Principals' Perspectives on Overcoming Barriers to Implementing Capacity-Building in Southwest Texas: A Qualitative Exploratory Case Study

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Abstract

The problem addressed in this study was many K-12 public schools' reading/language arts (RLA) test scores did not meet grade level in the southwest region of Texas, prompting the mandatory implementation of intervention measures to build capacity and increase student learning. The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to explore how principals overcome barriers to improve low RLA test scores. Studies indicate that universal educational achievement can be achieved through instructional leadership (IL). However, implementation fidelity is lacking in application. The professional realities of eight principals who employed various capacity-building practices through IL were examined for this study. Grounded in Coleman's social capital theory and Hallinger and Murphy's IL framework, this research focused on IL barriers and the actions principals took to overcome them. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and a focus group using Zoom's video recording and transcription features. The transcripts were analyzed using NVivo. The data were categorized, sorted, and investigated using Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis. The detailed analysis culminated in the emergence of four themes and eight subthemes. RQ1-barriers faced implementing IL: (1a) administrator duties and an underdeveloped learning culture, (1b) teacher lack of accountability and adaptability. RQ2-actions to overcome barriers: (2a) data analysis and professional learning communities, (2b) effective monitoring and feedback, and building an effective learning culture. This study found that principals who delegated specific duties, fostered a positive learning culture, managed data analysis, engaged structured PLCs, and maintained effective feedback systems achieved progress on their campuses. Future research could include exploring teacher accountability, comparing IL-trained campuses to those not trained, and a correlational study using the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS).

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Educational leaders and education policymakers in U.S. education systems at all levels need high but attainable standards of accountability. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) issued policies that reflect federal laws on such standards (Texas Education Agency, 2024). The TEA (2024) strategic plan particularly emphasized measures to provide inadequately performing schools with evidence-based capacity-building interventions to address performance shortcomings. What is more, the state maintains that its accountability ratings and classifications are in line with the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015), which mandates states to identify and categorize schools that show less than 5% performance as Additional Targeted Support (ATS), Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI), and Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI). Under TEA requirements, K-12 schools with consistently low performance ratings in the Closing the Gaps domain of state accountability are required to take part in compulsory interventions.

The *Closing the Gap* state accountability domain consists of four components: growth and graduation, progress toward English-language proficiency, school quality and student success, and academic achievement. The State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) is a measure of achievement. Students should attain the Meets Grade Level or above for their state-assessed performance level in reading/language arts (RLA) and mathematics on the STAAR (Texas Education Agency, 2024).

The 2023 Federal Reports show that Texas had 16 K-12 public and charter schools listed as CSI, 5 as TSI, and 2 as ATS in the southwest (Texas Education Agency, 2024). Texas Academic Performance Report (TAPR) shows that the mean RLA score of the 16 schools identified as CSI was 35% in 2023 and 32% in 2024; the mean RLA score of the five TSI schools was 44% in 2023 and 44% in 2024; the mean of RLA score of the two identified as ATS

was 40% in 2023 and 37% in 2024. The CSI school scores were 18% below the state average in 2023 and 22% below it in 2024. TSI schools scored 9% less in 2023 and 10% less in 2024. In 2023 and 2024, ATS schools' scores declined by 13% and 17%, respectively (Table 1). Schools classified as CSI will engage in interventions as part of their Targeted Improvement Plan (TIP), and those classified as TSI and ATS will have to develop a Local Improvement Plan (LIP).

Instructional leadership (IL) is one of the interventions described in the TIP guidance, an evidence-based strategy aimed at raising student achievement and developing educational leadership and teacher capacity. The IL approach focuses on developing capacity at campuses and districts by providing targeted leaders with systematic competencies and professional development practices. These practices and skills integrate common ideas in daily campus activities such as schoolwide culture practices, instructional planning, observation and feedback, and data-driven instruction. Thus, IL enhances teacher self-efficacy and student learning outcomes (Texas Education Agency, 2024).

Table 1

School and State Average RLA Scores by Classification

Classification	2023	2024	2023 State	2024 State	2023 Difference	2024 Difference
CSI	35%	32%	53%	54%	18%	22%
TSI	44%	44%	53%	54%	9%	10%
ATS	40%	37%	53%	54%	13%	17%

Campus leaders are expected to focus on enhancing learners' educational learning outcomes and teacher capacity (Walker & Qian, 2022). According to Shirrell (2021), in the modern education era, teacher capacity is fostered through enhancing their knowledge, skills, and competencies. Meyer-Looze and Vandermolen (2021) found that, in The Building Leader Capacity Series (BLCS), enhancing leadership skills through peer learning transfers positive outcomes. However, there are still barriers to teacher capacity-building despite existing interventions to enhance student achievement and learning outcomes. These barriers manifest when implementing evidence-based capacity-building programs.

According to the classic model based on the IL by Murphy et al. (1983), the central challenges associated with the development of teacher capacity are (1) the lack of expertise in instruction and curriculum among school leaders, (2) the failure to test the efficacy of educators, and (3) poor immeasurable goals that are characterized as imprecise, ill-defined and vague and which ultimately inhibit organizational success. As a result, the immense potential of IL with fidelity is often not fully valued by a significant segment of educational leaders, raising questions about the systemic challenges that limit the consistent and effective implementation of IL.

Regardless of IL's complexity, its implementers managed to operationalize it through high-quality instructional practices. In one study, a conceptual framework was put forward by Murphy et al. (1983), who suggested that the following constructs be considered:

1. Instructional Leadership Functions
2. School Leadership Processes, and
3. School Leadership Activities.

Each construct (Figure 1) is further subdivided into 19 subcategories and 10 IL functions: framing goals, promoting expectations, developing standards, assessing and monitoring student

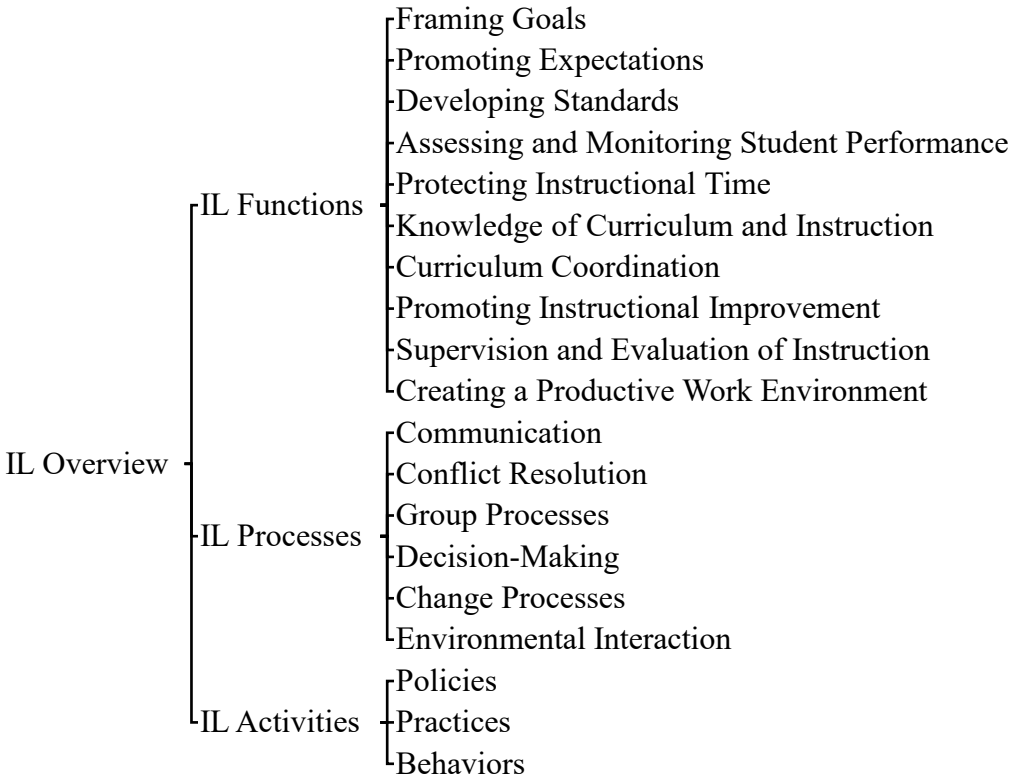
performance, protecting instructional time, knowledge of curriculum and instruction, curriculum coordination, promoting instructional improvement, supervision and evaluation of instruction, and creating a productive work environment. There are six school leadership processes: communication, conflict resolution, group processes, decision-making, change processes, and environmental interaction. Three school leadership practices: education leaders' policies, practices, and behaviors (Murphy et al., 1983).

Hallinger et al. (2020) showed that IL has gained global recognition as a critical model for evolving practices, techniques, and procedures in educational leadership. Hallinger et al. (2020) also determined that the modernity of IL highlights its importance in developing the academic purpose and mission, administration of curriculum and teaching, teacher competency and proficiency, and student educational outcomes. These elements are required to eradicate systemic issues, forming a line between IL principles and evidence-based capacity-building strategies.

Nonetheless, the obstacles to teacher capacity-building may and frequently do arise in campus cultures that have become unacceptably compromised internationally. Walker and Qian (2022) emphasized the impact of stagnant policies and uncommitted operations on professional development, inhibiting teacher growth and effectiveness. On the contrary, Dilekçi and Limon (2022) stated that the most effective leaders and teachers have a high degree of personal capacity-building and meaningful IL support.

Figure 1

Instructional Leadership (IL) Framework



Note: Adapted and modified from Murphy et al. (1983). Figure created by Dr. Allen Haynes.

Statement of the Problem

The problem addressed in this study was many K-12 public schools' reading/language arts (RLA) test scores did not meet grade level in the southwest region of Texas, prompting the mandatory implementation of intervention measures to build capacity and increase student learning outcomes (Godina, 2024; Texas Education Agency, 2024). According to the 2024 Texas Academic Performance Report (TAPR), RLA scores for CSI schools were 29% in 2023 and 30% in 2024; the mean RLA scores for the six TSI schools were 40% in 2023 and 42% in 2024 (Texas Education Agency, 2024). The Texas Education Agency informed the non-performing school principals that their schools must be involved in capacity-building programs implemented

in their classrooms. However, principals encounter resistance from teachers in complying with fidelity requirements, which may, in turn, compromise, the feasibility of implementing intervention programs.

Studies indicate that universal educational achievement can be achieved through instructional leadership (IL). However, implementation fidelity is lacking in the application. This may affect capacity-building interventions across schools, with educators at different levels reporting challenges to full engagement with IL strategies. Moreover, Thien et al. (2024) found that inconsistent IL practices occur when professional development among teachers fails to align with school goals. These misalignments affect teachers, learners, and administrators across Texas, as evidenced by RLA scores, especially in Southwest Texas.

Leaders may encounter difficulties in consistently applying IL practices. However, research shows that consistent adoption of IL alongside collective teacher efficacy can greatly contribute to teacher commitment and engagement (Thien et al., 2024). Nonetheless, there is no clarity on how leaders interact with leadership behavior and institutional practices to support or impede educator capacity-building (Dilekçi & Limon, 2022; Walker & Qian, 2022). Failure to fill this knowledge gap may hinder teacher development and lower teacher efficacy at schools (Dilekçi & Limon, 2022; Thien et al., 2024; Walker & Qian, 2022). Thus, identifying the causes of systemic challenges can promote a stable, well-supported teaching workforce for the effective implementation of IL practices and ensure sustainable improvements in education.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to explore how principals overcome barriers faced when implementing mandatory capacity-building in schools to improve low RLA test scores. Cox and Mullen (2023) advanced the field by noting that no current

research has examined the direct influence of principals on teachers in campus-wide IL practices. Most researchers studying IL in the U.S. and internationally focus on quantitative research. The researchers suggested that qualitative research, including focus groups or interviews, would provide better insight into educators' experiences and perceptions of IL (Goddard et al., 2021; He et al., 2024; Ralebese et al., 2025). This study sought to determine which factors hinder the fidelity of evidence-based IL implementation by systematically analyzing discussions of principals' experiences in schools implementing IL practices.

The data collection process included a focus group and semi-structured interviews to capture a wide range of perspectives. The analysis aligned with the research problem and the chosen research method. Byrne (2021) noted that the six-phase reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) is one of the most suitable methods of recognizing recurring insights and patterns. RTA was employed in the data analysis to align with these critical concepts. The proposed research addressed the stated problem by helping fill gaps in the literature on barriers to effective IL implementation and aligning with the research questions. The representative sample size in this study was eight participants within southwest Texas, who met the following criteria: (a) at least two years of experience in their position, (b) at least one year of experience in implementing capacity-building with teachers who have been resistant to this intervention, (c) overcame obstacles to implementing capacity-building, (d) the school has improved the RLA test scores on campus.

Introduction to Theoretical Framework

Coleman's social capital theory is the theoretical framework underlying this research. Social capital theory provides the constructs necessary to support the arguments presented in the research problem and purpose statements. The research questions have been formulated as a

design to examine the possible connection among trust, networks, and mutual norms. The research questions will also be applied to understand the systematic effects of these factors on teacher capacity-building and the sustainability of IL practices. In this way, the social capital approach can be applied to the analysis, with the aim of identifying practical implications to overcome obstacles to successful IL practices and teacher capacity-building, based on principals' experience. Coleman (1988) found that social capital is a product of networks of resources arising from human interactions. Coppe et al. (2022) also clarified that professional development among teachers is interdependent and exists within particular social networks. Thus, by implementing and aligning with this framework, this research showed the importance of these constructs in determining obstacles to the implementation of IL practices, by authenticating principals' experiences.

Theorists conceptualized foundational knowledge and identified critical aspects of social capital theory, which are useful for the theoretical framework of modern research. Singh's (2024) book compiled the seminal work of Marx, Coleman, Bourdieu, Putnam, Fukuyama, and Lin. Putnam's work also contributed to this study's efforts. Singh (2024) posited that Putnam described social capital as a collage of networks, mutual exchange, and trust, which further support Coleman's (1988) analogous constructs.

Trust is one of the key aspects of social capital that promotes a collaborative environment where teachers can contribute to the overall success of the campus, fostering interdependence, information exchange, and accountability. According to Liljenberg (2021), trust is the key to the success of professional development and IL. Lack of trust makes teachers resistant to collaborative efforts of routine participation in evidence-based teaching. Social networks are instrumental in sharing knowledge, resources, and expertise to support an individual's

professional growth and development. According to Bukko et al. (2021), effective dissemination of new practices is facilitated by strong teacher networks, which promote confidence in collective self-efficacy. Shared norms are the objectives and strategies that define how a profession works and enable its continued development. According to Coppe et al. (2022), accountability and group progress emerge in educational systems through established norms.

Coleman's social capital theory provides the framework for this study, which explored how insufficient trust, disjointed resource networks, and weak cultural norms in schools create barriers to effective capacity-building among educators. Social capital theory provides the necessary constructs to support the claims highlighted in the problem and purpose statements. The research questions provided a framework for exploring the relationships among trust, networks, and mutual norms, and for determining how they systematically impact teacher capacity-building and the sustainability of IL practices. Thus, social capital theory helped identify actionable insights to address barriers to effective IL practices and to teacher capacity-building, based on principals' experiences.

Introduction to Research Methodology and Design

I adopted a qualitative methodology to address the research problem. An exploratory case study design was used to address the study questions, exploring the barriers to consistent capacity-building practices by examining principals' views on the implementation of evidence-based IL practices. I employed the concepts of qualitative research proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to combine the major concepts of trustworthiness and researcher as the primary instrument to investigate the research topic. Qualitative research can assist researchers in answering the questions of *what* and *how* a specific phenomenon may occur, according to

Creswell and Poth (2025). Qualitative methodology can help understand how individuals conceptualize social phenomena within a bounded system (Bloomberg, 2023).

An explorative case study design was the most appropriate design for this study. The design had two elements: exploratory and case study. Exploratory design was used as a strategic tool to identify novel areas of study, uncover preliminary patterns, and generate insights that can form the basis for further research (Casula et al., 2020; Haile, 2023). New or emerging phenomena are best researched using an exploratory design in forming research questions for future testing or to better understand complex issues, such as low RLA scores in Southwest Texas.

A case study, alongside the exploratory study, is employed to examine a group, institution, situation, or phenomenon occurring in the current natural environment. In case study design, researchers recognize a limited system or a well-defined product of a distinct case. A case is an example of an organization or a place within a recognizable boundary (Creswell & Poth, 2025). This tactic is feasible in evaluating a particular school district, project, or population because it encompasses multiple types of data and information to provide a general perspective of the research problem (Zarestky, 2023). In this research, the bounded system was the principals in the chosen schools in Southwest Texas.

In exploratory case studies, researchers often gather data through interviews and focus groups (Haile, 2023). The human resources directors of 16 district and charter schools were requested to send out flyers and emails to recruit the principals. I designed a recruitment flyer and used two email lists to get potential participants. My personal account was used to send emails to principals across Southwest Texas who met the inclusion criteria. Participants who were qualified were contacted and requested to participate in the study. I then organized and

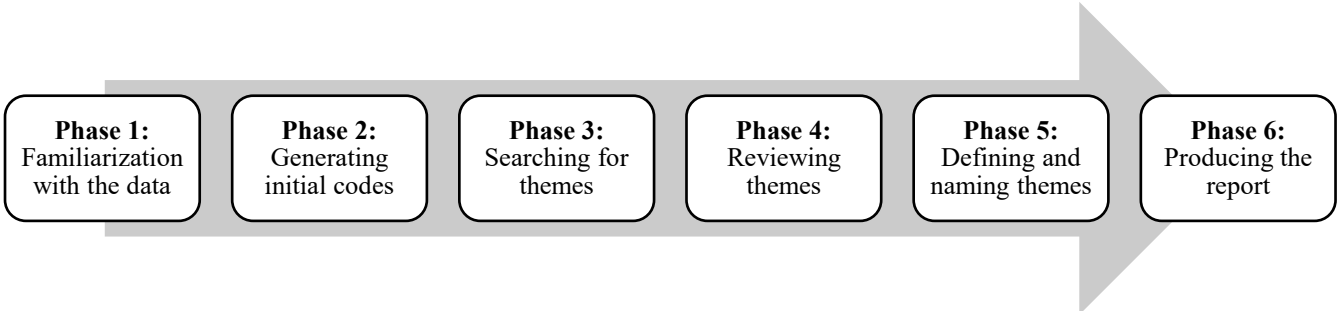
conducted individual Zoom interviews with eight principals to gather information. I then led a group of three volunteer principals in an online focus group. Interviews and focus groups may provide distinctive insights into the phenomenon under study and enrich and broaden the data obtained (Bloomberg, 2023; Creswell & Poth, 2025).

Braun and Clarke's (2021) reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) was used to analyze the data. Reflexive thematic analysis is compatible with an exploratory case study design, as it shares iterative characteristics (Byrne, 2021). The data were organized into the six phases of the recursive process (Figure 2) and their related functions. The preliminary process, conducted systematically, facilitated the identification, analysis, and interpretation of data patterns, yielding meaningful and informative findings that guided principals in recognizing how to address barriers to implementing mandatory capacity-building on Southwest Texas campuses.

Furthermore, I transcribed the conversations using the Zoom transcription feature to initiate the manual coding process. Manual coding involved color-coding transcriptions in NVivo to group similar ideas. I also used the Word highlighting feature to help code the data. Additionally, NVivo was used to organize and categorize the initial data.

Figure 2

Phases of Thematic Analysis



Note: Adapted and modified from Braun & Clarke (2006). Figure created by Dr. Allen Haynes.

Research Questions

RQ1

What barriers do principals face when implementing mandatory school capacity-building to improve low reading/language arts (RLA) test scores?

RQ2

How do principals overcome barriers when implementing mandatory school capacity-building to improve low reading/language arts (RLA) test scores?

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in the evidence-based options instructional leaders can use to improve campus capacity-building strategies by addressing perceived barriers that hinder the fidelity of instructional leadership (IL) implementation. Principals will be able to recognize perceived barriers, apply the IL strategies with fidelity on their campuses, and address barriers that limit the improvement process, thereby enhancing student learning outcomes, greater teacher commitment, ongoing capacity-building, and sustained improvement in education. Principals can use the compiled data presented to devise strategies to address low test scores. This research can turn into a handbook for other principals who both approach and are confronted with this phenomenon to increase student test scores across their campuses. Thus, the study is significant because it is the responsibility of all educational leaders in Southwest Texas to ensure that students achieve the desired testing level.

Given the rising accountability requirements for educational leaders, assessing the impediments to IL implementation is essential for developing evidence-based professional development initiatives (Goddard et al., 2021). Pianta et al. (2021) discovered that when teachers combine evidence-based instructional practices in their classrooms, student outcomes can

improve. Nevertheless, there is limited research regarding the barriers to IL's influence on teacher capacity-building. This research provided the opportunity to gain theoretical and practical knowledge of capacity-building in the educational process by analyzing principals' views on the obstacles they face in IL operations, processes, and activities. This contribution aligns with broader efforts to increase teacher efficacy and student learning in underperforming schools. When developing future research for this inquiry, it is necessary to link IL and capacity-building to address this systemic challenge.

Definitions of Key Terms

Barriers

Barriers in the context of education define problems, issues, or challenges that make the effective use of leadership practices or capacity-building initiatives difficult to become operationalized (examples include unavailability of resources, resistance to change, hectic schedules, or inappropriate training or support to achieve instructional objectives) (Cansoy et al., 2024; Cansoy et al., 2025; Cherutoi et al., 2024).

Did Not Meet Grade Level

Did not meet grade level is a State of Texas Assessment Academic Readiness (STAAR) performance standard. Students that fall into this category have not proven adequate knowledge and skills in the subject matter, meaning that: (1) they are far below the level of knowledge and skills that they are expected to possess at their grade or course, (2) they are unlikely to succeed at the next grade or course without major academic intervention and support, and (3) they might need additional academic intervention and support to meet the expectations at their grade level. In addition, this standard is applied in other accountability calculations to determine the achievement of students requiring accelerated learning (Texas Education Agency, 2024).

Capacity-Building

Capacity-building is a holistic process of enhancing the knowledge, abilities, and skills of instructional personnel and developing campus instructional management. During this process, the professional development, collaboration, and reflexivity conditions are set within the educational institution. Capacity-building is a knowledge multiplier and must be managed to influence instructional practice, maintain school improvement, and boost student learning outcomes (Clark, 2017; Pashmforoosh et al., 2023).

Fidelity of Implementation

Describes the application of educational initiative according to its original intent. Implementing with fidelity means that each component is delivered with high proficiency levels and ensures students benefit from the desired achievement outcomes (Nuñes et al., 2024; Spacciapoli et al., 2022).

Instructional Leadership

The activities, methods, and processes through which campus leaders strategically develop capacity of the instructional staff, which in turn have a positive effect on student learning outcomes through the creation of shared goals, the shaping of the school culture, the curriculum management, the observation of the instruction and the provision of timely feedback, the collaboration of the teaching staff, and the management of the data-driven decision-making (Karakose et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2021; Zhan et al., 2023).

Overcoming

A deliberate and thoughtful process that helps to recognize, address, and prevail over challenges, obstacles, and adversities in order to achieve the desired outcome. It means knowing the obstacles, focusing, and being willing to act while believing that the effort to overcome

negative situations will lead to a better condition or future. This may be highly stressful, demanding adaptability, resilience, and in some cases external professional help to achieve sustainability and guarantee long-term success (Brush et al., 2011).

Underperforming

Underperformance is a persistent situation in which a school or schools have lower student achievement, poorer educational results, or poorer institutional effectiveness than other schools of the same type. The underperformance is attributed to a history of achievement gaps in learning, failure to comply with curriculum standards, and structural ineffectiveness in the instructional practices (Harris & Jones, 2022; van de Grift & Houtveen, 2006).

Summary

In Chapter 1, I presented the need for interventions in low-performing schools, especially in comprehensive support and improvement categories, and the necessity of introducing instructional leadership (IL) strategies to address low test scores. Specifically, I examined the Texas assessment standards, described low reading/language arts (RLA) scores, and showed this phenomenon as the problem statement in this research. The research question answered in the present study was whether reading/language arts (RLA) test scores in many K-12 public schools in the southwest part of Texas were below grade level, which led to the compulsory adoption of intervention measures to establish a capacity-building effect and subsequently increase student learning outcomes (Godina, 2024; Texas Education Agency, 2024). I developed the purpose statement to explore how principals overcome barriers to implementing mandatory capacity-building in schools to improve low RLA test scores.

I then introduced Coleman's (1988) social capital theory as the theoretical framework for this study. I also described how I integrated an exploratory case study design into this study. I

then discussed my data collection methods and data analysis. I formulated and listed two research questions. Finally, I discussed the significance of this research and the seven major terms essential to the overall research. This research can provide information that could assist principals in addressing barriers and enable students to achieve the required RLA passing levels.

To address low reading/language arts (RLA) test scores in Southwest Texas schools, this study aimed to explore the implementation challenges of IL strategies in underperforming Texas schools, with a particular focus on IL capacity-building efforts. Using a qualitative, exploratory case study, a thorough collection of research data was conducted through principal interviews and a focus group to analyze barriers to educational leadership effectiveness. The study is undergirded by Coleman's social capital theory as the theoretical framework for investigating the impact of professional relationships, institutional norms, and resource networks on the fidelity of IL implementation. Findings from the study could inform policy decisions on leadership development, organized collaboration, and instructional improvement. The evidence from this study could advance structured educational improvement by identifying strategies to overcome implementation barriers. The findings might also offer insight into how systemic factors influence the implementation of IL strategies and could help refine functions, processes, and activities that support principal effectiveness, teacher and leader capacity-building, and increased student learning outcomes.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The problem addressed in this research was the low reading/language arts (RLA) proficiency in the K-12 public schools in Southwest Texas. These low scores require mandatory interventions and capacity-building programs, but principals face barriers to effectively implementing these initiatives (Godina, 2024; Texas Education Agency, 2024). This qualitative, exploratory case study examined how principals address barriers that emerge during the implementation of compulsory capacity-building strategies in Southwest Texas schools. The main focus was on identifying knowledge of effective leadership practices to promote capacity-building and, eventually, improve student learning outcomes.

