

**EVEN THOUGH STUDENTS ARE GETTING A HEAD START, WHY
ARE TEACHERS NOT FINISHING THE RACE?**

By

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A Scholarly Delivery Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Educational Leadership

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Signature Page

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ABSTRACT

The final composite examines factors contributing to teacher attrition in Head Start programs and explores the potential of leadership support and preparation in retaining these teachers. The initial scholarly deliverable is a case study article that can be utilized to instruct doctoral or master's degree candidates in the field of educational leadership. Titled "Battling Teacher Attrition in Head Start," this case study concentrates on challenges faced by Head Start programs, offering innovative approaches to advertising, hiring, and onboarding to reduce resignations and attract highly qualified educators. The concluding scholarly deliverable is an empirical article titled "Even Though Students are Getting a Head Start, Why Aren't Teachers Finishing the Race." This empirical study delves into the factors contributing to teacher attrition in Head Start programs and explores the potential of leadership support and preparation in retaining these teachers.



**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR HUMAN SUBJECTS
Letter of Approval**

June 15, 2023

Dr. Harper:

The West Texas A & M University Institutional Review Board is pleased to inform you that upon review, proposal #2023.05.002 for your study titled, “Even Though Students are Getting a Head Start, Why Aren’t Teachers Finishing the Race”, meets the requirements of the WTAMU Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) No. 15.99.05.W1.01AR Institutional Review Board (Use of Human Subjects in Research). Approval is granted for one calendar year. This approval expires on June 15, 2024.

Principal investigators assume the following responsibilities:

1. **Continuing Review:** The protocol must be renewed on or before the expiration date if the research project requires more than one year for completion. A [Continuing Review form](#) along with required documents must be submitted on or before the stated deadline. Failure to do so will result in study termination and/or loss of funding.
2. **Completion Report:** At the conclusion of the research project (including data analysis and final written papers), a [Close out form](#) must be submitted to AR-EHS.
3. **Unanticipated Problems and Adverse Events:** Pursuant to [SOP No. 15.99.05.W1.13AR](#), unanticipated problems and serious adverse events must be reported to AR-EHS.
4. **Reports of Potential Non-Compliance:** Pursuant to [SOP No. 15.99.05.W1.05AR](#), potential non-compliance, including deviations from the protocol and violations, must be reported to the IRB office immediately.
5. **Amendments:** Changes to the protocol must be requested by submitting an [Amendment form](#) to AR-EHS for review by the IRB. The Amendment must be approved by the IRB before being implemented. Amendments do not extend time granted on the initial approval
6. **Consent Forms:** When using a consent form, only the IRB approved form is allowed.
7. **Audit:** Any proposal may be subject to audit by the IRB Administrator during the life of the study. Investigators are responsible for maintaining complete and accurate records for five years and making them available for inspection upon request.
8. **Recruitment:** All recruitment materials must be approved by the IRB. Recruitment materials distributed to potential participants must use the approved text and include

the study's IRB number, approval date, and expiration dates in the following format:
WTAMU IRB##-##-## Approved: ##/##/#### Expiration Date: ##/##/####.

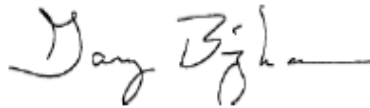
9. **FERPA and PPRA:** Investigators conducting research with students must have appropriate approvals from the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

administrator at the institution where the research will be conducted in accordance with the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) if applicable to the research being proposed. The Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (PPRA) protects the rights of parents in students ensuring that written parental consent is required for participation in surveys, analysis, or evaluation that ask questions falling into categories of protected information.

Sixty days prior to the expiration of this proposal, you will receive a notification of the approaching expiration date at which time you will need to submit an [Amendment/Continuation/Close out](#) form.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,



Dr. Gary Bigham
Chair, WTAMU IRB



Dr. Angela Spaulding
Vice President of Research and Compliance

Acknowledgement

This dedication is a testament to the love, support, and encouragement I have received from my incredible husband, Arthur Martinez, and my beautiful parents, Rose and Robert Trevino. Without them, this journey would not have been possible.

