teacher Impact

The role teachers hold in student achievement has been demonstrated across decades of research (Cordero & Gil-Izquierdo, 2018). Unfortunately, schools enrolling populations with the highest academic needs frequently possess staff with the least training (Battey et al., 2016; Kuriloff et al., 2019; Zhang & Zeller, 2016). Instruction, as a result, is weakest where it is needed most, and students often do not achieve their full potential or realize optimal academic achievement; therefore, improving teacher quality continues to remain an elusive and challenging goal for education reformers (Kuriloff et al., 2019).

Although educational systems around the world vary in makeup, expectations, and cultural ideologies, the classroom teacher remains paramount to student success. Effective instruction has been, currently is, and will continue to be vital for successful student achievement and the future success of any society. For instance, Leithwood and Louis (2012) found that more than one-third of the variance of students' academic achievement relates to classroom factors. Even more impactful, Hattie (2003) reported that 30% of the variance related to student achievement was held by the teacher. Azigwe et al.'s (2016) study of mathematics education in Ghana established that 55% of the variance of student achievement rested at the classroom level while only 45% was recognized at the student level. Additionally, a study conducted on classroom instruction discovered that teachers who scored one standard deviation (SD) higher on the rubric developed for that study "associated with a 0.15 [standard deviation] higher pupil test score in math, a 0.18 [standard deviation] higher score in spelling and a 0.11 [standard deviation] higher score in reading" (Steege & Gerritsen, 2016, p. 421). Moreover, Torenbeek and Peters (2017) determined that "teacher performance of one standard deviation above the mean may

result in annual margin gains of over \$20,000 on [the] present value of student earnings" (p. 392). Similarly, a study of vocational instruction in Padang established that teacher professionalism accounted for 13.4% of the student achievement measured (Bakar, 2018, p. 71). Therefore, effective instruction must be the purpose and lens of evaluation for educators and the avenue by which students are assessed regardless of the educational setting.

Fortunately, preservice teacher preparation has begun to see changes that better prepare new educators to meet the challenges of 21st-century learners. Ronfeldt (2015) identified that new teachers were better at raising student achievement when their preservice schools possessed a cohesive teacher community and/or, to some degree, aligned with the employing school "in terms of student enrollment, school level, and/or, to a lesser degree, [the] proportion of low-income students" (p. 318). Some in-service teachers, however, have great trepidation with accepting preservice student teachers. Nonetheless, Tygret (2017) found that individual student growth was demonstrated through increased test scores when the supervising teacher and student-teacher worked together in order to differentiate instruction and meet individual student needs. Furthermore, those same supervising teachers reported a heightened reflection of their performance (Tygret, 2017).

Although no defined consensus exists for high-quality instruction, Tygret (2017) noted that "teacher leadership and collaboration, effective classroom management and positive learning environment, masterful content knowledge and delivery, high expectations for self and students, and creating engaging learning opportunities" (p. 118) indicated effective teaching, which can contribute to student achievement. These indicators also align internationally with those identified by Ertem Akbaş et al. (2019) in their study of Turkish high school mathematics students. Their research found that students revealed four overarching categories that indicated

quality instruction: pleasant personal characteristics, effective communication, differentiated instruction, and informative evaluation feedback.

Focused Instruction

Education professionals can press for a culture of "high-quality instruction [which] can result in higher student achievement" (Boston et al., 2017). However, that drive possesses the unfortunate opportunity to create weary educators who subsequently lose motivation (Farah, 2017; Gobena, 2018; Torenbeek & Peters, 2017; Young, 2018). Furthermore, Gobena's (2018) research on in-service secondary teachers in Ethiopia identified that low motivation contributed 63.2% to the deterioration in educational quality. It is, therefore, imperative that educational leaders identify opportunities to support their teaching staff by providing "a working environment where teachers can highly value their jobs and careers while placing academic emphasis on student learning" (Son et al., 2016).

For this reason, purposeful professional development and collaborative learnings are paramount for beginning and veteran teachers alike (Fischer et al., 2018; Son et al., 2016; Wang & Xie, 2018). Prast et al. (2018) asserted that schoolwide professional targeting intentional differentiation strategies might yield "positive effects over and above the spontaneous adaptations" (p. 33) that teachers make. Additionally, the researchers further noted that their study demonstrated the potentially positive influence differentiated instructional classroom practices holds for all students.

Wiggins and McTighe (2005) identified enduring understandings, essential questions, and transfer goals as required considerations of effective instructional planning. Similarly, Polanco and Luft de Baker (2018) noted that "clear instructions, effective modeling..., adequate feedback, application of learning, and continued assessments and classroom routines" (p. 435)

consistently demonstrated a robust curriculum. Furthermore, the planned and intentional diversification of content application reduces boredom and increases student achievement (Lazarides & Buchholz, 2019). Allar et al. (2017) found that Head Start teachers using the actively mobile curriculum of the *I am Moving, I am Learning* (IMIL) approach with fidelity perceived their instruction positively. They believed it impacted their instruction in terms of emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support. Likewise, Battey et al. (2016) determined that student-generated math problems recognized existing student competence and promoted ownership, and Eshuis et al. (2019) similarly concluded that providing students with training in collaboration produced more positive utterances, on-task behaviors, and fostered a more critical attitude.

Although the literature remains inconclusive as to which characteristics best promote positively focused instruction, researchers continue to identify teachers as the most influential predictor of student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Fitchett & Heafner, 2018; Shaw & Newton, 2014; Young, 2018). Fitchett and Heafner (2018) determined that teachers who have secondary education backgrounds impacted eighth-grade student achievement positively on the National Association of Education Progress (NAEP-US8). Alternatively-certificated eighth-grade teachers, on the other hand, demonstrated lower student achievement on the NAEP-US8. Conversely, Zhang and Zeller (2016), as well as McBrayer and Melton (2018), determined that both traditional and alternative teacher certification programs are viable means to teacher preparation.

However, warnings exist against the current and common practice of consistent test preparation, also known as *teaching to the test* (Blazar & Pollard, 2017; Li & Xiong, 2018) as a means of student achievement and engagement. For instance, Blazar and Pollard (2017) held test

preparation responsible for lackluster teaching in schools across the United States. Additionally, Li and Xiong (2018) determined that in-class test preparation demonstrated a negative effect on test performance and affirmed prior research in that racial minorities typically receive more in-class test preparation activities than their White counterparts. Blazar and Pollard (2017), on the other hand, recognized that teaching to the test “could promote instructional quality if the test is aligned to rigorous content and teachers, in turn, align their instruction to these standards” (p. 420).

Governmental Influence

Over the past few decades, schools have witnessed a rise in governmental pressures to increase student achievement in order to remain competitive in the global marketplace (Azigwe et al., 2016; Boston et al., 2017). Wang and Xie (2018) noted that intellectual elites are encouraging the government's educational guidance; however, considerable variation still exists in terms of the instructional quality that students receive (Sandilos et al., 2019). Regardless, the degree to which students meet predefined standards determines student achievement. However, the standards-based curriculum movement only began in the early 1980s with "A Nation at Risk." Following this report, the National Governors Association began to look at the curriculum across the nation (Kenna & Russell, 2018). They subsequently identified six prominent goals through their Panel (1999) for the nation's education system related to student readiness and achievement around the turn of the century: a) young children will enter school, ready to learn; b) the graduation rate will increase to at least 90%; c) fourth, eighth, and twelfth-grade students will advance after demonstrating academic mastery; d) U.S. students will lead the world in the areas of math and science; e) U.S. adults will possess the essential skills required to compete in the global market; and, f) every American school will be free of drugs and violence and will

work under an environment that promotes high levels of learning.

Since the standards movement began, it has taken many shapes and has continued to evolve, e.g., No Child Left Behind (2001), Common Core State Standards (2009), Race to the Top (2010), and the current Every Student Succeeds Act (2015). Each version's developers attempted to revise and build on the predecessor's foundation to move education toward a greater focus on student achievement. Although this progression began as a “top-down initiative led by elite businessmen and politicians as a means to correct America’s lack of competitiveness” in the world market (Kenna & Russell, 2018, p. 43), the standards-based education reform movement has continued in almost every state. Each of these participating states has developed content standards to identify desired student learning outcomes (Kenna & Russell, 2018).

As a result, teachers bear the weight and responsibility of their students’ achievement through performance-based expectations, and current policy-makers continue to approach student achievement via teacher evaluation instruments, which primarily address teaching’s visible characteristics. Thus, they truly demonstrate limited predictability toward student achievement. However, many states are attempting to broaden the scope of teacher evaluation by employing multiple measures such as observations, student surveys, and value-added models (Sandilos et al., 2019). Nonetheless, the teacher evaluation practice, even with its limitations, will likely remain a continued practice for leaders to survey their educational landscapes. Evaluators frequently provide teachers with rubrics identifying best practices (Steege & Gerritsen, 2016) however, it is the interpretation of those rubrics and their expectations that create disconnects. Therefore, teachers and leaders should work within a shared frame of reference for observations and evaluations, allowing for specific and deliberate feedback aimed at improving instructional practices.

Research remains unclear as to which characteristics truly promote quality teaching, and as a result, some researchers are attempting to decipher those elusive teaching practices. Nevertheless, “the concept of teacher quality draws mixed responses from various education stakeholders” (Fitchett & Heafner, 2018, p. 1), as the evidence is often inconclusive and in opposition from study-to-study (Cordero & Gil-Izquierdo, 2018) because teaching is an intricate art (Vagi et al., 2017).

Teacher Attrition

The well-documented impact classroom teachers place on student learning outcomes indicate that teacher effectiveness increases with experience (Shaw & Newton, 2014; Wright et al., 2019; Young, 2018). Unfortunately, research has determined that the United States teacher turnover rate is 16% annually with 8% leaving the profession entirely and 8% shifting schools (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019); 29% of those teachers leave within the first five years, and 39% leave at the end of five years (Carlson, 2013; Dicke et al., 2019; Forseille & Raptis, 2016). Similarly, Vari et al. (2018) reported that recent teacher preparation program enrollment had declined by as much as 35%. However, this exodus is not isolated to the United States. Ávalos and Valenzuela (2016) found that only one-third of teachers with less than 10 years of experience still taught in any of the Chilean Ministry of Education schools in 2009. Likewise, Forseille and Raptis (2016) estimated that 30-40% of Canadian teachers leave the profession within five years of completing their bachelor's degree. Furthermore, Lanas (2017) proposed that 30-40% of newly prepared European teachers choose a vocation other than teaching, and 30-50% of those entering European schools exit within the first five years. Lindqvist and Nordänger (2016) projected that Swedish schools would lack some 22,000 educators by 2020. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2017) further identified a global concern by

identifying Australia, China, England, and Norway as countries also experiencing teacher attrition. Bressman et al. (2018) expressed that the teaching profession endures higher turnover rates when compared to many other professions.

This teacher exodus is alarming because losing teachers means schools lose their experience too (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Dicke et al., 2019; Torenbeek & Peters, 2017). This trend is particularly problematic for students taught in classrooms that serve disadvantaged students (Ávalos & Valenzuela, 2016; Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Conroy et al., 2019; Dunn et al., 2017; Whipp & Geronime, 2015; Wright et al., 2019). As a result, students often receive instruction from novice or inexperienced teachers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Zhang & Zeller, 2016) who often provide the least academic support.

Forseille and Raptis (2016) noted that high teacher attrition contributed more than \$2 billion worth of negative annual financial impacts to the United States alone, and Glazer (2018) stated those same impacts stand to cost the US even more than \$7 billion each year. Furthermore, Billingsley and Bettini (2019) estimated the cost of replacing each teacher who leaves the profession to range from \$9,000 to \$23,000. Regardless, teacher recruitment and replacement remain an expensive venture which cannibalizes valuable instructional resources.

Reasons Teachers Leave

Although teachers leave the profession for various reasons, Bukhari and Kamal (2018) determined that both job satisfaction and job-related stress were significantly related to employees' turnover intentions. Thus, when employees lack satisfaction in their employment or become continuously over-stressed, they will seek that satisfaction or relief elsewhere. This understanding and focus are particularly true within educational organizations. Sutcher et al.

(2016) stated that decreasing teacher attrition by one-half would almost negate the teacher shortage entirely because retirements only account for one-third of all teachers leaving the profession. Therefore, policymakers and educational leaders should seek meaningful strategies to combat the growing shortage rather than short-term fixes that only curb the crisis.

Rising student enrollments create even further issues as the need for more teachers continues to rise (Sutcher et al., 2016). California, for instance, increased the usage of educators possessing substandard credentials educators by 63% from 2015 to 2016 to fill its many classroom voids (Sutcher et al., 2016). Thus, the devised solution may only perpetuate the problem.

According to Glazer (2020), the research related to teacher attrition predominantly aligns with one of two focusses: individual factors or contextual factors. Each focus views attrition from a different perspective. Those studies that focus on individualized reasons look to the educator's background, preparation, experience, self-efficacy, and external noneducation-related detractors. However, the studies reviewing the contextual setting relate to organizational influences such as organizational support, student motivation, salaries, and available resources. Regardless of the research approach, job-related commonalities exist between novice and experienced teachers, and both cite a myriad of reasons for leaving.

Novice Teacher Attrition

Several factors contribute to the higher attrition of those teachers new to the teaching profession, such as loneliness, high-stakes testing, and ineffective leadership are well noted within the literature (Carlson, 2013; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Ingersoll et al., 2016; Sawchuk, 2018; Sutcher et al., 2016; Thibodeaux et al., 2015; Young, 2018; Zhang & Zeller, 2016). Ávalos and Valenzuela (2016) identified four critical conditions that could

potentially foster “early school turnover and early attrition: pressures on time, perceived deficits in school organisation [*sic*] and management, insufficient skills to handle ‘uninterested’ and special needs’ students, and having to take ‘out-of-field’ teaching responsibilities” (p. 287).

However, teacher attrition is seldom the result of any single event. The decision to leave the profession is most frequently the accumulation of less significant stressors (e.g., student defiance, classroom disruptions, continuous change, comparatively low wages, high-stakes accountability, familial responsibilities, and a perceived lack of administrative support) (Bressman et al., 2018; Clarà, 2017; Dunn et al., 2017; Glazer, 2018; Gobena, 2018; Lindqvist & Nordäng, 2016). Similarly, McLean et al. (2020) determined that a “poorer perceived school climate related to more symptoms of depression and anxiety and to less career optimism” (p. 9) led to higher attrition for first-year teachers. For instance, new teachers frequently receive classrooms serving the most troubled students and those with the greatest needs (McLean et al., 2020). Thus, new teachers are required to exert considerably more effort and time to meet the increased challenges associated with these classrooms (Somech & Bogler, 2019; Wright et al., 2019). Regrettably, once these teachers feel overwhelmed and unable to perform according to their expectations or meet the demands placed on them, they leave the profession (Johnson et al., 2005).

Experienced Teacher Attrition

Research has indicated that veteran teachers, like their novice counterparts, are also leaving the profession in great numbers (Bressman et al., 2018; Player et al., 2017; Torenbeek & Peters, 2017). Johnson et al. (2005) stated that the stressors associated with teaching place it as one of the most taxing occupations, causing increased physical and mental health concerns and lower job satisfaction. Similarly, Sorgen et al. (2020) determined that the same stressors hold for

higher education faculty members and that “stress accounted for 65% of the variance in [the participant’s] work-related quality of life” (p. 19). Much like P-12 education, higher education faculty must carry more substantial burdens of responsibilities as much-needed resources continue to diminish.

Many of the same issues leading to new teacher attrition contribute to the likeminded decisions of veteran teachers. Poorly perceived leadership (Carlson, 2013; Dunn et al., 2017; Somech & Bogler, 2019), comparatively low wages (Forseille & Raptis, 2016; Gobena, 2018), increased accountability measures (Dunn et al., 2017), limited feelings of self-efficacy (Glazer, 2018), ever-increasing stress (Lambert et al., 2019; Somech & Bogler, 2019), and emotional exhaustion and burnout (Arens & Morin, 2016; Collie et al., 2018; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017) are all found in the literature. Somech and Bogler (2019) noted that the ever-increasing expectations placed on schools frequently require teachers to perform at levels beyond their abilities. Unfortunately as Schwille (2016) observed, few teachers attempt to make many of the expected alterations needed to accommodate the changes in curriculum, current trends, and policies.

Teacher Retention and Recruitment

Teachers leave U.S. schools at twice the rate of other “high-achieving nations like, Finland, Singapore, and Ontario, Canada” (Sutcher et al., 2016). Policymakers often look more heavily at attracting prospective teachers to the profession. However, that approach neglects the opposite side of the same issue, retention. More specifically, national data indicate that teacher attrition rivals “that of police officers, [is] higher than nurses, and far higher than lawyers, engineers, architects, pharmacists, or academics” (Ingersoll et al., 2016, p. 45).

Thus, school administrators are tasked with responsibility of re-staffing and maintaining their schools with educators that will positively impact student achievement. However, that responsibility also requires educational leaders to possess foresight and a basic understanding of the overarching reasons teachers choose to leave their school (Young, 2018). Thus, it remains essential that school leaders possess a dual focus of both retention and recruitment because teachers continue to leave the profession at all stages of their careers (Glazer, 2018, 2020; Ingersoll et al., 2016; Sutchter et al., 2016).

Teacher Retention

Player et al. (2017) concluded that teachers more frequently remained within the profession when they perceived an intelligible alignment between their abilities and the needs of the school. Additionally,

no statistically significant differences [were found] with regard to the relationship between school leadership and retention in one's school when comparing novice and experienced teachers, elementary and secondary teachers, teachers in charter schools and those in traditional public schools, or teachers in Title I schools and those in non-Title I schools. (Player et al., 2017, p. 338)

Educational leaders must work to alleviate many of the job demands teachers face, such as meetings, paperwork, parental expectations, continuous change and uncertainty, and other non-teaching tasks that minimize their effectiveness as teachers. Even the common practice of teacher mentorship within education may add to the mentor teacher's job-related stresses and prove counterproductive in some instances (Torenbeek & Peters, 2017).

Bressman et al. (2018) suggested schools incorporate five readily available opportunities to support teachers and foster an educational support community: (a) initiate short-term

mentoring, (b) expand induction programs, (c) develop *critical friend* networks, (d) enhance professional learning communities, and (e) leverage technology when face-to-face sharing is not available. Collaborative efforts, such as those just stated, promote belonging and connectedness among the staff, improving perceived job satisfaction (Dicke et al., 2019). Meredith et al. (2019) stressed the importance of maintaining a healthy and positive atmosphere while avoiding co-rumination within the school to avoid burnout contagion among the staff.