Low- and under-performing schools in Southwest Texas require unique, deliberate, and specialized support for students (Harris & Jones, 2022). In a study focused on two school districts in Southwest Texas, Godina (2024) examined Hispanic students of Mexican descent who experienced difficulty in English as a second language, resulting in low RLA scores. Godina's (2024) evidence demonstrated the need for methodical, structured interventions to address low performance. The Texas Education Agency requires the adoption of instructional leadership (IL) to address underperformance (Texas Education Agency, 2024). However, principals face barriers when attempting to implement these intervening strategies with fidelity. These findings show that generic interventions fail to fully address the unique challenges of academic decline and language acquisition. Therefore, there is a need for culturally responsive, tailored IL.

This literature review systematically explores the key constructs associated with IL and capacity-building. First, I explain how Coleman's social capital theory serves as the basis for the study. I then describe barriers to implementing IL and capacity-building strategies. Next, I

provide an overview of principals' roles in overcoming these barriers. Lastly, I discuss the impact of IL and capacity-building on teacher efficacy and student learning outcomes.

Literature Search

This literature review was conducted through a thorough analysis and documentation of sources. The sources comprised books, scholarly journals, governmental publications, National University's Navigator search engine, Google Scholar, ERIC, EBSCOHost, JSTOR, ProQuest, SAGE resources, and Ulrichsweb (Bloomberg, 2023). Creswell and Creswell (2023) indicated that source research requires the use of carefully chosen subject terms to ensure that all online searches yield credible, evidence-based results. The research terms were *building capacity*, *instructional leadership*, *teacher efficacy*, and *social capital theory*. The limiters used to narrow results were full text, peer-reviewed, quotation marks, a date range of 2021-2025, and Boolean operators. The selected source selection process, along with clear inclusion and exclusion criteria, provided the required evidence to begin this literature review.

There is a need for a systematic process to navigate academic databases and reduce the large number of results to a set of relevant, high-quality sources to achieve effective instructional leadership research. The original search for the term *instructional leadership* yielded 571,067 results, which were filtered using limiters, including Full Text, reducing the results to 328,805; a second search with limiters, using the filter *peer-reviewed*, narrowed the results further to 150,406. Filtering the results using phrase searching with quotation marks and Boolean operators such as "AND" narrowed the results to 9,811. In contrast, further narrowing and using keywords such as *teacher capacity* yielded 165 results. Narrowing the publication year range from 1900-2025 to 2021-2025 helped enhance the relevance of the sources. In general, search limiters, Boolean operators, and phrase searching helped generate manageable results and facilitate

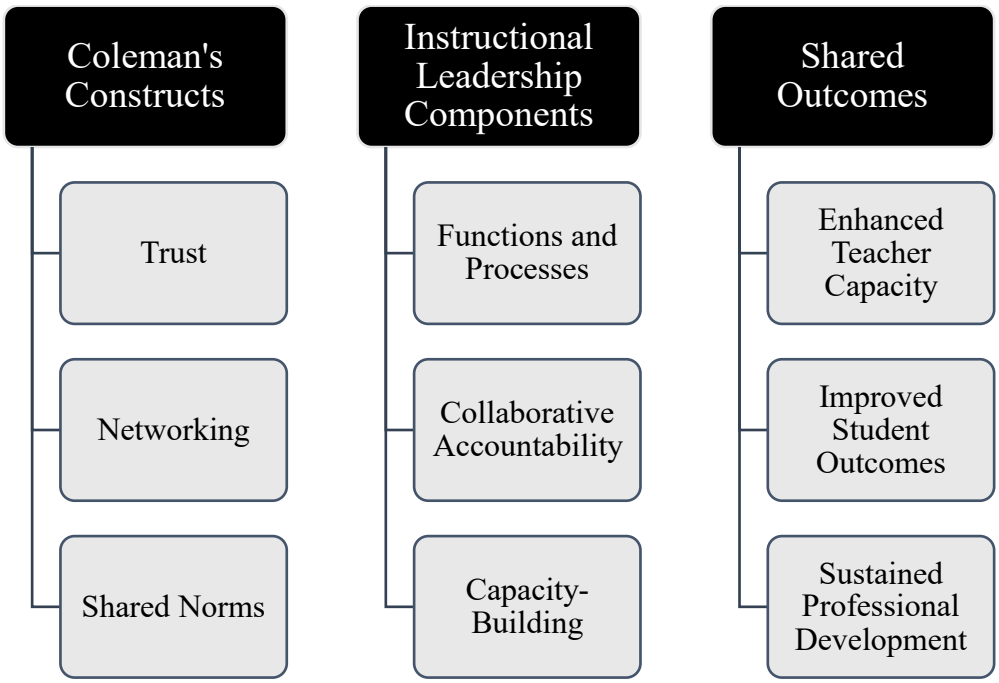
specific findings. In addition, leveraging searches within articles using subject terms and field codes also helped surface more related articles, enabling a progressive, iterative, and targeted approach to research.

Theoretical Framework

In this study, Coleman's (1988) social capital theory serves as a theoretical basis for how relationships, norms, and networks facilitate the implementation of instructional leadership (IL) strategies. Coleman pointed out three theoretical constructs, including trust, networking, and institutionalized shared norms, which are highly correlated with Murphy et al.'s IL model, that is, functions, processes, and leadership activities (Mikiewicz, 2021; Murphy et al., 1983). The initial construct, trust, is the basis for productive collaboration among related educators and can serve as a key element of IL and a powerful implementation tool across the campus. The second construct, information networks, which are influenced by human interaction, affects the way IL strategies spread and are implemented in educational institutions. Shared norms are the third construct of Coleman's social capital theory, enabling group reciprocity, which is imperative for initiating capacity-building processes to facilitate teacher professional development (Coppe et al., 2022). Coleman's framework shows that the interaction among trust, networking, and shared norms promotes the successful implementation and performance of IL strategies. The social capital theory is applied in IL based on its historical evolution. Figure 3 illustrates the alignment between Coleman's social capital constructs, IL, and shared outcomes.

Figure 3

Aligning Coleman's Social Capital Constructs, Instructional Leadership, and Shared Outcomes



Note: Adapted and modified from Coleman, J. S. (1988). Figure created by Dr. Allen Haynes.

Social capital is historically linked to Hanifan's (1916) discussion of community engagement; the contributions of John Dewey, Pierre Bourdieu, and Robert Putnam's theories have helped to refine its meaning over time (Tinkler & Tinkler, 2020). One of the pioneers of the theory, Bourdieu, helped distinguish social capital as a factor in maintaining social structures. Coleman, nevertheless, linked the concept to interpersonal networks as a basis for collaboration and mutual accountability (Mikiewicz, 2021). Putnam argued that social capital integrates networks, mutual exchange, and trust (Singh, 2024). Social capital is a service-learning and professional development activity that connects educators and the communities (Tinkler & Tinkler, 2020). There is a challenge in creating connections across diverse educational settings to bridge social capital due to institutional barriers (Putnam, 1993). Both modern and historical

perspectives of social capital's evolution suggest that social capital can be used to develop cohesive, collaborative educational communities while revealing the institutional barriers that hinder IL integration. These diverse theoretical perspectives help to interpret social capital's role in educational leadership.

The theory of social capital offers various alternative views and interpretations. One social capital perspective views social capital as a public good that supports democratic principles through civic participation (Putnam, 1993). Another example is network theory, which argues that relations form and change, influencing the flow and distribution of information in organizations (Granovetter, 1973). Coleman's perspective specifically applies to IL because a lack of trust, poor resource networks, and broken norms hinder educators' capacity-building (Coppe et al., 2022). This comparative assessment indicates that the perspectives of the public good and the network theory can help clarify the broader civic and relational aspects of social capital.

In contrast, the Coleman framework most effectively identifies the lack of trust and the fragmentation of resource networks as key obstacles that may limit educators' capacity-building efforts. Considering these challenges, Coleman's theory offers IL insights to overcome implementation barriers. Researchers can understand how school leaders overcome barriers to implementing leadership strategies by applying Coleman's theory to IL in addressing low student achievement.

This research study examined how principals cultivate trust, professional network building, and shared norm development to build teacher capacity and instructional effectiveness, in line with the research problem and purpose (Murphy et al., 1983). Similarly, the research questions of this study maintained a systematic design to explore the relationship between these

constructs and their impact on sustainable IL practices (Coppe et al., 2022). This combination of research evidence and theoretical models validated the argument that applying the Coleman framework to IL makes clear how trust reinforcement, network-building initiatives, and shared norms can help reduce barriers to teacher capacity-building and enhance student achievement. A further analysis of the overlap between social capital and IL further supports the need to develop a structure of professional development and collaboration.

The IL framework formulated by Murphy et al. (1983) shares some similarities with Coleman's theory, as both focus on mechanisms that facilitate professional development, information exchange, and collective accountability. The connection between social capital theory and IL indicates that trust enables teachers to feel comfortable adopting IL strategies, whereas professional networks introduce good practices, thereby making capacity-building easier to acquire (Coppe et al., 2022). The continuity and coherence of IL initiatives are based on shared norms. The alignment also indicates the role of social factors in promoting cooperation in IL, ensuring long-term change in teaching and learning (Putnam, 1993). IL and social capital theory, focusing on trust, committed professional networks, and shared norms, can help to develop sustainable teacher capacity-building in education practices. The research results may be applicable in practice to school leaders who want to improve teaching outcomes.

There is a need for a clear, well-defined understanding of the implementation barriers to IL strategies aimed at addressing low RLA test scores in Southwest Texas. In this regard, the current research used Coleman's social capital theory to examine the challenges that principals face and overcome as they build their capacities to increase student achievement. The problem, purpose, and questions of the research were used to explore how the three aspects, trust, professional networks, and shared campus norms, are connected and how such aspects have

systematic effects on teacher capacity, professional development, and sustainability of IL practices. Therefore, this investigation into the relationship between IL and capacity-building explains the mechanisms principals can use to improve teacher efficacy and student performance and forms a good basis for future research. The theoretical framework on social capital presented by Coleman provides a unique channel for further discussion of IL as a driver of capacity-building.

Instructional Leadership: Foundations, Implementation, and Impact

Instructional leadership (IL) in this study refers to the operations, practices, and processes applied by campus leaders to strategically develop the capacity of the instructional staff and influence student learning outcomes by: establishing shared goals, influencing school culture, managing the curriculum, observing instruction and providing timely feedback, promoting teacher collaboration, and overseeing data-driven decision-making (Karakose et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2021; Zhan et al., 2023).

One of the first conceptual models of IL was presented by Hallinger and Murphy (1985) and Gümüş et al. (2022), who described it in terms of three dimensions: defining the school mission, managing the instructional program, and encouraging a positive school learning climate. This model has been influential and, in subsequent studies, extended to incorporate distributed and transformational factors (Hallinger & Heck, 1996). Robinson et al. (2008) substantiated Hallinger and Murphy's work by affirming that IL is critical to the establishment of learning conditions and by emphasizing the collaborative functions of teacher commitment.

The first dimension defines the school's mission and establishes a clear vision and purpose that guides educational efforts. The mission helps with decision-making and resource allocation necessary for instructional quality and student achievement. The mission also enables

instructional leaders to motivate the school community to achieve common educational targets. The IL motivates staff members and students, which promotes accountability and a sense of belonging in the educational context (Walker & Qian, 2022). This aligns with Cox and Mullen (2023), who proposed that a well-defined mission supports innovation and the adoption of new teaching methods.

The second dimension is managing the instructional program by improving teaching practices through Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) model. Instructional leaders support teacher capacity-building and professional development through feedback and collaborative learning opportunities. This engagement leads to high-quality instruction and ensures positive student learning outcomes. Students' success is easily achieved in campus environments with a positive school learning culture. Recent research shows that supportive school culture boosts student engagement, teacher satisfaction, and retention (Cells et al., 2023; Qadach et al., 2020). IL, alternatively, establishes a standard practice of continuous improvement through shared educational responsibility.

The third dimension of IL focuses on campus leaders' efforts to promote a positive school learning climate through improving teaching and learning (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). Instructional leaders cultivate a sense of belonging and accountability by enhancing the relationships within the school community. Leaders play a key role in developing a supportive and inclusive environment that increases student engagement and motivation (Cells et al., 2023). Thus, emotional and social aspects of the learning process promote the team-based nature of IL and ongoing improvement in the learning context.

IL allows users to focus more closely on direct participation in instructional quality and teacher development (Murphy, 1988). This practical method allows leaders to help teachers

improve their teaching practices and provide more optimal learning environments. The study of IL is still developing its definition, which has made the topic more accessible for study and for understanding its underlying principles and practices. This development has led to additional improvements in the use of IL, as evidenced by research showing that IL can positively influence school effectiveness and improve student achievement.

Historical Evolution of Instructional Leadership

The idea of instructional leadership (IL) has evolved over the years through various studies exploring school effectiveness. Wang (2022) proposed that the first peer-reviewed IL paper may have been distributed as early as 1941 by the professional bulletin of the National Association of Secondary School Principals. Effective IL emerged as a new focus for educational researchers who held that high-quality IL is the key to school success during the Effective Schools movement of the 1970s and 1980s (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). This led several researchers to inquire into the role of principals in influencing and guiding more systematic teaching practices in schools (Kellams, 1979). Further studies by Bossert et al. (1982) supported the significance of principals as instructional leaders who affect curriculum, instructional practices, and student learning outcomes. The original concern of IL models centered on the principal as the key figure. However, later research found that successful IL involves shared leadership among teachers, other administrators, and support personnel (Hallinger, 2005).

Continuing the above discussion, the Effective Schools movement helped to shape IL. Studies in this period identified the main features of an effective school, including a strong principal, a clear academic purpose, and a positive school climate (Acton, 2021; He et al., 2024; Ralebese et al., 2025). The findings institutionalized IL as a foundational concept of education policy and administration. The movement facilitated a transition from traditional managerial

roles to a greater focus on curriculum development and teacher supervision (Acton, 2021; He et al., 2024; Ralebese et al., 2025).

Interestingly, the practice and theory of IL have evolved over time. Transformational leadership emerged as a new style of leadership during the 1990s, focusing on inspiring people and fostering collaborative working environments. The new course laid the groundwork for a distributed leadership model, recognizing that leadership responsibilities ought to be shared between teachers and staff (Shaked, 2024). Researchers recognized that these developments were integrated into the leadership model of learning, resulting in established learner-centered classroom environments that improved student academic outcomes (Bellibaş et al., 2021; Shaked, 2024).

The core role of IL is the role of principals, as the primary instructional leaders in their schools. Principal roles include leading the mutual conception of academic and student development goals, overseeing instruction, and aligning curriculum (He et al., 2024). Competent principals conserve instructional time and build a positive school climate, resulting in improved student success and teacher satisfaction (Kılınç et al., 2024). The role of the principal includes continuous instructional support and professional development (He et al., 2024; Kılınç et al., 2024).

IL operations have been shifted through the adoption of shared or distributed leadership methods. Leaders acknowledge that IL effectiveness in education requires input from principals, teachers, students, and members from the campus's IL team (Lin, 2022). Leaders who adopt a distributed leadership style facilitate collaboration and encourage innovative thinking. Leaders who gravitate to this style of leadership also promote shared accountability. Empirical studies show that shared IL can foster quality instruction, teacher self-efficacy, and enhanced student

academic achievement through collaborative decision-making and professional autonomy (Lin, 2022; Ma & Marion, 2021).

Researchers described the effect of IL on teaching practices and student proficiency. Principals who engaged in IL prioritized pedagogical models and teacher capacity-building (Bellibaş et al., 2025; Chen & Rong, 2023). Such leadership optimizes teacher performance, job satisfaction, and student achievement (Liu et al., 2021). The implementation of the curriculum, school climate, and guided instruction support these results (Bellibaş et al., 2025; Liu et al., 2021).

IL evolution is based on changes in the overall approaches to leadership in education. The Effective Schools movement and the interplay between transformation and distributed leadership theories have ensured that IL remains a core school improvement instrument. The critical importance of principals' roles in leadership development and the reported implications for instructional practice and student achievement underscore why IL is a significant area of contemporary education. These and later historical developments shifted the foundation of IL towards fundamental functions and processes in schools.

Conceptualizing Instructional Leadership into Functions and Processes

The new instructional leadership (IL) context gradually shifted toward normal practice across the various peer-reviewed journal articles, including the *National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin*, *Journal of Educational Administration*, *Educational Administration Quarterly*, and the *Journal of Educational Administration and History*. Throughout its transformation over the past eight decades, IL has experienced both increased interest and equal neglect, despite its rich history. Hallinger and Murphy (1986) defined IL in terms of two constructs: (1) leadership functions, and (2) leadership processes. This integration

of functions and processes is based on a chain of activities that includes defining the school mission, curriculum, instruction, assessment, data analysis, teacher capacity-building, and enhancing students' learning outcomes (Sanchez & Watson, 2021; Vogel, 2018).

Educational institutions have diverse student demographics and higher accountability needs, which require adaptive and integrative IL functions and processes consistent with those described by Hallinger and Murphy (1986). Therefore, to support teaching and learning, there is a need for leadership practices that promote mission refinement, IL, evidence-based decision-making, and capacity development (Maqbool et al., 2023). Subsequent historical events led to a shift in the basis of IL to core functions and processes in schools.

Implementing Instructional Leadership in Schools

School leaders purposefully design learning conditions and teaching practices necessary to generate the overall effects of instructional leadership (IL). Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) model identified three core functions of IL: (1) instructional supervision, (2) student progress monitoring, and (3) professional learning communities. School leaders recognize that strategically engaging principals in teacher capacity-building and curriculum planning results in higher student learning outcomes (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). However, there are existing challenges despite such evolutionary findings. The most frequent obstacles to IL effectiveness for education leaders are time management, administrative responsibilities, and a lack of coaching proficiency (Cansoy et al., 2024). Walker and Qian (2022) also noted that campus administrators who invested in professional learning, data-driven learning, and systematic collaboration experienced improved student performance and enhanced instructional quality.

Studies on leadership models began to focus on understanding the influence of context and collaboration on development. Current IL processes demand improvements in technical

skills related to IL. There is also a need to allot more attention to school culture and environmental influences (Cansoy et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2021). Principals promote teaching and learning by aligning with best practices, mobilizing staff support, and setting goals (Meyer et al., 2023). Such active partnerships and mutual efforts unite teachers and administrators as professional collaborators. Their professional agency plays a crucial role in fostering instructional improvement when facilitated utilizing close social networks and collectivization (Lingam et al., 2021).

Principals also led by creating conditions for adult learning. They supported teacher growth through campus-wide monitoring (Cox & Mullen, 2023). Researchers revealed that principal involvement in curriculum and instruction supports teacher development. However, excessive directive approaches may reduce teacher morale (Zhan et al., 2023).

Additionally, principals can foster a culturally responsive school culture by considering demographics and community assets to boost trust and shared ownership (Mansfield & Lambrinou, 2024). There is a need for systemic changes that would allow principals to prioritize leadership functions (Cox & Mullen, 2023; Pendergrass & Wood, 1979). Transitioning from a supervisory to a collaborative model would shape IL implementation and assessment (Cansoy et al., 2024).

Operationalization and Assessment of Instructional Leadership

Research on instructional leadership (IL) requires frameworks capable of assessing the principal's participation in the instructional improvement process. Hallinger and Murphy (1985) developed the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS) to assess IL by focusing on school mission, management of instructional programs, and promotion of a positive school climate. The instrument is a reliable IL assessment tool used in various educational

systems. According to Hallinger and Heck (1996), the higher the PIMRS score, the stronger the indicators of student performance, greater teacher collaboration, and improved instructional quality. Therefore, measurement standardization promotes the comparability of leadership practices across contexts and data-driven leadership improvement.

Despite their usefulness, studies indicated that quantitative tools cannot always detect the best practices involving IL and the complex properties associated with its success. Research showed that principals sometimes adapted their leadership to local contexts and challenges, which quantitative instruments may not always uncover (Shaked, 2021). Decisions made for students in low-income or rural areas can differ from those made for students in urban or affluent areas (Cox & Mullen, 2023). These findings suggest that quantitative tools, combined with qualitative research methods, enable the assessment of IL effectiveness.

The proven relationship between IL and educational achievement makes it vital to incorporate this practice into capacity-building programs to sustain school success. Principals who are highly involved in IL help establish a learning and collaborative atmosphere in their schools, thereby contributing to increased professional capacity (Mora-Ruano et al., 2021). In addition, instructional quality-based leadership practices were found to result in sustainable gains in student learning, growth, and development when accompanied by transformational leadership practices guided by data outcomes and periodic system appraisal (Bellibaş et al., 2021). This dual focus on instructional improvement and professional development is a basis for school culture and reform implementation. Instructional excellence is the focus in educational systems; however, identifying and enhancing IL is key to long-term adjustment. The next section explains the intersection between IL's operational practices, systems' assessments, and school capacity, for systemic professional growth and organizational improvement.

Instructional Leadership as a Catalyst for Capacity-Building

Teacher capacity development requires instructional leadership (IL) since leaders rely on it to create learning conditions that enhance professional growth and teamwork. Researchers found that IL-focused schools led by supportive principals have a higher teacher job satisfaction index, higher retention, and well-defined professional development (Bellibaş et al., 2021). Leaders directly influenced the quality of instruction in learning environments through regular participation in instructional practices such as curriculum oversight and supervision of instruction (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Walker & Qian, 2022). Scholars have also found that successful IL practices led to greater collaboration among teachers and the establishment of a mutual responsibility model to support student achievement (Bellibaş et al., 2021; Walker & Qian, 2022). The evolution of IL practices remains critical to the development of learning environments that support teachers' continuous development of instructional skills.

Researchers also suggested that combining transformational leadership practices with IL enhances principals' ability to leverage it as a catalyst for capacity-building. Bellibaş et al. (2021) found that transformational leadership mediates the relationship between IL and improvements in teachers' professional learning and teaching practices. Principals using both instructional and transformational leadership styles promoted more profound professional practice and instructors' creativity by inspiring a shared vision and driving teachers beyond transactional duties (Bellibaş et al., 2021; Hallinger et al., 2020). The integrated leadership model intersects with the complexities of school reform, as they contribute to the development of instruction and transforming the organization (Hallinger et al., 2020). The synthesis of instructional and transformational leadership patterns yields a more holistic model for building school capacity and achieving long-term sustainability.

The organizational structure and the specific social context within which IL functions also played key roles in its overall success. Walker and Qian (2022) found in their research on IL in Chinese schools that principals modified their practices to align with cultural standards and educational rules, thereby demonstrating that leadership approaches should be adjusted in diverse educational settings. Also, historical reviews of IL showed that, despite the model's global applicability, it is highly differentiated across decentralized and centralized education systems (Hallinger et al., 2020). Since IL changes with more expansive leadership paradigms, contextual effects are important for adapting leadership practices that constructively develop teacher capacity (Bellibaş et al., 2021; Walker & Qian, 2022). Thus, to develop IL, it is important to focus on specific leadership behaviors and to be sensitive to the cultural, structural, and political contexts in which schools operate.

Policy Influence on Instructional Leadership

The adoption of educational policy changes has had a significant impact on how instructional leadership (IL) operates in schools. The Goals 2000: Educate America Act (1994) introduced a national education reform agenda that emphasized equity and standards alongside systemic improvement. This legislation altered the passive educational leadership approach of the time to one that identified formal leadership roles to support teaching and learning (U.S. Congress, 1994). Federal support was later institutionalized under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 through Title II funding, principal preparation, and support services (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). Evidence-based interventions and IL development were also introduced as the primary means of school improvement in ESSA. These policies guided state systems in making principalship a leadership position focused on developing teacher capacity to support student achievement.

Similarly, the national leadership standards framework was revised to accommodate the new policies. The *National Policy Board for Educational Administration* (NPBEA) launched the new *Professional Standards for Educational Leaders* (PSEL) in October 2015. The primary purpose of the newly ascribed PSEL was to replace the *Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium* (ISLLC) standards, which focused on instructional enhancement and equity (NPBEA, 2015). The PSEL standards have been designed based on over 600 research studies to advance academic rigor and favorable student environments (Wilson, 2021). The standards serve as a basis of assessment and licensure, influence professional development, and principal training programs in various states. New leadership standards also focus on ethical practice in addition to cultural responsiveness and instructional quality, shifting from management-based to instruction-based leadership expectations.

These policies and standards transformed educational leadership programs and reforms. Policy-driven reform movements of the 1980s required leadership preparation programs to address IL directly and systematically (Murphy, 1991). Virtual professional learning communities and equity-focused leadership even helped leaders implement PSEL principles, promoting teaching and learning practices (Grogan, 2024; Pashmforoosh et al., 2023). The IL framework currently connects federal objectives to local educational practice for school improvement. Education policy helps to maintain and develop IL throughout the educational system.

Connecting National Frameworks to Texas Instructional Leadership

Instructional leadership (IL) has been institutionalized, with a growing emphasis on national policy frameworks that have prioritized the quality of instruction and teacher development. In various states, the Professional Standards of Educational Leaders (PSEL) were

implemented as the proverbial anchor of IL and provided researchers insight to establish a coherent framework for defining effective leadership behaviors (Bailes et al., 2023; Roberts & Singleton, 2024). These principles promote equity, data-driven teaching, and collaboration as key leadership values. Furthermore, Bengston et al. (2020) also noted divergent opinions, indicating that the comprehensive scope of national standards leads to shallow implementation at the school level due to a lack of relevant adjustment practices. The holistic perspective of PSEL relies on local practitioners to turn it into practical instructional change.