To my dearest husband, Arthur, you have been my rock and my pillar of strength. When the weight of the world seemed too much to bear, you were there, holding my hand and reminding me of my own resilience. Especially midway through this journey, when we found out that I was in Stage 4 renal failure. Your relentless belief in me has given me the courage to keep pushing forward, even when I doubted myself the most. Thank you for being my constant source of inspiration and for loving me unconditionally.

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Battling Teacher Attrition in Head Start

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Abstract

Although the administration has aimed to increase the qualifications of Head Start teachers over the past 50 years, programs are facing high teacher attrition rates. These early childhood teachers are resigning from Head Start for reasons such as inadequate compensation, lack of training, and high-level responsibilities to produce high student outcomes. Facing an era of massive resignations, this program must respond to the critical need of high attrition rates. This case study focuses on questions and scenarios faced by Head Start programs to become innovative in advertising, hiring, and onboarding ideas to lower the number of resignations and attain high-qualified teachers.

Keywords: attrition rates, teacher retention, Head Start teachers

Case Study

Head Start is one of the nation's largest early childhood education programs created to break the cycle of poverty by providing comprehensive and educational services to families in need (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2021). In the past 50 years, administrations have passed bills to improve the program by increasing funding and implementing systems to improve the quality of services (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2021). Since then, the program has been reconstructed and expanded by legislation to improve the quality of services. To increase the quality of classroom instruction, in 1998, a "bipartisan legislation mandated that by September 2003 at least 50% of Head Start teachers nationwide in center-based programs have an A.A., B.A., or graduate degree in early childhood education... or related field" (Hart & Schumacher, 2005, p. 5).

Head Start was revised and reauthorized again in 2007, stating no "later than September 30, 2013, at least 50% of Head Start teachers nationwide in center-based programs...have a baccalaureate or advanced degree in early childhood education..." (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2007). According to the Office of Head Start Program Information Report of 2019, 38.12% obtain a B.A. in early childhood education, 19.81% have a B.A. in another field with "coursework equivalent to a major relating to early childhood education with experience teaching preschool-aged children" (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2019, p. 3).

Although Head Start has increased the teaching qualifications, the quality of teachers and the high attrition rate continue to be a concern. According to Wells (2015), Head Start's high teacher turnover rates are connected to inadequate compensation, lack

of training, high-level responsibilities and "thus limit the potential positive outcomes that could be delivered to the children and their families" (p. 153). In the Program Information Report from the Office of Head Start Enterprise System (2019), 615 Head Start teachers in Texas left the program. Of those teachers, 27.89% left for higher pay in a comparable role, 11.06% changed their career field, and 60.16% left for other reasons not noted (p. 11). The outlined teaching qualifications illustrate the high attrition rate and low teacher qualifications in the Head Start program servicing three and four-year-old children in different social-economic demographic areas that promote equal school readiness outcomes as state-funded prekindergarten programs.

The purpose of this case study is to address these high attrition rates influencing early childhood teachers to resign from Head Start and to discuss and problem-solve by creating innovative ideas in advertising, hiring, and onboarding ideas to lower the number of resignations and attain high-qualified teachers. Without alignment of state and federal prekindergarten programs, inequalities in staffing and education will continue, thus increasing the complexity of closing the achievement gaps.