Additionally, Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2017) warned that highly effective teachers are at risk of burnout because they tend to "spend more time preparing for teaching and caring for individual students" (p. 158). This understanding requires school leaders to recognize those individuals in danger of crisis and relay reasonable expectations (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017; Somech & Bogler, 2019; Wright et al., 2019). Furthermore, school leaders must avoid leaning on the same highly effective teachers for many of the extra-role responsibilities that so frequently overtake the learning environment. Otherwise, they run the risk of creating potential victims of burnout (Somech & Bogler, 2019). Lastly, external life events, such as being a parent, a spouse, and a parental caregiver, seem to further aggravate stressors on the individual educator (Sutcher et al., 2016; Torenbeek & Peters, 2017).

Teacher Recruitment

As the teacher attrition crisis continues, classroom teaching positions remain unfilled (Sutcher et al., 2016). Forseille and Raptis (2016) commented that "entering the teaching profession is a process of identity negotiation that is more complex than merely assuming a new role" (p. 240). Further complicating the issue, many teachers discourage any renewed growth as they position themselves and their voices as opponents to rather than proponents of education. For example, Owens (2015) determined that two-thirds of existing teachers were either unlikely

or very unlikely to encourage a graduating senior to enter the teaching profession. Lindqvist and Nordänger (2016) even posited that the real issue is not a teacher shortage but instead that many education majors do not enter the teaching profession at all following graduation or they choose to leave within a few years.

Therefore, quality teacher recruitment, selection, and induction must remain at the forefront for educational leaders. Ávalos and Valenzuela (2016) and Whipp and Geronime (2015) both admitted that retaining teachers in high-needs urban schools is difficult. Thus, recruitment and hiring for these problematic locations must intentionally target those who are more likely to remain resilient through adversity (Whipp & Geronime, 2015). Ávalos and Valenzuela (2016) determined that education institutions frequently attract first-generation college-goers as opposed to better-suited graduates who might exhibit better resilience. One method of filling the many teaching voids is through the recruitment of second-career individuals.

As such, Goodwin et al. (2019) found that late-career changers had higher retention intentions than their early career changers during the pre-service years. However, second-career teachers demonstrated comparatively lower retention intentions and higher attrition during the induction teaching year. This finding suggested that “prior work experience in other professions and length of working years did not make a difference in starting teachers’ retention intentions over time” (Goodwin et al., 2019, p. 153).

Conversely, McBrayer and Melton (2018) concluded that alternative teacher preparation programs in Georgia provided “well-balanced... programs in accordance with the goals of teacher preparation programs” (p. 11). McBrayer and Melton (2018) also warned that individuals considering teaching should clearly understand that teaching is a demanding profession.

Similarly, Moir (1999; as cited in Lanas, 2017) provided a transition of first-year teaching stages that ought to be supported: eager anticipation, the shock of reality, survival, disillusionment, and reflection.

Regardless of one's path to the classroom, educational institutions and their leaders must stop teacher attrition before it begins because the ultimate goal of education *is* student achievement. For this reason, McLean et al. (2020) argued that first-year teachers would likely benefit from training topics "such as emotion regulation, fostering positive professional relationships, and supporting challenging students" (p. 11). The goal of optimal student achievement, however, will never be fully realized as long as attrition factors continue to impact students and their learning negatively.

Student Achievement

The 2002 passing of the No Child Left Behind Act called for state, school, and teacher accountability in the hope of improving educational quality as measured by student achievement (Adnot et al., 2017; Arnett-Hartwick & Walters, 2016; Dotson & Foley, 2017; Ingersoll et al., 2016; Jones et al., 2018; Li & Xiong, 2018). However, the truth is that, regardless of this or any other legislative mandate, not all students succeed at the same level. Certain demographic groups have historically yielded better performance scores on standardized achievement tests despite schools' best efforts (Jones et al., 2018). Nonetheless, accountability measures still require schools to increase their students' academic performance on standardized achievements.

Visible learning researcher Hattie (2003) reviewed over 500,000 studies to determine the effect size of various influencers on student achievement in six different classifications: student, home, school, curriculum, teacher, and teaching and learning approaches. Hattie (2003) determined that almost everything done with fidelity has a positive effect size on student

achievement. However, a vast number of those influencers impact instruction with only minimal reward.

Student and Family Backgrounds

Although teachers account for 30% of variance in student achievement, the student is the greatest determinant and accounts for 50% of the variance while the school and home each holds an approximate 10% of additional variance (Hattie, 2003). Thus, nearly two-thirds of a student's success rests outside of the educational setting. Therefore, educators must work inside the classroom to encourage opportunities and mitigate detractors that rest outside of their reach. This realization requires that teachers understand the importance of approaches to learning, parent involvement, and home-based involvement if they desire to maximize their academic influence toward student achievement (Anthony & Ogg, 2019).

Student Efficacy

Jones et al. (2018) stated that “the unsuccessful students tend to come from readily identifiable groups” (p. 64). Recent studies have demonstrated that 67% of African-American children and 42% of Hispanic children score less than their Caucasian and Asian-American counterparts (Jones et al., 2018). Similarly, Native-Americans, English language learners, students with disabilities, and students from poverty tend to underperform on state assessments (Jones et al., 2018).

Additionally, Park et al. (2019) determined that a student's behavior and emotional characteristics bear sharply upon their academic achievement. More specifically, the researchers found that, “middle school students' aggressiveness, depression, and social withdrawal did not impact on their academic achievement and over-time growth; rather, their attention, self-esteem, and behavioral control” (Park et al., 2019, p. 447) proved most impactful for both language and

math achievement. Similarly, Fung et al. (2018) concluded that cognitive student engagement yields greater academic reward than either affective or behavioral engagement and that students who possess higher levels in two or more of the components outperform their peers who only demonstrate high cognitive engagement. Of interest, Park et al.'s (2019) research also demonstrated that the self-esteem variable had a more significant effect on a student's achievement than the maintained attention variable (Park et al., 2019). Further still, Hattie (2003) identified a student's disposition to learn as having a 0.61 effect size on their achievement.

Students often do not realize there is hope in improving academically, and they become resigned to their current state (Freire, 1970/2018). For instance, Jones et al. (2018) noted that both African-American and Hispanic dropout rates escalated from already low percentages in two-parent households to nearly twice as much in single-parent households (17% to 30% and 25% to 49%, respectively). For similar reasons, (Freire, 1970/2018) reminded us that,

The oppressed, who have adapted to the structure of domination in which they are immersed, and have become resigned to it, are inhibited from waging the struggle for freedom so long as they feel incapable of running the risks it requires. Moreover, their struggle for freedom threatens not only the oppressor, but also their own oppressed comrades who are fearful of still greater repression. (p. 47)

Nevertheless, the work of Park et al. (2019) provided hope through their findings concerning initial student performance. Their work countered the seminal works of Walberg and Tsai (1983) and Stanovich (1986) concerning *Matthew Effects* within education, which assumed prior advantage. This prior advantage was believed to create a continued gap in over-time growth between for those possessing higher initial performance over lower initial performers. Park et al. (2019) determined that the prevailing argument of a student's first performance did not appear

indicative of students' over-time growth for either language or math. More specifically, the researchers noted that teachers may find added value in providing behavioral and emotional supports to both students and their families as they both leverage accumulated advantage for academic achievement.

Home and Home-life Influence

Williams and Weiss (2018) determined that the perceptions of those closest to the child positively relate to the child's performance, adding further cause for concern. Thus, academic and structural support are essential to combat instructional detractors such as student poverty, single-parent homes, and the perceptions of significant others (Arnett-Hartwick & Walters, 2016; Jones et al., 2018; Sutcher et al., 2016; Williams & Weiss, 2018). Likewise, Sengul (2019) noted the volume of literature surrounding the influence of family structures on student achievement held that students living with guardians performed below their peers living in intact families.

However, Jones et al. (2018) determined that, at least for their study and contrary to prior studies, single-parent homes did not negatively impact learning with factors outside of those attributed to poverty. Nonetheless, the effects of poverty alone are quite sufficient to stifle student growth (Arnett-Hartwick & Walters, 2016; Egalite, 2016; Sengul, 2019; Teig et al., 2018). "Poor nutrition, poor health, lack of parental supervision, inadequate living conditions, adverse social and physical environment, volatile family dynamics, and limited access to transportation" (Arnett-Hartwick & Walters, 2016, p. 19) all prove detrimental to academic achievement. Egalite (2016) also noted the importance of family income on student achievement because financially struggling parents often lack the time needed to assist their children academically. Similarly, Teig et al. (2018) determined that the socioeconomic status of students in their study "explained 66.6% of the variance in achievement at the classroom level" (p. 28).

Additionally, “estimates suggest that, by age 3 [*sic*], children whose parents receive public assistance hear less than a third of the words encountered by their higher-income peers” (Egalite, 2016, p. 2). Limited parent interaction, therefore, negatively impacts children’s academic achievement (Warren et al., 2018).

Arnett-Hartwick and Walters (2016) stated that two requirements must exist in order to ever break the chains of generational poverty: an education and intervening individuals. Further aggravating the issue, Arnett-Hartwick and Walters (2016) warned that parents’ prior negative educational experiences create barriers that need to be addressed, and Anthony and Ogg (2019) called for early and robust parent involvement. Additionally, their findings indicated that “home-school communication levels in kindergarten positively predicted reading achievement in third grade” (Anthony & Ogg, 2019, p. 383).

Conversely, parental influences of all socioeconomic statuses stand to impact student achievement negatively. Warren et al. (2018) determined that “the manner in which parents interact with their children impacts many aspects of child development, including their ability to succeed in school” (p. 330), and parent interactions such as anger and yelling create anxiety and self-esteem issues. Therefore, rigid and overzealous parent engagements filled with high expectations may prove counterproductive and create additional academic disdain as a result (Warren et al., 2018).

Teaching and Learning

Teachers, like parents and significant others, hold a great deal of perceptual power in their students’ lives. Those teachers who provide children with emotional security dramatically increase students’ engagement in the learning process (Sengul, 2019). This is most important for those students with volatile or non-supportive home-lives because “the atmosphere of the home

is prolonged in the school” (Freire, 1970/2018, p. 155). More specifically, when teachers bridge the gap between apprehension and engagement, they provide their students with a platform for increased achievement (Fung et al., 2018), motivation, and academic cognition (Sandilos et al., 2019).

Teacher Impact

Optimal learning occurs best when teachers are willing to “DIE for their students” (Hattie, 2015, p. 81). This acrostic calls for teachers to diagnose student understanding at the onset of instruction, employ interventions that will support and maximize student mastery, and evaluate students both formatively and summatively in relation to those interventions (Hattie, 2015). In essence, students will achieve the most when their instruction aligns with personal relevance and meaning.

Hattie (2015) also recognized that effective instruction is more about the teacher’s instructional thinking than their instructional actions. Teachers must make active and intellectual student engagement their ultimate goal (Gage et al., 2018). Similarly, Rollins (2017) noted that the “larger share of those rigorous verbs [should fall] on students’ capable shoulders” (p. 7), alluding to the necessity of deliberate and dynamic student ownership of learning. This intentional transference of educational labor from teacher to students allows the teacher to engage each student at a deeper level through individual dialogue and specific feedback (Gage et al., 2018).

Additionally, research has indicated that a significant negative relationship exists between teacher turnover and student performance; although the exact percentage fluctuates from study to study, a significant number of teachers leave the profession within their first five years of teaching (Carlson, 2013; Owens, 2015; Torenbeek & Peters, 2017; Zhang & Zeller,

2016). This understanding compounded with the three to seven years of instructional experience needed for a teacher to truly develop their craft (Shaw & Newton, 2014) makes this issue unnerving because replacing teachers with those who are new to the profession simply elongates the school's return on investment associated with academic training, instructional efficacy, and increased student achievement.

Teacher quality, therefore, “is among the most variable school-based influences on student learning” (Cowan & Goldhaber, 2018, p. 138), and according to Dicke et al. (2019), both teacher well-being and the principal's behavior repeatedly link to student achievement and motivation. Also, Hattie (2015) identified the collective teacher efficacy as having a 1.57 effect size toward student achievement. Teachers, therefore, truly matter in the lives of their students because schools are quite often the only point of stability in some students' lives. So if teachers are expected to fill the gap and, as Hattie (2015) coined it, DIE for their students, leaders must, likewise, be willing to DIE for their teachers.

Instructional Practices

The instructional practices found in each classroom, just like the individual who provides it, bears heavily on student achievement from both the engagement and content perspectives (Fung et al., 2018; Lekwa et al., 2019). Students who are actively engaged in learning have less frequent off-task behaviors and create fewer classroom disruptions which negatively affect their classroom counterparts and the instructional impact as a whole (Conroy et al., 2019; Gage et al., 2018). Additionally, Berliner (1990; as cited in Gage et al., 2018, p. 302) stated the relationship between academic engagement and student achievement is no less important than the relationships between “homeostasis in biology, reinforcement in psychology, [or] gravity in physics” (p. 3).

However, viewing academic achievement from an “input-output [perspective] fails to recognize its formation, casting it solely as a constituent of school productivity fully dependent on the performance of the teachers” (Skourdoumbis, 2017, p. 611). In alignment with this understanding, Lekwa et al. (2019) linked instructional behavior, classroom management, and academic gains for both reading and math. Therefore, schools need to employ strategies that align and connect students’ demographic realities with the academic content, and even more so for the disadvantaged (Klusmann et al., 2016; Skourdoumbis, 2017). For instance, Vercellotti (2018) correlated increased in-class attendance with academic achievement, and Warren et al. (2018) highlighted the negative impact suspension places on students’ academic achievement. Nevertheless, schools continue to remove students from the very instruction which they beg students to attend.

Similarly, Warren et al. (2018) noted the importance of school counselors in linking the home and classroom to support academic achievement, and Jones et al. (2018) encouraged educators to provide early interventions for those living in poverty in order to meet their academic needs. Many disadvantaged students, unfortunately, lack the social-emotional skills required to work collaboratively, which further impacts their academic performance negatively (Ottmar, 2019). However, Ottmar (2019) found that improved intrapersonal academic interactions demonstrated increased academic achievement, albeit indirectly.

School Setting

School characteristics either add to or detract from student achievement. Hussain (2018) identified notable characteristics such as “physical facilities, level of community school relations, management support, availability of teaching resources, quality of teachers, the role of [principals], and learning environment” (p. 90). Further still, Dicke et al. (2019) found a clear

positive relationship on the school's disciplinary climate and student achievement, and Fung et al. (2018) determined that behavioral engagement promoted both student attendance and effort.

Contrary to the belief of many educators, two studies found that general spending did not appear to improve student achievement, but strategic spending on experienced teachers' instruction demonstrated academic achievement (Cobb-Clark et al., 2016; Sirait, 2016). Also, Hattie (2015) determined collective teacher efficacy produced the greatest strength for the school as it held a 1.57 effect size toward student achievement and that small-group instruction posted a moderate effect size of 0.47. However, Mayer et al. (2016) determined that decreased class size did not increase student performance within their study, and Abdulkadiroğlu et al. (2018) concluded that vouchers and school choice negatively impact student achievement on state-mandated assessments in math by 0.41 standard deviations.

Jones and Shindler (2016), providing another perspective, found that school climate highly correlated with student achievement and that ability-grouped instruction included differing practices that further determined the students' school climate experience. Furthermore, teaching is a profession that often requires significant demands and "takes its toll on teachers' psychological functioning and, in turn, their students and families" (Collie et al., 2018, p. 131). Therefore, school leaders must actively seek practices that cultivate academic staff and nurture the school's climate.

The school's principal owns the first step in creating a positive school climate for both students and staff (Fung et al., 2018; Hitt et al., 2019). Likewise, Dicke et al. (2019) argued that the principal's role held an indirect influence on student achievement more considerable than that of teachers when compared per capita. The school leader's role requires a continuous

understanding of the school's climate, teacher satisfaction, student performance, and a multitude of managerial tasks (Anderson, 2017).

Leadership

Blurred lines have historically stood between leadership and management because the two frequently overlap and, in some cases, must co-exist. Nevertheless, a great deal of literature exists distinguishing the two (e.g., Blanchard, 2018; Covey, 2013; Hunter, 2004; Kotter, 2012; Maxwell, 2008; Northouse, 2018). For instance, Blanchard (2018) differentiated the two in that leadership maintains a visionary role, while the role of management seeks implementation. More succinctly, leadership is about “doing the right thing[s]... and management is [about]... doing things right” (Blanchard, 2018, p. 7).

This subtle difference creates a multitude of task-minded opportunities that further obscure the difference between leadership and management. The very name "manager" identifies the purpose behind its creation at the turn of the 20th century. Management was created to oversee and solve the complexities of an industrial work setting (Kotter, 2012; Northouse, 2018). Unfortunately, managers tend to wield their positions with authority and frequently view themselves, as do others within their respective organizations, as the experts who possess the requisite answers for the problems at hand (Calderone et al., 2018; Hunter, 2004).

Modern Leadership

The complexity of today's society no longer allows leaders to utilize the past and, subsequently, outdated notions of leadership and management (Fleming et al., 2018). These prior paradigms assumed “leadership to be a stable construct..., which in turn, [left] executives and students of leadership in a frustrated state when faced with the realities of increasing challenges

and uncertainty, disagreements, and unpredictability of their environments” (Fleming et al., 2018, p. 607).

Further still, a managerial mindset fosters an errant understanding of what motivates individuals. Managers utilize what Pink (2009) termed *Motivation 2.0*. Where Motivation 1.0 revolved around actual daily survival, Motivation 2.0 contended that workers either worked for the gain of rewards or the fear of punishment. Thus, "carrots and sticks," as Pink (2009) called them, are a manager's tools of choice. Although this compensation-based model certainly worked well for the algorithmic tasks associated with manufacturing and production, it has proven detrimental to creativity and ingenuity (Pink, 2009).