States have developed state-specific models that use national leadership standards to address implementation fidelity and contextual challenges. Texas adopted Chapter 149 of the Texas Administrative Code Subchapter BB (Administrator Standards) in June 2014. This adoption made Instructional Leadership the first standard in Rule 149.2001 on principal standards (Texas Administrative Code, 2014). Subsequently, the adoption of the PSEL was an intentional effort to establish a more formal alignment between leadership principles and instructional practice (DeMatthews et al., 2021). There is a growing consensus among researchers that state adaptation enhances alignment between leadership and school accountability systems and the clarity of principal evaluation systems (Wilson, 2021; Zhan et al., 2023).

Despite the growing emphasis of state and regional policies on IL, Meyer-Looze and Vandermolen (2021) discovered that most principals, especially in districts with less developed structures of support, had troubles with new leadership practices since few had coaching infrastructures, little superintendent assistance, or were contaminated by competing demands of the building that obstructed learning transfer and implementation. The gap between standards

and actual implementation requires robust models that translate standards into operational processes.

The Texas Instructional Leadership (TIL) program is a multifaceted model designed to close the implementation gap by incorporating IL into routine practices. Texas educational policymakers transformed TIL from basic IL procedures into replicable systems of practice (Texas Education Agency, 2024). The TIL model integrates data-based instruction, action coaching, and analysis of student work into school improvement initiatives that enable school leaders to apply the Effective Schools Framework (ESF) practices. These features of TIL, which align it with teacher and principal development systems such as the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS) and the Texas Principal Evaluation and Support System (T-PESS), facilitate continual teacher and principal development through real-time feedback.

Divergently, researchers have expressed concern about the sustainability of IL reforms, in which school systems over-rely on external technical support or policy requirements without developing internal leadership capacity. One such example was a study by DeMatthews et al. (2021) that found that the principals of a Texas district perceived that evaluation and support systems were applied inconsistently and poorly aligned with the realities of IL at the campus level. Equally, Cansoy et al. (2025) indicated that IL initiatives frequently fail to establish, mainly due to contextual barriers stemming from deficient training, bureaucratic overload, or an insufficient coaching infrastructure, which diminishes principals' capacity to implement reform-based leadership practices. Nevertheless, TIL has been accepted as a scalable model that closes the policy-practice gap.

The works by Bambrick-Santoyo and the field-tested frameworks profoundly guided the TIL practice architecture and informed the national discussion of instructional coaching and

leadership. Although Leverage Leadership 2.0 by Bambrick-Santoyo (2018) and Get Better Faster 2.0, also by Bambrick-Santoyo (2025), provide systematic protocols for coaching and planning, recent field studies agree on the effectiveness of these same routines. Ezzani (2020) discovered that high-quality lesson planning, data-informed decision-making, and data-driven observation-feedback loops have propelled teacher leaders and encouraged cultural change in high-need school settings. These frameworks are the foundation of the coaching modules compiled within TIL. Contrarily, divergent arguments suggested that the operational manifestation of these routines was often intended to emphasize compliance rather than honor culture and teachers' autonomy (Ezzani, 2020). However, Bambrick-Santoyo's work remains fundamental to translating the concept of IL into a practical, scalable phenomenon in Texas schools.

Texas's efforts are closely aligned with instructional improvement research. Findings reported by researchers converged on the idea that TIL adopts tenets of the IL theories of Hallinger (2005) and Cansoy et al. (2024), specifically enhancing instructional supervision and data utilization. TIL provides an environment of intentional practice that develops teacher capacity over time through routine observation cycles and reflective coaching (Ezzani, 2020; Texas Education Agency, 2024). However, opposing views also warn that implementing small-scale models prioritizes IL concepts and distributes their corresponding resources at the district level rather than centralizing these roles in school heads on campuses (DeMatthews, 2021; Meyer-Looze & Vandermolen, 2021). These opposing views underscore the vital role of system coherence in sustaining micro-level leadership models, such as TIL.

Additionally, TIL demonstrates a possible future for microcosmic IL models to support strategic policy innovation. Scholars of empirical research suggested that instructional

frameworks such as TIL can assist campuses in both promoting their instructional core and enhancing teaching quality through ongoing coaching and collaboration (Walker & Qian, 2022). The findings of Bellibaş et al. (2021) converged on the view that IL behaviors, such as curriculum monitoring and support for teaching practices, positively affect teacher quality, regardless of context. Texas offers an interesting benchmark of how IL might transform a conceptual framework into working implementations, as other states reflect on the same. Conversely, in future studies, long-term principal retention, teacher mobility, and the equity of implementation should be examined to reveal how the model can be adapted in areas beyond Texas (Sebastian et al., 2019). Gaps in the current literature suggest that the barriers to IL implementation warrant further exploration to understand their influence on sustainable IL impact.

Barriers and Challenges to Effective Instructional Leadership

Multiple factors hinder the delivery of effective instructional leadership (IL) across campuses, negatively affecting teaching quality and student outcomes. Cherutoi et al. (2024) stated that the difficulty in overcoming systemic obstacles, including the lack of training, insufficient resources, role confusion, and heavy workloads, prevented principals from fully implementing effective IL practices in schools. Complications of overloaded schedules, administrative tasks, facility management, and community participation imposed minimal time to conduct classroom observations, coach teachers, and develop a curriculum (Cherutoi et al., 2024). Principals were frequently overwhelmed by administrative workload and consequently lacked time to engage in IL activities, dedicating all their time to urgent operational demands (Cansoy et al., 2024). External challenges were also encountered by instructional leaders who manage various expectations and priorities of others within their scope of responsibility, such as

parents, district administrators, and community organizations (Elomaa et al., 2024). Afterwards, these demands on instructional leaders create time constraints that frequently manifest as significant obstacles to frequent IL practices.

Cansoy et al. (2024) further found that time constraints were frequent barriers to principals' key instructional activities. Principals struggled with heavy workloads of administrative and managerial tasks, which inevitably reduced the time spent on IL (Mandapitan & Rodriguez, 2024). Conversely, the time spent in management of the organization and school size were inversely correlated, such that a principal on a large campus had a greater burden in deciding between management and instructional areas (Ni et al., 2024). The time principals spent on administrative tasks diminished their capacity to observe classrooms, offer meaningful feedback to educators, and engage in professional learning communities (Cansoy et al., 2025). Time constraints and other systemic issues-imposed conditions that denied principals sufficient training in managing the complex nature of IL.

The increased demands placed on school leaders do not correlate with the formal preparation they receive to effectively oversee the requirements of IL. The lack of professional training in curriculum design, data processing, and teacher observation and feedback posed notable challenges to principals who had to lead instructional activities (He et al., 2024). The professional development did not align with theoretical understanding and practical use, leaving principals without the skills to handle the context-specific challenges that were becoming complex and apparent in their schools (Shaked, 2024). Lack of training also contributed to role ambiguity as the principals were not fully aware of what they needed to do in IL. Poor IL development using conventional teaching techniques was a matter of significant concern

(Cherutoi et al., 2024). This lack of preparation complicated principals' efforts to address competing demands, forcing them to focus on other directives.

Principals are used to working within several conflicting pressures that divert resources and attention from their primary roles as instructional leaders. These challenges were driven by district mandates, parental expectations, community pressures, student discipline, and security issues (Elomaa et al., 2024). The most common reason principals had to assume a relegated role was their inherent need to defuse urgent crises and resolve emergent conflicts, rather than focusing their efforts on IL. This task relegation decreased the time and energy that otherwise would have been devoted to active planning of instruction and pedagogical transformation (Cansoy et al., 2025). Moreover, the growing focus on accountability and standardized testing further added pressure on principals to concentrate on test preparation and data management at the cost of more comprehensive curriculum and instructional approaches (Walker & Qian, 2022). Role ambiguity intensified amid competing demands, leading principals to lose focus on their IL functions and responsibilities, further complicating the ability to offer clear direction and support to teachers.

Role ambiguity is a significant obstacle to effective school administration because instructional leaders lack clear expectations and accountability. A lack of clarity in principals' expectations led to poor time management and reduced effort, as they were unable to determine which tasks should be given priority (Cansoy et al., 2024). Similarly, Tsehaye and Fekadu (2021) identified the lack of a clear role created unequal leadership practices, which undermined the establishment of a cohesive and supportive school culture. Principals with poorly defined roles were less likely to influence curriculum design, resulting in a disjointed educational experience for students (Kilag & Sasan, 2023). The absence of mutual understanding of IL goals and

priorities among principals, teachers, and district administrators was due to the conflicting expectations that created an ambiguous situation (Ho et al., 2023). These were the collective hindrances of time constraints, insufficient training, numerous responsibilities, and role confusion, all of which resulted in organizational problems such as resistance to change, inconsistent appraisals, and structural barriers to IL initiatives.

Instructional Leadership in Diverse and Underserved Contexts

Instructional leadership (IL) differs across educational settings, including high-poverty, rural, and urban schools. Campus leaders must implement strategies to address unique challenges in each context. The administrators of schools with high poverty faced limited funds, inadequate resources, and the impact of economic factors on student learning (Cox & Mullen, 2023). According to Meyer and Patuawa (2022), the principals who could distribute resources, write grants, and develop community alliances allowed the school to increase its capacity to provide high-quality instruction. The challenges in rural schools included small student groups and difficulty retaining qualified instructional personnel due to the remote location (O'Shea & Zuckerman, 2022). In this scenario, instructional leaders prioritize community relationships and apply technology to address spatial barriers and develop individual professional learning models that address the unique needs of their teaching personnel (Daniel et al., 2023; DeMatthews et al., 2021; Meyer & Patuawa, 2022).

Urban schools faced overcrowding and bureaucratic hurdles despite receiving extra resources. They served students from different backgrounds (O'Shea & Zuckerman, 2022). Instructional leaders attempted to prioritize culturally responsive teaching through conflict resolution and inclusivity (Daniel et al., 2023). Leaders in urban schools acknowledged the cultural and demographic dimensions of their communities to foster a sense of belonging among

students (Walker & Qian, 2022). Culturally responsive leadership practices helped schools with limited resources achieve improved learning outcomes.

Meanwhile, principals managed the difficulties of diverse student populations to establish inclusive school environments. Bonanno et al. (2023) and DeMatthews et al. (2021) found that principals addressed their students' needs by applying various culturally responsive leadership strategies. Culturally responsive leadership fostered a school environment that valued learners, promoted active participation in learning, and supported respect (Leithwood et al., 2020). Culture-responsive leaders also focused on establishing effective relationships with parents and community members because they knew that student success depends on parental support; therefore, they embraced the power of differences to solve community problems (Galindo & Sanders, 2022).

Galindo and Sanders (2022) noted that motivated leaders inspired culturally responsive pedagogy. When students had diverse cultural backgrounds and learning preferences, motivated leaders encouraged teachers to ponder their own cultural identities and biases to develop inclusive classroom settings. Researchers also found that leaders assisted teachers in conducting critical self-assessments of their racial, cultural, and language prejudices and in creating more inclusive classroom environments (Bonanno et al., 2023). Effective school leaders maintain fair practices by providing every student with the resources and encouragement they need, irrespective of their socioeconomic status, cultural background, and language abilities.

Applications of IL in marginalized school communities face critical challenges due to resource shortages, which create major barriers to quality education. Marginalized schools were underfunded, leading to the degradation of facilities, a lack of educational materials, and a lack of technological resources (DeMatthews et al., 2021; Fortner et al., 2021; O'Shea & Zuckerman,

2022; Ylimaki et al., 2022). These limitations prevented instructional leaders from effectively assisting teachers in implementing new programs and distributing resources to students (Cansoy et al., 2024). Consequently, limited resources led to larger class sizes and increased teacher workloads, while restricting students' access to special services, leading to extra pressure on already overwhelmed school systems (DeMatthews et al., 2021). Effective IL leaders who recognized these challenges focused on collaboration, actively involving families, and building trust to enhance student learning outcomes (Banwo et al., 2022). The following discussion examines individual approaches instructional leaders use to develop this collaboration.

One of the most important tasks of instructional leaders, especially in a diverse environment, is establishing trust and engaging families and communities to influence student success (Wang et al., 2025). Instructional leaders endeavored to connect to families and communities through cultural practices that acknowledge learners and promote inclusivity (Bonanno et al., 2023; DeMatthews et al., 2021). In addition, empirical evidence from the Four Paths Model showed that leadership behaviors that reinforced school climate, increased teacher trust, and improved student learning, using social and emotional factors in schools as core mediators of leadership (Leithwood et al., 2020). The results implied that instructional leaders who involved internal and external entities created an environment that supported community-informed decision-making and helped overcome barriers grounded in inequity and exclusion. This implication highlighted the importance of responsive, relational leadership in meeting learners' needs.

The management of systemic inequities demands that instructional leaders balance external pressures and their commitment to high-quality instructional outcomes. Leaders acknowledged that policies and practices discriminate against certain groups and should take

measures to address such practices within their learning facilities (Bonanno et al., 2023). Bonanno et al. (2023) argued that preserving the norms of the traditional institutions promoted practices that disadvantaged marginalized students. The instructional leaders who deviated from this trend encouraged culturally sustaining patterns by altering teaching practices and curriculum content to leverage students' cultural resources and by advocating equitable access to resources (Mansfield & Lambrinou, 2024). These leadership styles demand critical awareness, cultural competence, and a willingness to challenge norms. There is a need for targeted analysis of existing empirical research on adapted IL models in linguistically and culturally diverse schools to inform further review of leadership approaches in diverse and underserved contexts.

Researchers of existing empirical studies found that the adapted IL models were effective in linguistically and culturally diverse schools, supporting the effectiveness of educational outcomes. Instructional leaders who matched their cultural practices with those of students were more effective in addressing achievement gaps and promoting inclusivity (Ezzani, 2020; Mansfield & Lambrinou, 2024). For instance, Ezzani (2020) showed that leaders who reflected on overcoming their personal biases and who implemented distributed leadership practices were among those leaders who fostered more socially just learning environments. Ylimaki et al. (2022) found that school leaders who embraced culturally aware leadership also encouraged effective teacher collaboration and student engagement in multilingual classrooms. DeMatthews et al. (2021) also found that principals adopting asset-based, culturally responsive practices established a relationship of trust and improved student outcomes in disadvantaged communities. An asset-based strategy acknowledges the strengths and cultural resources of students, rejecting deficit-oriented perspectives and recognizing the original value that marginalized learners bring to high-performing, equitable classrooms (Fortner et al., 2021).

In contrasting views from researchers such as Leithwood et al. (2020), the quantifiable influence of leadership on student learning, aside from cultural identity, may have affected student proficiency (Leithwood et al., 2020). Researchers suggested that the approach acknowledges effective leadership adaptation, but disagree on whether equity should be treated as a contextual variable or a core moral imperative that impacts performance. Along with the encouraging practices, researchers noted conflicting tensions for school leaders in maintaining IL priorities amid external pressure and a competitive context.

Instructional leaders encountered challenges in maintaining IL in underserved settings, especially when deciding systemic demands (Cansoy et al., 2024). Small schools with high needs had leaders who juggled instructional, administrative, and managerial roles. They lacked the resources to facilitate lasting change (Meyer & Patuawa, 2022; O'Shea & Zuckerman, 2022). When administrative leaders enacted culturally responsive IL, they faced significant challenges, primarily high staff turnover, limited access to professional learning, and ongoing inequity (Scallon et al., 2023). These dynamic situations explain why instructional leaders explore how to enact equity-focused practices that are relational, contextually situated, and systemic-resistant.

Instructional Leadership Within Equity-Oriented Practices

Instructional leaders perceive instructional leadership (IL) as how leaders implement and practice it. Whereas leaders in varied and underserved settings focus on adapting to changing socio-cultural and economic realities, equity-based instructional leaders focus on inclusivity, fairness, and justice in every leadership decision. Researchers found that a broad framework requires leaders to navigate context-specific constraints while also addressing systemic inequities (Bonanno, 2023; Shaked, 2025; Walker & Qian, 2022).

Researchers believed that to achieve successful equity-focused leadership, educational leadership should implement a purposeful emphasis on managing racial, linguistic, and socioeconomic inequalities through curriculum reform, inclusive policies, and strategic teacher development (Fortner et al., 2021; Mansfield & Lambrinou, 2024; Shaked, 2025). These leaders focused on relational leadership, advocating for students, and centering community-based cultural knowledge to foster a sense of belonging and academic success among marginalized student populations (Shaked, 2025). Equity-oriented instructional leaders practiced proactive, values-based, and situation-specific IL (Fortner et al., 2021). Thus, the responsibility of the instructional leader extends beyond management to that of a change agents who incorporate equity into the instructional and organizational systems.

Empirical data showed that principals who incorporated equity in IL made a significant contribution to student achievement and teacher performance, especially when they could leverage culturally responsive strategies and inclusive professional learning systems. Researchers determined that culturally responsive leadership (CRL) needs systemic support. According to Bonanno (2023), collaboration and data-informed reflection enhance learning conditions in equity-centered leadership among historically underserved students. Equity implementation in IL is one of the moral imperatives and strategic options of bridging the achievement gaps (Fortner et al., 2021; Mansfield & Lambrinou, 2024; Shaked, 2025). Researchers' findings highlighted how leaders must balance between instructional rigor and equity literacy even as they struggled to ensure schoolwide improvement across various learning settings.

Effective instructional leaders used deliberate plans, including data-based decision-making and differentiated instructional support, to explicitly address discrepancies in access and outcomes. High-stakes accountability systems in Texas have exacerbated the pressure on leaders

to show academic gains, reinforcing testing systems that exclude some groups of students, ecologically based on their status as emergent bilinguals and economically disadvantaged (Bach, 2020). Nevertheless, when principals employed these accountability tools to encourage reflective teaching practices and empower teachers' voices, they shifted their instructional cultures toward equity-oriented practices (Paletta et al., 2020). These leadership actions encompassed matching assessment data with equity indicators and aligning interventions to root causes of inequity rather than their symptoms (Fortner et al., 2021). As a result, adaptive equity-based practices by instructional leaders became essential due to accountability demands and students' diverse needs, thereby establishing long-term equity-based school improvement conditions.

Instructional leaders who were following equity-oriented practices defined strategic coherence, distributed leadership, and created an institutional support structure beyond short-term projects. According to Koh et al. (2023), long-term improvement initiatives are more likely to succeed when leaders build collaborative networks, use data to conduct formative assessments, and embed equity objectives into regular operations. These strategies differ from fragmented or compliance-based leadership approaches, which do not address the systemic issues underlying underserved settings (Fortner et al., 2021). Equity-oriented IL strategies, in contrast to fragmented or compliance-oriented strategies, broadened their focus to transformative and culturally sustaining practices that actively addressed systemic inequities and valued the cultural and linguistic resources of underserved communities (Bonanno, 2023; Fortner et al., 2021; Mansfield & Lambrinou, 2024). Instructional leaders who implemented intentional IL practices improved equity and resilience and created conditions that enabled teachers to be change agents within school cultures of collaboration and inclusion.

Instructional Leadership for Teacher Empowerment

Instructional leaders strategically adopted the concept of instructional leadership (IL) to empower teachers as change agents, promoting innovation, accommodating the needs of diverse students, and leading classroom transformation (Park et al., 2023). According to Carswell (2021), teacher empowerment requires investing time and resources in professional development and independent leadership skills. Long-term effectiveness entails that instructional leaders offer more than simple task delegation. IL teams led school improvement by strengthening the implementation of instructional skills, clarifying the school's purpose, and increasing teacher involvement in educational decisions (Reid et al., 2025). These leaders delegated leadership roles to teachers, sharing those authority tasks and establishing collective efficacy across their schools (Ezzani, 2020; Reid et al., 2025). There is a need to research how teacher leadership development under IL improves outcomes in the school environment.

The empowerment of teacher agency is the outcome of IL that provides educators with input into their own professional growth and classroom teaching methods. This empowerment further translates into ownership and commitment, ultimately enhancing educator efficacy and successful learning environments. Teachers were empowered by instructional leaders who redirected their efforts toward building knowledge and applying curriculum and assessment systematically (Kang et al., 2022). Instructional leaders created supportive environments that enabled teachers to experiment with new instructional approaches and adapt their teaching to meet evolving student learning needs (Ralebese et al., 2025). Empowered teachers should be eager to experiment with new teaching strategies and better adapt their approaches to meet their students' needs. This empowerment raises an important question: How does this increased sense of teacher agency affect classroom and student outcomes?

These direct empowerment plans engaged teachers by building their confidence and skills, leading to effective teaching and improved learning conditions (Mokhlis & Abdullah, 2025). Instructional leaders played an important role in creating environments in which teachers participated in collaborative professional development work and applied new strategies (Bellibaş et al., 2025). They shared expertise and empowered the team by delegating leadership and distributing roles based on potential (Carswell, 2021; Ezzani, 2020; Reid et al., 2025). Liu et al. (2021) agreed that instructional leaders shape teachers' beliefs about their ability to influence student learning. School administrators who invest in teachers' strengths and agency-building create an environment that facilitates innovative practices that can transform classroom learning and improve students' learning outcomes. This emphasis on shared knowledge leads to professional learning communities (PLCs) in which teachers engage in lifelong learning to continually improve their students' learning.

Instructional Leadership's Effect on Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

The notion of professional learning communities (PLCs) closely relates to the broader concept of organizational learning, introduced by authors such as Senge (1990) and applied to the learning school context (Antinluoma et al., 2021). In this study, PLCs are described as learning communities in which teachers engage in joint inquiry and reflective conversation to enhance their teaching practice. Although initial research focused on Western systems, recent scholarship has applied this theory on an international scale and reported that in other settings, such as China and Finland, PLCs are operationalized in terms of embedded professional routines and forms of collaboration that are already familiar and part of school culture (Antinluoma et al., 2021; Qian & Walker, 2021). Rather than processes that appear as add-ons, researchers reported that these constructs highlight PLCs as organizational systems that facilitate individual and group

professional development (Xiu et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2023). This background knowledge of PLCs as collaborative learning communities provides a basis for considering convergent perspectives in the literature, positioning instructional leadership (IL) as a key driver in creating and maintaining successful PLCs across diverse educational settings.

Global research agrees that IL has a critical role in the formation and maintenance of PLCs. Principals who used shared decision-making, modeled collaboration, and structural supports had a positive impact on the depth and sustainability of PLCs (scheduled time for teacher collaboration is an example) (Admiraal et al., 2021; Qian & Walker, 2021). In one instance, Antinluoma et al. (2021) discovered that in four schools in Finland that implemented visionary leadership as PLCs, principals brought about cultural changes and fostered collective responsibility. Equally, in China, principals nurtured learning structures and relational trust that strengthened the idea of instructional leaders as professional learning enablers (Qian & Walker, 2021). These views revealed that IL is a critical aspect of sustainable PLCs, but subsequent research offers differing perspectives that highlight both implementation barriers and contextual limits.

Despite this agreement, contradictory results suggest that PLCs may become symbolic rather than transformative unless matched with organizational capacity. Johannesson (2022) found that when action research was not coherent with school objectives or could not fit within existing teacher systems in PLCs, mutual engagement was disrupted, leading to imbalanced outcomes. Similarly, De Jong et al. (2021) found that PLC practices enhanced collaboration. Unfortunately, others were hindered by poor alignment between professional development goals and institutional structures in Dutch schools. Researchers implied that although IL is essential, its effectiveness depends on the mature instructional leader's ability to adapt to contextual

constraints and avoid a top-down approach to implementation. Despite these issues, several studies found that instructional leaders who placed importance on collaboration and teacher agency could foster the collective efficacy needed for high-functioning PLCs.

The successful instructional leaders who build PLCs foster a collective teacher capacity-building environment. Carmi et al. (2025) emphasized that facilitators should use the concept of distributed leadership, in which members co-create the direction and objectives of their PLCs. In a three-year study, they illustrated that learning tools, reflective protocols, and teacher-designed agendas facilitated true cooperation and learning improvement. In addition, Lagarense et al. (2025) found that in Indonesian elementary schools, vision-setting, ongoing reflection, and frequent routine PLC meetings, when associated with transformational leadership, led to even greater professional cooperation. These results supported the notion that high-performing PLCs directly mediate IL, thereby facilitating teacher learning rather than regulating it. The insights into the IL role in collective efficacy formation help explore the impacts of this leadership practice on the long-term sustainability of PLCs in school systems.

Lastly, in all settings, the sustainability of PLCs depended on instructional leaders integrating professional learning in the daily activities of the school. Admiraal et al. (2021) found that PLC practices, primarily collaboration and recurring goal setting, persisted long after initial PLC implementation. Likewise, Qian and Walker (2021) observed that in Chinese schools, leaders advanced student proficiency through consistent PLC practices integrated into daily school operations. In this sense, leadership that draws on the power of structures and trusting relationships is viewed as an optimistic model that ensures PLCs become cultural norms.

A Synthesis of Instructional Leadership's Convergent and Divergent Views

Instructional leadership (IL) is widely recognized as a critical driver for student achievement and teacher efficacy, serving as a school-wide change agent to develop teacher capacity and professional empowerment. This section briefly highlights key points of convergence and divergence mentioned throughout this chapter (Table 2). One key point of convergence found in the research emphasized the importance of IL in creating and sustaining successful professional learning communities (PLCs) across diverse settings. Another point that emerged in the research involved instances in which principals shared decision-making, modeled collaboration, and provided structural supports. These and other educational leader actions positively impacted the depth and sustainability of PLCs (Admiraal et al., 2021; Qian & Walker, 2021). Furthermore, integrating IL with distributed leadership enhances teacher job satisfaction and self-efficacy by fostering positive working relationships and a strong school culture (Liu et al., 2021). To be successful, leaders should combine clear conceptualization, appropriate assessment measures, context-sensitive instruction, a purposeful investment in teacher collaboration, and an agenda grounded in equity.