Leadership, as opposed to management, derives its strength from the leader’s ability to guide, support, and motivate followers as opposed to the task-oriented mentality of managers. Covey (2013) explained the difference as *Character Ethic* versus *Personality Ethic*. The leader works within the schema that Character Ethics are at the core of a person’s success because those associated traits are the foundation to which the individual truly is and regards “... things like integrity, humility, fidelity, temperance, courage, justice, patience, industry, simplicity, modesty, and the Golden Rule” (Covey, 2013, p. 26). Personality Ethics, on the other hand, are those charismatic characteristics such as smiling when making eye contact, dressing well, reflective listening, and so on. Although Covey (2013) admitted that personality characteristics are beneficial, they are superficial at best when being viewed through the leadership lens.

Similarly, Maxwell (2008) encouraged those in leadership positions to be a leader, not a boss, because “a boss says, ‘Go.’ A leader says, ‘Let’s go’” (p. 5). He continued that a leader's primary purpose is to help as many people succeed as is possible. This simple, yet powerful, ideology is expressed best through the leader's actions rather than their words. Furthermore,

leaders who have never learned to follow typically make less effective leaders; for example, Bishop Sheen (as cited in Maxwell, 2008) stated, “‘Civilization is always in danger when those who have never learned to obey are given the right to command.’ Only a leader who has followed well knows how to lead others well” (p. 14).

Likewise, similar concerns add to the confusion within educational institutions, and many school administrators continue to struggle with understanding that “management is what we do. Leadership is who we are” (Hunter, 2004, p. 32). The daily requirements that constitute the management of the school rest on the shoulders of school administrators, frequently consuming their time and energy, robbing them from their chief responsibility as the instructional head, and marginalizing the support they can effectively provide to their faculty and staff. Thus, many school administrators lean toward a managerial approach to tackle the large number of tasks tugging at them every day (e.g., discipline, parent contacts, teacher needs, and general office related responsibilities). As a result, few principals have given the time or focus “to provide high-quality instructional feedback to teachers” (Leithwood & Louis, 2012, p. 6).

Unfortunately, far too many in leadership positions do not recognize the potential and lasting impacts of their actions, nor do they understand the limited traction their initiatives hold when others view them as fleeting or temporary fixes awaiting the next initiative or redirection (Ávalos & Valenzuela, 2016; Bressman et al., 2018; Joe et al., 2018; Somech & Bogler, 2019). This realization is particularly essential within education because a society's future success rests upon the quality of its educational system. As stated by Leithwood and Louis (2012), educational leadership serves two primary purposes: “providing direction and exercising influence” (p. 4). Educational leadership, therefore, occurs over the entire expanse of the organization's interactions from senior-level leadership to classroom teachers.

Educational Leadership

Educational leadership, as defined by Kareem and Patrick (2019), “is the process of enlisting and guiding the talents and energies of teachers, pupils, and parents toward achieving common educational aims” (p. 53). The educational leader’s actions and interactions, either help or hinder the school in terms of staffing, direction, and curriculum. For instance, school principals are charged with hiring the best teachers who will most likely remain committed to the school for their open positions (Chen et al., 2016; Ronfeldt, 2015; Ronfeldt et al., 2016). The same holds for identifying and holding steady the school’s direction and curricular platforms because principals may simultaneously lead as many as five competing generations within their school (Kareem & Patrick, 2019).

However, a troubling trend known as *principal churn* continues to stifle effective leadership and continued practices. Kachel (2018) reported that the average principalship lasts only four years and that most principals spend less than seven years as a principal altogether; yet, research notes effective change generally requires between five and seven years to become embedded practice within organizations (Fullan, 2001). Thus, principal churn causes the school’s leadership to change before any meaningful improvements are woven into the school’s operation. Additionally, Finnigan and Daly (2017) determined through a social network analysis study that while professional linkages increased for educational leaders from 2010-2013, their emotional ties decreased. This emotional erosion negatively impacts improvement aims across the entire district (Finnigan & Daly, 2017) and thereby decreases employee voice while increasing both employee stress and organizational cynicism (Kim et al., 2019; Reb et al., 2018).

Further aggravating educational improvements, the standards-based movement within education typifies that of business. The students have become the products; the standards act as

quality control measures; the teachers serve as the factory workers churning out their labor. For example, “many public organizations have implanted practices such as performance-based compensation and dismissal of low performers, that [is] typical of for-profit organizations” (Kim et al., 2019, p. 1). Thus, “education has become business and schools have become social organizations conducting daily business” (Anderson, 2017, p. 3). This new normal requires principals to now operate within multiple roles, such as human resources, fiscal manager, academic head, accountability specialist, and mentor (Böhlmark et al., 2016). Undoubtedly, no single leadership style can fully meet all the demands of any organization (Kareem & Patrick, 2019).

As a result of the multiple and diverse expectations continually placed on school leaders, eight predominant leadership styles have emerged in education: innovative, charismatic, command and control (also known as either transactional or *leader-member exchange*), laissez-faire, situational, pace-setter, *transformational*, and servant. However, three additional classifications from these eight styles appear most frequently within educational leadership: *Autocratic* (charismatic, command and control, and pacesetter), *Democratic* (situational, servant, and transformational), and laissez-faire (Ahmad & Dilshad, 2016). Each of the aforementioned leadership categories and styles adds value within the diverse scope and requirements of educational leaders as each is well-suited for various situations and circumstances. However, it is ultimately the leader’s “values, beliefs and preferences, as well as the organizational norms, culture and situation” (Ahmad & Dilshad, 2016, p. 909) that most often elevates various leadership styles and discourages others within the educational landscape and the leader’s repertoire.

Ahmad and Dilshad (2016) found that democratic leadership styles are received and work best in education. Therefore, three primary business-derived democratic leadership theories have emerged within education: Transformational Leadership, Leader-member Exchange (LMX), and Servant Leadership, and a simple Google search will reveal that the preponderance of literature both supports and pertains to transformational leadership. Nevertheless, the original premises shared between Transformational and Servant Leadership Theories possess two close assertions (Andersen, 2018; Liden et al., 2008). First, both theories call for direct leadership relationships with those whom they lead and to cultivate the followers into like-minded leaders themselves; and second, each theory recognizes the impact that leadership holds on society (Andersen, 2018).

A stark foundational difference, however, exists between the two theories: the focus of transformational leadership is service to the organization, while servant leadership focuses on serving the followers for their personal growth (Andersen, 2018; Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006). More specifically, “there is nothing in the transformational leadership model that says leaders should serve followers for the good of followers” (Graham, 1991, p. 110) because the primary concern for transformational leadership is “performance beyond expectations” for the good of the organization (Sendjaya et al., 2008, p. 403). Regardless of the leadership theory employed, relationship quality stands as a predominant indicator within the literature as a leading determinant of a leader’s success or failure (e.g., Battey et al., 2016; Bolman & Gallos, 2011; Fullan, 2001; Gordon, 2017; Maxwell, 2008; Reb et al., 2018). Therefore, leaders must remain cognizant of their own biases and mannerisms because even attempted positive actions potentially result in adverse perceptual outcomes (Babalola et al., 2017; Qin et al., 2019).

For instance, Qu et al. (2017) recommended for authentic leaders to “openly emphasize their benevolence values in front of their followers” (p. 1039). However, they cautioned those

highly authentic leaders against hiring highly authentic followers to avoid power struggles, and in turn, hinder group performance. Similarly, Babalola et al. (2017) recognized the importance of values-based and ethics-driven leadership as they both serve as moral compasses for the leader's actions. This, too, however, beckons caution because followers may perceive those characteristics as inflexible leadership practices, which was found by Babalola et al. (2017) to encourage deviant organizational citizenship behaviors. Further still, even the selflessness attribute of humility creates potential leadership pitfalls when subordinates view the leader's meekness as a weakness rather than strength and, as a result, believe themselves to be stronger or more intelligent than their leader (Qin et al., 2019). Nonetheless, research clearly and positively aligns leadership with student achievement (e.g., Böhlmark et al., 2016; Chen et al., 2016; Kareem & Patrick, 2019; Kim et al., 2019; Levine, 2005).

The literature surrounding educational leadership has also proven a strong relationship between the effectiveness of both the institutional leader (Brown et al., 2017; Young, 2018) and the classroom teacher as servant leaders (Thibodeaux et al., 2015) as each strives to serve the needs and development of those in their care. Research also indicates that leadership is a primary determinant in whether teachers leave or remain within the profession or transfer to another school (Afaq et al., 2017; Young, 2018). This recognition matches Maxwell's (2008) estimation that some 65% of individuals leave their organization because of their management.

Educational leadership has, likewise, followed a similar evolutionary path where leaders have become a primary cause of the organization's attrition (Carlson, 2013; Owens, 2015; Thibodeaux et al., 2015; Young, 2018). For teachers who view their administrators as authoritarian managers, this perception potentially alienates and belittles them, further aggravating the situation, as many educational leaders seek compliance over competence.

However, leadership that deliberately aims to transform the organization and its people to a better place tomorrow than exists today is one that nurtures the next generation for continued growth in order to promote the organization's future success.

School leaders, therefore, need to move from managers to leaders in the purest sense, where they seek a balance between "consideration and initiating structure behaviors" (Jones & Watson, 2017, p. 53). They must allow members of their faculties to share in both the established vision and contribute to the associated mission of the school. The most effective educational administrators are those who create an environment where their faculty and staff feel appreciated and valued (Vari et al., 2018). The positive effects of shared leadership extend beyond the solution to any given problem. Organizational members gain motivation from challenging work, and their achievement leads to psychological growth (Thibodeaux et al., 2015). Thus, the leader's shift from control to collaboration moves the follower from compliance to autonomy (Pink, 2009). Servant leadership is one such approach that intentionally seeks the engaged input of those closest to the action (Wheeler, 2012) through trust (Covey, 2018; Greenleaf, 1977) to garner the greatest understanding.

Servant Leadership

Particularly after the turn of the 20th century, leadership has morphed through various ideologies. Politics, world affairs, and changes in society have attributed to these variations. Northouse (2018) explained that the first quarter of the century expected obedience and submission on the part of the laborer. The second quarter shifted away from the leaders' domination over to the leaders' influence on the workforce. The third and fourth quarters subsequently focused more on group support and shared goals. Thus, several leadership theories have emerged since the last few decades of the 20th century, with each one calling on the leader

to utilize personal qualities to support the goals of the organization. Servant leadership labeled by Greenleaf (1977) in his original 1970 essay, is one such ideology that has emerged (Northouse, 2018).

Greenleaf (1977), the originator of the theory, noted that servant leadership exists between two extremes: leader-first and servant-first. In his initial essay *The Servant as Leader*, Greenleaf (1970) stated that a leader's quest for a specific outcome is easy to identify but difficult to explain (Greenleaf, 1977). He further noted that effective leaders possess the ability to point others toward the same goal. However, the one who identifies the goal must garner the followers' trust because the followers share the burden of risk.

Servant leadership, the theoretical framework for this study, according to Northouse (2018), "is a paradox—an approach to leadership that runs counter to common sense... [and] originated in the writings of Greenleaf (1970, 1972, 1977)" (p. 227). Greenleaf (1977) attributed his initial servant-minded concepts to the central character of Hermann Hesse's (1956) fictional *Journey to the East*, Leo, and then began to reflectively parallel those ideas with the foundations of his Quaker faith in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.

Regardless of one's faith, or lack thereof, the life and teachings of Jesus Christ represent the purest examples of what authentic servant leadership looks like to both the religious and the non-believer. He lived according to and for a higher authority. As such, He claimed only one truth for His life when He said, "For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of Him who sent Me" (John, 6:38). Thus, He yielded His life to the mission of His calling, "to seek and save the lost" (Luke 19:10). Jesus made bold decisions, and those who witnessed those decisions in action were either astonished or afraid (Wilkes, 1998).

Additionally, it is safe to say that the example set by Jesus throughout the Bible is the typified representation of servant leadership, and many, therefore, seek to emulate His example in the manner with which they live out their lives. A significant number of others, however, choose to resist from submission when they expect little to no return for their efforts. Therefore, “the only authority deserving one’s allegiance is that which is freely and knowingly granted by the led to the leader in response to, and in proportion to the clearly evident servant stature of the leader” (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 24).

As such, Servant Leadership Theory begins with a heart to serve, follows with an attentive ear, looks through widened eyes, and works through giving hands. Greenleaf (1977) explained that leaders choose one of two possible characters: leader-first or servant-first. For those choosing the latter, listening is the first action of any wise leader, and he supported his notion through a “line from the prayer of Saint Francis, ‘Lord, grant that I may not seek so much to be understood as to understand’” (p. 31). This understanding leads to foresight, an additional premise of Servant Leadership Theory. Accordingly, effective leaders must view their world and the end goal through full peripheral sight to understand the situation rightly (Greenleaf, 1977).

Lastly, Greenleaf (1977) called on leaders to remember the power and impact of healing and serving through community, such as when individuals sought to aid orphans and widows. For this reason, he further wrote,

where community doesn’t exist, trust, respect, and ethical behavior are difficult for the young to learn and for the old to maintain. Living in community as one’s basic involvement will generate an exportable surplus of love that we may carry into our many involvements with institutions that are usually not communities: businesses, churches, governments, schools. (p. 52)

Thus, Servant Leadership Theory rests on the bedrock characteristics of love, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment, and service (Hunter, 2004; Shaw & Newton, 2014)

Greenleaf (1970) originally identified 10 characteristics of a servant leader. Yet, various researchers have attributed at least 44 different characteristics or traits (van Dierendonck, 2011) and produced 16 different measures (Eva et al., 2019) across the approximate 50 years of servant leadership's literary existence. Additionally, various industries have embraced servant leadership while incorporating industry-specific versions, thereby creating a fragmented understanding and providing no clear definition.

Nevertheless, for the purposes of this study, servant leadership will be defined as “an (1) other-oriented approach to leadership (2) manifested through one-on-one prioritizing of [individual follower's] needs and interests, (3) and outward reorienting of [the leader's] concern for self towards concern for others within the organization and the larger community” (Eva et al., 2019, p. 114). As such, “a servant-leader focuses primarily on the growth and well-being of people and the communities to which they belong... The servant-leader shares power, puts the needs of others first and helps people develop and perform as highly as possible” (Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership, 2016). Servant leadership, therefore, seeks to build others up through its foundational characteristics: love, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment, and service (Hunter, 2004; Shaw & Newton, 2014).

As previously stated, Greenleaf (1977) noted that servant leadership exists between two extremes: leader-first and servant-first. He believed that service is a prerequisite to leadership, and as such, he stated that,

the best test, and difficult to administer, is this: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, *while being served* [sic], become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more

likely themselves to become servants? *And [sic]*, what is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit or at least not be further deprived? (p. 27)

However, more particular to schools and schooling, Greenleaf (1977) noted in his seminal essay (1970) on servant leadership that,

the *school [sic]*, on which we pinned so much of our hopes for a better society, has become too much a social-upgrading mechanism that destroys community... And much of the alienation and purposelessness of our times is laid at the door, *not of education [sic]*, but of *school [sic]*. (p. 51)

Servant leadership often feels counterintuitive to the modern understanding of hierarchical leadership, or rather the typical top-down leadership structure. While many leadership dynamics operate to some degree of command-and-control processes, servant leadership operates directly in opposition to that mindset (Hunter, 2004; Northouse, 2018). More specifically,

some institutions achieve distinction for a short time by the intelligent *use [sic]* of people, but it is not a happy achievement, and eminence, so derived, does not last long. Others aspire to distinction (or the reduction of problems) by embracing gimmicks: profit sharing, work enlargement, information, participation, suggestion plans, paternalism, motivational management. There is nothing wrong with these in a people-building institution. But in a people-using institution they are like aspirin—sometimes stimulating and pain relieving, and they may produce an immediate measurable improvement of sorts. But these are not the means whereby an institution moves from people-using to people-building. In fact, an overuse of these nostrums may seal an institution's fate as a people-user for a very long time. (Greenleaf, 1977, pp. 53-54)

The concept of servant leadership is undoubtedly difficult for some to grasp. Both society and history have created a culture of “self above others,” whereas the servant leader looks to serve and support “others before self.” Servant leadership rests on the premise that the leader's needs and desires are subordinate to those of the follower and their higher purpose (Greenleaf, 1977; Hunter, 2004; Northouse, 2018; Wilkes, 1998).

Although education is a people-based enterprise, servant leadership is not prominent within the school setting. Yet, Afaq et al. (2017) determined that a significant and positive impact exists between servant leadership and the job satisfaction of faculty members. Similarly, Shaw and Newton (2014) identified a significant positive correlation between faculty members’ intention to remain and the level of their leaders’ perceived servant leadership.

Existing research denotes the negative impacts teacher turnover places on student achievement (Adnot et al., 2017; Carlson, 2013; Finnigan & Daly, 2017; Sawchuk, 2018; Young, 2018). Still, the bureaucratic nature of schooling operates in opposition to “an organization where human affairs and feelings are intense” (Insley et al., 2016, p. 231), even though research has demonstrated the many positive influences servant leadership generates within education (Afaq et al., 2017; Campbell et al., 2017; Chughtai, 2016, 2019; Gedifew & Bitew, 2017; Insley et al., 2016; Shaw & Newton, 2014).

Wheeler (2012) noted that aspiring servant leaders seek to develop self-actualizing followers. He further paralleled servant leadership with Maslow’s hierarchy of needs to explain that leaders are responsible for the psychological safety of their followers and that those leaders “are particularly interested in creating an environment that prizes belonging, inclusiveness, love, achievement, and growth” (p. 36). However, those tenets do not always exist in education.

Historical Review

Servant leadership is undoubtedly a difficult concept for some to grasp. Both society and history have created a culture of “self above others,” where the servant leader looks to serve and support “others before self.” Servant leadership, therefore, rests on the premise that the leader's needs and desires are subordinate to both the follower's needs and the higher purpose, or rather, the mission of the organization (Greenleaf, 1977; Hunter, 2004; Northouse, 2018; Wilkes, 1998).

The preponderance of recent leadership literature relates to the values and usage of transformative leadership (e.g., Amankwaa et al., 2019; Breevaart & Bakker, 2018; Breevaart & Zacher, 2019; Bukhari & Kamal, 2018; Cansoy, 2018; Foulkes-Bert et al., 2019; Howladar et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2019; Lin et al., 2018; Murugami, 2018; Pradhan & Jena, 2019; Yadav & Kumar, 2019). Although a substantial amount of servant leadership research exists, a considerable portion of that literature was developed more than five years before this study. Nonetheless, an incremental reevaluation of servant leadership has taken place over the past decade (Liden et al., 2015).