Despite these benefits, divergent views highlight significant implementation barriers and contextual limits that can hinder IL effectiveness. Time constraints, administrative workloads, role ambiguity, and rigid frameworks that stifle teacher autonomy hinder IL (Cansoy et al., 2024; Mandapitan & Rodriguez, 2024; Zhan et al., 2023). One example excavated from the research is the Texas Instructional Leadership (TIL), which is often criticized because there is limited research explicitly linking it to local implementation practices across diverse school settings (Walker & Qian, 2022).

A divergent view regarding PLCs indicated that without proper alignment with organizational capacity, PLCs risk becoming symbolic rather than transformative (De Jong et al., 2021; Johannesson, 2022). Additionally, IL initiatives frequently failed due to contextual barriers stemming from deficient training, bureaucratic overload, or an insufficient coaching infrastructure. Barriers such as these, along with other factors, reportedly diminished instructional leaders' capacity to initiate evidence-based practices (Cansoy et al., 2025). These results underscore that similar viewpoints driven solely by leader principles can be criticized for lacking shared leadership or shared infrastructure (Liu et al., 2021; Walker & Qian, 2022).

Table 2

A Synthesis of Instructional Leadership's Convergent and Divergent Views

Convergent Views	Divergent Views
Instructional Leadership (IL) is critical for student achievement and teacher capacity-building.	Implementation barriers include time constraints, administrative workloads, and role ambiguity.
IL supports the creation and sustainability of successful professional learning communities (PLCs).	Frameworks like the Texas Instructional Leadership (TIL) lack research linking them to diverse school settings.
Principals who share decision-making, model collaboration, and provide structural supports positively impact PLCs.	PLCs risk becoming symbolic rather than transformative unless properly aligned with organizational capacity.
Integrating IL with distributed leadership enhances teacher job satisfaction and self-efficacy.	IL initiatives often fail due to deficient training, bureaucratic overload, or insufficient coaching infrastructure.
Successful IL requires clear conceptualization, context-sensitive instruction, investment in teacher collaboration, and equity-focused agendas.	Contextual barriers and rigid frameworks can stifle teacher autonomy and diminish leaders' capacity for evidence-based practices.

Summary

This chapter expanded a literature review on the conceptual foundations, implementation processes, and educational impacts of instructional leadership (IL). A range of theoretical frameworks and literature search strategies informed the organization of existing research on IL, with particular attention to Coleman's social capital theory. Scholars traced the historical development of IL from managerial models to collaborative and learning-centered approaches. Definitions and functions, such as direction-setting, instructional program management, and learning climate development, were categorized to clarify the conceptual structure. Qualitative and quantitative research investigators of IL analyzed how implementation practices affected teacher development and student achievement through direct instructional oversight. Their studies employed different frameworks and measurement approaches to assess IL primarily because defining and evaluating this construct proved complex.

This deep analysis of the literature revealed that researchers explored IL as a driver of educator capacity-building, positioning it as a means to promote professional agency, collaboration, and skill development. Many educational leadership experts noted connections between IL practices and federal/state policy directives, including alignment with the Texas Instructional Leadership framework. Extensive reviews of various studies also revealed three main obstacles: insufficient training, conflicting roles, and differences between schools serving underrepresented populations. Academic researchers studied equity-centered IL by developing culturally responsive practices and methods for teacher voice development and inclusive coaching approaches. Educational researchers who studied teacher empowerment through frameworks also emphasized autonomy, leadership distribution, and instructional influence.

Lastly, key patterns in the IL literature revealed specific conventions that researchers identified as indicators of IL's effects on professional learning communities (PLCs) through shared purpose, collaborative inquiry, and reflective dialogue. Authors of multifarious studies combined their opposing and similar viewpoints, representing different scopes, authority, and adaptability interpretations. As a result of this comprehensive literature review, the overall characterization of IL emerged as a product of iterative conceptual refinement and empirical validation within global and localized education systems. The need for contextual responsiveness and data-informed planning also emerged as central considerations. Key findings reinforced distributed leadership, equity, and instructional coherence as critical dimensions in future applications of IL.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Despite growing recognition that teacher capacity is essential to school improvement, many schools in Southwest Texas face barriers that complicate the implementation of mandated reforms to raise low reading/language arts (RLA) test scores. The problem addressed in this study was many K-12 public schools' reading/language arts (RLA) test scores did not meet grade level in the southwest region of Texas, prompting the mandatory implementation of intervention measures to build capacity and increase student learning outcomes (Godina, 2024; Texas Education Agency, 2024). Some gaps in teacher development have resulted in barriers to building teacher capacity. These challenges require support to enhance teachers' instructional practices (Cansoy et al., 2024). The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to explore how principals overcome barriers faced when implementing mandatory capacity-building in schools to improve low RLA test scores.

This chapter expands the method selected for this study, establishing how it possesses characteristics that aligned best with investigating the barriers principals face when implementing mandatory capacity-building in Southwest Texas. The study is grounded in a qualitative method and a case study design. By employing iterative, interactive, and interpretive methods, characteristic of a qualitative, exploratory case study design, this study revealed in-depth insight into the bounded system of principals' experiences with capacity-building initiatives (Bloomberg, 2023; Creswell & Poth, 2025). The selected methodology reflected the study's problem and purpose. It helped ensure a rigorous inquiry into how principals understand and respond to the organizational, systemic, and instructional challenges that influence teacher growth and development. The methodological approach provided a basis for the design rationale

by defining the methods for participant selection, data collection, and analytical procedures used to address the research questions.

Research Methodology and Design

A qualitative research method with an exploratory case study design was used for this study. The qualitative research method comprises the most appropriate procedures for studying how principals experience the challenges of implementing school capacity-building initiatives in their contexts. This research method was an appropriate approach to addressing the problem of low RLA test scores resulting from implementation barriers. It enabled a thorough examination of principals' views on the challenges they encounter (RQ1) and the methods they employ to address them (RQ2) in their schools. The selection of this method was compelled by evidence proving that this research approach involves depth, reflexivity, and iterative analysis in exploring participants' perceptions, beliefs, and professional realities (Byrne, 2022; Creswell & Poth, 2025). To supplement this research approach, an exploratory case study design was used to guide research efforts into a detailed investigation of a bounded system, principals in selected schools across Southwest Texas. The design involved using multiple data sources and recursive cycles of meaning-making, with opportunities to capture distinct principal perceptions through emergent, interactive, and interpretive methods. Together, these features established an active framework for uncovering the organizational, systemic, and instructional barriers that influence the implementation of RLA improvement efforts.

The exploratory case study design was used to investigate how school leaders implement instructional leadership (IL) practices in response to state-mandated requirements to build teacher capacity. This design best suits research conducted in real-world settings to study phenomena in particularly natural circumstances (Zarestky, 2023). This specific research design

offers the most effective constructs for exploring leadership interactions with organizational systems and policy expectations by focusing on boundedness and using qualitative data sources. The design's systematic phases served as an analytical lens to identify regional patterns of IL in Southwest Texas while maintaining the flexibility to uncover unexpected findings. Moreover, the exploratory case study design aligned with the problem and purpose statements, yielding findings directly supporting teacher capacity-building and school improvement.

While designing this research, a quantitative methodology was considered but ultimately rejected. Researchers use quantitative research to hypothesize, test, and measure relationships among variables using structured instruments and statistical procedures (Casula et al., 2020). However, the process does not include the appropriate techniques to equip researchers with the interpretive depth needed to examine how principals understand and respond to IL challenges (Bloomberg, 2023).

The intent of this study was aimed at understanding the barriers to implementation rather than to quantify them. Deductively, the qualitative method was a better fit. Moreover, research questions about principal leadership in specific educational contexts require interpretive rather than numerical inquiry, primarily because they ask about the *what* and *how* of leadership functions. Furthermore, qualitative methodology involves vernacular analysis to examine capacity-building practices across their subjective and institutional dimensions.

Although several qualitative designs were considered, with phenomenology deemed the most preferred choice, it was less applicable than an exploratory case study. Lived experiences are the focus of phenomenological studies. They are often used to uncover the overall meaning behind shared experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Zarestky, 2023). While this approach offers insights into personal narratives, it is not very effective at analyzing organizational procedures

and leadership practices in the context of systemic issues and barriers. This study was designed to target principal perceptions and investigate administrative factors that shape capacity-building implementation. As such, the exploratory case study approach, grounded in systems thinking and contextual sensitivity, better supported the research purpose and enabled the integration of individual IL experiences with broader organizational realities.

Population and Sample

The research population encompassed 250 principals serving in public and charter schools throughout Southwest Texas. The region includes K-12 campuses ranging from rural to urban settings, with diverse student populations, a large percentage of English Language Learners, and varying academic achievement levels. As instructional leaders, the principals in this study are responsible for instructional supervision, implementing school improvement plans, and building teacher capacity through evidence-based leadership practices. Their ongoing involvement in instructional leadership (IL) closely aligned them as experts to reflect on the challenges and successes of facilitating schoolwide professional development to improve reading/language arts (RLA) achievement (Bloomberg, 2023; Creswell & Poth, 2025).

This population was appropriate for the study because of its potential involvement with the research problem: barriers to implementing mandatory capacity-building efforts in schools with low RLA test performance. Principals serve as the chief instructional leaders in their buildings. They are tasked with initiating and sustaining teacher development aligned with improvement and state mandates. Exploring their experiences supported an essential aim of the study: identifying and understanding the barriers to effective IL practices within a bounded geographical and organizational context. The investigation was directly related to barriers to building teacher capacity. These barriers, along with the actions to overcome them, manifested in

the daily work and leadership decisions of school principals. Their perspectives were vital to addressing the research questions and advancing theory. The foundational theory used in this was Coleman's (1988) social capital constructs of trust, networks, and norms (Coppe et al., 2022; Singh, 2024).

A representative sample of eight principals was relevant for this exploratory case study. Primarily, because it closely aligned with recommendations by Bekele and Ago (2022), who stated that qualitative case studies involving relatively homogeneous groups may reach saturation with as few as 12 interviews. Saturation was met after the eighth participant. The participants in this study shared roles and similar implementation experiences. Therefore, the representative sample ensured methodological rigor while remaining feasible within the study's time, access, and resource constraints. The inclusion criteria for the participants included: (a) must be a principal with at least two years of experience in their role, (b) have a minimum of one year of experience implementing capacity-building with teachers who have resisted implementation, (c) have overcome barriers when implementing capacity-building, and (d) have experienced an improvement in campus RLA test scores. The selection criteria ensured that participants possess appropriate expertise and direct experience with the studied issues, enabling the identification and exploration of detailed findings from practitioners who lead instruction (Haile, 2023; Zarestky, 2023). Accordingly, the sample included participants from multiple public-school districts to ensure variation in context, leadership conditions, and student needs.

This representative sample was also appropriate for a qualitative exploratory case study design because it provided potential transferability and an opportunity to explore a bounded system, principals within a geographic region, who offered rich, descriptive accounts of their leadership practices. The chosen participants reflected the diversity of settings and experiences

necessary to gain a broad but contextually grounded understanding of the phenomenon. Again, the goal of the study was to understand how barriers are overcome, not to generalize findings statistically. Therefore, the sample size aligns with qualitative research principles, including deep rigor (Creswell & Poth, 2025; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Additionally, the sampling design also aligned with the broader aspirational goal of uncovering patterns and strategies for implementing IL practices across diverse campus environments.

Participants were selected using criterion-based purposive sampling based on their understanding of implementation practices and their campus RLA test performance. A predetermined analytical expectation was that a sample size of 8-15 would be sufficient to achieve data saturation, defined as the point at which no new themes emerge during analysis. Braun and Clarke's (2006) reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) was used to guide the analysis through a six-phase recursive process that supports theme development through ongoing immersion, coding, refinement, and interpretation. Saturation was achieved among eight participating principals. No additional participants were recruited for the study due to redundancy (saturation) observed in the data (Byrne, 2022).

Participants were recruited using a multi-step strategy. A recruitment flyer was distributed via two email lists (secondary and elementary principals) accessible through a regional professional office email account. Human resources directors from four districts granted permission to distribute recruitment materials. Interested participants were asked to contact the organization using the email address or phone number provided in the flyer. Once eligibility was confirmed, participants received an informed consent form and were scheduled for an individual Zoom interview. A subset of volunteers was later invited to a follow-up virtual focus group. The triangulation of interviews and a focus group strengthened the study's trustworthiness by

incorporating diverse perspectives on IL barriers in Southwest Texas schools (Bloomberg, 2023; Creswell & Poth, 2025; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Materials and Instrumentation

To conduct this qualitative exploratory case study on how principals in Southwest Texas experience and overcome barriers to implementing mandatory school capacity-building practices aimed at improving low reading/language arts (RLA) test scores, several materials and instruments were developed to support ethical compliance, rigorous data collection, and analytical integrity (Locke et al., 2020; Maxwell, 1996; Nuñes et al., 2024). Approval to collect data was the first ethical safeguard ascertained through a signed Site Permission Letter (Appendix A). Afterwards, several districts received a Human Resources Response Letter (Appendices B1-B4) confirming district-level approval. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval Letter (Appendix C) was obtained after receiving these permissions to verify compliance with federal ethical standards. A recruiting campaign was conducted using a dissertation committee-approved Recruitment Letter and Recruitment Flyer (Appendices D1-D2). Lastly, informed consent was obtained from each participant through a Consent Form (Appendix E) before any data collection activity commenced.

Two primary instruments were used to collect qualitative data to analyze for this study: a semi-structured one-to-one interview protocol and a semi-structured focus group protocol. Both instruments were designed to align with the study's research questions, which examined principals' barriers to implementing capacity-building and their strategies to overcome them. The One-to-One Interview Protocol (Appendix F) included 10 open-ended questions that explored participants' leadership experiences and decision-making processes related to instructional leadership (IL). Afterwards, I facilitated the focus group using seven open-ended questions from

the Focus Group Protocol (Appendix G) to promote shared dialogue about collective challenges and successes. The discussions yielded valuable insights into participants' real-life experiences, thereby strengthening this research's methodological triangulation.

An expert review panel assessed and provided feedback on 10 semi-structured interview questions, evaluating their alignment with the study's problem, purpose, and research questions. The panel used an Expert Review Panel Protocol and Evaluation Matrix (Appendices H1-H3) to field-test the questions. Bloomberg (2023) recommended that an expert review panel examine the interview questions as a field test to check their simplicity, correctness, alignment with research objectives, and propensity to prompt thoughtful reflection. Guided by this framework, I developed questions and presented them to the panel for scoring. The expert review panel evaluated the questions and provided ratings and qualitative feedback, which confirmed the interview questions' rigor and trustworthiness. The review process enabled me to identify which questions required modification. I then developed the final one-to-one interview protocol. Ultimately, the expert review panel's contributions ensured the interview questions were methodologically sound and capable of producing credible data aligned with the study's objectives.

Aligned with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) work, this research was grounded in a central role for the researcher, who serves as a primary instrument in qualitative inquiry. As a primary instrument, I took measures to reduce bias while improving the trustworthiness of findings through reflexive and transparent practices. To do so, I implemented reflexive practices such as reflexive journaling. Reflexive journaling strengthened the study's trustworthiness and alignment with constructivist inquiry. I maintained a reflexivity journal throughout the study. This journal

was used to record reflections that surfaced during data collection and analysis. These practices helped enhance credibility, confirmability, and dependability.

All interviews and the focus group were conducted virtually via Zoom to accommodate the participants' schedules and geographic constraints while maintaining accessibility and convenience. All sessions were audio-visually recorded with the participants' consent. The recordings helped ensure accurate transcription and rigorous analysis. Transcribed data were coded manually, using NVivo and Braun and Clarke's (2021) reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) approach. The National University's (NU) Institutional Review Board (IRB) closure letter (Appendix J) was obtained from the IRB upon completion of the study and IRB closure. These materials and instruments helped gain meaningful insights into how school leaders implement IL practices under state-mandated capacity-building requirements and the contextual factors that shape their responses.

Study Procedures

The research data collection process began after obtaining NU IRB approval. This approval ensured that all measures, protecting participants' rights, privacy, and well-being, were followed. Site permission was also secured from multiple school districts in Southwest Texas through formal documentation. After NU IRB approval and district authorization, recruitment letters were emailed to eligible campus principals. Purposive sampling was used to select well-positioned participants to provide detailed insights into the research questions and specific settings.

Following participants' signed consent, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted via Zoom to support scheduling flexibility and ensure access across a geographically dispersed region. Each interview lasted 45 to 60 minutes and followed a predetermined structure

to obtain comprehensive details about participants' experiences with instructional leadership (IL) and capacity-building practices. Before each interview, participants received information about their rights and assurances of confidentiality. The interview recordings were transcribed through Zoom. All districts, campuses, and individuals mentioned in the data received gender-neutral pseudonyms to protect their privacy (Wang et al., 2024).

The study's credibility was strengthened through data triangulation by conducting a follow-up focus group with three of the interview participants who volunteered. This 64-minute virtual Zoom session confirmed the emergent themes in a collective discussion. An iterative method was used to guide the interviews and the focus group through a naturally flowing dialogue with participants to clarify their responses. A reflexive research journal was used to document all data collection activities to capture fresh reflections at the end of the interviews and the focus group. The journaling process helps researchers achieve transparency, reflexivity, and dependability, which are essential trustworthiness criteria in qualitative research according to Ahmed (2024) and Braun and Clarke (2022).

The recordings and transcripts are stored on a password-protected device. The data collection process ended when saturation was achieved. Participants were notified of the study's termination, and all records will be stored for 3 years. The study results will be presented in an aggregated format for academic and scholarly purposes (Ritchie, 2021).

Data Analysis

This study's qualitative data analysis was structured following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase reflexive thematic analysis. This analysis aligns with the constructivist paradigm and the exploratory case study design. Zoom's integrated video recording and transcription features were used to create verbatim transcripts of interview and focus group data, preserving

participants' responses with depth and accuracy. According to McMullin (2023), transcription comprises an interpretive rather than neutral act. The process required both exact, word-for-word transcription and control over repeated statements and grammatical changes, as well as the inclusion of nonverbal cues, such as pauses and laughter, to accurately represent participants' meanings (Byrne, 2022). The qualitative software NVivo 15 was used to organize, code, and retrieve the uploaded transcripts. This analytic approach ensured that the data were used to address the research questions by identifying emergent patterns related to instructional leadership (IL), capacity-building mandates, and leadership challenges in school improvement contexts.

The analysis began with immersion through repeated readings of transcripts and the generation of analytic memos. I used inductive coding, categorization, and sorting to identify key elements in the dataset before moving to theme development. Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, themes were reviewed for coherence, conceptually defined, and named to reflect semantic and latent meanings. Triangulation across data sources, including interviews, focus group responses, and memo documentation, was used to ensure internal consistency of findings.

Strategies such as ongoing consultation and feedback with the dissertation committee, audit trails, and member checking were employed to support trustworthiness. Two rounds of member checking were conducted. This process was initiated to verify the initial results. Later, in Chapter 4, these findings are presented thematically through narrative description and tables to ensure credibility and clarity.

Assumptions

Assumptions are beliefs accepted as true without direct supporting evidence, yet they are essential for framing the research. I assume participants responded honestly to all questions. They were not coerced or intimidated to present any perceived or desirable answers. Such

assumptions lie beyond my control but remain necessary to establish the conditions under which the study's findings were interpreted. This study also rests on several other assumptions that shaped its design, participant engagement, and interpretation of findings. Research conducted by Ahmad and Wilkins (2025) showed that contributing participants in a study will participate voluntarily, respond candidly, and draw on authentic experiences. In this study, I assumed that 8-15 principals selected through purposive sampling would describe the implementation of mandatory capacity-building measures to address low RLA test scores. Participants were further assumed to have firsthand experience with Texas Education Agency initiatives.

As Bekele and Ago (2022) explained, a small, information-rich sample can generate sufficiently rich, contextually grounded data to answer research questions, consistent with qualitative research principles. I used a sample such as this to address the research questions in this study. Using Zoom for interviews and the focus group required participants to have reliable internet access, sufficient digital literacy, and a positive attitude toward virtual engagement (McMullin, 2023). Additionally, I assumed that virtual participation did not reduce rapport or the amount of narrative detail participants provided. Having used Braun and Clarke's (2006) reflexive thematic analysis, I assumed that the iterative process, supported by NVivo software, enabled competent coding, pattern recognition, and theme development. These techniques accommodated researcher reflexivity and subjectivity as essential analytic tools (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Locke et al., 2022).

Limitations

The research design incorporated in this study contains built-in weaknesses, which I identify as limitations. This research design includes three main limitations: a small sample size, time constraints, and limited data availability. These limitations may have affected my findings,

which I cannot control, but need to acknowledge, because they limit the study's scope and interpretation. The research design also contains a central limitation, mainly due to its boundedness: eight principals from Southwest Texas. This limited scope, due to constraints on diverse perspectives, confirmability, and transferability, reduces its trustworthiness (Bekele & Ago, 2022). Another limitation to report is that the uniform communication across the state about the Texas Education Agency's mandated capacity-building initiatives constrains the diversity of implementation experiences available for analysis.

McMullin (2023) warned that using Zoom could limit researchers' ability to detect nonverbal signals and environmental information observed in traditional in-person interactions. These types of challenges were not an issue and did not contribute to existing limitations. Moreover, the sensitive nature of discussing low student performance and institutional challenges did not pose an issue, as the participants were familiar with my regional duties. In my role of *researcher as instrument*, I was responsible for remaining unbiased in interpretation while honoring the inherently subjective and context-dependent nature of qualitative inquiry.

As previously mentioned, the reflexive thematic analysis method of Braun and Clarke (2006) is a process for theme development. Researchers rely on this process through their own reflexive engagement. When properly managed, this approach remains valuable despite potential interpretive bias (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Byrne, 2022). I facilitated data management and transparency using the NVivo software, but I also ensured that my combining the process with the software did not eliminate the interpretive nature of qualitative coding. Grajzel (2025) noted that reflexive journaling strategies can mitigate threats to credibility and confirmability. I complemented these strategies through ongoing consultation and feedback with the dissertation committee and member checking.

Delimitations

I recognize delimitations as the boundaries I establish to determine and limit the scope of the research, often to ensure the study's feasibility. The scope of this study was intentionally bounded by methodological and theoretical choices. The research focused on eight K-12 principals in Southwest Texas who implemented Texas Education Agency-mandated capacity-building initiatives due to low RLA performance, while excluding leaders from different regions, grade spans, and subject areas. Creswell and Poth (2025) and Ahmad and Wilkins (2025) stated in their research that purposive sampling involves selecting information-rich cases relevant to the qualitative research paradigm rather than statistical generalization. In my study, I used purposive sampling to select participants who could provide deep, contextually relevant insights. I facilitated all interviews and the focus group via Zoom to maximize geographic accessibility and scheduling flexibility while reducing logistical barriers.

Braun and Clarke (2021) emphasized that reflexive thematic analysis can be used as a comprehensive analytic approach. Locke et al. (2022) indicated that NVivo software can be used to manage coding, track iterative theme development, and maintain an audit trail. In my study, I used Braun and Clarke's (2021) reflexive thematic analysis as the sole analytic approach, supported by NVivo to organize and document the analytic process. Coleman's social capital theory guided the study's theoretical framing. The theory was used to ground the findings on the roles of trust, networks, and norms in overcoming barriers to capacity-building. These delimitations ensured alignment among the problem statement, purpose, research questions, and analysis, which supported a targeted inquiry (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Byrne, 2022).

Ethical Assurances

Throughout this study, I maintained high ethical standards, including those for studies involving human participants. Before starting the study, I completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) Program, which provided extensive training about ethical principles, regulatory frameworks, and best practices for protecting research participants. To ensure compliance with federal and institutional requirements for research involving human participants (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979), I received approval from the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) before collecting any data.

In accordance with these standards and *The Belmont Report*, I adhered to the ethical principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. These principles guided my dedication to protecting participants' rights through informed consent and fair participant selection. I obtained electronic informed consent from participants before participation. I also explained the study's purpose, its voluntary nature, and participants' right to withdraw without penalty. I protected the confidentiality of all participants by removing personally identifying information from the transcripts. I also used gender-neutral pseudonyms in all publications and presentations (Wang et al., 2024).

All interviews and the focus group were conducted using Zoom, and the sessions were recorded with participant permission. Recordings are stored on password-protected drives and transcribed for analysis. Transcripts and related files are stored in accordance with IRB requirements. Data analysis was conducted using Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2021) reflexive thematic analysis with NVivo software to manage the coding cycle. An audit trail was also generated using NVivo (Byrne, 2022; Locke et al., 2022). As the principal researcher, I designed

the study, and I collected and analyzed the data. Through this completed research, I reported the findings. Grajzel (2025) observed that keeping a reflexive journal helps manage the impact of biases during data interpretation. Ongoing consultation and feedback from the dissertation committee helped safeguard this study against interpretive bias. Lastly, I employed these reflexivity strategies to address potential bias stemming from my educational leadership consultant and doctoral researcher background.

Summary

In this chapter, I synthesized the qualitative exploratory case study methodology I used to investigate how principals in Southwest Texas overcome barriers involving implementing mandated capacity-building initiatives to improve low reading/language arts performance. I explored a bounded system of eight principals selected through purposive sampling. They were selected primarily because they met the inclusion criteria. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, and a follow-up focus group to triangulate and ensure trustworthiness. I used the reflexive thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2021) in NVivo to guide coding and theme development across multiple iterations. I maintained ethical considerations throughout the IRB approval process and adhered to the protocols for confidentiality. I acknowledged this study's assumptions, limitations, and delimitations, and defined its boundaries and potential restrictions. This methodology set the stage for the findings chapter, which is thematically represented in the principals' experiences, strategies, and insights focused on overcoming instructional leadership barriers.