Eva et al. (2019) noted in their systematic review that the longitudinal study of servant leadership falls into three distinct phases: concept development, valid measurements, and lastly, various relationships and “model development... [which seeks] to go beyond simple relationships with outcomes to understand the antecedents, mediating mechanisms, and boundary conditions of servant leadership” (p. 112). Additionally, Eva et al. (2019) stated that recent servant leadership literature is gaining popularity “with over 100 articles and two meta-analyses being published in the last four years alone” (p. 112). However, this recent notoriety has not always been the case where servant leadership is concerned.

According to van Dierendonck (2011), the primary purpose behind early servant leadership literature was to identify philosophical notions of servant leadership actions and intentions. Although various servant leadership survey instruments exist, empirical data is lacking as to “how much ‘servility’ a leader must exhibit in order to be perceived as a servant leader” (Andersen, 2018, p. 765). Furthermore, no one prevailing definition exists for servant leadership, although several researchers have attempted to clarify Greenleaf’s theoretical model (Andersen, 2018; Locke, 2019; van Dierendonck, 2011).

Nonetheless, the second phase of servant leadership research effectively began with Lytle et al. (1998) and their SERV*OR service orientation scale. The SERV*OR measures 10 dimensions of service orientation. Additionally, Lytle et al. (1998) held that a managerial focus on service orientation and the intentional usage of their instrument for that aim could be directly “linked with specific outcome measures such as employee satisfaction, profitability, customer satisfaction, and other customer behavioral measures” (p. 483). They also believed that using their instrument would affect meaningful organizational change within customer-service oriented businesses.

The following year, Laub (1999) sought to understand better the meaning behind *The Institution as Servant* (Greenleaf, 1972). Through his dissertation study, Laub (1999) created a servant leadership instrument known as the Servant Organizational Leadership Assessment (SOLA) and validated his instrument across “four sectors: religious non-profit organizations, secular non-profit organizations, for profit organizations and public agencies” (Laub, 1999, p. 54). However, only six leadership characteristics found their place in the SOLA.

Agapao love, according to Dennis and Bocarnea (2005), is the foundation of servant leadership. This love calls for social morality and the leader’s understanding that others are not

objects for profit but rather individuals with purpose. Following this understanding, Dennis and Bocarnea (2005) developed an instrument that effectively measured five servant leadership characteristics for organizations seeking to hire servant leaders. Additionally, Dennis and Bocarnea (2005) cautioned organizations using their instrument to be somewhat selective in the individual(s) determining the servant leadership degree of those taking the survey.

Similarly, Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) identified 11 servant leader constructs via a review of the literature to operationalize a scale for empirical research. Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) found that servant leadership was a “justified [approach] as it appears [to hold] strong relationships with positive outcomes such as employees’ extra effort, employees’ satisfaction, and perceptions of organizational effectiveness” (p. 322). Additionally, the researchers tested the psychometric properties of their instrument by administering it to a group of elected community leaders and noted that their sampling technique proposed challenges for generalizations to the private sector. Therefore, they recommended the use of their instrument for both pre and post servant leadership testing aimed to better assist organizations in both recognizing and hiring servant leaders.

Next, Wong and Davey (2007) utilized an “extensive review of the literature” (p. 8) to identify 12 characteristics that they believe defined exceptional leadership within the corporate world. Additionally, they called for a “new paradigm of [MBA] leadership training... [because] the world is full of leaders with huge egos and a great deal of leadership” (pp. 10-11). For this reason, they sternly warned that ego-driven leaders are counter-productive for the organization and called for leadership based on humility and love.

In the following year, two different landmark studies appeared, Sendjaya et al. (2008) and Liden et al. (2008). Both studies developed multidimensional scales for servant leadership, the

Servant Leadership Behavior Scale (SLBS), and the SL-28, respectively. Sendjaya et al. (2008) incorporated a mixed methods study of both for-profit and not-for-profit business organizations to develop the items for their instrument. Their six dimension and 35-item SLBS created an additional easily administered and valid survey instrument. Liden et al. (2008), on-the-other-hand, originally began with a pilot of 85 items from other preexisting instruments and utilized exploratory factor analysis to developed a business-oriented seven-factor analysis with 28 items, four per factor, known merely as the SL-28 (the parent of the SL-7 survey instrument).

The Liden et al. (2008) study, like those before it, demonstrated both the complexity and multidimensionality of servant leadership. Additionally, the researchers held that their study demonstrated that servant leadership stood alone as a separate leadership theory from either transformational or leader-member exchange leadership theories. They continued that their research suggested servant leaders inspired followers to enhance organizational performance and increase commitment.

Seeking to “resolve the [then] current confusion in the literature on what servant leadership is and to establish an overall theoretical framework,” van Dierendonck (2011, p. 1229) incorporated an extensive review of related literature surrounding responsible business integration. Serving and leading, according to van Dierendonck (2011), work in harmony to improve both the leader and follower. Additionally, van Dierendonck (2011) stated that he believed authentic leadership was an extension of servant leadership rather than a separate theory, and that earlier models “confused behaviors with outcomes” (p. 1254). However, he also noted that limited empirical evidence existed for the many positively conjectured outcomes related to servant leadership and, therefore, he called for future research to address this need.

The current phase, however, “has seen a proliferation of studies on servant leadership, with over 100 articles and two meta-studies being published in the last four years alone” (Eva et al., 2019, p. 112). Although much of the prior research has remained disconnected, a common thread remains constant throughout servant leadership literature in the progression of its focus: followers, organization, and then self (Graham, 1991; Greenleaf, 1970; Sendjaya et al., 2008). As a result of the recently increased servant leadership theory exposure, “some modern organizations are embracing alternative structures giving rise to non-traditional leader-follower situations... [such as] education and medicine and in not-for-profit and volunteer organizations” (Eva et al., 2019, p. 117). However, the lack of education-related servant leadership studies within the United States beckons the need for further contextual understanding and rests as a foundational purpose of this study in educational practice.

Servant Leadership As Related to Employees

A real understanding of servant leadership, according to Autry (2001), views leadership bilaterally through employee-created performance expectations and reciprocated performance reviews of the leader. This reciprocity beacons collegiality between the leader as a servant and the servant as a leader. Additionally, servant leadership requires one to embrace a new paradigm of leadership where community, team-work, and shared decision-making take the place of traditional hierarchical leadership models (Crippen & Willows, 2019). Thus, this newer servant leader mindset requires “leaders to be authentic, vulnerable, accepting, present, and useful” (Autry, 2001).

Being Authentic. Authenticity is simply being and acting consistently in every circumstance (Autry, 2001). Thus, authenticity is vitally important in the expectations that leaders have for their followers. Each consistent and clearly defined expectation provides

stability and assurance for the follower that surpasses relational attributes on which a good number of leaders rely. Thus, followers find security and psychological safety through the assurance that authenticity provides, allowing them to perform at higher levels (Brohi et al., 2018; Chughtai, 2016; Sun et al., 2019).

Additionally, Verdorfer (2019) stated that higher perceptions of a leader's authenticity increased their "followers' personal identification with and respect for their leader [and was] highly likely to facilitate subsequent, more direct and intentional influence attempts by the leader" (p. 127). Similarly, Bande et al. (2016) confirmed that servant leaders' authenticity causes them to realize their moral obligation of ensuring follower success by providing clarity and support, and Lu et al. (2018) found servant leaders cultivated deeper and more meaningful relationships with their followers. Thus, servant leaders engage their employees through their intentional and moral commitment (Bao et al., 2018).

Being Vulnerable. Vulnerability, however, calls for the courageous leadership of trusting in others and the admission of one's fallibility and lack of control (Autry, 2001). For this very reason, servant leaders must recognize that their meekness, in conjunction with the empowerment of some followers, potentially lays the foundation for animosities and misperceptions of weakness. Servant leadership, therefore, may not always be the appropriate leadership approach for every situation when contextual barriers such as culture or competitive employee dispositions exist (Brohi et al., 2018; Liden et al., 2014).

However, servant leadership remains "compatible with cultural contexts that emphasize individualism and uncertainty avoidance" (Verdorfer, 2019, p. 128). For this reason, Autry (2001) warned that vulnerability stands in direct opposition to many prominent societal roles

such as expressed masculinity, hidden emotions, and veiled empathy. On the contrary, he notes that vulnerability cannot exist when one's authenticity proves otherwise.

Being Accepting. True servant leaders must “abandon any dualistic notion of winners and losers” (Autry, 2001, p. 17). Instead, servant leaders embrace the imperfection in their followers because they understand the imperfection and vulnerability found within themselves. As such, Lu et al. (2018) indicated that leaders ought to see their followers empathetically and encourage personal expression while aiding them with emotional processing.

However, Sun et al. (2019) warned that listening alone was insufficient. Rather, authentic acceptance required leaders to invest in discovering situational characteristics and to work to meet the specific needs warranted for the employees. Additionally, openness and agreeableness both directly related to servant leadership leading to benevolent leadership behaviors (Sun et al., 2019). Thus, authentically accepting leaders shed their judgment and condescension of others just as they hope others will do for them.

Being Present. Presence, on the other hand, provides reassurance through the leader's actions. To achieve this, Bao et al. (2018) encouraged servant leaders to visit with followers regularly and cultivate meaningful dialogue with them to minimize any perceived distances through three different approaches: mentorships, modeling, and collaborative decision-making. Additionally, these approaches provide a perception of genuine care and, in turn, cultivate follower alignment and identification with the leader (Verdorfer, 2019; Wang et al., 2017).

Additionally, Wang et al. (2017) found that perceived servant leadership transcended the leader/follower relationship to indirectly and positively spill over to the follower's work-family balance. The leader's presence, therefore, is essential when seeking to lead holistically. However, Stollberger et al. (2019) urged organizations to “consider introducing work-family

balance initiatives especially for direct supervisors with frequent employee interactions” (p. 168) because continued family interruptions diminished work-related servant leadership. Therefore, servant leaders must monitor their actions while understanding that a tempered presence is essential for personal preservation.

Being Useful. Servant leaders must remain useful to both the follower and the organization. This usefulness is more aligned with building community (Bauer et al., 2019), encouraging productive behaviors (Stollberger et al., 2019), and cultivating care (Autry, 2001). However, Bao et al. (2018) contrasted the conflicting perspectives of social exchange and social learning in that the prior expects in return while the latter altruistically serves a broader audience of stakeholders.

In addition, useful servant leaders actively invest in their followers’ future career success. For example, Zhen Wang et al. (2019) determined that even though “some individuals [are] not proactive by nature, organizations still can encourage and support employees to become more proactive in managing their careers” (p. 726). Thus when servant leaders seek to influence others and positively cultivate them, two manifestations exist, prosocial behaviors and employee performance (Stollberger et al., 2019).

Servant Leadership Within Education

Servant leadership is not a prominent leadership approach within school settings as education has historically followed a traditional hierarchical leadership model. However, servant leadership study, according to Crippen and Willows (2019), should be an integral component within teacher leadership programs. They hold that servant leadership’s employee cultivation will likely encourage teacher leaders to identify themselves as leaders.

Organizational Commitment. The commitment that servant leaders exhibit toward their followers' success positively impacts organizational commitment within educational institutions. For instance, a significant and positive impact exists between servant leadership and the job satisfaction of education faculty members (Afaq et al., 2017). Additionally, faculty members' intention to remain has been demonstrated to be significantly and positively correlated to the level of the leaders' perceived servant leadership (Ardana & Surya, 2019; Shaw & Newton, 2014).

Furthermore, Allen et al. (2018) noted that although servant leadership has excellent potential to better support knowledge-based organizations, it still receives minimal notoriety as a prominent leadership structure within non-profit organizations. Nonetheless, the freedom and commitment granted by servant leaders to their followers foster self-determination, motivation, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Allen et al., 2018; Bande et al., 2016; Rozika et al., 2018; Zargar et al., 2019). These positive employee behaviors improve the overall culture within the organization, further solidifying organizational commitment (Amin et al., 2019) and minimizing the degree to which employees heed negative aspects of their workplaces (Sun et al., 2019).

However, Insley et al. (2016) discovered that the teachers within their Turkish study did not believe their principals possessed enough knowledge to demonstrate servant leadership behaviors. For this reason, researchers have repeatedly stressed the importance of meaningful and cultivated dialogue between servant leaders and followers.

Employee Retention. Existing research clearly explains the negative impacts teacher turnover places on student achievement (Adnot et al., 2017; Carlson, 2013; Finnigan & Daly, 2017; Sawchuk, 2018; Young, 2018). Still, the bureaucratic nature of schooling operates in

opposition to “an organization where human affairs and feelings are intense” (Insley et al., 2016, p. 231), even though research has demonstrated the many positive influences servant leadership generates within education (Afaq et al., 2017; Ardana & Surya, 2019; Campbell et al., 2017; Chughtai, 2016, 2019; Gedifew & Bitew, 2017; Insley et al., 2016; Shaw & Newton, 2014).

For instance, Brohi et al. (2018) “tested the moderated mediation model of servant leadership, psychological safety, employees’ regulatory focus, and turnover intention” (p. 11) within Pakistan. They found that servant leadership both increases psychological safety and decreases the turnover of their followers. Similarly, Palta (2019) determined that servant leadership’s effect on organizational commitment decreased teachers’ turnover intention in Turkey because of the personal connection that teachers feel for the organization. Further still, they noted that, according to their research, neither gender, tenure, nor seniority held any perceptual weight which differed to prior studies.

Additionally, Chiniara and Bentein (2018) attributed positive servant leadership behaviors and attitudes to increased team cohesion, and as a result, employees perceived less division of in-group and out-group factions. Thus, servant leadership practices that foster beneficial human resource practices “will manifest a healthy competition that eventually leads to job satisfaction” (Rozika et al., 2018). Three beneficial outcomes occur as a result: job satisfaction substantially increases, turnover decreases, and organizational success improves.

Organizational Success. Recent studies have demonstrated the value that high-quality servant leadership oriented relationships add to organizational success across various for-profit and not-for-profit industries (Alafeshat & Tanova, 2019; Allen et al., 2018; Opoku et al., 2019; Zhining Wang et al., 2019; Zhen Wang et al., 2019; Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara & Ruiz-Palomino, 2019). These meaningful relationships foster a cohesive organizational climate that

provides for improved psychological and environmental factors (Liu & Shi, 2018). Subsequently, followers often choose to seek to exceed their leader's expectations (Mostafa & El-Motalib, 2019) and act in innovative ways such as through contributory and altruistic interpersonal relationships with their colleagues (Chiniara & Bentein, 2018; Zhu & Zhang, 2019; Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara & Ruiz-Palomino, 2019).

As a result, both employee attitudes (Kiker et al., 2019) and collective thriving (Zhining Wang et al., 2019; Xu & Wang, 2019) occur, which reasonably stands to provide organizations with a competitive advantage (Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara & Ruiz-Palomino, 2019). In alignment, both Liu and Shi (2018) and Opoku et al. (2019) reasoned that servant leaders should seek opportunities to engage and grow their followers, thereby encouraging the followers to “become servants themselves, and... [be] willing and proactive to share ideas with others” (Zhu & Zhang, 2019, pp. 16-17). Thus, providing additional opportunities for thought diversity stimulates innovation within the organization further.

However, it should be noted that servant leadership holds differing strengths in for-profit and not-for-profit organizations. “Employee attitudes such as job satisfaction, commitment, ... trust [and organizational citizenship behaviors are] generally higher in business settings” (Kiker et al., 2019, p. 191). However, increased job performance is generally higher in not-for-profit organizations (Kiker et al., 2019), such as education.

Additionally, Lemoine and Blum (2019) determined that servant leadership more closely aligned with less masculine leadership theories and held that their study provided evidence that women may be better suited to act as servant leaders. Although their study hypothesized that “members of teams with higher compositions of feminine gender roles responded to manager servant leadership by growing in prosocial motivation, with higher levels of their own servant

leader behaviors, and subsequently enjoying stronger performance” (Lemoine & Blum, 2019, p. 16), such was not the case. Sex neither promoted prosocial behaviors nor employee performance; however, it did provide a more considerable influence of female leaders in cultivating employee servant leadership behaviors, which both improve employee performance and bolster organizational success. Thus, one could surmise that servant leadership implementation might be more readily adopted within the female-dominated educational setting than in the more masculine for-profit environment. As such, servant leadership stands as a viable leadership theory within education.

Chapter Summary

Increasing teacher attrition and decreasing teacher preparation program enrollments both posit several adverse effects on schools and schooling, such as draining already scarce financial resources, decreasing the efficacy of classroom instruction, and more importantly, diminishing student achievement as seen on mandated high-stakes test scores. Although teachers note various reasons for leaving the profession and their schools, the lack of administrative support is frequently mentioned as a critical determinant. This realization is particularly essential within education because a society's future success rests upon the quality of its educational system.

However, minimal research exists as to which leadership theories and characteristics best negate teacher turnover. Therefore, the focus of this study was to determine if any relationship exists between servant leadership, teacher retention, and student achievement. This study is intended to further the understanding of best leadership practices that result in improved employment and increased student achievement.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The U.S. teacher turnover rate is 16% annually, with 8% leaving the profession entirely and 8% shifting schools (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019); 29% of those teachers leave within the first five years, and 39% leave at the end of five years. This annual turnover is twice that of Finland, Singapore, and Ontario, Canada, which are also considered high achieving countries and is even more pronounced in southern states (Sutcher et al., 2016). Georgia certainly falls into alignment with this increased turnover as 44% of teachers leave within the first five years of entering the profession. Further aggravating this issue, only 2.7% of Georgia's 53,000 teachers surveyed stated that they would encourage students to look to teaching as a profession (Woods et al., 2019). Additionally, Sutcher et al. (2016) noted two more alarming considerations. First, less than one third of the teachers who leave education ever return, and second, alternately certified educators leave at twice the rate of those receiving traditional training. However regardless of why or when teachers choose to leave the profession, it is ultimately the students who bear the brunt of their leaving.

Teachers hold a great deal of influence on students' achievement (Cordero & Gil-Izquierdo, 2018). Hattie (2003) determined that teachers hold the highest education-related variance in student achievement and account for two of the highest effect sizes: teacher estimates of achievement, 1.62 and collective teacher efficacy, 1.57. Unfortunately, schools enrolling populations with the highest academic needs frequently possess staff with the least training (Battey et al., 2016; Kuriloff et al., 2019; Zhang & Zeller, 2016); in other words, instruction is often weakest where it is needed most.

Although both novice and experienced teachers cite numerous education and non-education reasons for leaving their schools or the profession, ineffective leadership appears in a great deal of research (Ávalos & Valenzuela, 2016; Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Bukhari & Kamal, 2018; Carlson, 2013; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Dicke et al., 2019; Dunn et al., 2017; Forseille & Raptis, 2016; Ozmen, 2019; Polatcan & Cansoy, 2019; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017; Somech & Bogler, 2019). However, limited information exists as to which of the numerous leadership theories best promotes teacher retention and fosters student achievement. Thus, school leaders possess minimal information in how to best support their faculty, staff, and students. Therefore, this study sought to explore the relationship that servant leadership, the theoretical framework for this study, held with both teachers' retention intention and student achievement.

Research Questions

The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine the relationship between servant leadership, teacher retention, and student achievement. Therefore, the ultimate goal of this study was to assess servant leadership's relationship with student achievement to provide educational leaders with information that has the potential to improve their academic stewardship and the molding of future leaders and teachers.

To further assist in this understanding, the following equally weighted research questions (RQ) were employed:

1. Does servant leadership [high, low] influence teacher retention intention?
2. What is the effect of servant leadership [high, low] on student achievement by categorical population groups as identified by the GaDOE?

3. What is the effect of teacher retention intention [stay, leave] on student achievement while controlling for servant leadership perception overall by categorical population groups as identified by the GaDOE?

Research Design

This non-experimental quantitative study intended to determine if a relationship exists between servant leadership and both teacher retention and student achievement. Additionally, this survey sought to measure any variance that teachers' intended retention may hold on student achievement. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), survey-designed studies work best when one seeks to answers descriptive questions or has "question[s] about the relationships between variables" (p. 147). This study sought both.

Furthermore, the non-experimental survey design both increased the economy and minimized any potential harm. First, the shortened survey improved the likelihood of participation since it took less than five minutes to complete (Lindermann, 2018). Additionally, the survey instrument for this study utilized participant determined sliding scale values from 0 to 100, which reduced any servant leadership biases the researcher may possess. Lastly, both the de-identified demographic information and the usage of publicly available archival student achievement data promoted subject safety. Therefore, this study utilized a one-time cross-sectional collection of online teacher surveys in seven superintendent-approved school districts using Qualtrics and the publicly available 2018-2019 CCRPI data.

Population, Sample, and Sampling

The setting for this study was a contiguous group of public middle and high schools located in a rural region in the southeastern United States. These schools work through a collaborative partnership within the same *Regional Education Service Agency* (RESA). All but

three of these districts identify more than 50% of their students as being economically disadvantaged (ED), yet all of them historically perform relatively well on state-mandated assessments. More specifically, the 2018-2019 RESA ED average was 60.0%, while the state posted a 64.3% ED average for that same year. Thus, one in 25 fewer Rural RESA (pseudonym) students classify as ED in comparison to the state average. Additionally, the grand mean per-pupil expenditure for the 2016-2018 school years of these RESA districts is approximately \$335 greater than the state mean per-pupil expenditure of \$9375 for those same years.

Fifteen rural districts comprise this RESA. However, one of those districts is an alternative evening school that employs many day-time teachers from other school districts. Therefore, this alternative school district was not considered to participate in this study. Additionally, no primary or elementary schools were included in this study for two related reasons. First, each school district approaches the grade make up of its various early education schools differently. For instance, some school districts possessed only P-5 elementary schools, while others included both P-2 and 3-5 graded schools, and still yet, some included all of the previous scenarios. Second, the CCRPI calculations to determine Content Mastery are unequally calculated based upon the grade structure for the different schools. For example, a P-5 elementary school would have students that matriculate from second to third grade, the first tested grade for the Georgia Milestones Assessment, under the same school leadership. However, a P-2 primary school's Content Mastery is calculated based upon the third-grade performance of its matriculated students. This posed a problem when feeder schools did not clearly align, and students attended various elementary schools under different school leaderships. Thus, parallel statistics relating to grades P-5 were unattainable for this study.

Seven of the 14 remaining districts agreed to participate in this study, one declined, and six never responded. However, one of the districts agreeing to participate made principal changes at the beginning of the 2019-2020 school year for both its middle and high school. Likewise, another district also made a principal change at one of its middle schools at the beginning of that same year. Therefore, those three schools were unable to participate in this study.

Additionally, the GaDOE's decision to abandon state-mandated assessments for the 2019-2020 school year due to the Covid-19 pandemic necessitated that the included schools be under the same principalship for both the 2018-2019 and the 2019-2020 school years. This additional caveat allowed for the alignment between teachers' perceived servant leadership rating for the school's principal and the 2018-2019 CCRPI. Additionally, the related COVID-19 high budget cuts, staff reductions, and unstable economy likely minimized the number of first-year or transfer teachers included in the study.

Therefore, a qualifying question led the survey to mitigate statistical irregularities. This qualifying question eliminated three schools from the study, as previously mentioned, since the participants within the school indicated that they did not work under the same school principal for both the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 school years, thereby reducing the approximated study population from $N \approx 920$ to $N \approx 823$. The vast majority of the six participating school districts (see Table 1) are similar in student enrollment and makeup.

Subsequently, 236 respondents began the survey by agreeing to the participant's implied consent. However, this number differed from the number utilized for analysis purposes because only those respondents providing complete data were included in the analyses, and thus, any participant who did not respond to all survey items was omitted from the main data analyses of

the present study. Of the initial 236, only 145 provided complete data to be included in the analyses.

Table 3.1: Rural RESA Participating Districts

District Pseudonyms	Full-Time Equivalent Enrollment	Economically Disadvantaged %	3-yr Avg. Per-Pupil Expenditure	MS + HS Teachers
Agrestic Bay	3,879	50.7	\$ 9,500	129
Broadwater Beach	7,272	56.8	\$ 10,050	197
Indigo Falls	2,940	54.7	\$ 10,750	110
Monroe County	4,102	44.9	\$ 9,200	129
Newberry Plains	3,109	59.5	\$ 11,000	122
Westbrook Heights	3,725	46.2	\$ 11,250	136

Note. All values are for the 2018-2019 school year.

Instrumentation

The researcher obtained permission from R. C. Liden (personal communication, June 25, 2019) through an email exchange to use the SL-7 (Liden et al., 2015) survey instrument. Additionally, Liden (personal communication, June 25, 2019) provided the most current version of the SL-7 (see Appendix B). The SL-7 (Adapted) was used to establish teachers' perceptions of school leaders' level of servant leadership.

All SL-7 questions utilized an adapted 100-point sliding scale. The SL-7 created a summed score value for each participant's rating for the degree of perceived servant leadership as it contained the question with the highest loading factor analysis score for each of the seven dimensions of its parent survey, the SL-28 (Liden et al., 2008). Lastly, additional questions were added to the survey to gain demographic and teacher retention intention information. The publicly reported CCRPI values located under the Content Mastery tab of the 2018-2019 CCRPI served as the student achievement components for this study

Lindermann (2018) noted that surveys having more than 12 questions or exceeding a five-minute completion reduce response rates by 15%, and surveys passing the ten-minute mark drop even further to as much as a 40% reduction. Furthermore, online response rates frequently do not yield the number of respondents required to provide robust data analysis, and longer surveys diminish the response rate even more (Lindermann, 2018). Therefore, the researcher worked to provide an instrument requiring less than five minutes for total completion to maximize participation rates at each school.

Teachers in the superintendent-approved Rural RESA middle and high schools received the SL-7 (Adapted) survey instrument. These questions utilized a 100-point sliding scale, where any score within the 0-100 range was interpreted as a valid response. Each of the three retention intention questions related to two anchors, “Very true for me” (100) and “Not at all true for me” (0). Additional questions were added to the front of the instrument to collect essential identifiable demographic information related to the teachers' gender, age, length of teaching experience, and highest degree earned. However, as this study only sought to measure the principal's degree of servant leadership, no principal demographics were necessary for the correlational comparisons.

A median split procedure was originally planned to determine the break point between a high and low rating of the perceived level of servant leadership. However, the ceiling effect, median = 88.67 within a scale of 0 to 100, created vastly uneven group sizes for high and low servant leadership, $n = 115$ and 20, respectively. Therefore, a conceptual median of the 0 to 100 scale itself was applied. Thus, all global servant leadership values being less than or equal to 50 received a “Low” rating for servant leadership, and scores being greater than or equal to 51

constituted a “High” rating for servant leadership. This adjustment provided relatively even group sizes for high, $n = 65$, and low, $n = 70$, servant leadership.

Additionally, the SL-7 has been shown to exhibit adequate internal consistency reliability and construct validity through exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis to measure servant leadership (Liden et al., 2015). More specifically, Liden et al. (2015) assessed the psychometric properties of their short form, SL-7, at the individual level via three independent study groups consisting of 729, 218, and 552 participants. The results across these three groups provided correlations between the SL-7 and the SL-28 averaging .90. Additionally, the reliabilities for these three groupings on the SL-7 remained above .80 (Cronbach alpha scores of .80, .81, and .89, respectively). Additionally, the “criterion-related validities (tested only in the organizational samples) for the SL-7 were high and very similar to those produced by the SL-28” Liden et al. (2015, p. 267). Furthermore, Liden et al. (2015) tested the convergent validity against three frequently used servant leadership instruments: “28 items from Liden et al. (2008), $\alpha = .97$; 14 items from Ehrhart (2004), $\alpha = .96$; and 30 items from van Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011), $\alpha = .95$ ” (p. 258) making the SL-7 an acceptable instrument in determining a global value for servant leadership. However, for the present study, the SL-7 yielded an internal consistency reliability coefficient for the sample, $n = 145$, of Cronbach alpha = .900, thereby closely aligning with those reliability coefficients found by Liden et al. (2015).

Three additional retention intention questions followed the survey also utilizing a 100-point slider scale, where any score within the 0-100 range was interpreted as a valid response. Each of the three retention intention questions related to two anchors, “Very true for me” (100) and “Not at all true for me” (0). Again, a median split procedure was used to determine the break

point between a high and low rating of responses to these retention intention questions. The three questions are as follows:

1. I am considering **leaving the teaching profession** within the next three years for reasons other than retirement. [*Very true for me, Not at all true for me*]
2. I am considering **leaving for another school or district** within the next three years. [*Very true for me, Not at all true for me*]
3. I am **not considering leaving** the teaching profession **or** my teaching position within the next three years. [*Very true for me, Not at all true for me*]

Data Collection

The researcher requested letters of cooperation via email from the Rural RESA school district superintendents to invite their middle and high school teachers to participate in a multidimensional survey, the SL-7, identifying the level of their perception of the building-level principal as a servant leader. Following the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from Georgia Southern University (See Appendix A), the researcher invited all of the middle and high school teachers in the superintendent-approved districts to participate in the survey. Additionally, the survey was voluntary for all teachers and conducted anonymously through Qualtrics. The researcher did not track IP addresses nor any other identifiable data for any survey submission. Teachers were only asked to complete a leadership survey of their principal, and the servant leadership aspect of the study was undisclosed to minimize any preconceived biases of teachers.

These surveys were also strategically requested during the late summer semester, while the various extraneous, external, and additional teaching requirements that so frequently consume classroom teachers' valuable time were at their lowest. To combat the previously mentioned participation constraints, the one qualifying question, the four demographic questions,

the seven SL-7 survey items, and three additional retention intention questions were all short and closed-ended. Thus, respondents were able to complete their responses at an estimated rate of four to eight items per minute, which yielded an approximate two- to four-minute completion time.

The survey was developed with embedded-logic driven questions to minimize participation time, and only the researcher had access to each of the respective surveys. The results obtained and attributed to each principal and school will be maintained and kept confidential for a minimum of three years and stored on a password-protected external drive. However, the researcher offered each superintendent the overall culminating results, as well as their district's information at both the district and school levels to encourage participation approval. However, the researcher will not provide any individualized survey data results to anyone. The finalized and publishable data, analytical results, tables, and figures shared, explaining the research findings attributed to servant leadership for this study, and all essential identifications employ pseudonyms and generalized labels.

Data Analysis

This quantitative study utilized descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation, one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), and one-way multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA). More specifically, the first research question (RQ1), "Does servant leadership [high, low] influence teacher retention intention?" required a MANOVA with servant leadership [high, low] being the independent variable (IV) and each teacher retention construct serving as the dependent variables (DV). For the purposes of this study, a conceptual median of the 0-100 scale itself was utilized to determine the sample median and identify the categorical split for the servant leadership variable. Those summed question values being greater than or equal to 51

constituted a “high” degree of servant leadership, and summed values being less than or equal to 50 constituted a “low” degree of servant leadership. Furthermore, each construct (leaving the profession, leaving the school or district, and the intention validation question) utilized a 100-point sliding scale, where any score within the 0-100 range was interpreted as a valid response with the anchors “Not at all true for me” (0) and “Very true for me” (100).

The second research question (RQ2), “What is the effect of servant leadership [high, low] on student achievement by categorical population groups as identified by the GaDOE?” also employed a MANOVA with the IV being servant leadership [high, low] and each of four CCRPI content mastery scores (English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies) serve as the DVs. This RQ also considered summed question values being greater than or equal to the conceptual median of 51 for the 0-100 scale as constituting a “high” degree of servant leadership and summed values being less than or equal to the conceptual median of 50 representing a “low” degree of servant leadership. Additionally, each content area score was calculated by categorical population group scores reported for the CCRPI. However, only the Hispanic, White, Economically Disadvantaged, and Students with Disabilities population groups were included for this research question as only they yielded sufficient data for analysis among the participating schools.

The third research question (RQ3), “What is the effect of teacher retention intention [stay, leave] on student achievement while controlling for servant leadership perception overall, by categorical population groups as identified by the GaDOE?” required a MANCOVA to control for the additional influence of servant leadership. Thus, the intention of staying or leaving served as the IV [stay, leave], each of the four content mastery scores (English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies) the DVs, and servant leadership perception as

the covariate, or control variable. Like those for RQ2, only the Hispanic, White, Economically Disadvantaged, and Students with Disabilities population groups were included for this research question as only they yielded complete data for analysis among the participating schools.

Reporting the Findings

The triangular data configuration of this study as necessitated by the three research sub-questions required multiple presentation formats. However, the findings are primarily presented through text and tables. Additionally, the interaction of numerous variables within each RQ called for a linear and thorough discussion for each RQ independently. For instance, RQ1 necessitated an individualized review of each of the three teacher retention intention questions. Similarly, RQ2 and RQ3 both called for various demographic and academic achievement discussions to adequately explain the findings.

Limitations, Delimitations, and Assumptions

This study provided a global view of the impact of servant leadership on both teacher retention and student achievement. Still, the following limitations inevitably constrained the analysis and results. First, the purely quantitative nature of this study did not allow for identifying causality but rather only correlation. In addition, this was a dissertation in practice; therefore, the researcher was not seeking generalizability. While this research study may not be robust enough to transfer to other studies, the researcher has provided adequate descriptions so the reader may determine transferability.

The geographic region of this study posed additional constraints. Pre-existing socioeconomic and cultural similarities exist within the research group. For instance, the vast majority of the schools and districts that reside in the Rural RESA service area have greater than 50% of students qualify for either free or reduced meals; minimal ethnic diversity exists within

the region as the area is primarily White, and individuals living within this geographic region openly admit their predominantly Christian faith. The alignment of servant leadership tenets and Judeo-Christian thought potentially present some skewing of the results because these ethnographic similarities could have created a bias in favor of servant leadership.

Additionally, all data were calculated at the school level for both the perception data and student achievement values. Furthermore, the relatively small number of available respondents at each school call for return rates that substantially exceed the rate of return needed to maintain a 95% confidence and 5% margin of error. Nonetheless, the researcher sought a sample size of greater than 90 across all available participants.

The researcher also considered the following to be assumptions of the study. First, the researcher considers himself to be an aspiring servant leader, and therefore, believes that servant leadership is the best form of school leadership. For this reason, the study followed a quantitative approach to minimize researcher biases that may have occurred through researcher-imposed qualitative themes.

Additionally, this study possessed key assumptions. First, this study assumed that those teachers comprising the final study sample yielded an accurate representation of the entire Rural RESA population. Second, it assumed that participants answered honestly and accurately in terms of their principals' servant leadership characteristics. Third, the assumption existed that participants genuinely believed this was an anonymous study and responded accordingly. Fourth, two related assumptions existed as follows: that neither the leader changed leadership practices over the required two-year period, nor that teachers changed their perceptive views of the leader's servant leadership traits.

Chapter Summary

The loss of quality teachers negatively impacts student achievement, and many educators report ineffective and non-supportive leadership as the reason for leaving the profession. The root cause may be attributed to the leadership itself. The researcher hoped that this study will add to the limited understanding of which leadership theories prove most effective in the ongoing teacher retention dilemma. Therefore, the purpose of this non-experimental correlational study was to ascertain if servant leadership, one such leadership theory, offers any aid in improving teacher retention and student achievement.

CHAPTER 4

REPORT DATA AND DATA ANALYSIS

The loss of quality teachers negatively impacts student achievement, and many educators report ineffective and non-supportive leadership as the reason for leaving the profession. Unfortunately, student achievement frequently suffers as a result. Therefore, this study aimed to assess servant leadership's impact on both teacher retention and student achievement.

Additionally, this study sought to add a third component in that it aimed to consider the impact teacher retention held on student achievement while controlling for servant leadership. This added analysis created a triangular connection between the three variables that to the researcher's knowledge had not been previously conducted. Thus, this chapter provides the study's related survey results, data collections, and its findings.

Research Questions

Educational leaders who understand the value and result of their actions are better able to provide appropriate leadership that improves their organization and its overarching mission. Therefore, this study's overall goal was to assess servant leadership's relationship with both teacher's retention intention and student achievement, the implied mission of all academic institutions. This study also aimed to provide educational leaders with valuable information that improved their potential to enhance their visionary stewardship and mold future leaders and teachers.