Chapter 4: Findings

The problem addressed in this study was many K-12 public schools' reading/language arts (RLA) test scores did not meet grade level in the southwest region of Texas, prompting the mandatory implementation of intervention measures to build capacity and increase student learning outcomes (Godina, 2024; Texas Education Agency, 2024). The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to explore how principals overcome barriers faced when implementing mandatory capacity-building in schools to improve low RLA test scores. This exploration was conducted through semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions about participants' leadership experiences and decision-making processes related to instructional leadership. The data collected through the interviews were analyzed, coded, categorized, and assigned themes using the NVivo qualitative data analysis software.

While maintaining a deep connection to key elements throughout this study, including the problem and purpose statements, the theoretical framework, and the research questions, I present the findings in this chapter. In this chapter, I assess the data's trustworthiness by examining it against the criteria of credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability. I also present the data through the lens of the research questions and provide a brief description of the participant demographics. Finally, I close this chapter with a concise comparison of the results to the literature review.

Trustworthiness of the Data

In qualitative research, a distinct relationship among the researcher, participants, and the readers relies heavily on trust and rigor (Bloomberg, 2023; Creswell & Poth, 2025). This relationship is bound by the belief that the researcher retains ample confidence in the fidelity and honesty of the data. Explicitly embedded within the written accounts of qualitative research

findings are components of trustworthiness (Ahmed, 2024). In their hallmark work, Lincoln and Guba (1985) presented these components of trustworthiness as four specific criteria: credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability. Similar to standards of quantitative research, the importance of trustworthiness ensures a plausible defense of genuine representation and transparency of the data and findings in qualitative research.

Credibility. The significance of credibility in qualitative research lies in the researcher's commitment to intellectual honesty and to mitigating biases. Bloomberg (2023) describes credibility as a fusion of the participant's voice and insight with the researcher's honest depiction of what was observed during the interaction. Researchers can use three approaches to ensure credibility, including prolonged engagement, triangulation, and member checking. I field-tested the interview questions, using an expert review panel. I used a triangulation of one-to-one interviews, a focus group, and member checks to corroborate the data collected and verify correctness. Another triangulation method I used was to ground the research in Coleman's (1988) social capital theory and Murphy et al.'s (1983) instructional leadership framework.

Confirmability. This criterion refers to a process used in qualitative research to corroborate the researcher's interpretations of the literature and findings through other authors. It also reduces their biases (Bloomberg, 2023). The primary purpose of confirmability is to develop findings based on the data's fidelity rather than on the researcher's beliefs, feelings, and interpretations. This process does not suppress the researcher's thoughts and motives. Researchers confirm their studies by using the literature and findings of other authors, keeping a research journal, and conducting a confirmability audit. I grounded my research in Coleman's (1988) social capital theory and Murphy et al.'s (1983) instructional leadership framework to support the unpacking of the codes and sorting of the themes in my analysis. I used reflexive

journaling to report the transparency of my personal views relative to factual data. An excerpt from one of my journal entries of a participant whom I greatly admire follows:

> I felt very fortunate to recruit Avery. They possess an enormous amount of educational leadership experience, including years of experience and leadership positions. They responded to the interview questions with careful thought, offering extremely rich detail and vignettes. To regulate my biases against the less experienced principals, I must value their experiences and allow the verbatim transcription of their responses to remain the only data that I consider in my findings.

Saldaña (2025) itemized several analytic memos researchers could reflect on and write about, including descriptive summaries, researcher/participant personal associations, shared philosophical views, disturbing statements made by participants, and many other reflective considerations. I used a separate reflexivity journal entry for each participant I interviewed, drafted in accordance with many of Saldaña's analytical memos. As illustrated in Figure 4 and detailed in Appendix I, I also conducted an initial confirmability audit of the transcript coding, aligned with the study's title, problem, and purpose statements, theoretical framework, and research questions. The audit revealed 18 barrier codes, 10 leadership trait codes, 19 related to managing strategies, six as skills/practices, five as systems/processes, and 15 as actions overcoming barriers.

***Dependability*.** Clear documentation and consistency are two foundational elements in dependability (Bloomberg, 2023). Researchers can ensure their findings are dependable by clearly presenting the research process, using field notes, and maintaining audit trails. Through dependability, researchers map the actions they took to gather and analyze the data. This criterion is vitally important in qualitative research because the researcher traces a path from the

findings through the methodology to directly address the research questions. The first approach was to ensure I presented the research process clearly. I did that in Chapter 3, where I articulated the process like a recipe to ensure a well-defined path through each step. Then I engaged with field notes. Researchers use field notes to safeguard consistency with up-to-date annotations. I applied this field-notes technique by maintaining a written journal of notes from relevant webinars, an electronic reflexive journal of observations from interviews, and reflecting on those notes throughout the coding and theming process. Lastly, maintaining an audit trail necessitates having a digital auditor to review the researcher's activities and demonstrate how well the standards of trustworthiness and credibility were upheld. I used NVivo to export a coding manual after each coding cycle. I also reviewed the digital audit trail after each sorting cycle to preserve the fidelity of my overall data collection and analysis.

I followed a systematic coding and sorting cycle. I began this process after importing cleaned transcripts into NVivo's "Files" feature. I developed a coding structure following Braun and Clarke's (2021) reflexive thematic analysis and integrated it into NVivo's "Coding" feature (Appendix I). I coded each participant's contributions to the research conversation, organized the codes into similar categories, sorted and grouped the categories into potential themes, and reanalyzed the data to finalize the themes. A summary audit trail of all 73 initial codes, condensed into categories and sorted, is depicted in Appendix I.

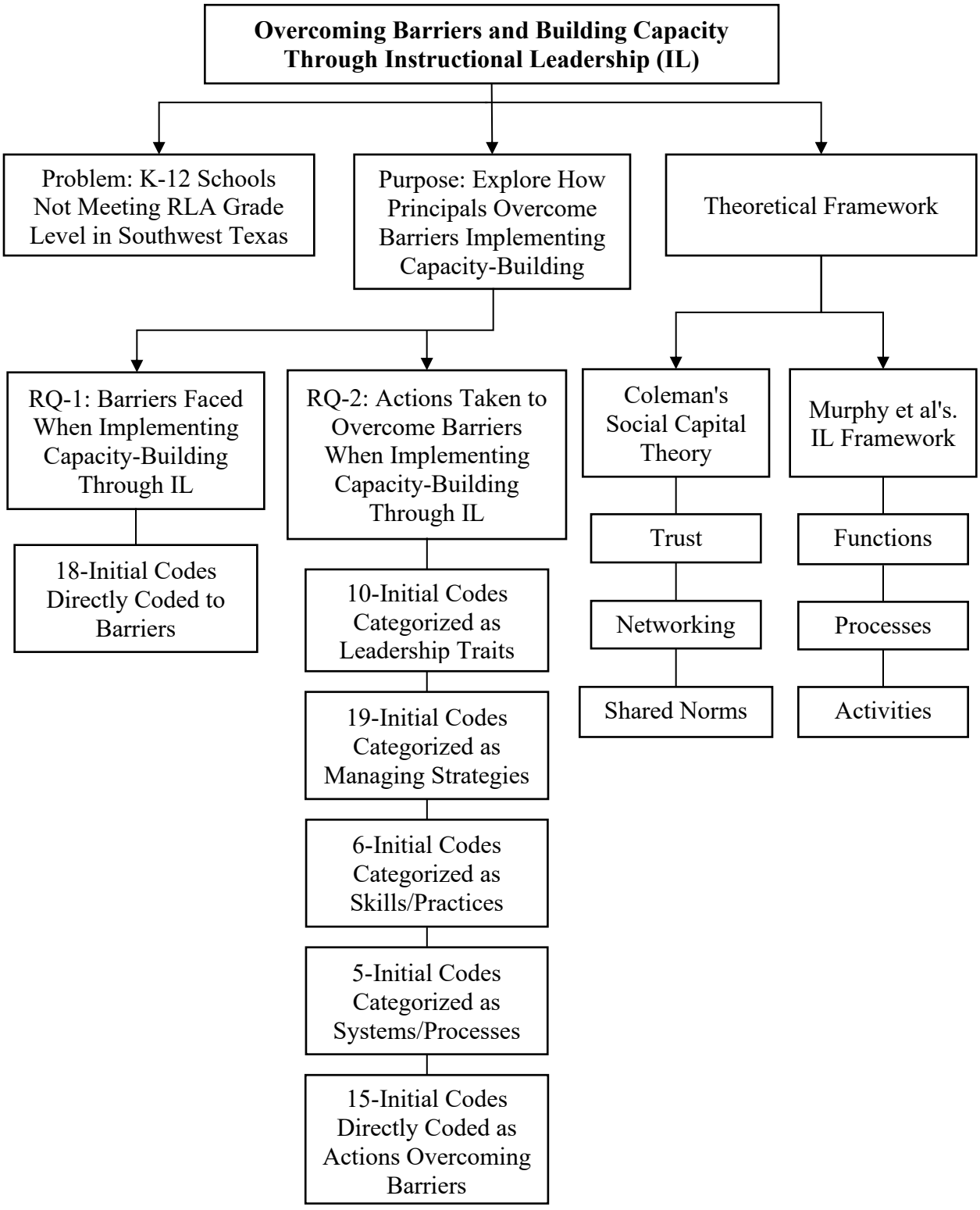
Transferability. Ahmed (2024) noted that the transferability criterion closely correlates with application. This important component of trustworthiness rests on the implication that the reader is empowered to bridge the connection between the study and their own situation. Researchers build transferability by providing rich, transparent descriptions of the research context, using clear, comprehensive writing, and employing thick description. By accurately and

precisely illustrating the context, settings, participants, and other relevant information, researchers enable readers to consider the applicability of the research and its findings with insight into their own bounded settings. Transferability originated in my study, beginning with a clear description of the population and sample in Chapter 3: *Research Method*. Purposive sampling was based on specific recruitment criteria, participants' understanding of instructional leadership, and their successes in overcoming capacity-building barriers.

Next, researchers use clear, understandable writing to chart a steady course of thought clarity, identifying the findings and how they were reached for the reader. I manifested comprehensive writing throughout Chapter 4: *Findings*, beginning with a reminder of the problem and purpose statements, a detailed and structured explanation of trustworthiness and how I achieved it, and a methodical examination of the research results, including a comparison with the literature review. Lastly, through thick description, researchers detail the study's setting and process. Readers benefit from exploring the study's explicit insights, which render it applicable to their own circumstances. I employed thick description by providing summaries of participants' experiences as principals and definitions of instructional leadership in their own words (Table 3). I also provided verbatim quotes from participants' interviews and the focus group to ensure a clear, resonant voice from the field and to clarify the experiences that potential readers can relate to. The criteria nestled in trustworthiness offer meaningful insight into the reader's unique knowledge base and collective practices, and they generate trust and rigor throughout the research study, including the results.

Figure 4

Initial Coding Clusters Related to Building Capacity Through Instructional Leadership (IL)



Note: Figure created by Dr. Allen Haynes.

Results

Semi-structured interviews were facilitated using Zoom's integrated video recording and transcription features. After interviewing eight participants, each received an emailed copy of their one-to-one interview transcript to confirm its accuracy as a process of member checking. Three responded with a positive confirmation that the information in the transcript was accurate, except for one, who corrected the word *can to can't.* For the remaining five participants, accuracy was assumed after seven days without a response. I conducted a second member check after my initial draft of the findings. The process was similar to the first member checking. I emailed a copy of the findings to each participant, ensuring I addressed them only by their pseudonyms. I asked them to confirm the accuracy of their intended context. Three responded with a positive confirmation that I captured the intent of what they conveyed. For the remaining five, the intended context was assumed after seven days without a response.

I analyzed the transcripts using NVivo. I began by importing each transcript into the "Files" feature. I then developed a coding structure following Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis in the "Coding" section of NVivo. Next, I coded relevant responses from each participant's interview answers. I organized the codes into similar categories and began sorting them into potential themes. Semi-final themes were generated after I reanalyzed the interview data. I finalized the themes only after analyzing, categorizing, and sorting the focus group data to identify new evidence and capture the triangulated and confirmed information.

Table 3

Participant Demographic Table

Gender-Neutral Pseudonym	Years as a Principal	School Level	Increased RLA Performance	Instructional Leadership One-Word Definition
Quinn	13	Elementary	Yes	Adaptive
Jaiden	3	Middle	Yes	Communication
Robin	7	Elementary	Yes	Supporting
Mackenzie	2	Middle	Yes	Visible
Avery	19	High	Yes	Vision
Pheonix	1	Middle	Yes	Coaching
Jordan	10	Pre-School	Yes	Trust
Addison	2	Middle	Yes	Communicate

Quinn currently serves as an elementary school principal with 13 years of experience. They highlighted improvements in interim RLA scores. Quinn reported their school status as a "very high, low socio-economic community." Quinn defined instructional leadership by stating, "Okay, so I've come to learn that instructional leadership has to be fluid, has to be … it's an adaptive process."

Jaiden currently serves as a middle school principal with three years of experience. They alluded that RLA is the strongest department on campus. Jaiden did not specify their school status in terms of social ranking or economic station. Jaiden defined instructional leadership as follows: "it's about a two-way communication. You've got to be able to provide positive and sometimes negative feedback to teachers on what you are witnessing in instruction."

Robin is an elementary school principal with seven years of experience. They noted that their campus has earned the highest RLA performance scores over the past few years. Robin did not specify their school status in terms of social ranking or economic station. In their definition of instructional leadership, Robin stated, "I think the biggest thing for me as an instructional leader is you've gotta be boots to the ground, you've gotta know your role, and you've got to do

your homework so that you're not there as a…supervisor, but you're there to facilitate when possible, and to be a colleague."

Mackenzie currently serves as a middle school principal with two years of experience. They discussed significant progress in RLA scores, reaching the highest ratings. Mackenzie conveyed their school status as a "high economically disadvantaged school." In their definition of instructional leadership, they said: "One of the things that we started doing, right, was to be visible everywhere. And so that includes the classroom. And you'll see instructional leadership, as a big thing for me, because you'll see it constantly in our agendas."

Avery has 25 years of administrative experience and is currently serving in their fourth principalship, having served 19 years as a high school principal. They indicated improvements in STAAR RLA scores and distinctions in other content areas. In reference to school status, Avery expressed the following: "both parents in the household, they're probably both working … probably been a while since they've done any reading." To define instructional leadership, Avery declared, "I think instructional leadership is making sure that there is an instructional vision in place, and an instructional vision that is shared with the faculty."

Phoenix currently serves as a middle school principal with almost two years of experience. They communicated a high number of students achieving the "Master's" level in RLA scores. Phoenix revealed that their campus serves "low-income students, a high population of at-risk students … a huge EB population…a huge special ed population." Their definition of instructional leadership included the following: "I always want to coach up my teachers. And so, that's my focus when we're in PLC, when I'm doing walkthroughs."

Jordan currently serves as a primary school principal with 10 years of experience. They reported that a very high percentage of their students achieved top RLA scores. Jordan described

their school's status in terms of social ranking or economic station as follows: "small campus … budget's very small." To define instructional leadership, Jordan shared: "We gotta walk the talk. Definitely that … a literacy leader … coaching teachers … know that curriculum … know what's expected in our classroom so we can support our teachers."

Addison currently serves as a middle school principal with two years of experience. They mentioned a schoolwide focus on improving RLA performance. Addison recalled that at the onset of their principalship, the school's status was "in a lot of transition … a principal that was running a school with a thousand kids for two months by themselves with one counselor." Sharing their definition of instructional leadership, Addison stated: "I think instructional leadership is the ability to be able to speak, content and pedagogy with, the staff. Let them know that I do have that understanding and, have, you know, those expectations when we're entering rooms."

A total of eight participants were interviewed for this research study. Six participants were later invited to a voluntary Zoom focus group. Three of them participated in a 64-minute focus group. I ensured the focus group questions augmented the problem and purpose statements, the theoretical framework, and both research questions, maintaining alignment throughout this portion of the data analysis phase. This coding and thematic analysis process led to the development of the four themes cataloged in Table 4.

Table 4

Research Questions and Emergent Themes

Research Questions	Themes	Frequency	Participants
RQ1: What barriers do principals face when implementing mandatory school capacity-building to improve low reading/language arts (RLA) test scores?	Theme 1A: Administrator duties and an underdeveloped learning culture are barriers that hinder instructional leadership.	7/8	Quinn, Jaiden, Mackenzie, Avery, Phoenix, Jordan, Addison
	Theme 1B: Teacher lack of accountability and adaptability are barriers that hinder instructional leadership.	7/8	Jaiden, Robin, Mackenzie, Avery, Phoenix, Jordan, Addison
RQ2: How do principals overcome barriers when implementing mandatory school capacity-building to improve low reading/language arts (RLA) test scores?	Theme 2A: Data analysis and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are systems used to implement capacity-building through instructional leadership.	8/8	Quinn, Jaiden, Robin, Mackenzie, Avery, Phoenix, Jordan, Addison
	Theme 2B: Implementing effective monitoring and feedback and building an effective learning culture are processes used to implement capacity-building through instructional leadership.	8/8	Quinn, Jaiden, Robin, Mackenzie, Avery, Phoenix, Jordan, Addison

RQ1. What barriers do principals face when implementing mandatory school capacity-building to improve low reading/language arts (RLA) test scores?

The first research question focused on the barriers principals faced in implementing capacity-building through instructional leadership. During the data analysis process, the

following themes emerged: (a) administrator duties and an underdeveloped learning culture; and (b) teacher lack of accountability and adaptability.

Theme 1A: Administrator duties and an underdeveloped learning culture are barriers that hinder instructional leadership.

Several principals reflected on administrative duties that distract them from their functions as campus chief instructional leaders. Six of eight reported that various important daily distractions often prevent them from maintaining sustained focus on instructional leadership. Jaiden reminded me that often, critical issues, such as the metaphorical *bomb* going off, require administrator attention. They stated:

> As an administrator, and you as a former administrator know what it's like when sometimes bombs go off in the office, and you got parents here, you have a drug issue, you have a fight, and everybody's busy in the office.

Other concerns that distract principals from this crucial work were mentioned. Avery shared that:

> Discipline is another one that I wish I had a magic wand to be able to fix it, but we're doing the best we possibly can, so that ... our discipline isn't just a punitive response, but there are a lot of on-site factors that, schools are overwhelmed with a lot of outside factors that get manifested discipline problems in schools. Vaping. The drug issues, the ... just a lot of things.

Phoenix also emphasized the importance of discipline and assigned it as a priority to a new campus administrator. They mentioned, "And so right now, we have a new assistant principal, and they are a former counselor themself, and so we brought them in to attend to the discipline." Issues of discipline were not the only matters that consumed administrator time, Jordan reflected on an overload of administrative duties:

> So, my current role right now, since we are a smaller campus, I'm the only administrator on board. I would say it's definitely internal myself; I guess it would be more management of time. I oversee the cafeteria ... you know, I oversee everyone's position there, and sometimes those managerials, those HR things, can come in my way. Where I need to be where I need to be at, and sometimes it's hard … I'm leaving work 7:30-8:00 o'clock.

Circling back to discipline, student reprimands were not always the only sanctions required at the principal's level. Mackenzie recounted a situation where a campus administrator and a couple of teachers were at the apex of instructional disruption. They shared, "And so, I printed the reports of attendance for the two teachers and themselves. And then I said, and how are those conversations gonna look when your attendance is just as bad?" During the focus group, they reemphasized, "I just don't believe in the nonsense that we have to go through when people are not effective … I'll be honest, the hardest thing right now is to remove people that have no business working with children."

Avery advanced the case of compliance demands and their struggle to prioritize the campus instructional vision. They argued:

> Because if I get bogged down in the day-to-day, I'm not watching our vision. I'm not watching where we're headed. I think that is the primary role of the principal. Because day to day, assistant principals get bogged down with a ton of things that they have to do. So, somebody has got to be looking at the vision.

Avery added to the narrative:

> There are things that we're doing for … at the state and at the district level that are nonsense. They don't impact instruction one bit. I think a lot of it is compliance ... I would really like to see … less of that bureaucratic, busywork.

Campus leaders get consumed with so many other administrative duties that they often settle on doing what they can. Addison stated, "and have a bunch of different things happening in different subjects. You look at what you're gonna get the biggest bang for your buck."

Underdeveloped learning cultures also surfaced as a barrier identified in this subtheme. This barrier creates an overall learning environment that is less than favorable. Seven of eight participants identified cultural challenges as hindrances to instructional leadership. Quinn reflected, "So, I think barriers a lot of the time could be communication, it could be lack of knowledge, it could be ... That you don't have, building a culture." They further stated, "So, you, have to work on, culture. Culture is a big thing; it's a gradual process." Jaiden related to the sentiment of culture. They stated, "It is so easy to forget culture at a campus, because you have so many things that you're trying to implement from central office."

Mackenzie addressed the discussion of culture from the standpoint of the campus's individual and collective actions. They mentioned, "So, this school was low performing, a lot of drugs, a lot of violence, a lot of, there was not a lot of teacher turnover, but there was just no…no standard." They continued with, "And so, once I felt like that was the culture, I had to think ... maybe they just don't know." They closed this discussion during the one-to-one interview by concluding: "So, like mentioned before, culturally, there was no expectation." Later, during the focus group discussion, they recapped: "I think people were stuck ... They had not achieved success. And so, it just became ... It's culture, right? Negativity, or … they just couldn't do it." Mackenzie's examples included the following: "we've always been like this ... this is who we are,

nothing's gonna make us better." A similar response was observed by Jordan: "They were, they knew what they had to do, but they did kind of the minimal. ... So, I think, culture had to change, you know, the mind frame at our campus." Avery directed their thoughts about culture toward the adults outside of the campus: "I think culturally, in this area, we have a mindset, or a culture, that doesn't appreciate reading … outside of school that it is … uniformly supported that reading is important." During the focus group, Phoenix advocated how the language barrier affected culture. They stipulated that: "the big lens is, we have a strong population of emerging bilinguals. And so, the language barrier is a cultural barrier that we're constantly addressing with students."

This barrier was further exacerbated when the emphasis centered on teachers. Avery said, "High school English teachers are trained as literature teachers ... they are not trained as reading teachers ... I think the capacity of teachers is … we need to close; we need to increase the capacity." Phoenix shared this sentiment with the following:

> Because they're so accustomed, so…because some of them have been teaching in the same grade level for 30 years, to lead that influence, it was taxing, it was, there's a lot of conversations, and it's part of building that growth mindset, building that culture of a growth mindset for all.

During the focus group, Jordan echoed this perspective by adding: "It was a tough crowd, a very few smiles," they underscored, "it was learning to trust me."

Theme 1B: Teacher lack of accountability and adaptability are barriers that hinder instructional leadership.

The first barrier identified in this subtheme is teachers' lack of accountability, which hinders effective instructional leadership. Observed actions related to this barrier indicate teacher

resistance to complying with specified policies and expectations. Five of eight participants noted teacher accountability matters in their recounting. Jaiden highlighted this barrier, stating, "Before, and I'm gonna say this, accountability." Mackenzie described their campus in this manner: "So, this school was low performing, a lot of drugs, a lot of violence, a lot of, there was not a lot of teacher turnover, but there was just no standard." Addison remarked, "That school has a lot of, long-standing teachers, teachers that have been there for 10, 15 plus years, right? And so, a lot of it was like, you know, we withstood the last principal, we're gonna withstand you too." Jordan explained, "And I think coming to the campus, six years ago, they weren't used to that. I'm not downplaying any of my predecessors, but it wasn't being monitored, and they know I'm going to follow through with that." Jordan further acknowledged:

> I think culture, they were new, they were coming from a larger district, 17 years in a larger district, coming to a smaller district, maybe ... I'm not saying the expectations were lower, but I don't think, how can I say rephrase that? They were, they knew what they had to do, but they did kind of the minimal.

Jaiden contrasted a disproportionate level of individual performance inputs among staff, they mentioned:

> When you have a group of teachers, and they're all getting paid the same salary. To do the same content, and some are busting their behinds to get the best performance out of their kids, and then you have the ones that just don't do what they're supposed to do, they come late, they want to leave early, they don't tutor, you know, they don't want to collect the data.

They added, "So, for years, you have someone that's been able to come late to work every day, no one's told them anything, it kills morale." Mackenzie expressed a similar agreement, they

stated, "They're absent a lot. And they have two teachers that are under their, oversight. That have terrible attendance. And that is affecting data." Mackenzie continued:

> And so, I printed the reports of attendance for the two teachers and herself. I said, have you had a conversation with so-and-so? No. Have you had a conversation with so-and-so? No. And then I said, and how are those conversations gonna look when your attendance is just as bad?

Jaiden further illustrated a pattern in this breach of accountability. They said:

> When I started holding those teachers accountable. Like, man, this is the guy, like, he's, unfortunately, you have to write people up. Hey, if you keep leaving early, you're gonna get written up. If you keep getting here late, you're gonna get written up.

Phoenix elevated a discussion surrounding instructional differentiation: "you have your high-performing teachers, and as a solid coach, you're going to coach up your quote-unquote mediocre teachers." They asserted their dispute with classroom configuration: "When I first got there, everything was rows and lines in the classroom, and we shifted that, oh, no, that's what they do in elementary school." They also reflected on an opposition among teachers to adopting a growth mindset, reflecting:

> Because they're so accustomed … some of them have been teaching in the same grade level for 30 years, to … lead that influence, it was taxing, it was, there's a lot of conversations, and it's part of building that growth mindset, building that culture of a growth mindset for all.

They concluded, "And so, it's, we've seen success, and yes, they're gonna be the first to contest it." Phoenix also contended with a systemic capacity challenge, they revealed the following:

> Because we don't always get, people to support, so then the instructional leaders depend on the paras to provide the teaching on those Saturday camps. So that's definitely one area that we could definitely build the strength of our campus, is having the certified teachers run the camps on Saturdays, and it's not the paraprofessionals, along with the coaches.