The researcher hypothesized that a positive relationship existed between servant leadership and both teachers' intention to remain within the educational setting and student achievement. The overarching research question guiding this study was: What is the relationship between school leaders' level of servant leadership as perceived by teachers, teacher retention

expectations within the school, and student achievement? To further assist in this understanding, the following equally weighted research questions (RQ) were employed:

1. Does servant leadership [high, low] influence teacher retention intention?
2. What is the effect of servant leadership [high, low] on student achievement by categorical population groups as identified by the GaDOE?
3. What is the effect of teacher retention intention [stay, leave] on student achievement while controlling for servant leadership perception overall by categorical population groups as identified by the GaDOE?

Research Design

This study employed a non-experimental quantitative design to minimize researcher bias as he considers himself an aspiring servant leader. The quantitative survey design allowed the researcher to seek explanatory answers while evaluating any relationships among the three variables: servant leadership, teacher retention intention, and student achievement. This quantitative survey design approach also provided a platform for increased economy and decreased potential for respondent harm. Additionally, the four demographic questions and the use of publicly available student achievement data further promoted subject safety.

Additionally, each of the seven questions related to servant leadership and the three associated with teachers' retention intention utilized a 100-point sliding scale where any value from 0 to 100 was deemed valid. This adapted sliding-scale approach provided response flexibility and freedom that Likert-designed surveys often lack (Imbault et al., 2018). Although descriptive statistics are essential for informational dissemination, the analysis needed to answer the study's RQs required the more complex statistical approaches on MANOVA for RQ1 and RQ2 and a MANCOVA for RQ3.

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

The study participants were middle and high school teachers from a contiguous region of schools from a rural area of the Southeastern United States. Each of these schools works within the same collaborative RESA. Additionally, the respondents all worked under the same school principal within their respective schools during the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 school years. This two-year requirement was not planned for this study. However, it became essential after the GaDOE absolved state-mandated testing for the 2019-2020 school year due to the global Novel or New Corona Virus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Seven school district superintendents originally agreed to participate in the study, and emailed invitations were sent to each of their middle and high school teachers ($N \approx 920$) to participate with the Qualtrics survey link. However, one of those districts made principal changes at both its middle and high schools before the 2019-2020 school year, excluding them from the study, and another district made a principal change at one of its middle schools, reducing the actual approximate number of eligible respondents ($N \approx 823$). Additionally, the vast majority of the six participating school districts (see Table 3.1) are similar in student enrollment and demographic makeup.

Additionally, 236 respondents initially began the survey by agreeing to the participant's implied consent. However, two respondents ended their survey before answering any further questions, while 188 respondents answered "yes" to the qualifying question, and 46 answered "no," thereby receiving a thank you notification and ending their survey. Lastly, only 145 of those moving beyond the qualifying question provided adequate data to be included in the analyses, thereby creating an approximate participation rate of 17.6% for this study.

Respondents replied to four demographic questions on their gender, school district, school, and certification level. However, more specific demographic questions, such as age or years of teaching experience, were deemed too risky for ensuring respondent anonymity when paired with the school's identification. However, the CCRPI information breakdown required both the district and school identification to retrieve accurate student achievement data. Nonetheless, the demographic questions provided valuable information (see Table 4.1).

Participants' Gender

Participants were asked to identify their gender for this study. Participant responses indicated that 71.03% of respondents identified as being female, 26.21% as male, and 2.74% either chose not to answer the question or selected "Prefer Not to Answer."

Participants' Instruction Level

Participants were also asked to provide their school district and school in which they worked to obtain accurate student achievement data. These two demographic questions provided each participant's instructional level. As such, 53.10% of the participants reported working in middle schools, while 46.90% identified as working in high schools.

Participants' Highest Degree Earned

Participants were asked to indicate their highest degree earned for this study. Responses indicated that 25.52% of the respondents had earned a bachelor's degree, 28.97% possessed master's degrees, 35.86% held a specialist's degree, 6.90% had obtained their doctorate, and 2.76% did not indicate their highest degrees earned.

Table 4.1: Descriptive Statistics by Demographic Aligned with the Global SL-7 Score Ratings

Demographic	Frequency	Percent	Global SL-7 Score		
			<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range
Gender					
Female	103	71.03	80.41	19.57	8.57 - 100
Male	38	26.21	84.56	14.66	40.86 - 100
Prefer Not to Answer	4	1.37	---	---	---
Instructional Level					
Middle	78	53.10	81.51	19.89	8.57 - 100
High	67	46.90	80.72	17.66	35.71 - 100
Highest Degree Earned					
B.A.	37	25.52	79.54	20.68	28.43 - 100
M.Ed.	42	28.97	79.56	20.03	8.57 - 100
Ed.S.	52	35.86	84.83	15.09	24.29 - 100
Ed.D./Ph.D.	10	6.90	76.14	22.76	42.57 - 100
Blank	4	2.76	---	---	---

Note. The “---” indicates the value is omitted due to an extremely small group size.

N = 145

Findings

One hundred forty-three respondents answered all seven of the SL-7 questions to provide a global servant leadership score. Each item on the SL-7 aligns with an individual trait attributed to servant leadership. Liden et al. (2015) noted that the SL-7's design called for a summed value to obtain a global servant leadership score. However, as the sum and mean are linear transformations, the mean scale score provided a conceptual alignment with the 100-point scale used throughout this study. The descriptive statics related to servant leadership within this study are located in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Descriptive Statistics of Servant Leadership

IV	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range
Servant Leadership	81.138	18.820	8.57 - 100

N = 145

Descriptive Profile of Student Achievement Data

The Georgia Department of Education's CCRPI utilizes a 100-point scoring for each of its student achievement components. This study included only those categorical populations which possessed sufficient data across the participating schools. Thus, this study utilized the Hispanic, White, Economically Disadvantaged, and Students with Disabilities categorical groups. Additionally, the White, economically disadvantaged, and students with disabilities groups all possessed equivalent group sizes ($N = 182$) across content areas save the Students with Disabilities grouping within the Social Studies content area ($N = 171$). However, the Hispanic grouping acquired different sample sizes across the content areas (ELA, $N = 159$; Math, $N = 159$; Science, $N = 123$; and Social Studies; $N = 112$). Additionally, the mean, standard deviation, and range for each categorical value remained relatively similar across each of the four content areas. Table 4.3 provides detailed descriptive information for each content area by the categorical group as identified by the Georgia Department of Education for reporting the CCRPI student achievement data.

Table 4.3: Descriptive Statistics of CCRPI Student Achievement Data by Categorical Populations

Content Area	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range
English/Language Arts				
Hispanic	159	65.064	8.501	53.90 – 79.63
White	182	77.094	7.809	62.53 – 90.06
Economically Disadvantaged	182	63.870	8.395	49.67 – 80.57
Students with Disabilities	182	35.976	5.231	28.08 – 80.57
Mathematics				
Hispanic	159	65.898	10.854	49.44 – 81.68
White	182	73.699	9.418	60.69 – 88.76
Economically Disadvantaged	182	63.567	11.373	48.63 – 80.34
Students with Disabilities	182	35.560	10.393	19.43 – 60.45
Science				
Hispanic	123	51.549	7.209	38.24 – 63.13
White	182	72.158	13.575	48.16 – 92.63
Economically Disadvantaged	182	58.897	15.535	32.88 – 90.32
Students with Disabilities	182	36.051	11.060	14.29 – 55.00
Social Studies				
Hispanic	112	63.570	9.382	47.74 – 84.62
White	182	80.662	8.573	61.35 – 92.95
Economically Disadvantaged	182	66.482	8.896	50.37 – 81.13
Students with Disabilities	171	40.703	6.300	30.36 – 53.58

Correlational Comparisons

Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation between the servant leadership mean score and each of the teacher retention variables indicated that a relationship existed between servant leaders and teacher retention (see Table 4.4). More specifically, these correlations demonstrate small and small to moderate relationships between the variables: leaving the profession ($r = -.382, p < .001$), leaving the school or district ($r = -.283, p < .001$), and the retention validation ($r = .197, p = .010$). Similar small and small to moderate correlations exist for each of the retention questions among themselves as well.

Table 4.4: Zero-Order Correlation Matrix between Servant Leadership and Teacher Retention Intention

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Servant Leadership Mean Score	-	-.382**	-.283**	.197**
2. Intent to Leave/Stay in Teaching Profession		-	.348**	-.281**
3. Intent to Leave/Stay in School/District			-	-.208**
4. Intent to Stay/Leave Overall				-

N = 143

However, no statistically significant correlations existed between servant leadership and any of the student achievement variables at the univariate level. On the other hand, a substantial number of correlations between categorical student achievement variables were indeed significant (see Table 4.5) and ranged from -.843 to .963. Additionally, collinearities were evident between the economically disadvantaged groupings and both the Hispanic and White categorical groupings because a large portion of the students in both of the categorical groups are also reported within the economically disadvantaged group. Thus, their academic performance was present in both classifications.

Table 4.5: Zero-Order Correlation Matrix of Servant Leadership Scale Mean Score and Categorical Student Achievement Values

Variable	N	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. SL Mean Score	143	-	.072	-.034	.025	-.057	.070	-.006	.021
2. ELA- Hispanic	127		-	-.252**	.303**	-.175*	.489**	.128	.131
3. ELA-White	143			-	.816**	.483**	-.472**	.041	.150*
4. ELA-ED	143				-	.361**	.090	.340**	.534***
5. ELA-SWD	143					-	.133*	.172*	.241**
6. Math-Hispanic	127						-	.842**	.840**
7. Math-White	143							-	.963**
8. Math- ED	143								-
9. Math-SWD	143								
10. Sci-Hispanic	94								
11. Sci-White	143								
12. Sci-ED	143								
13. Sci-SWD	143								
14. Soc-Hispanic	89								
15. Soc-White	143								
16. Soc-ED	143								
17 Soc-SWD	138								

**, Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed); *, Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).

Table 4.5 (continued): Zero-Order Correlation Matrix of Servant Leadership Scale Mean Score and Categorical Student Achievement Values

Variable	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1. SL Mean Score	-.015	-.048	.005	.029	.075	-.002	-.045	.024	-.070
2. ELA- Hispanic	-.063	-.337**	-.434**	-.148*	.334**	.288**	-.347**	.078	-.275**
3. ELA-White	-.218**	.235**	.653**	.581**	.292**	-.425**	.480**	.354**	.138*
4. ELA-ED	-.065	.381**	.665**	.771**	.622**	-.515**	.280**	.562**	.016
5. ELA-SWD	.503**	.056	.379**	.293**	.283**	-.843**	-.145*	-.062	.431**
6. Math-Hispanic	.679**	.234**	.047	.256**	.514**	-.112	-.411**	.175*	.110
7. Math-White	.725**	.460**	.498**	.583**	.575**	-.039	-.084	.442**	.166*
8. Math- ED	.658**	.507**	.644**	.739**	.718**	-.179*	-.007	.545**	.182**
9. Math-SWD	-	.053	.302**	.280**	.430**	-.248**	-.327	.087	.405**
10. Sci-Hispanic		-	.594**	.576**	-.124	-.253**	.454**	.399**	.072
11. Sci-White			-	.929**	.660**	-.433**	.587**	.742**	.271**
12. Sci-ED				-	.836**	-.466**	.456**	.839**	.145*
13. Sci-SWD					-	-.459**	.105	.674**	.151*
14. Soc-Hispanic						-	.107	.275**	-.358**
15. Soc-White							-	.678**	.062
16. Soc-ED								-	.005
17 Soc-SWD									-

** , Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed); * , Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).

Note. ED = Economically Disadvantaged, SWD = Students with Disabilities

Response to Research Questions

This study employed three research questions to better understand the overarching question: What is the relationship between school leaders' level of servant leadership as perceived by teachers, teacher retention expectations within the school, and student achievement? Each question dissected the overarching question into a more focused understanding. The first question related to teacher's retention intention and approached that influence from a primary contact front in that principals are in direct contact with their teachers. The second question, however, observed the relationship between the principal's servant leadership and student achievement. Additionally, the third question sought to understand how teacher's retention intention affected student achievement. Each of the three research questions in this study served as a constructed leg of a triangle meant to inscribe and better understand servant leadership's influence within the educational environment.

RQ1: The Relationship Between Servant Leadership and Teacher Retention

The first research question sought to understand servant leadership's [high, low] influence on whether teachers intended to remain or stay within the teaching profession entirely or within their school or school district. To better understand this notion, respondents answered three separate retention intention questions. The first question pertained to leaving the teaching profession entirely; the second referenced transferring from their current school or school district to another. However, the third question served as a validation of the first two and was written with reverse coding from the previous two questions.

A one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed for this research question to help protect against Type I error inflation that might typically occur across multiple one-way ANOVAs. A series of Pearson correlations were conducted to determine if

correlations existed between the dependent variables (see Table 4.4), and all correlations ranged between small and small to moderate. Thus, no multicollinearity existed between the dependent variables. As noted earlier, servant leadership held a small to moderate negative correlation with teachers' intention to leave the teaching profession ($r = -.382$). However, the assumption of homogeneity of covariance was not met across the groups as Box's M value was significant ($p < .001$).

Nonetheless, a MANOVA was conducted to determine if any mean differences existed between high and low servant leadership. The IV groupings, high and low, were calculated based on a conceptual split (high, ≥ 51 ; low, ≤ 50) of the servant leadership questionnaire's, SL-7, 0 to 100 scale itself. This procedure produced relatively even group sizes for high ($n = 65$) and low ($n = 70$) servant leadership classification groups regarding whether teachers intended to leave or stay within the teaching profession. The MANOVA yielded an overall effect of servant leadership upon the dependent variables, *Wilk's Λ* = .886, $F(3, 131) = 5.637$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .114$. Thus, approximately 11% of the multivariate variance of teachers' intention to remain or leave the profession was associated with teachers' perceived level of their principal's degree of servant leadership.

Additional follow-up of one-way ANOVAs indicated that a significant effect existed for servant leadership on teachers' intent to leave or stay within the teaching profession, $F(1, 133) = 13.109$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .090$. Likewise, there was a significant effect of servant leadership on intent to leave or stay within the school or school district, $F(1, 133) = 8.092$, $p = .005$, $\eta^2 = .057$. However, there was no statistically significant effect of servant leadership on teachers' intent to stay or leave overall ($p = .085$).

Further review of the mean differences and standard deviations between low and high servant leadership provided a clearer understanding of the ceiling effect (see Table 4.6). Substantially larger mean differences existed for low servant leadership than those for high servant leadership on both the leaving/staying-profession and leaving/staying-district/school variables. This data indicated a broader range and greater spread across the grouping for the low servant leadership than for high servant leadership, providing an understanding that those teachers who rated their principals highly on the servant leadership questionnaire had a greater intention of remaining in the profession and remaining within their current school district and/or school.

Table 4.6: Mean Differences of Statistically Significant Teacher Retention Variables

Leave / Stay	Servant Leadership					
	Low ($n = 70$)		High ($n = 65$)		Sample ($N = 135$)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Profession	20.13	32.785	4.09	14.668	12.41	26.850
School / District	22.47	34.442	8.11	22.548	15.56	30.081

RQ2: The Relationship Between Servant Leadership and Student Achievement

The second research question sought to determine if servant leadership [high, low] held any effect on student achievement in each of the four content areas and by those categorical demographics that provided sufficient data for analysis across the participating schools. Thus, each of the four content areas was further broken into four subgroups by the CCRPI categorical demographics: Hispanic, White, Economically Disadvantaged, and Students with Disabilities (see Table 4.7).

Table 4.7: Descriptive Statistics of Student Achievement Variables

Content Area	Servant Leadership					
	Low		High		Sample	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
ELA- Hispanic	60.324	6.111	58.537	5.897	59.463	6.039
ELA-White	76.250	9.231	76.495	10.048	76.368	9.573
ELA-ED	59.400	5.900	59.857	6.667	59.620	6.245
ELA-SWD	36.752	6.150	36.671	5.672	36.713	5.888
Math-Hispanic	60.585	9.772	62.356	10.377	61.438	10.044
Math-White	69.740	10.271	70.807	10.180	70.254	10.178
Math- ED	57.835	10.606	59.594	10.188	58.682	10.379
Math-SWD	35.831	11.540	35.952	9.722	35.889	10.637
Sci-Hispanic	50.581	5.933	52.762	6.518	51.631	6.279
Sci-White	70.520	11.817	73.717	12.998	72.059	12.426
Sci-ED	54.512	8.685	56.455	10.143	55.448	9.407
Sci-SWD	32.126	6.463	31.254	5.511	31.706	6.002
Soc-Hispanic	62.926	7.883	62.133	7.442	62.544	7.636
Soc-White	81.274	8.112	83.383	8.574	8.289	8.352
Soc-ED	63.812	5.239	65.457	6.833	64.604	6.077
Soc-SWD	41.605	7.285	42.153	6.603	41.869	6.927

Note. Sci = Science, Soc = Social Studies, ED = Economically Disadvantaged, SWD = Students with Disabilities

A MANOVA was, therefore, employed for this RQ to address the 16 dependent variables.

However, only those respondents providing complete data were included in the data, which provided a much smaller sample size for RQ2 ($N = 81$; low, $n = 42$; high, $n = 39$) than the sample size for RQ1.

Additionally, this small sample size is approximately half of what is typical required for a MANOVA and subsequently led to an odd overall effect of servant leadership on the dependent

variables, *Pillai's Trace* = .100, $F(9, 71) = .873$, $p = .553$, $\eta^2 = .100$. Furthermore, a review of the between-subjects effects revealed nearly non-existent effect sizes for servant leadership across all dependent variables as the partial η^2 -values were all $\leq .030$, while p -values were $\geq .119$. Thus, teachers' perceptions of their principal's servant leadership had no effect on student achievement outcomes by content or group.

RQ3: The Relationship Between Teacher Retention Intention and Student Achievement

The third and final research question helped determine if servant leadership indirectly influenced student achievement through teachers' retention intentions. This RQ arguably required the most analysis to understand because three separate teacher retention variables were reviewed against 16 dependent variables. Each of these three analyses called for an individual one-way analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) to control for any influence that servant leadership may hold on the relationship between teachers' retention intention (IV) and the sixteen student achievement groups (DV). Therefore, each teacher retention variable follows as a separate analysis.