The second barrier, in reference to this subtheme, spotlighted teacher adaptability, specifically their unwillingness to work outside their comfort zones. This refusal to accept change also emerged as a barrier to effective implementation of instructional leadership. Five of eight participants recounted instances that supported this claim as a barrier to instructional leadership. Jaiden elaborated, "Well, it definitely isn't easy having difficult conversations with people that don't want to do it. I'm a science teacher; I don't do math. I'm a social studies teacher; I don't do reading." They added, "So, those are hard discussions to have, because you don't have … you have to have buy-in, and if the teachers don't have buy-in, they're not gonna … they're not gonna give their best."

Robin detected the same critical barrier. They stated:

> And just giving them the insight into secondary, because I think that's another barrier we've had, is they don't see the big picture. Because in, and through no fault of their own, they've been trained in silos. This is how elementary runs, this is how middle school runs, this is how high school runs.

Robin continued with:

> And they've never branched out in any direction, you know. And that's why, you know, it's notorious. High school says middle school didn't do their job, and middle school says

> elementary didn't do their job. But because nobody understands the jobs, and, you know, what's coming next.

They further commented,

> Because in elementary, you don't have a lot of teachers who are well-versed K-5. They tend to either, they like the littles, or they like the bigs. It's really rare that you have a teacher who's like, I'll do 5th grade one year, and then I'll go do kinder next year. That's just, it doesn't exist. It's rare. They're like unicorns.

Avery underscored gaps in teacher capacity. They mentioned, "Teachers are trained as creators of an instructional environment and teaching delivery. Not all teachers are curriculum specialists." They clarified, "Because we found out that they were not teaching to the rigor level that was required for the grade level." They accentuated the challenge of capacity-building across content areas. They stated, "But really teaching teachers how to become ... better supporters of complex reading in their content area." They added:

> So, I think the gaps have been wider and I think the second barrier that we encounter is that … and I think this is something that is somewhat unique to secondary schools. And, we've had this discussion with our English departments, at the high school level, because it was a huge change for our high school teachers. High school English teachers are trained as literature teachers ... they are not trained as reading teachers.

Phoenix described the cultural resistance encountered during implementation: "Because they're so accustomed ... some of them have been teaching in the same grade level for 30 years." This viewpoint was shared by Jordan, who also framed the discussion as a cultural issue: "I think culture, they were new, they were coming from a larger district, 17 years in a larger district, coming to a smaller district, maybe ... I'm not saying the expectations were lower, but I don't

think … how can I say rephrase that? They were ... they knew what they had to do, but they did kind of the minimal."

RQ2. How do principals overcome barriers when implementing mandatory school capacity-building to improve low reading/language arts (RLA) test scores?

The second research question focused on the key actions taken by campus instructional leaders to build teacher capacity through instructional leadership. The collection of codes assembled from the data converged into the following themes: (a) data analysis and professional learning communities (PLCs); and (b) implementing effective monitoring and feedback and building an effective learning culture.

Theme 2A: Data analysis and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are systems used to implement capacity-building through instructional leadership.

The first system in this subtheme, specified as a strategic action undertaken by campus leaders to improve low RLA scores, was to build teacher capacity in data analysis. Instructional leaders embedded data analysis as a system to manage student intervention and sustain data-informed decision-making. Seven of eight participants designated this systematic approach to building teacher capacity through instructional leadership. Robin offered the following remark, "And so, I always present data to the entire campus K-5. They all get the data. They all see our highs; they see our lows." They also stressed that, "The student knows where their needs are, and then as a team, as a PLC, they know each other's data, so there's no islands." They stated, "And, really, it's knowing every kid's data, you know? We don't just look at how the teacher's doing, we dig deep."

Jaiden highlighted, "And so, we have our data, our interim results, and now we are doing very strategic, specific grouping of children." They remarked, "This is very important to go child

by child and strategically group a kiddo, so they're given the correct and appropriate interventions during their advisory period." Phoenix articulated, "What we start the year is targeting our lower-performing students, knowing those students specifically, so that we're targeting them." They reinforced, "As a leadership team, we have our data tracker, and so we're seeing how they're performing."

Avery described using data to group students. They discussed, "So, I used the data that was coming back and used standard deviations to actually group kids into particular sections so that we could actually highlight skills that were necessary for different groups of kids." They went on to emphasize, "But we had evidence that they were growing. We had evidence that could be sustained." Addison conducted a comparative analysis of systems for teachers teaching the same subject. They conferred the following: "Your goal is to be less than three, no more than five points lower than your partner." When misalignment occurred, they warned that "we have one-on-one conversations with the teachers and let them know, like, this is not acceptable."

Jordan defended accountability through data analysis cycles. They fortified this claim, declaring, "But they do that already, it's their data, it's their evidence, and they know I'm going to look at it." During the focus group, Jordan affirmed, "Their scores matter too, and so we just finished looking at their SLO [Student Learning Objectives], teachers' SLO data, and it's amazing to see where we were at the beginning and where we're at." Mackenzie used data to confront cultural resistance. They contended, "I brought the whole front office. And I shared the data, the accountability data that we get from district." In the focus group, Mackenzie also explained a leadership restructuring: "Based on data, I removed RLA from an administrator, and I took it on." Lastly, they clarified the connection between data and growth. They concluded, "So

their schedule's gonna be SEL, reading, writing, reading, writing. And specifically for those tests, because we're looking for growth."

The second system in this subtheme, specified as a strategic action undertaken by campus leaders to improve low RLA scores, was to build teacher capacity through structured professional learning communities (PLCs). Scheduled PLCs are allocated to provide a designated time and space for academic content teams to meet and plan lessons. Seven of eight participants recognized this system as an effective approach to building teacher capacity through instructional leadership. Quinn discussed the impact of PLCs (or professional learning teams, PLTs), meeting time, and how these factors strengthened team collaboration. They expanded the following:

> So, my third grade is my third grade PLT, my Kinder PLT, so that's the teams. Yes, the PLC practices the whole for the school, but we meet as PLTs. ... So, collaborative practices are very important … for planning days, I use my counselor, my IT, my librarian … so that the teachers can have either … a half-day planning day, or they can have a 90-minute PLT every single week … to just do data talks.

To build teacher capacity, they indicated, "they're also including lead teachers … they call them PLT leads … So, when we meet for PLTs now, there's two people that are there to support the remaining teachers in that grade level."

Jaiden underscored a shift from meeting updates to instructional collaboration: "It's no longer a community where you just kind of discuss things. This is a team where you have active roles … you're the planner … you're the one bringing the previously tested items from STAAR [State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness]." They stressed consistent support from the instructional coach: "the instructional coach is there every day to work with the PLT … it is a very, very strong PLT, but they don't resist change."

Robin conveyed a system of administrative support and collective ownership. They mentioned, "as a team, as a PLC, they know each other's data, so there's no islands … We are one. … We're present at the PLT meetings … then we're in the classrooms … meeting those walkthroughs every week." They also made a connection to district involvement. They added, "our district has really been … investing … in Solution Tree. … from the PLC, PLT perspective."

Mackenzie emphasized shared training. They said, "they're actually going to turn around and provide that training to their department." During the focus group, they clarified, "it's analyzing our data, right? It's the who, what, when … and how … it's identifying those students, and specifically the learning target. And it's shifting from … these are my students … to these are our students."

Phoenix portrayed the strength in PLCs. They disclosed, "our PLC teams are very strong in collaboration … In PLCs, we have our RLA teachers providing support for other content classrooms." During the focus group, Phoenix reflected,

> Looking at our data from the beginning of the year, middle of the year, and then right now as we're looking at TELPAS [Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System] scores, the district has initiated a Summit K-12. … we're using that specific data to drive our TELPAS prep.

They added, "we definitely have our data walls on the PLC rooms."

Jordan also made a connection to the strength of PLCs. They said, "I do attend all PLCs. … I think our PLC has been really strong." During the focus group, Jordan articulated, "it's being involved with the teachers. It's taking out that data and it's dissecting, what can we do? What is it that you need? I think that's probably our strongest force at our campus."

To ensure teacher alignment, Addison charged teachers with the following:

> Your goal is to be less than three, no more than five points lower than your partner. … When you're looking at five points … that becomes a red flag … we don't just address within the PLC. We have one-on-one conversations with the teachers.

Addison readily questioned teachers' actions during PLC. They inquired, "You taught about the topic, but did they learn it the way that it was tested?" They also discussed district collaboration: "We started sending some different, rising superstars there." Lastly, they affirmed accountability goals: "They have pretty much said that, set those at 90-60-30, so 90% for approaches, 60% for meets, and 30% masters."

Theme 2B: Implementing effective monitoring and feedback and building an effective learning culture are actions used to build capacity through instructional leadership.

The first action listed in this subtheme involves implementing effective monitoring and feedback processes, which helped overcome barriers to instructional leadership. Effective instructional leaders initiate or maintain consistent observation, evaluation, or coaching cycles. They provide constructive, actionable feedback that improves teacher performance and builds their capacity. All eight participants reported progress through various monitoring and feedback processes. Quinn summarized this discussion on openness and consistency. They said:

> Okay, a lot of it is always communicating. We've been doing a lot of observations, a lot of instructional rounds, we've done lesson studies, we've done, well, a lot of professional development, but the key thing is monitoring. … So, you know, we're talking about it and letting them know, this is what we're looking for. There's no surprises.

They continued with the following:

> So, we do have an intervention period, and we have it at the same time every day, and there's gotta be monitoring, you know, you have to monitor, be consistent with that, so that's a practice that we have here.

Jaiden centered their response on deliberate planning: "And I say witnessing because it's not a, secondhand, it's gotta be from walkthroughs … this is something that's daily." They added, "We don't just randomly hit rooms. We plan weekly on what rooms we're going to visit." Robin acknowledged, "So, being present, being in the classrooms, meeting those walkthroughs every week … you've got to be in a minimum of five classrooms a week."

Mackenzie commented on providing immediate feedback: "And so, we were able to get into classrooms, provide teachers with feedback, and meet with teachers immediately." They stated, "We will get to instructional information no matter what … we read lessons, we go into the classrooms, we provide the feedback, because the feedback is important with the teachers." In the focus group, Mackenzie connected walkthroughs to coaching cycles: "You have to have those conferences with the teacher, walkthroughs are only effective if there's a coaching aspect, right? Let's put some plan of action … And being consistent with it."

Avery discussed monitoring systems and leadership calibration. They mentioned:

> And then, within that system, you have a monitoring system. How are you going to monitor that? T-TESS [Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System] can be helpful for that. But making sure that our instructional leadership team is calibrated when we do observations.

They also stated, "You need to know when it's appropriate to start getting away from the coaching and being more directive."

Phoenix said, "The focus in the district is … with a[n] … instructional coaching model. I always want to coach up my teachers." They added, "The requirement is to do eight … My goal is to get to 18 to 20 per week … I'm very present in the class." In the focus group, Phoenix said, "In terms of building capacity, we're having monthly coaching, conferences with our teachers … all the instructional leaders on campus … our RLA team, has their coaching conferences, regarding students and strategies in the classroom."

Jordan stressed, "Monitoring, monitoring, that's the key." They added, "When I'm doing T-TESS observations, I have those conversations … I emphasize on the reinforcement and the refinement, and then I go back to follow that through." In the focus group, they alluded to supporting teachers. They confirmed, "I'm doing my walkthroughs, I'm doing my T-TESS … I've been doing that within my walkthroughs, giving that feedback, catching the teachers, how can we support you?"

Addison mentioned, "the data is a great … indicator … to get somebody else on board, right?" They added, "your goal is to be less than three, no more than five points lower than your partner." They continued with, "We have one-on-one conversations with the teachers and let them know, like, this is not acceptable."

The second action listed in this subtheme refers to launching an effective learning culture, which helped overcome barriers to instructional leadership. Principals led their campuses in overcoming obstacles to instructional leadership by building a positive school learning culture. All eight participants recounted a variety of strategies and actions they launched to construct or restore a sustainable learning culture on their campuses. Quinn illustrated the need for vision:

> I think I became a better teacher when I went back to school to get my principal certification. I saw the big picture, a bigger picture. … Once they realize the picture and why … that helps you organize yourself as a teacher.

Jaiden acknowledged initial signs of teacher burnout and took action:

> My teachers were…they just looked spent, they looked burnt out … I forgot about them … culture was dropping … I had to make sure that with my staff, that I was in it with them, and it wasn't me delivering top-down.

Robin integrated a culture of collective data analysis, including student involvement. They shared, "students know their data, and they work with teachers," they added, "we redesigned … the way we PLC," and "looking at student work … especially when we're able to do it vertically." Mackenzie connected accountability to purpose: "I brought the whole front office. And I shared the data … the ratings and the distinctions," they informed the staff, "attendance is number one." During the focus group, Mackenzie affirmed, "Showing up was big. … It's a continuation of positivity … constantly giving positivity. … It's not a dictatorship." They asked teachers, "What do you think needs to get done?"

Learning cultures that targeted intervention achieved progressive performance success. Avery clarified, "I think tutoring has to be very targeted. … use tutoring for skill development, not reteaching." Addison disclosed an effective classroom routine:

> The FSGPT [Frequent, Small-Group, Purposeful, Talks], the frequent, purposeful talks amongst students, and having them be able to say what they're internalizing, and a lot of times the discussions that kids have with their peers, are a lot more helpful than the ones that they're having with a teacher.

Addison added a brief discourse in support of teacher leaders. They stated, "let them know that they were seen as leaders and valued." Phoenix connected culture to managing discipline. They recalled the following:

> We were successful because we didn't have any kids going to DAEP [District Alternative Education Program] … it allowed for the social studies DAEP teacher to be in the classroom and to co-teach … it allowed the para that's in the DAEP classroom setting to support classes.

They expanded the discussion by mentioning the effective use of walkthroughs and feedback. They added, "The walkthroughs, giving the teacher feedback … it's not a gotcha, it's I want to use it as an opportunity to coach up." During the focus group, Phoenix advanced family engagement. They said, "I highlight Summit K-12 [an online supplemental curriculum] … any members in the family can have their own account."

Jordan normalized walkthrough expectations and secured teacher buy-in. They said, "My teachers already know the first three weeks I'm going to be looking in their classroom is for classroom management." During the focus group, they proclaimed, "The mindset of our teachers is they want to do more for our kids." Lastly, Jordan stated, "I went for my toughest person to win them over. … you walk your talk."

Comparison of Results to the Literature Review

The results of this qualitative case study aligned with existing research and the theoretical framework that undergirded it. I analyzed Chapter 2: *Literature Review* by importing it into NVivo. I then coded interrelated information using the codes I developed to derive the findings' themes and aligned them with the two research questions (RQs). Next, I conducted a comparative analysis using NVivo's *Matrix Coding Query* feature to capture the percentages of

the coded data. Table 5 presents the coded data by subthemes, their percentages of the overall coded information, and the cited authors for RQ1. Table 6 illustrates the same data for RQ2.

The focus of RQ1 was to identify barriers principals face when implementing mandatory school capacity-building. Under Theme 1A, other administrative duties and underdeveloped learning cultures emerged as barriers to the effective implementation of instructional leadership (IL). Mandapitan and Rodriguez (2024) reported that principals manage heavy workloads of administrative and managerial tasks, which inevitably reduces their time spent on IL. Other researchers confirmed that principal tasks such as facility management, district mandates, urgent crises, and the resolution of emergent conflicts reduced the time and energy that could have been devoted to IL (Cansoy et al., 2024; Cansoy et al., 2025; Cherutoi et al., 2024; Elomaa et al., 2024). According to research, supportive school culture and culturally sustained practices boost student engagement and teacher satisfaction/retention (Bonanno et al., 2023; Cells et al., 2023; Fortner et al., 2021; Mansfield & Lambrinou, 2024). Participants in this study stated that at the onset of their principalship, an underdeveloped learning culture was a concern.

Regarding Theme 1B, the lack of teacher accountability and unwillingness to work outside their comfort zones hinder progress. Conversely, Walker and Qian (2022) found that staff members upheld accountability standards and felt a sense of belonging due to active IL practices. Leaders who established leadership roles and shared IL decisions with teachers increased buy-in, empowerment, and participation (Ezzani, 2020; Park et al., 2023; Reid et al., 2025).

The focus of RQ2 was to explore how principals overcame barriers when implementing mandatory school capacity-building. Theme 2A, investigated data analysis as an IL strategy and the application of professional learning communities (PLCs). The integration of functions and

processes is based on a chain of activities, including data analysis, teacher capacity-building, and improvements in student learning outcomes (Sanchez & Watson, 2021; Vogel, 2018). According to Xiu et al. (2022) and Zhang et al. (2023), PLCs are organizational systems that facilitate individual and group professional development.

Theme 2B addressed building a learning culture and effective monitoring and feedback. Effective educational leaders adapt learning cultures that meet the learning needs of students and staff (Mansfield & Lambrinou, 2024). They create conditions that support teacher growth through personal skills development, observation, coaching, and collaborative inquiry (Cox & Mullen, 2023; Walker & Qian, 2022).

I also compared the results with the theoretical framework embedded in this research study. Coleman's framework shows that the interaction between trust, networking, and shared norms promotes the successful implementation and performance of IL strategies. Coleman (1988) pointed out three theoretical constructs, including trust, networking, and institutionalized shared norms, which are highly correlated with Murphy et al.'s IL model, that is, functions, processes, and leadership activities (Mikiewicz, 2021; Murphy et al., 1983). The connection between social capital theory and IL indicates that trust enables teachers to feel comfortable adopting IL strategies, whereas professional networks introduce good practices, thereby making capacity-building easier to acquire (Coppe et al., 2022).

Table 5

Comparative Analysis of the Literature Review and Findings: RQ1

Research Question	Coded Subthemes	% Coded	Authors Cited
RQ1: What barriers do principals face when implementing mandatory school capacity-building to improve low reading/language arts (RLA) test scores?	Theme 1A: Other Administrative Duties as an IL Distractor	14.9%	Cansoy et al., 2024; Cansoy et al., 2025; Cherutoi et al., 2024; Elomaa et al., 2024; Kilag & Sasan, 2023; Mandapitan & Rodriguez, 2024; Walker & Qian, 2022
	Theme 1A: Underdeveloped Learning Culture	14.48%	Bonanno et al., 2023; Cells et al., 2023; DeMatthews et al., 2021; Fortner et al., 2021; Leithwood et al., 2020; Mansfield & Lambrinou, 2024; Qadach et al., 2020; Walker & Qian, 2022
	Theme 1B: Teacher Lack of Accountability	10.72%	Bellibaş et al., 2021; Ezzani, 2020; Ho et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2021; Reid et al., 2025; Walker & Qian, 2022
	Theme 1B: Teachers Unwilling to Work Outside of Their Comfort Zones	7.68%	Bellibaş et al., 2025; Daniel et al., 2023; Kang et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2021; Park et al., 2023; Ralebese et al., 2025

Table 6

Comparative Analysis of the Literature Review and Findings: RQ2

Research Question	Coded Subthemes	% Coded	Authors Cited
RQ2: How do principals overcome barriers when implementing mandatory school capacity-building to improve low reading/language arts (RLA) test scores?	Theme 2A: Data Analysis as an IL Strategy	12.16%	Bonanno et al., 2023; Ezzani, 2020; Karakose et al., 2024; Koh et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2021; Maqbool et al., 2023; Sanchez & Watson, 2021; Vogel, 2018; Walker & Qian, 2022; Zhan et al., 2023
	Theme 2A: Professional Learning Communities (PLC)	6.7%	Admiraal et al., 2021; Lagarense et al., 2025; Qian & Walker, 2021; Xiu et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2023
	Theme 2B: Building a Learning Culture	8.97%	Bonanno et al., 2023; Cells et al., 2023; Cox & Mullen, 2023; Fortner et al., 2021; Mansfield & Lambrinou, 2024; Shaked, 2025; Wang et al., 2025
	Theme 2B: Effective Monitoring and Feedback	14.12%	Bambrick-Santoyo, 2018; Bambrick-Santoyo, 2025; Bonanno, 2023; Cansoy et al., 2024; Ezzani, 2020; Shaked, 2025; Texas Education Agency, 2024; Walker & Qian, 2022

Summary

In this chapter, I shared the participants' relevant demographics and the methods I used to collect data through one-to-one interviews and a focus group. I outlined the process I used to code, categorize, and sort the data, eventually developing themes using the six-phase thematic analysis introduced by Braun and Clarke. Emergent themes included: Administrator Duties and an Underdeveloped Learning Culture; Teacher Lack of Accountability and Adaptability; Data Analysis and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs); Effective Monitoring and Feedback and Building an Effective Learning Culture. I chronicled rich, direct quotes from principals and included them in two rounds of member checking. I also introduced four tables, one figure, and one appendix to present graphical depictions of key findings throughout this chapter.

In Chapter 5, I intend to synthesize key implications extracted from the findings. I will provide recommendations on how this study can contribute to the existing body of knowledge in educational leadership. Lastly, I will conclude this qualitative, exploratory study by providing a research-based outcome to potential readers.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Recommendations, and Study Summary

The problem addressed in this study was many K-12 public schools' reading/language arts (RLA) test scores did not meet grade level in the southwest region of Texas, prompting the mandatory implementation of intervention measures to build capacity and increase student learning outcomes (Godina, 2024; Texas Education Agency, 2024). The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to explore how principals overcome barriers faced when implementing mandatory capacity-building in schools to improve low RLA test scores. Throughout this study, I examined the professional realities of principals who employed various capacity-building practices to improve their campuses' RLA scores. Utilizing elements of the case study design, particularly one-to-one interviews and a focus group, I investigated barriers to implementing effective instructional leadership (IL) efforts (what) and the actions principals engaged to overcome them (how) in Southwest Texas. The findings from this research have the potential to inform educational leaders at multiple levels on how to improve instructional effectiveness through IL initiatives.

By combining the meticulous, reflexive thematic analysis of Braun and Clarke (2021) with the sophistication of NVivo's qualitative data analysis software, I was able to code, categorize, sort, and generate themes from the collected dataset. After employing elements of exploratory design, I generated 73 independent codes (Appendix I) from the one-to-one interview transcripts and reached saturation at eight participants. I then developed themes and synthesized findings using thick description and rich narratives excavated from the data. The emergent themes were systematically bundled and reported in the results section of Chapter 4. The categorized and sorted codes were combined into the following themes: Theme 1A: *Administrator Duties and an Underdeveloped Learning Culture*; Theme 1B: *Teacher Lack of*

Accountability and Adaptability; Theme 2A: *Data Analysis and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)*; and Theme 2B: *Effective Monitoring and Feedback and Building an Effective Learning Culture*.

These emergent themes not only characterize the common barriers faced by a voluntary sample group but also signify the extant actions that successful principals implemented with fidelity to overcome those barriers. As alluded to in Chapter 1, the significance of this study was to highlight options instructional leaders could use to improve campus capacity-building strategies by addressing identified barriers. The research approaches used throughout this study provided a significant exposure to explicit skills, practices, and systems that could be adopted by other educational leaders seeking campus improvement. Although fruitful, these approaches did not render such outcomes without limitations. In Chapter 3, I identified three central limitations: a small sample size, time constraints, and limited data availability. However, I embedded three delimitations to counter them, which included: purposive sampling, participant criteria, and the combined analytical approach of Braun and Clarke's (2021) six-step RTA with NVivo. While this research analysis evolved from significance to systems, codes to themes, and from barriers to actions, we now converge at the point of completion in Chapter 5.

In Chapter 5, I provide a reasonable overview of the study's implications, practice recommendations, future research recommendations, and its conclusion. In the discussion section, I will present thematic findings related to the barriers to implementing capacity-building through IL and the actions taken to overcome them, aligned with the two research questions (Table 7). In the recommendations for practice section, I will address administrator skills, school culture, teacher commitment, teacher adaptability, data analysis, PLCs, and effective monitoring

cycles (Table 8). I will close the study with future recommendations and a conclusion that addresses the study's overall outcome (Table 9).

Discussion

One potential goal of qualitative research projects is to answer an exploratory question (Venkatesh et al., 2023). The discussion section of Chapter 5 can serve as the apex of the study's conclusion, documenting the answer to the phenomenon in question. In the discussion section, significant implications typically serve as *waypoints* to systematically introduce evidence of the study's contribution to the body of knowledge (Tracy, 2025).

The purpose of the implications articulated in the following subsections is to identify the theoretical implications that impacted this study's contribution to theory confirmability. The goal is to address the study problem and purpose while framing the findings within the literature to the derived research questions. The evidence in this research reveals a connection to Coleman's (1988) social capital theory and Murphy et al.'s (1983) instructional leadership framework. While exploring the problem of low RLA scores in Southwest Texas, the issue of barriers to effective implementation of capacity-building and the actions principals used to overcome them emerged. The following implications stemmed from the two research questions and the findings that I generated in my detailed analysis (Table 7).

Table 7

Implications

Research Questions	Implications
RQ1: What barriers do principals face when implementing mandatory school capacity-building to improve low reading/language arts (RLA) test scores?	A. Principals' time and engagement in instructional leadership practices were reduced due to other administrative duties, hindering capacity-building efforts. B. Weak, underdeveloped learning cultures hamper student engagement and discourage teachers' motivation to commit to capacity-building efforts. C. Teacher resistance to adopting or complying with instructional change and evolving expectations reduces their openness to building professional capacity. D. Teachers' unwillingness to work outside of their comfort zones reduces their opportunities to grow and weakens organizational improvement.
RQ2: How do principals overcome barriers when implementing mandatory school capacity-building to improve low reading/language arts (RLA) test scores?	E. Implementing data analysis and data-driven instructional decision cycles increases teacher capacity and student learning outcomes. F. Aligned and structured professional learning communities (PLCs) enhance professional development and add a systems approach to teacher capacity-building. G. Effective observation, feedback, and coaching cycles strengthen educators' individual and collective efficacy.

RQ1. What barriers do principals face when implementing mandatory school capacity-building to improve low reading/language arts (RLA) test scores?

Implication A: Competing Priorities. Principals' time and engagement in instructional leadership (IL) practices were reduced due to other administrative duties, hindering capacity-building efforts. Principals' daily tasks and responsibilities can consume an enormous amount of time during the instructional day, leaving less time for IL and capacity-building (Mandapitan & Rodriguez, 2024). Distractions prevented them from observing classrooms and providing constructive recommendations around teaching and learning skills (Cansoy et al., 2025). Common reasons principals are often detached from their IL roles include the perceived need to defuse urgent, time-sensitive crises.

Other time-consuming demands can surface throughout the day, including district directives, student discipline, and unannounced parent visits (Elomaa et al., 2024). Novice and inexperienced principals who lack training may not yet grasp the importance of IL compared to the short-term issues they solve throughout the day. Unfortunately, when teachers and other staff perceive the principal's deprioritized actions as not in line with the urgency required to sustain IL, they do not regard it as a priority either.

Implication B: Underdeveloped Learning Cultures. Weak, underdeveloped learning cultures hamper student engagement and discourage teachers' motivation to commit to capacity-building efforts. This implication closely relies on the constructs embedded in the theoretical framework of this study, Coleman's (1988) social capital theory. Effective school culture requires a deep connection to trust, information networks, and shared norms. Research by Cells et al. (2023) and Qadach et al. (2020) showed that school culture infused with internal supports and mutual collaboration increased student engagement and teacher commitment.

One of the first conceptual models of IL, presented by Hallinger and Murphy (1985), also underpins the significance of school culture. Specifically, they framed defining the school mission, managing the instructional program, and encouraging a positive school learning culture as factors that influence campus commitment and collaboration. Teaching and learning, supported by the frameworks of social capital theory and IL, create a compelling environment that motivates teachers and optimizes conditions for student success.

Implication C: Teacher Accountability Challenges. Teacher resistance to adopting or complying with instructional change and evolving expectations reduces their openness to building professional capacity. While conducting research for the literature review in this study, the discussion of accountability emerged as a component of IL. Throughout my reporting, I highlighted the principal's role in accountability. Principals' responsibilities, including developing goals, overseeing instruction, and aligning curriculum, were among the most prevalent accountability objectives (He et al., 2024). Much to my surprise, 63% (five of eight) of the participants indicated conflicting issues with teacher accountability. Ownership of accountability is a matter of leadership and supervision. Leaders have the authority to demand (in a professional manner) compliance with established policies and shared expectations from teachers. I will further discuss this in my recommendations for practice and future research.

Implication D: Teacher Resistance to Change. Teachers' unwillingness to work outside of their comfort zones reduces their opportunities to grow and weakens organizational improvement. According to Coleman's (1988) social capital theory, trust enables teachers to become comfortable adopting IL strategies. Ralebese et al. (2025) reported that instructional leaders created supportive environments that enabled teachers to experiment with new instructions. Despite research-based evidence of effective IL practices that motivate teachers, a

majority of the participants reported concerns about teachers' refusal to accept change, embrace flexibility, and adapt for the sake of student success.

RQ2. How do principals overcome barriers when implementing mandatory school capacity-building to improve low reading/language arts (RLA) test scores?

Implication E: Data-Driven Decision Cycles. Implementing data analysis and data-driven instructional decision cycles increases teacher capacity and student learning outcomes. Maqbool et al. (2023) mentioned that campus systems and practices, such as data analysis, reinforce teaching and learning. Participants in this study, specifically 88% (seven of eight), attributed considerable growth in their RLA scores to data-driven decision-making. Engaging in structured, teacher-led, and deliberate data analysis as an instructional leadership (IL) strategy facilitates teacher capacity-building and advances student academic proficiency.

Implication F: Professional Learning Communities. Aligned and structured professional learning communities (PLCs) enhance professional development and add a systems approach to teacher capacity-building. This implication also aligns well with Coleman's (1988) social capital theory. Successful PLCs inculcate trust, information networks, and shared norms. Embedded support is the basis for effective PLCs. A guarantee of success includes protected planning time, lesson internalization, and periodic data analysis. Other bedrocks of success involve resource sharing and a safe space to practice lesson delivery amongst peers. When instructional leaders systematically establish, model, and supervise PLCs, they embed opportunities to improve teaching practices and cultivate a macro-level, effective school learning culture (Antinluoma et al., 2021; Qian & Walker, 2021).

Implication G: Observation, Feedback, and Coaching Cycles. Effective observation, feedback, and coaching cycles strengthen educators' individual and collective efficacy. Eight of

eight participants of this study (100%) agree that campus administrators should practice a cadence of developing teachers over time through routine observation cycles and reflective coaching. Principals who strategically implemented well-defined observation and feedback systems also increased capacity-building and, in turn, affected students' academic progress (Cox & Mullen, 2023).

One-to-one growth and development systems can evolve as default mechanisms used by instructional leaders to improve teacher efficacy. Principals gravitated to the concept of classroom walkthroughs. They also conveyed the critical task of giving immediate feedback through a follow-up conference as part of their coaching mechanisms. Lastly, principals mentioned the significance of instructional rounds (in which multiple teachers circulate among classrooms to identify observable trends) as opportunities to calibrate teacher growth and development.

Recommendations for Practice

After fixing the theoretical waypoints and documenting this study's contribution to the body of knowledge in the previously listed implications, the following recommendations outline actionable practices to improve campus capacity-building and instructional leadership (IL) implementation. I formulated these practices based on connections in previous research, insights from this study, and participants' experiences to provide potential reflections to consider when faced with similar barriers. This non-exhaustive approach lists recommendations that could help resolve immediate concerns or establish initial systems to sustain long-term capacity-building through IL (Table 8).

Table 8

Recommendations for Practice

Implications	Recommendations for Practice
A. Principals' time and engagement in instructional leadership practices were reduced due to other administrative duties, hindering capacity-building efforts.	1. Principals should publish clear roles, effectively prioritize IL, and delegate administrative tasks to members of the instructional leadership team.
B. Weak, underdeveloped learning cultures hamper student engagement and discourage teachers' motivation to commit to capacity-building efforts.	2. Educational leaders at all levels should prioritize a positive school culture by conducting periodic climate surveys, building trust, promoting collaboration, establishing shared norms, and celebrating "wins."
C. Teacher resistance to adopting or complying with instructional change and evolving expectations reduces their openness to building professional capacity.	3. Teacher accountability fundamentally relates to the managerial function and supervisory authority invested in school leaders; leaders should provide recurring professional development and assert accountability measures in a professional manner.
D. Teachers' unwillingness to work outside of their comfort zones reduces their opportunities to grow and weakens organizational improvement.	4. Principals should combine teacher growth and development techniques with incremental challenges to lead their staff in a culture of continuous improvement; they create safe spaces to manage a positive mentorship program and model the expected growth.
E. Implementing data analysis and data-driven instructional decision cycles increases teacher capacity and student learning outcomes.	5. Instructional leaders should train teachers on data analysis, establish aligned data review cycles, and lead systematic data discussions.
F. Aligned and structured professional learning communities (PLCs) enhance professional development and add a systems approach to teacher capacity-building.	6. Principals should block and protect structured PLC time, actively supervise PLCs, and consistently prioritize instructional goals and challenges.

G. Effective observation, feedback, and coaching cycles strengthen educators' individual and collective efficacy.	7. Principals empower members of the instructional leadership team to actively monitor and coach teachers; structure coaching cycles to consistently provide long-term, actionable, and documented feedback with immediate follow-up.

Recommendation 1 Based on Implication A. Principals should strategically plan and prioritize IL to prevent other duties and distractions from hindering their focus on IL. Participants reported the powerful effect their instructional leadership team (ILT) wielded on the success of their IL efforts. The ILT is a vital part of any school campus. Principals should ensure that each team member's role is clearly documented and explicitly shared with the entire team. The principal should assign appropriate levels of IL prioritization to ILT members based on their scope of duties and experience. Additionally, principals should delegate administrative tasks to ILT members.

Recommendation 2 Based on Implication B. School culture encompasses campus-wide success and entails everything from student arrival routines to teacher collaboration in PLCs. Educational leaders at all levels should make it a top priority to manage their school's culture. Culture management can be challenging when it has been overlooked for a long time. To avoid a decline in school culture, educational leaders should conduct periodic climate surveys of various educational entities, including students, parents, teachers, administrators, staff, and community members. The purpose of the survey is to gauge the collective *pulse* of the culture. Grounded in social capital theory, principals should build trust, promote networking and collaboration, establish shared norms, and celebrate individual and collective *wins*.

Recommendation 3 Based on Implication C. I briefly alluded to the theme of teachers' lack of accountability in the implications section. I also expressed surprise when it was mentioned during data collection. Teacher accountability is a fundamental function of managers and leaders with supervisory authority. Education as a professional vocation nestles on specific professional standards, including a Code of Ethics, certification standards, federal, state, and local policies, and many others. Embedded within these professional standards and policies is the expectation of individual compliance. Educational leaders possess legitimate authority inherent in their assigned position to enforce and compel compliance. Leaders should proactively provide recurring professional development to reinforce expectations and inform staff of new policies or changes to existing policies. Leaders are also consistently expected to assert these accountability measures professionally and authoritatively.

Recommendation 4 Based on Implication D. Unfortunately, some teachers become deeply connected and, frankly, very competent in their assigned subject areas, despite the range of their certifications. As a result, they could often become unwilling to work outside of their comfort zones. This lack of adaptability can often stifle teacher growth, but worse than that, suppress campus-wide and student success. As the chief instructional leader, principals should always contemplate ways to combine teacher individual growth and development techniques with incremental challenges. This positive leader's move can enable a culture of continuous improvement among campus staff. Another way to foster continuous improvement among adults on campus is to create safe spaces to implement a positive mentorship program, and for campus administrators to model the expected growth.

Recommendation 5 Based on Implication E. An effective data analysis system, purposefully structured and deeply embedded in a campus's operational framework, can slowly edge a campus toward institutional success. Data analysis can be challenging for inexperienced staff; therefore, principals should consider training teachers in data analysis. Along with the training, principals should establish data review cycles intentionally aligned with district and unit assessment cycles. To promote data analysis and data-driven instructional decisions implemented with fidelity, principals should always attend and periodically lead systematic data discussions.

Recommendation 6 Based on Implication F. Professional learning communities (PLCs) can serve as a crucial campus-based system to manage teacher efficacy. Principals who plan to build capacity and increase student learning outcomes should consider aligning and structuring this systems approach to their campuses. If they have not already done so, principals should consider blocking and protecting a structured PLC time for teachers to collaborate with their content team to plan and internalize lessons. Principals should also implement active supervision by meticulously coordinating the campus ILT to ensure deep, systematic fidelity. Additionally, principals should regularly prioritize and reprioritize instructional goals and challenges throughout the school year to maintain team, department, and campus-wide collaboration.

Recommendation 7 Based on Implication G. Instructional leaders who value and dedicate time and effort to effective evaluation and coaching cycles can build capacity and measurably boost teacher growth. Establishing effective monitoring and feedback systems can also be a challenging IL effort. It requires deep commitment from administrators authorized and certified to deliver one-to-one evaluation ratings or coaching action steps to teachers. Principals should empower ILT members to monitor actively and coach teachers within their supervisory scope. Principals should structure coaching cycles through detailed calendaring. Principals

should establish processes to provide long-term, actionable, consistent, and documented feedback with immediate follow-up sessions.

Recommendations for Future Research

While the points between the findings, results, implications, and recommendations for practice reveal a clear path of the study's contributions to the body of knowledge, they also illuminate critical phenomena worthy of analytical review. As with most research studies, identifying future research that builds on these points, extends the current study's overall significance, and inspires a prospective researcher toward a potential research goal. This section recommends a deeper discussion of teachers' lack of accountability (qualitative) and other quantitative designs to advance logical, appropriate, and meaningful future inquiries (Table 9).

Table 9

Recommendations for Future Research

Methodology	Design	Purpose
Qualitative	Phenomenological	Researchers can further study the phenomenon of teachers' lack of accountability to confirm this unexpected discussion that surfaced in my study.
Quantitative	Causal-Comparative	Researchers can advance the study of IL by comparing the evaluation ratings of teachers and administrators from a campus that has been trained in full implementation of IL with those from a campus that has not been trained and uses unstructured IL practices.

Quantitative	Correlational Analysis	Researchers can conduct a study in Southwest Texas to examine the relationships between IL and teacher capacity-building using Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS).

The first recommendation for future research stems from the previous discussion involving teachers' lack of accountability. This phenomenon surfaced unexpectedly and may require a qualitative study with a phenomenological design. Using this approach, future researchers may have the opportunity to explore the lived experiences of teachers and administrators who perceive accountability issues. This study could uncover root causes and contextual factors contributing to teacher accountability issues. Researchers could excavate rich descriptive data through interviews and focus groups to discover themes and patterns that support or disprove this observation. Utilizing thematic analysis and NVivo data analysis software, researchers could code, categorize, and draw insights into this identified IL barrier. Within the field of educational leadership, this study could offer suggestions to improve accountability efforts and effectiveness. The findings can inform professional development and enhance teacher performance. A representative sample of eight teachers and administrators in Southwest Texas who possess knowledge of accountability infractions or sanctions could inform this study.

The second recommendation is for a prospective researcher to conduct a quantitative methodology with a causal-comparative design. This study encourages the researcher to study the impact of structured IL training on evaluation ratings of teachers and administrators. This design contains ideal elements for examining differences between a campus fully implementing

IL and one that uses unstructured practices. A causal-comparative study involves researchers assessing cause-and-effect relationships. The researcher may need to use a quantitative analysis tool, such as Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), to investigate statistical disparities in evaluation ratings and must possess extensive experience in teacher and principal evaluation systems. A study of this type is well-suited to assess IL systems' effectiveness and quality. In educational leadership, this research can support the implementation of IL and improve school performance. A diverse research sample across two campuses with comparable student and teacher population sizes, teacher experience, administrator effectiveness, and location would ensure an applicable study. One campus would have undergone structured training in IL practices with implementation fidelity, while the second would rely on its unstructured, standard IL practices.

The third recommendation for future researchers to ponder is a quantitative method, coupled with a correlational analysis design. Launching this study, researchers may challenge themselves to examine the relationship between IL and teacher capacity-building in Southwest Texas, using Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS). The components embedded in the PIMRS enable researchers to survey how IL influences the development of teachers' professional skills and instructional effectiveness. This correlational analysis design, paired with the SPSS statistical analysis tool, is ideal for measuring relationships between independent and dependent variables commonly used in quantitative research. This study has the potential to advance educational leadership in Southwest Texas by illuminating correlations between IL and teacher capacity-building. A sample of 100-125 educators and administrators throughout Southwest Texas is a suitable representation for this study.

Study Summary

This study addressed the issue of many K-12 public schools in the southwest region of Texas failing to meet reading/language arts (RLA) test scores. This issue prompted the implementation of mandatory intervention measures to build capacity and improve student learning outcomes. This problem was explored using an exploratory case study design within a qualitative research methodology.

Identifying the barriers principals faced when implementing capacity-building practices at their campuses and discussing the actions they took to overcome them were the purposes of this study. Using Coleman's social capital theory, I examined how trust, networking, and shared norms contributed to the success of various instructional leadership (IL) strategies among eight principals in Southwest Texas. The principals participated in interviews and a focus group, generating 73 codes that culminated in the emergence of four themes and eight subthemes. Thematic analysis was used to identify hindering barriers and effective strategies for capacity-building through IL.

Findings included two primary barriers to effective IL: (1) administrative duties and underdeveloped learning cultures, and (2) teacher accountability and adaptability issues. Principals indicated that daily duties and weak school cultures hindered campus focus on IL implementation. Additionally, teacher resistance to adhere to expectations and their unwillingness to work outside norms also impeded capacity-building progress. Principals implemented systematic data analysis, structured professional learning communities (PLCs), monitoring and feedback cycles, and resourceful initiatives to build a positive learning culture throughout their campuses.

The findings of this study also uncovered a confirmable contribution to the body of knowledge. Principals provided insight into actions directly applicable to Coleman's social capital theory and Hallinger and Murphy's IL framework. This contemporary application clearly addressed the gaps connected to barriers to capacity-building and effective IL implementation.

The results, implications, and recommendations of this study emphasize the essential role that principals, as the chief instructional leaders, play in the successful implementation of IL and building teacher capacity. Principals should prioritize IL practices. Evidence rooted in this study demonstrated that principals who delegated specific duties and developed a positive learning culture achieved systematic progress on their campuses. Additionally, educational leaders who manage data analysis, engage structured PLCs, and maintain effective feedback systems do create sustainable improvements in teacher efficacy and student achievement. This study serves as an invitation to engage educational leaders at all levels. From the classroom to the boardroom, when educational leaders elevate the significance of IL and capacity-building that empowers principals to focus on their roles as chief instructional leaders, teacher growth and development, and increased student learning outcomes can ensue. Ultimately, campus success hinges on evidence-based actions anchored in trust, networking, and shared norms.

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Appendix A

Site Permission Letter

National University IRB
9388 Lightwave Ave., San Diego, CA 92123
irb@nu.edu

Date:

Hello _____ Independent School District,

My name is Allen Haynes, and I am a doctoral student at National University. I am conducting interviews and a focus group to explore principals' perspectives on overcoming barriers to implementing instructional leadership and capacity-building practices at their campuses. The interviews and the focus group are strictly confidential. They will take place via Zoom. The interviews include 10 questions and should take 60 minutes. While the focus group includes seven questions and should take 45 to 60 minutes. I am requesting permission from this site to conduct interviews and a focus group for research.

I am recruiting participants who meet all of the following criteria:

1. A principal with at least two years of experience in their role.
2. A principal with a minimum of one year of experience implementing capacity-building with teachers who have resisted implementation.
3. A principal who has overcome barriers when implementing capacity-building.
4. A principal whose campus experienced an improvement in campus RLA test scores.

I request permission to do the following within your district:

1. Interview participants in an online interview via Zoom for 60 minutes
2. Assign participants to review their interview summary via email for 10-15 minutes
3. Invite and interview a subset of participants in a virtual focus group via Zoom for 45 to 60 minutes

If you have questions, you may contact me at (915) 248-6028 or by email allen.haynes@yahoo.com

Thank you for your time and consideration regarding this request.

Allen R. Haynes
PhD Candidate
(915) 248-6028
a.haynes0444@o365.ncu.edu

Appendix B1

Human Resources Response Letter

[redacted]

September 26, 2025

To Allen R. Haynes,

This is to inform you that, upon reviewing the submitted documentation for your study titled "Principals' Perspectives on Overcoming Barriers Implementing Mandatory Capacity-Building in the Southwestern Region of Texas: A Qualitative Exploratory Case Study", the [redacted] has determined that your project conforms to our District's standards regarding informed consent, privacy issues, and FERPA regulations and has approved your research request proposal. Your research approval number is [redacted]. Please provide a copy of this form to administrators when soliciting their participation.

If you are visiting a campus, a background check is required. Please stop by the District Service Center located at [redacted] and pick up the background check form from the receptionist or contact [redacted] in Human Resources, [redacted] email is [redacted]. When you reach out to [redacted], let [redacted] know your reason for needing the background check.

The school administrator has the right to decline campus participation, and any participation in this research is entirely voluntary and may be withdrawn at any point. We understand that you will not use our District's name or any other identifying information when you publish your findings. We ask that you keep our department informed of your progress through updates throughout your project's duration and provide this office with a copy of your results upon completion.

If you require additional information, please feel free to call me at [redacted] or E-mail me at [redacted].

Sincerely,

[redacted]

Appendix B2

Human Resources Response Letter

[redacted]

October 7, 2025

Mr. Allen R. Haynes
5397 Guillermo Frias Lane
El Paso, TX 79934

SENT VIA EMAIL: allen.haynes1@yahoo.com

Dear Mr. Haynes:

This is to inform you that the [redacted] has approved the project titled ***Principals' Perspectives on Overcoming Barriers Implementing Mandatory Capacity-Building in the Southwestern Region of Texas: A Qualitative Exploratory Case Study.*** We have determined that this project conforms to the district's standards regarding informed consent and FERPA regulations. Your IRB number for 2025-2026 is [redacted].

Please **make this letter available upon your first communication with school principals and District staff** as it provides them assurance that the study meets the district's research policy. District approval does not ensure research participation from the faculty given that research subjects have the right not to participate and withdraw from the research study at any point. If you will require District data, please submit all data requests through the [redacted] office.

Also, please keep the office appraised of your progress and when the project is complete provide our office with a copy of your final report. The District's name cannot be used when you publish your findings without previous consent in writing.

If you require additional assistance, you may contact me at [redacted] or e-mail me at [redacted].

Best regards,

[redacted]

Appendix B3

Human Resources Response Letter

[redacted]

REQUEST FOR APPROVAL TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

[redacted]

1. Name of Person Initiating Request: Allen R. Haynes

[redacted]

2. Title of Research Project: Principals' Perspectives on Overcoming Barriers Implementing Mandatory Capacity-Building in the Southwestern Region of Texas: A Qualitative Exploratory Case Study

3. Nature of the Project. (Attach to this form a brief outline of the purpose, method, and general plan of investigation and its benefits to the [redacted])

4. Data Collection for the Project. (Attach to this form, not more than one page, a specific description of the procedures to be used in collecting data, beginning and ending dates, and how privacy rights will be protected. Include a Confidentiality Oath Form for each person who will access student records.)

5. Instrument. (Attach a copy of each test, interview schedule, or questionnaire to be used.)

6. Participants. (Attach a list of schools or departments from which information is to be collected, students to be involved, and teachers or other school employees to be involved. Describe how participants are to be selected.)

7. Reporting of Data. (Attach a statement, not more than one page, describing the data to be collected and reported and the method of collection.)

8. Institutional Approval. (This is required of all students and faculty members representing colleges and universities doing any research involving human subjects. Approval of

[redacted]

Allen R. Haynes — Signature of Person Initiating

10/10/2025 — Date of Request

[redacted]

[redacted]

Appendix B4

Human Resources Response Letter

National University IRB
9388 Lightwave Ave., San Diego, CA 92123
irb@nu.edu

Date: 11/12/25

Hello NU IRB,

My name is [redacted] and I am the Superintendent at [redacted] Independent School District.

I have reviewed Allen Haynes's study, and I understand that they are recruiting participants who meet all of the following criteria:

1. A principal with at least two years of experience in their role.
2. A principal with a minimum of one year of experience implementing capacity-building with teachers who have resisted implementation.
3. A principal who has overcome barriers when implementing capacity-building.
4. A principal whose campus experienced an improvement in campus RLA test scores.

I grant permission to Allen Haynes to do the following:

1. Interview participants in an online interview via Zoom for 60 minutes
2. Assign participants to review their interview summary via email for 10-15 minutes
3. Invite and interview a subset of participants in a virtual focus group via Zoom for 45 to 60 minutes

If you have questions and would like to reach me, please do so at [redacted].

Thank you for your time,

[redacted]

Appendix C

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval Letter

National UNIVERSITY

9388 Lightwave Ave.
San Diego, CA 92123
irb@nu.edu

Notice of Exemption

September 17, 2025

To: Allen Haynes

Project Title: Principals' Perspectives on Overcoming Barriers Implementing Mandatory Capacity-Building in the Southwestern Region of Texas: A Qualitative Exploratory Case Study
NU IRB Number: IRB-FY25-26-183
Determination: Exempt from further review 45 CFR 46.101 Category 2.(ii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:
Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; or

Status: Active - Research activities may begin as of September 17, 2025

Dear Allen Haynes:

The study referenced above has been reviewed by the National University IRB. The IRB has determined your research is exempt from further review under 45 CFR 46.104, which means you will not need to renew your study and may begin your study effective immediately. However, if you find the need to change your study in any way, you will need to submit a modification to the IRB prior to implementing the changes. This will allow the IRB to determine whether or not the study still meets exemption criteria.

Please review your Post Approval Responsibilities here: Approved Documents Guidelines

For any questions regarding your protocol, please reach out to the IRB at irb@nu.edu.

Sincerely,

Dr. Joseph Marron, IRB Chair

Dr. Brianne Mongeon, Director, HRPP & IRB

Jenessa Eberhardt, Associate Director, HRPP & IRB

Appendix D1

Recruitment Email/Letter

National University IRB
9338 Lightwave Ave., San Diego, CA 92123
irb@nu.edu

My name is Allen Haynes, and I am a doctoral student at National University. I am conducting a research study to explore principals' perspectives on overcoming barriers to implementing instructional leadership and capacity-building practices at their campuses.

I am recruiting individuals who meet all the following criteria:

1. A principal with at least two years of experience in their role.
2. A principal with a minimum of one year of experience implementing capacity-building with teachers who have resisted implementation.
3. A principal who has overcome barriers when implementing capacity-building.
4. A principal whose campus experienced an improvement in campus RLA test scores.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following activities:

1. Participate in an online interview via Zoom for 60 minutes
2. Review interview summary via email for 10-15 minutes
3. Upon invitation, volunteer to participate with a subset of participants in a virtual focus group via Zoom for 45 to 60 minutes

During these activities, you will be asked questions about:

1. Your professional experiences with instructional leadership
2. Any barriers you have faced implementing effective capacity-building practices
3. Strategies you have employed to overcome barriers to effective instructional leadership practices

Participants in this study will receive a $15 Starbucks gift card via email after the interview.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact me at (915) 248-6028 or email allen.haynes@yahoo.com

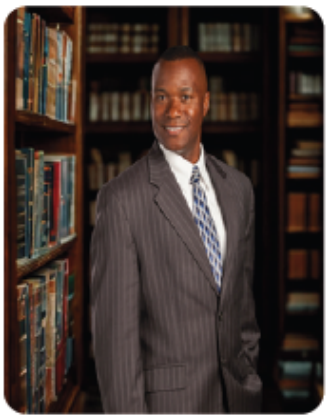
Thank you for considering participating in this voluntary research!