Intent to Stay or Leave the Teaching Profession and Student Achievement

The first MANCOVA sought to understand the effects of teachers' intention to remain in or leave the teaching profession on student achievement while controlling for servant leadership. The coding for this question called for respondents to answer within a 0 to 100-point continuum according to the two anchors, [*leave*, 0; *stay*, 100]. A median split procedure provided two IV groupings, staying in the teaching profession ($n = 72$) and leaving the teaching profession ($n = 9$). Thus, approximately 89% of the respondents intended to remain within the profession (see Table 4.8). However, like RQ2, the small sample size created a situation where a moderate multivariate effect size was not statistically significant, *Pillai's Trace* = .129, $F(9, 70) = 1.152$, p

= .339, $\eta^2 = .129$. Additionally, none of the results were significant at the univariate level as all p -values were $\geq .081$. Thus, teachers' intention to stay or leave the profession bore no effect on student achievement when controlling for servant leadership.

Table 4.8: Descriptive Statistics for Leaving the Profession

Content Area	Retention Intention				Sample ($N = 81$)	
	Stay ($n = 72$)		Leave ($n = 9$)		M	SD
	M	SD	M	SD		
ELA- Hispanic	59.166	6.064	64.841	5.586	59.463	6.039
ELA-White	76.746	9.743	73.339	7.898	76.368	9.573
ELA-ED	59.860	6.327	57.703	5.493	59.620	6.245
ELA-SWD	36.740	5.833	36.492	6.684	36.713	5.888
Math-Hispanic	61.042	10.118	64.606	9.353	61.438	10.044
Math-White	70.014	10.173	72.170	10.618	70.254	10.178
Math- ED	58.548	10.366	59.749	11.052	58.682	10.379
Math-SWD	35.532	10.301	38.741	13.401	35.889	10.637
Sci-Hispanic	52.090	6.298	47.961	5.021	51.631	6.279
Sci-White	72.795	12.441	66.174	11.250	72.059	12.426
Sci-ED	55.999	9.290	51.041	9.712	55.448	9.407
Sci-SWD	31.681	5.616	31.681	5.616	31.706	6.002
Soc-Hispanic	62.371	7.401	63.927	9.725	62.544	7.636
Soc-White	82.743	8.544	78.657	5.750	82.289	8.352
Soc-ED	64.824	6.373	62.843	2.227	64.604	6.077
Soc-SWD	41.434	6.851	45.346	6.932	41.869	6.927

Note. Sci = Science, Soc = Social Studies, ED = Economically Disadvantaged, SWD = Students with Disabilities

Intent to Stay or Leave the School or School District and Student Achievement

The second MANCOVA sought to understand the effects of teachers' intention to remain in or leave the school or school district and what that intention might hold on student

achievement while controlling for servant leadership. Again, the respondents answered according to a 0 to 100-point continuum according to the two the same to anchors [*stay, 0; leave, 100*], and a median split procedure provided on the two IV groupings ($N = 80$), staying in the teaching profession ($n = 67$) and leaving the teaching profession ($n = 13$). Thus, for this IV, approximately 84% of the respondents intended to remain within either their school and/or school district (see Table 4.9).

Table 4.9: Descriptive Statistics for Leaving the School or School District

Content Area	Retention Intention				Sample ($N = 80$)	
	Stay ($n = 67$)		Leave ($n = 13$)			
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
ELA- Hispanic	59.234	6.094	59.920	5.560	59.346	5.982
ELA-White	77.474	9.639	70.984	7.766	76.419	9.622
ELA-ED	60.372	6.189	56.004	5.578	59.662	6.273
ELA-SWD	37.062	5.923	35.420	5.667	36.795	5.878
Math-Hispanic	60.997	10.256	64.255	8.949	61.526	10.075
Math-White	69.973	10.334	72.088	9.851	70.317	10.226
Math- ED	58.609	10.435	59.829	10.459	58.807	10.383
Math-SWD	35.570	10.568	38.298	11.180	36.014	10.645
Sci-Hispanic	51.774	6.360	51.142	6.259	51.671	6.309
Sci-White	73.206	12.409	67.225	11.552	72.234	12.403
Sci-ED	56.139	9.450	52.497	9.028	55.547	9.424
Sci-SWD	31.653	6.093	32.178	5.929	31.739	6.033
Soc-Hispanic	62.291	7.814	62.959	6.427	62.400	7.573
Soc-White	83.198	7.954	77.613	9.427	82.290	8.405
Soc-ED	65.004	5.897	62.492	7.015	64.496	6.115
Soc-SWD	42.219	6.997	40.575	6.669	41.952	6.930

Note. Sci = Science, Soc = Social Studies, ED = Economically Disadvantaged, SWD = Students with Disabilities

However, once again, the small MANCOVA sample size provided no statistical significance. Nevertheless, it did indicate a small to moderate multivariate effect size, *Pillai's Trace* = .097, $F(9, 69) = .820, p = .599, \eta^2 = .097$.

However, as seen in Table 4.10, three univariates demonstrated statistically significant effect sizes. Two of which yielded moderate effect sizes, ELA-White and ELA-Economically Disadvantaged, and the third, Social Studies-White, approached the moderate cusp. Thus, teachers' retention intention to remain in the school or school district demonstrated both a positive relationship with and effect on student achievement when approached from the staying or leaving the school or school district in the areas of language arts and social studies. However, no other results were significant at the univariate level as all *p*-values were $\geq .165$.

Table 4.10: Statistically Significant Univariates for Staying or Leaving the School or School District

DV	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2	<i>MD</i>	Group	<i>M^a</i>	<i>SE</i>	95% <i>CI</i>
ELA-White	5.367	.023	.065	6.792*	Stay	77.523 ^a	1.156	[75.220, 79.825]
					Leave	70.731 ^a	2.672	[65.410, 76.051]
ELA-ED	5.510	.021	.067	4.481*	Stay	60.390 ^a	.753	[58.891, 61.889]
					Leave	55.909 ^a	.1740	[52.445, 59.374]
Soc-White	4.123	.046	.051	5.197*	Stay	83.135 ^a	1.009	[81.125, 85.145]
					Leave	77.937 ^a	2.333	[73.293, 82.582]

Note. *MD* = (Stay – Leave)

Intent to Leave or Stay Overall and Student Achievement

The final MANCOVA needed to answer RQ3 questioned the effect that teachers' retention intention, regardless of whether it be the profession, school, or school district, on student achievement while controlling for servant leadership. The question for this IV was coded in reverse and included a "not" in its wording. Thus, the anchors for this question worked oppositely [*leave*, 0; *stay*, 100], and served as a validation question for the other two.

Interestingly, this particular IV yielded substantially more statistically significant univariate findings than either of the other two IVs for RQ3. Again, a median split procedure produced two IV groupings, leaving overall ($n = 25$) and staying overall ($n = 55$), which demonstrated that approximately 31% of the respondents intended to leave at some capacity (see Table 4.11).

Table 4.11: Descriptive Statistics for Leaving or Staying Overall

Content Area	Retention Intention				Sample ($N = 80$)	
	Leave ($n = 25$)		Stay ($n = 55$)		M	SD
	M	SD	M	SD		
ELA- Hispanic	60.691	5.521	58.998	6.252	59.528	5.050
ELA-White	73.176	6.916	77.570	10.240	76.197	9.508
ELA-ED	57.890	4.980	60.266	6.622	59.523	6.223
ELA-SWD	36.388	6.453	36.755	5.673	36.640	5.889
Math-Hispanic	65.612	8.788	59.759	10.076	61.588	10.015
Math-White	74.290	10.295	68.594	9.400	70.374	10.184
Math- ED	62.377	11.586	57.139	9.494	58.776	10.410
Math-SWD	40.673	12.641	33.854	8.983	35.985	10.669
Sci-Hispanic	50.438	6.932	52.149	6.007	51.614	6.317
Sci-White	70.4464	12.552	72.638	12.484	71.953	12.468
Sci-ED	55.063	10.243	55.563	9.175	55.407	9.458
Sci-SWD	33.702	7.255	30.853	5.218	31.743	6.031
Soc-Hispanic	63.338	7.883	62.300	7.593	62.624	7.650
Soc-White	79.181	8.090	83.573	8.196	82.200	8.370
Soc-ED	64.090	6.232	64.855	6.103	64.616	6.115
Soc-SWD	42.684	7.014	41.437	6.965	41.826	6.961

Note. Sci = Science, Soc = Social Studies, ED = Economically Disadvantaged, SWD = Students with Disabilities

Again, no statistically significant multivariate finding existed because of the small sample size. Nonetheless, a large multivariate effect size existed, *Pillai's Trace* = .154, $F(9, 69) = .820$, $p = .207$, $\eta^2 = .154$.

Additionally, five univariate DVs posted statistically significant results, and two were just above the $p \leq .05$ level, and are also reported in Table 4.12. The magnitudes of the math-related variables and the resulting adjusted means differences for this study are of great interest, as they posed a negative relationship between teachers' intention to remain overall and student achievement in mathematics while controlling for servant leadership.

Table 4.12: Statistically Significant Univariates for Leaving or Staying Overall

DV	F	p	η^2	MD	Group	M ^a	SE	95% CI
ELA-White	3.882	.052	.048	-4.521*	Leave	73.089 ^a	1.895	[69.315, 76.862]
					Stay	77.609 ^a	1.272	[75.077, 80.142]
Math-Hisp	7.297	.008	.087	6.359*	Leave	65.959 ^a	1.944	[62.087, 69.832]
					Stay	59.600 ^a	1.305	[57.002, 62.199]
Math-White	6.300	.014	.076	6.065*	Leave	74.543 ^a	1.996	[70.569, 78.518]
					Stay	68.478 ^a	1.340	[65.811, 71.146]
Math-ED	5.300	.024	.064	5.707*	Leave	62.699 ^a	2.048	[58.622, 66.777]
					Stay	56.992 ^a	1.374	[54.256, 59.729]
Math-SWD	7.853	.006	.093	7.043*	Leave	40.827 ^a	2.076	[36.694, 44.961]
					Stay	33.784 ^a	1.393	[31.010, 36.559]
Sci-SWD	3.660	.059	.045	2.781	Leave	33.655 ^a	1.201	[31.264, 36.047]
					Stay	30.874 ^a	.806	[29.269, 32.479]
Soc-White	4.341	.041	.053	-4.166	Leave	79.336 ^a	1.652	[76.048, 82.625]
					Stay	83.502 ^a	1.108	[81.295, 85.709]

Note. MD = (Leave – Stay)

Furthermore, each of the related effect sizes for the math-related variables rose to a moderate level, and both Math-Hispanic and Math-SWD are considered to have substantially moderate

effect sizes. Therefore, this study's findings indicated that student achievement in mathematics is inversely related to their teachers' intention to remain in their classrooms.

On the other hand, two of the other three reported univariates possessed a negative mean difference indicating that teachers' intention to remain overall improved student achievement within their grouping. However, the ELA, science, and social studies findings only provided minimal and almost haphazard support for the effects of teachers' overall retention intention on student achievement.

Thus, this study indicated that teachers' perceived degree of the principal's servant leadership is positively related to their intention to remain. However, no evidence existed for any relationship whatsoever between teachers' perceived degree of the principal's servant leadership and student achievement. Finally, and most intriguingly, this study found both positive and negative relationships between teachers' retention intention and student achievement.

Chapter Summary

This non-experimental quantitative study compared three variables: servant leadership, teacher retention intention, and student achievement, with six rural southeastern school districts participating in the study. However, only 145 middle and high school teachers provided complete data and were included in the summative analysis. Each of the three RQs for this study required a multivariate analysis with the first two utilizing a MANOVA and the third a MANCOVA.

Subsequently, the results revealed that a positive and small to moderate relationship exists between servant leadership and teachers' intention to remain within the teaching profession. On the other hand, this study's findings demonstrated no effect of teachers' perception of their principal's degree of servant leadership on student achievement outcomes by

content area or by demographic grouping. However, sporadic univariate findings noted some positive effects of teachers' retention intention and student achievement. Still, oddly enough, the data for this study observed that students' achievement in mathematics is inversely related to their teachers' intention to remain in their classrooms.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Summary

This non-experimental quantitative study aimed to ascertain if any relationship existed between servant leadership and teacher retention and student achievement. Six school districts within the same Regional Education Service Agency (RESA) participated in this study, and teachers served as participants. Students within each of these school districts possessed similar enrollments, socioeconomics, and demographics.

This study focused on three research questions to break down the overarching question that sought to determine how well servant leadership works within P-12 education: What is the relationship between school leaders' level of servant leadership as perceived by teachers, teacher retention expectations within the school, and student achievement? The first two research questions directly linked to servant leadership itself to the two dependent variables, with the first being: Does servant leadership [high, low] influence teacher retention intention?; and the second: What is the effect of servant leadership [high, low] on student achievement by categorical population groups identified by the GaDOE? However, the third question indirectly approached the concept by asking: What is the effect of teacher retention intention [leave, stay] on student achievement while controlling for servant leadership perception overall by categorical population groups as identified by the Georgia Department of Education's College and Career Readiness Performance Index?

To answer each of the research questions, the responding middle and high school teachers completed a survey instrument that consisted of one validation question, four general demographic questions, the seven servant leadership from the SL-7 Servant Leadership

Questionnaire (Liden et al., 2015), and three teacher retention intention questions. The survey collection occurred during early August of the 2020-2021 school year before additional teaching responsibilities consumed the teachers' precious time. As such, two hundred thirty-six teachers originally agreed to participate in this study. However, the qualifying question and incomplete survey entries reduced the participant number to 145. Of those participating, 103 were female, 38 were male, and four chose not to indicate. Additionally, 78 of the respondents reported working in middle schools and 67 at the high schools. Lastly, the survey requested the respondents to report their highest degree earned, and the results are as follows: Bachelor's = 37, Master's = 42, Specialist = 52, Doctorate = 10, and four did not respond to the question (refer to Table 4.1).

Analysis of Research Findings

The triangular approach of this study between the SL-7 Servant Leadership Questionnaire (Liden et al., 2015), the three additional teacher retention intention questions, and the 2018-2019 CCRPI student achievement data revealed four critical findings. However, it should be noted that statistical significance was not present for a good number of the multivariate results because of the small sample sizes that were approximately half of those needed for robust MANOVA calculations. The first of which is that a positive relationship existed between teachers' retention intention and their perception of the principal's degree of servant leadership.

However, it was the lack of any effect that created the second finding of interest for this study. This study found that the responding teachers' perception of their principal's degree of servant leadership produced neither an increase nor decrease in student achievement as the group means for both high and low servant leadership was practically equivalent in each of the 16 student achievement univariates.

Thirdly, this study found sporadic positive relationships existed between teacher retention and student achievement in two of the four content areas. However, it is the fourth finding in this study that is arguably the most interesting. While the other three findings provide almost nominal results, the fourth concerning the relationship between teacher's retention intention and students' achievement in mathematics demonstrated statistically significant findings that are contradictory to the literature and prevailing thoughts. Furthermore, this contradiction posts a moderate effect size in all four reported demographics areas.

Thus, this study indicated that teachers' perceived degree of the principal's servant leadership is positively related to their intention to remain, but provided no evidence of any influence on student achievement. Lastly, this study found both positive and negative relationships between teachers' retention intentions and student achievement.

Discussion of Research Findings

Each of the three research questions in this study served as a constructed leg of a triangle meant to inscribe and better understand servant leadership's influence within the educational environment. For instance, the first question related to teachers' retention intention approached that influence from a primary contact front in that principals are in direct contact with their teachers. The second question, however, observed the direct relationship between the principal's leadership and student achievement. However, the third question sought to understand how teacher's retention intention affected student achievement while controlling for servant leadership.

Interestingly, the respondents overwhelmingly rated their respective principals highly in servant leadership. Their ratings produced a ceiling effect as the median of the sample was 88.67. This high median is perhaps the result of social desirability bias in that teachers felt more

inclined to project the shadow of doubt in favor of their principal. These high ratings were likely much akin to a common concern of inflated evaluation scores noted on non-specific scoring rubrics by Steeg and Gerritsen (2016) with teacher evaluations by their principal.

Furthermore, Autry (2001) explained that servant leadership is a bilateral review between the leader and the follower. His explanation beacons collegiality and shared decision making. Therefore, the commonplace of grade-level meetings, leadership team meetings, school improvement team meetings, and a myriad of other meetings that frequently occur in schools may have invited a transferred notion toward teachers' identification with their respective principal (Bao et al., 2018; Verdorfer, 2019) on the seven questions of the servant leadership questionnaire. However, none of the SL-7 items address personal relationships directly, but each plausibly addresses it indirectly.

Additionally, this study found that those identifying as males yielded a higher average servant leadership score and smaller range than their female counterparts. Therefore, the results of this study align with the implications found by Lemoine and Blum (2019). Their study determined that servant leadership might be most appropriate in female-dominated organizations and that the leader's sex played no difference in employee performance. Their first determination is certainly true for this study, as 71% of the respondents identified as female, making this study overwhelmingly dominated by females. Although employee performance, per se, was not a measure of this study, it is plausibly conjectured that the findings of this study parallel Lemoine and Blum's (2019) second determination concerning the irrelevance of the leader's sex, since only a minimally increased mean and decreased standard deviation was observed for male-led schools in terms of their perceived servant leadership.

Lastly, this study supports the literature concerning the negative relationship between servant leadership and turnover intention, as seen by both Brohi et al. (2018) and Palta (2019). Furthermore, Palta (2019) noted that neither gender, tenure, nor seniority held any perceptual weight in teachers' perceptions of servant leadership. Again, the findings of this study mirror the literature (refer to Table 4.1). For example, the mean scores for perceived servant leadership had a minimal range across all demographic categories for gender, instructional level, and highest degree earned.

RQ1: The Relationship Between Servant Leadership and Teacher Retention

Teacher retention is a concept that has undergone a great deal of study and is problematic throughout the world (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017), and both Thibodeaux et al. (2015) and Vari et al. (2018) noted the importance of effective leadership as a means to combat the alarming exodus. Therefore, this first research question sought to determine if servant leadership was a worthy leadership approach in the war against teacher attrition. To better understand servant leadership's value, the dependent variable was further broken into three categories.

Each category attempted to address the literature from a slightly different perspective. For example, the first dependent variable approached the concern of teachers leaving the profession, never to return, as indicated by Sutchter et al. (2016). The second dependent variable considered teacher retention from a less dramatic, but still, a problematic approach addressed by Afaq et al. (2017), Thibodeaux et al. (2015), and Young (2018). This dependent variable sought to determine if servant leadership influenced teachers' decisions from a transfer perspective. However, the third dependent variable approached the attrition topic from an overall view and with a reversed coding. Thus, leaving was the leading theme.