Allen R. Haynes
PhD Candidate
(915) 248-6028
a.haynes0444@o365.ncu.edu

Appendix D2

Recruitment Flyer

Seeking Principals for Instructional Leadership Research



Scan the QR code or click the link here to sign up today!

Study Purpose:

This research study is to explore principals' perspectives on overcoming barriers implementing instructional leadership and capacity-building practices at their campuses.

To Participate You Must:

Be a principal with at least two years of experience in your role; have a minimum of one year of experience implementing capacity-building with teachers who have resisted implementation; have overcome barriers when implementing capacity-building; and have a campus that has experienced an improvement in campus RLA test scores.

In This Study-Participants Will:

Participate in an online interview via Zoom for 60 minutes; review interview summary via email for 10-15 minutes; upon invitation, volunteer to participate with a subset of participants in a virtual focus group via Zoom for 45-60 minutes.

Participants In This Study Will:

Receive a $15 Starbucks gift card via email after the interview.

Essential Question: How do principals in Southwest Texas experience and address barriers when implementing mandatory school capacity-building to improve low RLA test scores?

Participants will be asked questions about:

- Background
- Leadership
- Barriers
- Strategies
- Sustainability

Interested? Contact Allen Haynes

915-248-6028

allen.haynes1@yahoo.com

Your leadership experience can shape the future of Texas schools.

National University

This research study is approved by National University IRB Protocol. All responses are confidential.

Appendix E

Consent Form

National University IRB
9338 Lightwave Ave., San Diego, CA 92123
irb@nu.edu

My name is Allen Haynes, and I am a doctoral student at National University (NU).

I'm asking you to take part in a research study about instructional leadership practices among K-12 school principals. The name of this research study is "Principals' Perspectives Overcoming Barriers Implementing Capacity-Building in Southwest Texas: A Qualitative Exploratory Case Study."

You may participate in this research if you meet all of the following criteria:

1. You are a principal with at least two years of experience in your role.
2. You have a minimum of one year of experience implementing capacity-building with teachers who have resisted implementation.
3. You have overcome barriers when implementing capacity-building.
4. Your campus experienced an improvement in campus RLA test scores.

I hope to include 8-15 people in this research.

Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in this study.

What you will be asked to do: If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following activities:

1. Participate in an online interview via Zoom for 60 minutes
2. Review interview summary via email for 10-15 minutes
3. Upon invitation, volunteer to participate with a subset of participants in a virtual focus group via Zoom for 45 to 60 minutes

During these activities, you will be asked questions about:

1. Your professional experiences with instructional leadership
2. Any barriers you have faced in implementing effective capacity-building practices
3. Strategies you have employed to overcome barriers to effective instructional leadership practices

Risks: There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts associated with this study. You can still skip any question you do not wish to answer, skip any activity, or stop participation at any time.

Benefits: If you participate, there are no direct benefits to you. This research may increase the body of knowledge in the subject area of this study.

Recording: I would like to audio/video record your responses with Zoom during the interview. You can disable the video function of the online meeting platform at any time.

Compensation: After you complete the interview, you will receive a $15 Starbucks gift card via email.

Confidentiality: I will keep records of this study private and take reasonable measures to protect the security of all your personal information. In any report I make public, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. I will securely store your data for 3 years. Then, I will delete electronic data and destroy paper data.

Taking part is voluntary: Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may quit at any time.

If you have questions: Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at a.haynes0444@o365.ncu.edu or at (915) 248-6028.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a subject in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) via email at irb@nu.edu.

Appendix F

One-to-One Interview Protocol

National University IRB
9338 Lightwave Ave., San Diego, CA 92123
irb@nu.edu

Introduction: Hello, and thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview today. My name is Allen Haynes, and I am a doctoral student at National University conducting my dissertation research. I hope the school year has been productive and positive for you and your campus so far. Again, I truly appreciate your time.

This interview is expected to last 60 minutes. I will be recording our discussion and taking notes to make sure I have complete information. Your responses will be held in confidence.

Consent: I would like to review the consent letter with you before we begin the interview.

Do you agree to participate in the study?
Participant: Yes _____ or No _____

Thank you. I am interested in your experiences with instructional leadership. This information will be confidential, and your individual answers will not be shared with anyone. Your perspectives and experiences are important to understanding how principals overcome barriers in implementing instructional leadership and capacity-building practices.

Do you have any questions before we get started?

Interview Questions:

1. Describe your current role and experience as a principal.
2. How would you define instructional leadership in your own words, and how is it reflected in your daily practices?

3. Which instructional leadership strategies have you personally implemented or adapted from district initiatives to build teacher capacity and improve low RLA scores?
4. In what ways are you expected to implement instructional capacity-building initiatives related to RLA performance on your campus, and how does this expectation shape your leadership practices?
5. Describe a significant barrier you faced when implementing evidence-based instructional leadership practices for RLA and the factors that contributed to it.
6. What organizational, cultural, or systemic challenges most affect your ability to lead instructional change, and how have you addressed these challenges?
7. Describe a successful effort where leadership strategies improved sustained versus short-term RLA outcomes, including the key actions you took and what made them effective.
8. What support (internal or external) would most enhance your ability to implement instructional leadership effectively?
9. If you could redesign the RLA capacity-building process on your campus, what changes would you make and why?
10. What practices or systems have you found most effective in sustaining improvements in teacher capacity and RLA performance over time?

Conclusion: Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today and to share your perspectives and experiences involving instructional leadership and capacity-building.

Debriefing Questions:

1. Do you have any questions or concerns?
2. Is there anything you would like to add or clarify about how you overcame barriers in implementing instructional leadership and capacity-building practices at your campus?

Next Steps: After this interview, I will format the transcript to remove typos and spacing issues, then email it to you for review. You will have seven days from today to confirm its accuracy, after which accuracy will be assumed if no response is received. In addition, you may be invited to participate in a focus group with peers who shared similar responses, to further discuss important themes that emerged.

Incentive: As an incentive and token of appreciation for participating in the study, please check your email within 24 hours for a $15 Starbucks digital gift card.

Appendix G

Focus Group Protocol

National University IRB
9338 Lightwave Ave., San Diego, CA 92123
irb@nu.edu

Introduction: Hello, and thank you for responding to the focus group invite and joining me again today. Again, I am Allen Haynes, a doctoral student at National University conducting my dissertation research. I truly appreciate your continued participation and the insights you have already shared in our initial interview session. As before, I am deeply grateful for your time.

This interview is expected to last 45 to 60 minutes. I will be recording our discussion and taking notes to make sure I have complete information. Your responses will be held in confidence.

Consent: I would like to reiterate the consent letter with you before we begin the focus group.

Do you agree to participate in the study?
Participant: Yes _____ or No _____

Thank you. I am interested in your experiences with instructional leadership. This information will be confidential, and your individual answers will not be shared with anyone. Your perspectives and experiences are important to understanding how principals overcome barriers in implementing instructional leadership and capacity-building practices.

Do you have any questions before we get started?

Interview Questions:

1. Name something you identified as a cultural barrier that hindered capacity-building at your campus? Then explain how you addressed this cultural hindrance.
2. Principals are involved in several scheduled activities and unexpected events daily. Discuss two administrative duties that act as barriers to instructional leadership at your campus.

3. As an instructional leader, name your most effective skill or practice impacting the success of capacity-building at your campus.
4. Discuss a data-driven decision that influenced a permanent campus instructional leadership practice and elaborate on its effect on RLA outcomes.
5. How do PLCs drive capacity-building and student learning outcomes on your campus?
6. How do you confirm and document that capacity-building efforts are being effective in your teachers' skills and practices?
7. Which productive systems or processes of instructional leadership exist at your campus? Please elaborate.

Conclusion: Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today and to share your perspectives and experiences involving instructional leadership and capacity-building.

Debriefing Questions:

1. Do you have any questions or concerns?
2. Is there anything you would like to add or clarify about how you overcame barriers in implementing instructional leadership and capacity-building practices at your campus?

Next Steps: After this focus group, I will format the transcript to remove typos and spacing issues, then email it to you for review. You will have seven days from today to confirm its accuracy, after which accuracy will be assumed if no response is received.

Incentive: As an incentive and token of appreciation for participating in the study, please check your email within 24 hours for a $15 Starbucks digital gift card.

Appendix H1

Expert Review Panel Protocol and Evaluation Matrix for Interview Questions (Bloomberg, 2023, p. 283)

Matrix Purpose: This matrix is designed to assist an expert review panel in evaluating each question to be used in a semi-structured interview for alignment with the study's statement of the problem, purpose of the study, and research questions.

Directions: Please rate each interview question using the criteria provided. Each question should be scored from 0 to 2 for each criterion. A total score of 6 or below indicates that the question requires revision. Please include any comments or suggestions as required.

Statement of the Problem: The problem to be addressed in this study is many K-12 public schools' reading/language arts (RLA) test scores did not meet grade level in the southwest region of Texas, prompting the mandatory implementation of intervention measures to build capacity and increase student learning outcomes (Godina, 2024; Texas Education Agency, 2024).

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study is to explore how principals overcome barriers faced when implementing mandatory capacity-building in schools to improve low RLA test scores.

RQ1: What barriers do principals face when implementing mandatory school capacity-building to improve low reading/language arts (RLA) test scores?

RQ2: How do principals overcome barriers when implementing mandatory school capacity-building to improve low reading/language arts (RLA) test scores?

#	Questions	A	B	C	D	E	Total	Comments/Suggestions
1	Describe your current role and experience as a principal in Southwest Texas?	1	1	2	2	2	8	It doesn't tie strongly to the problem/purpose (capacity-building for RLA).
2	How would you define instructional leadership in your own words, and how is it reflected in your daily practices?	2	1	2	2	2	9	Consider linking more directly to barriers or RLA outcomes.
3	Which instructional leadership strategies have you personally implemented or adapted from district initiatives to build teacher capacity and improve low RLA scores?	2	2	2	2	2	10	

4	In what ways are you expected to implement instructional capacity-building initiatives related to RLA performance on your campus?	2	2	2	1	2	9	Suggest adding…and how does this expectation shape your leadership practices?
5	Describe a significant barrier you faced when implementing evidence-based instructional leadership practices for RLA and the factors that contributed to it.	2	2	2	2	2	10	
6	What organizational, cultural, or systemic challenges most affect your ability to lead instructional change, and how have you addressed these challenges?	2	2	2	2	2	10	Excellent alignment to RQ1. Clear, open-ended, and invites rich examples.
7	Describe a successful effort where leadership strategies improved RLA outcomes, including the key actions you took and what made them effective.	2	2	2	2	2	10	Perfect alignment to RQ2. You might clarify "sustained" versus "short-term" improvements for richer data.
8	What support (such as professional development, district guidance, talent management) would most enhance your ability to implement instructional leadership effectively?	2	2	1	2	2	9	Good, but risks leading the respondent toward certain categories (PD, district guidance).
9	If you could redesign the RLA capacity-building process on your campus, what changes would you make and why?	2	2	2	2	2	10	Very strong , invites visioning, problem-solving, and reflection.
10	What practices or systems have you found most effective in sustaining improvements in teacher capacity and RLA performance over time?	2	2	2	2	2	10	

Criteria:
A-Alignment with Study's Problem and Purpose (Questions are clearly linked to and directly address the overarching problem and purpose of the study).
B-Alignment with Research Questions & Specificity (Questions directly align with the specific research questions (RQ1 or RQ2) and are highly relevant and specific to the constructs, concepts, or area of focus).
C-Clarity, Precision, and Unbiased Wording (Questions are worded in a clear, distinct, and precise manner).
D-Depth of Insight Expected (Questions are designed to extract rich, reflective, and detailed responses, encouraging participants to provide detailed and concrete examples that contribute to profound insights).
E-Opportunity for Probing (The questions are designed to encourage natural follow-up probes, which allow the interviewer to ask additional questions to obtain more detailed information).

Scoring Scale:
0 = No alignment
1 = Weak/indirect alignment
2 = Clear and direct alignment

Appendix H2

Expert Review Panel Protocol and Evaluation Matrix for Interview Questions (Bloomberg, 2023, p. 283)

Matrix Purpose: This matrix is designed to assist an expert review panel in evaluating each question to be used in a semi-structured interview for alignment with the study's statement of the problem, purpose of the study, and research questions.

Directions: Please rate each interview question using the criteria provided. Each question should be scored from 0 to 2 for each criterion. A total score of 6 or below indicates that the question requires revision. Please include any comments or suggestions as required.

Statement of the Problem: The problem to be addressed in this study is many K-12 public schools' reading/language arts (RLA) test scores did not meet grade level in the southwest region of Texas, prompting the mandatory implementation of intervention measures to build capacity and increase student learning outcomes (Godina, 2024; Texas Education Agency, 2024).

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study is to explore how principals overcome barriers faced when implementing mandatory capacity-building in schools to improve low RLA test scores.

RQ1: What barriers do principals face when implementing mandatory school capacity-building to improve low reading/language arts (RLA) test scores?

RQ2: How do principals overcome barriers when implementing mandatory school capacity-building to improve low reading/language arts (RLA) test scores?

#	Questions	A	B	C	D	E	Total	Comments/Suggestions
1	Describe your current role and experience as a principal in Southwest Texas?	1	2	2	2	2	9	Why Southwest Texas? The purpose doesn't state it and the overall questions do not state it.
2	How would you define instructional leadership in your own words, and how is it reflected in your daily practices?	2	2	2	2	2	10	
3	Which instructional leadership strategies have you personally implemented or adapted from district initiatives to build teacher capacity and improve low RLA scores?	2	2	2	2	2	10	

4	In what ways are you expected to implement instructional capacity-building initiatives related to RLA performance on your campus?	2	2	2	2	2	10	
5	Describe a significant barrier you faced when implementing evidence-based instructional leadership practices for RLA and the factors that contributed to it.	2	2	2	2	2	10	
6	What organizational, cultural, or systemic challenges most affect your ability to lead instructional change, and how have you addressed these challenges?	2	2	2	2	2	10	
7	Describe a successful effort where leadership strategies improved RLA outcomes, including the key actions you took and what made them effective.	2	2	2	2	2	10	
8	What support (such as professional development, district guidance, talent management) would most enhance your ability to implement instructional leadership effectively?	2	2	2	2	2	10	
9	If you could redesign the RLA capacity-building process on your campus, what changes would you make and why?	2	2	2	2	2	10	
10	What practices or systems have you found most effective in sustaining improvements in teacher capacity and RLA performance over time?	2	2	2	2	2	10	

Criteria:
A-Alignment with Study's Problem and Purpose (Questions are clearly linked to and directly address the overarching problem and purpose of the study).
B-Alignment with Research Questions & Specificity (Questions directly align with the specific research questions (RQ1 or RQ2) and are highly relevant and specific to the constructs, concepts, or area of focus).
C-Clarity, Precision, and Unbiased Wording (Questions are worded in a clear, distinct, and precise manner).
D-Depth of Insight Expected (Questions are designed to extract rich, reflective, and detailed responses, encouraging participants to provide detailed and concrete examples that contribute to profound insights).
E-Opportunity for Probing (The questions are designed to encourage natural follow-up probes, which allow the interviewer to ask additional questions to obtain more detailed information).

Scoring Scale:
0 = No alignment
1 = Weak/indirect alignment
2 = Clear and direct alignment

Appendix H3

Expert Review Panel Protocol and Evaluation Matrix for Interview Questions (Bloomberg, 2023, p. 283)

Matrix Purpose: This matrix is designed to assist an expert review panel in evaluating each question to be used in a semi-structured interview for alignment with the study's statement of the problem, purpose of the study, and research questions.

Directions: Please rate each interview question using the criteria provided. Each question should be scored from 0 to 2 for each criterion. A total score of 6 or below indicates that the question requires revision. Please include any comments or suggestions as required.

Statement of the Problem: The problem to be addressed in this study is many K-12 public schools' reading/language arts (RLA) test scores did not meet grade level in the southwest region of Texas, prompting the mandatory implementation of intervention measures to build capacity and increase student learning outcomes (Godina, 2024; Texas Education Agency, 2024).

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study is to explore how principals overcome barriers faced when implementing mandatory capacity-building in schools to improve low RLA test scores.

RQ1: What barriers do principals face when implementing mandatory school capacity-building to improve low reading/language arts (RLA) test scores?

RQ2: How do principals overcome barriers when implementing mandatory school capacity-building to improve low reading/language arts (RLA) test scores?

#	Questions	A	B	C	D	E	Total	Comments/Suggestions
1	Describe your current role and experience as a principal in Southwest Texas?	0	2	1	1	0	4	Question does not align to the purpose, problem, and RQs. Remember, the interviewer's perspective and experience are interrelated to the purpose/problem and RQ content.
2	How would you define instructional leadership in your own words, and how is it reflected in your daily practices?	2	2	2	2	2	10	

3	Which instructional leadership strategies have you personally implemented or adapted from district initiatives to build teacher capacity and improve low RLA scores?	2	2	2	2	2	10	
4	In what ways are you expected to implement instructional capacity-building initiatives related to RLA performance on your campus?	2	2	2	2	2	10	I would remove…In
5	Describe a significant barrier you faced when implementing evidence-based instructional leadership practices for RLA and the factors that contributed to it.	2	2	2	2	2	10	
6	What organizational, cultural, or systemic challenges most affect your ability to lead instructional change, and how have you addressed these challenges?	2	2	2	2	2	10	
7	Describe a successful effort where leadership strategies improved RLA outcomes, including the key actions you took and what made them effective.	2	2	2	2	2	10	
8	What support (such as professional development, district guidance, talent management) would most enhance your ability to implement instructional leadership effectively?	2	2	2	2	2	10	
9	If you could redesign the RLA capacity-building process on your campus, what changes would you make and why?	2	2	2	2	2	10	
10	What practices or systems have you found most effective in sustaining improvements in teacher capacity and RLA performance over time?	2	2	2	2	2	10	

Criteria:
A-Alignment with Study's Problem and Purpose (Questions are clearly linked to and directly address the overarching problem and purpose of the study).
B-Alignment with Research Questions & Specificity (Questions directly align with the specific research questions (RQ1 or RQ2) and are highly relevant and specific to the constructs, concepts, or area of focus).
C-Clarity, Precision, and Unbiased Wording (Questions are worded in a clear, distinct, and precise manner).
D-Depth of Insight Expected (Questions are designed to extract rich, reflective, and detailed responses, encouraging participants to provide detailed and concrete examples that contribute to profound insights).
E-Opportunity for Probing (The questions are designed to encourage natural follow-up probes, which allow the interviewer to ask additional questions to obtain more detailed information).

Scoring Scale:
0 = No alignment

1 = Weak/indirect alignment 2 = Clear and direct alignment

Appendix I

Summary Audit Trail: From Initial Codes to Potential Themes

Using Braun and Clarke's (2021) reflexive thematic analysis, an audit trail of initial codes to potential themes is summarized in this appendix. Beginning with Phase 2: *Generating Initial Codes*, the audit yielded 73 independent codes from the one-to-one interview transcripts. In Phase 3: *Searching for Themes*, 10 categories emerged during the analysis. The categories were then sorted into three potential themes during Phase 4: *Reviewing Themes*, which later evolved into four final themes and reported in the findings.

#	Name	Files	References
Sorting 1-Barriers Faced When Implementing Capacity-Building Through IL		**8**	**149**
	Category 1-Individual or Team Barriers Hindering IL	**8**	**56**
1	Barrier-Groups of Teachers Divided on Ways of Doing Things	4	15
2	Barrier-Lack of Knowledge	4	10
3	Barrier-Lack of Relationships	2	2
4	Barrier-Lack of Trust	1	1
5	Barrier-Teacher Lack of Accountability	5	15
6	Barrier-Teachers Unwilling to Work Outside of Their Comfort Zones	5	13
	Category 2-Leadership Barriers Hindering IL	**8**	**28**
7	Barrier-Lack of Communication	3	5
8	Barrier-Other Administrative Duties as an IL Distractor	6	16
9	Barrier-Perception of Favoritism	1	2
10	Barrier-Principal Perception of a Lack of Personal IL Capacity	2	5
	Category 3-Systemic Barriers Hindering IL	**8**	**65**
11	Barrier-Equity	1	1
12	Barrier-Lack of District Resources	1	3
13	Barrier-Low Performance and Gaps in Learning	3	13
14	Barrier-Major Campus Adversity	2	6
15	Barrier-Not Having Enough Information	2	3
16	Barrier-Pressure to Sustain High Ratings	3	14
17	Barrier-Teacher Vacancy and Turnover	3	4
18	Barrier-Underdeveloped Learning Culture	7	21
Sorting 2-Actionable Approaches, Essential Qualities, and Structured Frameworks of IL		**8**	**562**
	Category 4-Leadership Traits Contributing to Effective IL	**8**	**110**
19	Be Flexible	1	1
20	Be Inclusive	1	2
21	Be Open to Feedback	1	1
22	Be Proactive	1	2

23	Be Receptive	1	2
24	Be Working with a Team	6	21
25	Building Capacity is a Continuous Process	8	29
26	Expectations-High	5	30
27	Modeling	1	4
28	Sharing the Why	7	18
Category 5-Managing Strategies that Build Effective IL		**8**	**212**
29	Autonomy as an IL Strategy	2	2
30	Building Trust as an IL Strategy	5	12
31	Celebrations as an IL Strategy	5	16
32	Collaborating with Teachers as an IL Strategy	7	19
33	Consistency as an IL Strategy	5	11
34	Data Analysis as an IL Strategy	7	37
35	Effective Planning as an IL Strategy	2	2
36	Implementing Predeveloped Lesson Plans as an IL Strategy	4	13
37	Implementing Teacher-Developed Lesson Plans as an IL Strategy	5	12
38	Instructional Rounds as an IL Strategy	3	5
39	Internalize as an IL Strategy	3	4
40	Leader Presence as an IL Strategy	5	18
41	Lesson Studies as an IL Strategy	1	2
42	Looping Teachers by Grade Levels as an IL Strategy	1	1
43	Observations as an IL Strategy	8	20
44	Professional Development as an IL Strategy	5	22
45	Teacher Empowerment as an IL Strategy	4	8
46	Trying Something New as an IL Strategy	2	2
47	Vertical Alignment as an IL Strategy	2	6
Category 6-Skills and Practices Contributing to Effective IL		**8**	**124**
48	Assistant Principal as an Instructional Leader	7	27
49	Developing Teacher-Leaders	5	12
50	Improve Student Learning	7	31
51	Instructional Coaches	5	14
52	Principal as Instructional Leader	8	25
53	Principal Experience	5	15
Category 7-Systems and Processes Contributing to Effective IL		**8**	**116**
54	Developing the Mission and Vision	3	11
55	Differentiate the Professional Development	6	30
56	Individualized Education Plan	3	3
57	Instructional Leadership Team	8	34
58	Professional Learning Communities (PLC)	7	38

Sorting 3-Actions Taken to Overcome Barriers When Implementing Capacity-Building Through IL		**8**	**338**
	Category 8-Overcoming Individual or Team Barriers	**8**	**50**
59	Overcoming Barriers-Building Relationships	7	28
60	Overcoming Barriers-Giving Teachers Voice	4	11
61	Overcoming Barriers-Helping Teachers Understand	6	11
	Category 9-Overcoming Leadership Barriers	**8**	**125**
62	Overcoming Barriers-Collaboration Among Principals	4	7
63	Overcoming Barriers-Effective Communication	6	19
64	Overcoming Barriers-Effective Monitoring and Feedback	8	55
65	Overcoming Barriers-Holding Teachers Accountable	7	16
66	Overcoming Barriers-Receptive Implementation	3	4
67	Overcoming Barriers-Time Management	4	20
68	Overcoming Barriers-Using Leadership Agendas	2	4
	Category 10-Overcoming Systemic Barriers	**8**	**163**
69	Overcoming Barriers-Building a Learning Culture	8	40
70	Overcoming Barriers-Building Systems with Fidelity	7	36
71	Overcoming Barriers-District Support	6	23
72	Overcoming Barriers-Educational Approach or Model	6	48
73	Overcoming Barriers-Talent Management	4	16

Appendix J

NU IRB Closure Letter

National University

9388 Lightwave Ave.
San Diego, CA 92123
irb@nu.edu

Notice of Protocol Closure

March 13, 2026

To: Allen Haynes

Project Title: Principals' Perspectives on Overcoming Barriers Implementing Mandatory Capacity-Building in the Southwestern Region of Texas: A Qualitative Exploratory Case Study
NU IRB Number: IRB-FY25-26-183

Status: Closed as of March 13, 2026

Dear Allen Haynes:

Thank you for your submission of materials for this research study. The National University Institutional Review Board has CLOSED your project. **You must adhere to the following conditions:**

1. Once a study has been officially closed via a Request to Close Study, it cannot be re-opened.
2. If a later use for the research data is identified, you must submit a new research proposal for the use of the previously collected data.
3. The later use of the data may qualify for an exemption, if the existing data is recorded without identifiers; however, you must submit a new research proposal prior to using the data.
4. You will maintain the confidentiality of all data collected and will adhere to the federal policy of storing all data and consent documents in a secured environment for a minimum of 3 years.

If you have any questions, you may contact the IRB at irb@nu.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

Sincerely,

Dr. Joseph Marron, IRB Chair

Dr. Brianne Mongeon, Director, HRPP & IRB

Jenessa Eberhardt, Associate Director, HRPP & IRB