The Pearson correlation (refer to Table 4.4) and the MANOVA utilized for RQ1 provided two statistically significant dependent variables with moderate and near-moderate effect sizes for teacher retention at both the profession and school/school district levels (refer to Table 4.6). However, the third "overall" component did not possess either statistical significance or any real effect size. Nonetheless, this study exhibited a positive relationship between teachers' retention intention and their perception of the principal's degree of servant leadership aligning with the works of Shaw and Newton (2014). However, their study provided a more profound relationship than those found in this study. Thus, this study's findings fully support the notion that servant leadership fosters organizational commitment in terms of turnover and parallels the works of Afaq et al. (2017), Ardana and Surya (2019), and Shaw and Newton (2014). Therefore, this study adds to the existing literature and garners additional support for servant leadership as a useful educational leadership approach for employee retention.

RQ2: The Relationship Between Servant Leadership and Student Achievement

The second research question, on the other hand, bypassed the teacher and looked at the direct relationship between servant leadership and student achievement. As previously stated, this study received a smaller sample size than is typically needed for a MANOVA. Therefore, the results indicated a great deal of non-significance at both the multivariate and univariate levels.

As a result, the lack of statistical significance and almost nil effect sizes across all 16 student achievement univariates within this study counter the indirect influence of the school's principal on student achievement noted by Böhlmark et al. (2016) and Dicke et al. (2019). Nonetheless, RQ1's finding that servant leadership fostered teacher retention coupled with the well-documented literature connecting teacher retention and student achievement (e.g., Adnot et

al., 2017; Carlson, 2013; Finnigan & Daly, 2017; Sawchuk, 2018; Young, 2018) would lead one to conjecture a positive relationship. However, the results of this research question did not provide any direct or indirect support in that regard.

RQ3: The Relationship between Teacher Retention and Student Achievement

This final research question sought to complete the triangulation by assessing the indirect effect of servant leadership on student achievement via teachers' retention intention. Bukhari and Kamal (2018) determined that both job satisfaction and job-related stress were significantly related to employees' turnover intentions. Thus, when employees lack satisfaction in their employment or become continuously over-stressed, they will seek that satisfaction or relief elsewhere. Additionally, numerous studies have determined that teacher attrition negatively impacts student achievement (e.g., Adnot et al., 2017; Ávalos & Valenzuela, 2016; Carlson, 2013; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Dicke et al., 2019; Finnigan & Daly, 2017; Sawchuk, 2018; Young, 2018). However, the researcher could not locate any studies that made the connection between teacher retention and student achievement concerning any particular leadership theories. It appeared that the literature took one of two isolated approaches, either a leadership to teacher retention or teacher retention to student achievement.

Therefore, this third research question attempted to bridge the gap that exists within the literature by employing three different MANCOVAs with servant leadership acting as the covariate in each. However, the results provided both sporadic positive relationships and strong contradictory relationships between teacher retention and student achievement. Thus, these findings both corroborated and refuted the literature noting a positive relationship between teacher retention and student achievement.

The first MANCOVA reviewed teacher retention at the teaching profession level. Thus, this analysis asked if the teacher's desire to leave the profession entirely impacted student achievement. However, none of the results were statistically significant at either the multivariate or univariate levels. Thus, teachers' intention to stay or leave the profession bore no effect on student achievement when controlling for servant leadership and appeared to contradict the implications identified by Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2019) and Sutchter et al. (2016).

However, the second MANCOVA produced nominal results supporting the positive relationship between teacher retention at the school/school district level and student achievement. Although this MANCOVA did not demonstrate multivariate statistical significance, it indicated a small to moderate effect size with statistically significant univariate effect sizes in three of the demographic groups. ELA-White and ELA-Economically Disadvantaged both demonstrated moderate effect sizes, while the third, Social Studies-White, approached the moderate cusp (refer to Table 4.10).

Perhaps Hattie's (2003) assertion that almost anything done with fidelity will have a positive impact on student achievement is at play. However, the increase is more likely aligned with the realization that ELA and social studies are more verbal contents than their math and science counterparts. Thus, increased opportunities may allow for more frequent collaborative engagements within these content areas (Fung et al., 2018; Lekwa et al., 2019). Additionally, these content areas provide opportunities for students to interact simultaneously with peers and the material at hand, providing a platform for the active and intellectual engagement noted by both Gage et al. (2018) and (Rollins, 2017).

However, it was the third MANCOVA that produced the most perplexing findings of this entire study. The phraseology was reversely coded so that leaving was the focus of the question, but nowhere did the question indicate whether it be the profession, the school district, or school. Again, no statistically significant multivariate finding existed because of the small sample size. However, a large multivariate effect size did indeed exist.

Interestingly, this analysis retained the positive relationship between teacher retention intentions and student achievement in both ELA-White and social studies-White. These two relationships likely mirror the same underlying themes, as noted for RQ3's second MANCOVA. However, inverse associations were identified for all four of the mathematics subgroups and students with disabilities in science.

Furthermore, each of the math-related variables presented a moderate effect size, and both Math-Hispanic and Math-SWD are considered to be substantially moderate effect sizes (refer to Table 4.12). The students with disabilities for science variable was not statistically significant but was included because of its near significance and small to moderate effect size. The researcher conjectures that these two content areas require more exact thought process and do not grant the frequency of collaborative thinking opportunities as are typically available in ELA and social studies.

The typical instruction provided within mathematics and science classrooms follows somewhat scripted processes. Additionally, they are quite often taught through various reasonings and demonstrative models and platforms, which are predetermined by detailed performance standards, as noted by Kenna and Russell (2018). The researcher, having taught in a mathematics classroom for many years, understands the temptation of teaching to/for the test, one that many often find difficult to resist. However, that practice that has been demonstrated to

be counter-effective for both student achievement and engagement (e.g., Blazar & Pollard, 2017; Li & Xiong, 2018).

Thus, the statistically significant negative relationship between teachers' retention intention and student achievement in mathematics found in this study may be a product of not what but how the content is taught. For instance, teachers who plan to leave do not feel bound to the curriculum and the predetermined approaches of instruction, aligning with Hattie's (2015) determination that the most effective instruction comes from the teachers' thinking and not their actions. Therefore, teachers intending to leave may feel instructional freedom that their "staying" counterparts do not, thereby allowing them to provide instruction that is strategically needed and eliminate that which is not.

Conclusions

Retaining quality teachers and improving student achievement both remain at the forefront of education. Each one impacts the other in various symbiotic ways. When quality teachers leave, they take their content knowledge, their peer-related support, and their understanding of school-specific processes with them. As a result, their would-be students miss the non-tangible, yet beneficial, effects of their instruction. The overbearing expectations of increased student achievement, on the other hand, weigh heavily on the classroom teacher and cultivates a need to either minimize or eliminate its related stresses, thereby increasing potential teacher attrition.

Servant leadership may arguably cultivate a positive climate through its foundational principles of love, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment, and service. A leader who exhibited only one of these tenets regularly would likely aid others in their personal growth. However, servant leaders attempt to be mindful of them all, allowing school principals to provide

the intentional and relevant (Sisodia, 2018) caring needed (Sergiovanni, 2001) that establishes and enhances a climate of empowerment and success (Dicke et al., 2019; Fung et al., 2018; Hitt et al., 2019; Jones & Shindler, 2016; Shindler et al., 2016).

It is certainly good to know that servant leadership stands to improve teacher retention and, by a theoretical implication, improve student achievement. Although this study did not find any direct relationship between servant leadership and student achievement, it did provide a glimmer of hope for indirect influence via the classroom teacher. Therefore, servant leadership stands as a notably reasonable leadership ideology within education.

Implications

This study's findings have several implications. First, teachers rated their respective principals similarly regardless of gender, instructional level, or highest degree earned. Additionally, correlational comparisons indicated a positive relationship between the degree of servant leadership and teachers' retention intention, and one-way ANOVAs demonstrated moderate and near moderate effect sizes for two of the three retention intention variables. Therefore, this study posits servant leadership as a versatile leadership approach within education and adds to the existing literature gap concerning the most effective leadership approaches within education.

Second, the methodology incorporated in this study moved beyond the typical leadership to retention and retention to student achievement schemas that exist within the current literature. Although teacher perception of the leader's degree of servant leadership did not affect their students' achievement, the triangular approach provided a holistic view of the administration to student achievement connection. This alignment supported a more indirect influence based on

the existing literature, and thereby, cautions leaders to intentionally focus and keep their direct impact on their teachers to encourage their immediate effect on their students further.

Thirdly, this study utilized a relatively homogeneous region that did not allow for student groupings aside from Hispanic, White, economically disadvantaged, and students with disabilities. Therefore, further research is needed to provide a better understanding related to the diversity of servant leadership's influence within other populations. Additionally, the high servant leadership rating exhibited higher student achievement scores overall for students with disabilities and the economically disadvantaged. This recognition is particularly useful as academic gains within these two groups are often difficult to obtain.

Although multiple leadership theories exist, each one adds value to a leader's repertoire in differing situations. Thus, the findings from this study provide academic leaders a viable approach with servant leadership that increases teacher retention and theoretically cultivates a climate attuned to and intent on improving student achievement for all learners.

Impact Statement

Educational leaders are often thrust from the classroom into the multi-dimensional chaos of leadership. As a result, many "feel" their way through rather than receiving any formal leadership training, aside from the cursory overviews found within educational leadership programs of study. Thus, inexperienced and uninformed school leaders frequently become consumed with management-oriented responsibilities, and as a result, neglect the leadership side of the balance. Today's school leadership is certainly not a stable construct; therefore, school administrators must gain a comprehensive repertoire of engagements, styles, and realizations. This study adds to that knowledge by providing leaders with valuable information related to the benefits of servant leadership in the educational setting. In fact, this study provided statistically

significant findings that approximately 10% of the multivariate variance of teachers' intention to remain or leave was associated with teachers' perceived level of their principal's degree of servant leadership.

Additionally, this non-experimental quantitative study provides empirical evidence that servant leadership characteristics improve teacher retention within their classrooms. Thus, educational leaders may be better able to retain the valuable skills and knowledge that are too frequently lost through attrition and turnover by employing servant leadership traits and strategies. Furthermore, this study's lack of findings for servant leadership's influence on student achievement does not negate servant leadership's usefulness. On the contrary, these findings provide clarity for the principal's needed investment in supporting teachers and their instruction rather than reaching for the brass ring of student achievement alone.

Recommendations

Although this study provided statistically significant findings in favor of servant leadership concerning teacher retention, the GaDOE's decision to abandon testing during the year of this study most certainly impacted this study. For instance, almost 150 of the approximately 920 available respondents were unable to complete the survey because either principal changes or not working under their current principal during the associated year of CCRPI performance. Therefore, future studies may want to conduct a more recent timeframe for their respondent responses.

Additionally, researchers might be better served to incorporate nationally-normed assessment measures for the student achievement component. The state-specific CCRPI achievement data limits this study to some degree because the criteria selection and standards of performance are specific to Georgia alone. Furthermore, this study included 16 different student

achievement variables simultaneously. Thus, the statistical significance and effect were thinly spread across the univariates. Therefore, researchers may choose to reduce the number of student achievement variables to gain a more global understanding before diving deeper into the student achievement component.

The purpose of this study was to determine if servant leadership provided support within education, as the current literature does not address the value of different leadership theories.

Thus, future research topic suggestions include the following:

1. Research different leadership theories within the educational setting by creating a single survey instrument that includes reduced versions of differing leadership instruments to correlate with teacher retention.
2. Research different leadership theories in terms of school climate.
3. Research the effects of leadership traits or characteristics on teacher retention.
4. Research the effects of principal churn on both teacher retention and student achievement.
5. Research the effects of servant leadership within an urban or industrial setting as this study only addressed a rural setting this is steeped in Judeo-Christian ideology.

Limitations

Because of the global COVID-19 pandemic, unexpected limitations occurred with this study. First, sample sizes were reduced from what would have likely been available for this study as willing, and normally acceptable, participants were excused from the survey due to issues beyond their control. Second, the decreased sample size further aggravated this study in that it created multiple situations where notable multivariate effect sizes were non-statistically significant. Thus, the findings presented in Chapter 4 were detailed weighed heavily on their

notable effect sizes despite the lack of statistical significance. Lastly, several participants did not provide complete data even though the survey instrument only contained 15 total closed-ended questions. This created the unfortunate issue of inconsistent *n*'s across the analysis. Nonetheless, the findings of this study may not be robust enough for transfer but are provided so that other researchers may make their own determinations in that regard.

Dissemination

The findings of this study are of interest to most of the participating school districts. All but one of these school districts requested both the overarching results and their district-specific results. However, the dissemination of this study's results is of great concern for the leadership within the researcher's school district as they seek to understand how to serve those in their charge better and continue a high performance in student achievement.

Additionally, this research stands to provide a meaningful foundation for public discussions and presentations. Such presentations are likely to include presenting before the RESA Board of Control and some of their provided school board trainings. Also, the researcher's school district is a member of the Charter School Foundation, and the researcher has delivered TED-styled presentations at their state-wide conferences. The findings from this study are relevant topics that align with their overall focus on innovative approaches to increase student achievement. Furthermore, the researcher would welcome opportunities to present at other in-person or online conferences, and he desires to publish this study's findings to add to the existing servant leadership literature.

Concluding Thoughts

Educational leadership is an everchanging landscape that possesses the potential to trap those in its ranks to remain anchored with familiar practices and approaches. Furthermore,

divisiveness and inflexibility seem to percolate in almost every current avenue of life to the point that so many are shouting that few are listening. Therefore, educational leaders must wade through all of the unrelated nonsense and bring both ends to the middle if true collaborative efforts will come fruition. Therefore, a servant leadership mindset provides a humanistic platform that values the individual's success and growth above everything else.

This study provided two overarching thoughts that would behoove educational leaders, including the researcher, to keep in mind. First, it is incumbent that educational leaders understand that meaningful investments and interactions with those who are directly in their charge is their primary responsibility. The second, although peripheral to the first, is just as important; leaders must not become bogged down in seeking outcomes where they have no direct effect.

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APPENDIX A

GEORGIA SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

LETTER OF APPROVAL

Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs		
Institutional Review Board (IRB)		
Phone: 912-478-5465		Veazey Hall 3000
		PO Box 8005
Fax: 912-478-0719	IRB@GeorgiaSouthern.edu	Statesboro, GA 30460

To: Murphy, David

From: Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs
Administrative Support Office for Research Oversight Committees
(IACUC/IBC/IRB)

Approval Date: August 3, 2020

Subject: Institutional Review Board Exemption Determination - Limited Review

Your proposed research project numbered **H21021**, and titled "**The Relationship Between Servant Leadership and Teacher Retention and Student Achievement.**" involves activities that do not require full approval by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) according to federal guidelines. **<In this research project research data will be collected anonymously>**.

According to the Code of Federal Regulations Title 45 Part 46, your research protocol is determined to be exempt from full review under the following exemption category(s):

Exemption 2 Research involving only the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, if: Information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human participants cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to them. Please visit our FAQ's for more information on anonymous survey platforms; Any disclosure of the human participant's responses outside the research could not reasonably place the participant at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the participant's financial standing, employ-ability or reputation; Survey or interview research does not involve children; The research project does not include any form of intervention.

Any alteration in the terms or conditions of your involvement may alter this approval. *Therefore, as authorized in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to notify you that your research, as submitted, is exempt from IRB Review. No further action or IRB oversight is required, as long as the project remains the same. If you alter the project, it is your responsibility to notify the IRB and acquire a new determination of exemption. Because this project was determined to be exempt from further IRB oversight, this project does not require an expiration date.*

Sincerely,

Eleanor Haynes
Compliance Officer

APPENDIX B

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SERVANT LEADERSHIP
AND TEACHER RETENTION AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT SURVEY**Section A. Qualifying and Demographic Questions**

Qualifying Question:

Did you work under the same principal for both the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 school years.
[embedded-logic response: “yes” proceeds to question A1, “no” ends survey]

Demographic Questions:

1. **School District:** Dropdown list of all RESA Districts (embedded-logic response to appropriate question A2)
2. **School:** Dropdown list based on selected RESA District (embedded-logic response to question A3)
3. **Gender:** Male, Female, Gender Variant/Non-Conforming, Prefer not to answer
4. **Education Level:** B.A., M.Ed., Ed.S., Ed.D / Ph.D.

[Page 3] Section B. Leadership-Related Questions**In the following set of questions, think of your principal.**

For the following seven questions, please use the slider along the continuous scale and place it on the number that best corresponds to how you view your principal’s leadership. For instance, the closer the slider is to “Not at all true for me” the LESS true that statement is for you. Conversely, the closer the slider is to “Very true for me” the MORE true that statement is for you. Likewise, moving the slider to either end of the line (0 or 100) indicates that the statement is either not at all true of you (0) or very true of you (100). However, any number from 0-100 is a valid response.

Survey Questions:

1. My *principal* can tell if something work-related is going wrong.
2. My *principal* makes my career development a priority.
3. I would seek help from my *principal* if I had a personal problem.
4. My *principal* emphasizes the importance of giving back to the community.
5. My *principal* puts my best interests ahead of his/her own.

6. My *principal* gives me the freedom to handle difficult situations in the way that I feel is best.
7. My *principal* would **not** compromise ethical principles in order to achieve success.

[NB: The Servant Leadership Questionnaire, SL-7 (Adapted), is used with express permission of the author, Dr. Robert C. Liden (2015)]

Section C. Retention-Related Questions

For the following three questions, please use the slider along the continuous scale and place it on the number that best corresponds to your intentions to remain/leave the teaching profession. For instance, the closer the slider is to “Not at all true of me” the LESS true that statement is about you. Conversely, the closer the slider is to “Very true of me” the MORE true that statement is about you. Likewise, moving the slider to either end of the line (0 or 100) indicates that the statement is either not at all true of you (0) or very true of you (100). However, any number from 0-100 is a valid response.

1. I am considering **leaving the teaching profession** within the next three years for reasons other than retirement or personal circumstances. (0, Not at all true for me; 100, Very true for me)
2. I am considering **leaving for another school or district** within the next three years or personal circumstances. (0, Not at all true for me; 100, Very true for me)
3. I am **not considering leaving** the teaching profession **or** my teaching position within the next three years. (0, Not at all true for me; 100, Very true for me)