Case Narrative

Over the past 3 years, the Children's ABC Head Start Program, a nonprofit agency, has been awarded several grants throughout Utah due to their strong Classroom Assessment Scoring System, classroom teacher-child interaction classroom observation tool, results, and fully compliant federal audits demonstrating their ability to improve the program's quality quickly. As such, the Children's ABC Head Start program has demonstrated its capacity to effectively transition program operations while also being sensitive to the needs of current Head Start families. During this time, the superintendent

of the program built a leadership team to move the grants forward. In a short time, their leadership team had restructured a smaller Head Start program that had struggled with fiscal and ineffectiveness for years and begun to assimilate a similar process for the newly awarded grants. In addition, the Children's ABC Head Start program had commitments that expanded from two to 13 Independent School Districts (ISDs) and growing community partners across the state of Utah to provide comprehensive and expanded services to preschool children and their families. The partnerships with the ISDs were designed to provide Head Start students with a highly qualified teacher and an easier transition to kindergarten.

One of the leadership team members, the director of education, was onboarded with Children's ABC Head Start Program in 2019 and has since noticed that there had been an overwhelming influx of resignations of teaching staff in the program and had not been able to maintain the retention rate. Nancy had an extensive early childhood background working in the ISD for over 18 years. She believed that her experience would help transition the vision to the reality of providing high-quality education to children in need within the Children's ABC program. One strategy to begin closing the achievement gap would be to hire high-quality teachers.

Nancy worked with the human resource department to create a job description that would attract quality applicants and contain the minimum qualifications at the same time. The positions were posted throughout the state on various platforms such as Indeed, Monster, Workforce, etc. Applicants would apply, and some would eventually be hired. However, she noticed the teaching staff's high attrition rate about a year later. She wondered what she could do to create a larger applicant pool and to keep teachers from

resigning. She thought to herself, "I know, we'll have a 'Teams' meeting on Monday to brainstorm ideas." Nancy then sent out a Teams invite to her area directors for Monday.

Collaborative Meeting Sessions

Nancy waited patiently as her three area directors logged into the Teams meeting. As each logged in, they sighed about their long Monday meetings and the drama for the day. Oddly, each one also made a statement about a new resignation turned in. Cindy exclaimed, "At the rate, we are going, we may not be able to keep any of our centers open!" Nancy asked, "What are the reasons this time, and what are we going to do about this?" "Well, one teacher said that she doesn't get paid enough to change 3-year-old's diapers," sighed Lisa. Nancy explained:

Well, you don't have to be potty trained to attend school, so there isn't anything we can do about that one. Anyways, part of the teacher's role is to transition the child out of diapers into using the restroom independently.

Cindy chimed in and said, "Another reason given was that she wasn't paid enough for our high standards, and it was stressing her out." Nancy responded, "We are not going to change our standards. I can tell you that right now. However, we need to figure out how to advertise in different avenues. So, what are some ideas?" Lisa suggested:

We can ask to repost the job positions, and I think we need to go to the local colleges and try to recruit students in the early childhood field. I know some of the directors, and I can go over and talk to them about our program.

Nancy replied with hope, "I think it is worth trying to repost the positions and reach out to the community. Will you work with the human resource department to get these posted by the end of the week?"

The area directors of education began to work with the human resource departments to advertise in the local and surrounding areas, including using social media resources to reach populations that might not be reached through traditional avenues. Even with the reposting of vacant positions, they did not notice a difference in the applicant pool. Another idea was brought up to advertise the vacancies by posting fliers in the local community. This effort was organized by the area directors and staff, which they spent an afternoon canvassing the area, posting flyers, and spreading word of mouth.

The director of education felt the pressure to determine why Head Start retention rates were so high. She reached out to a director in the human resource department to inquire why teachers were resigning and stated their reasons on the employee exit forms. She thought this might help her find out why teachers were leaving the program. The human resource director was obliged to accumulate answers for her. After reading the employee exit forms, she discovered two main reasons their teachers were leaving: a) They were leaving to work at another position, meeting the same job expectations at a higher pay rate at another location; b) They were leaving to work at a school district with higher pay and the same expectations. Nancy and the area directors of education continued to collaborate with the human resources director and with community agencies to increase the applicant pool; however, it was found that within the first year, the teacher pool was not increasing, and the teachers were submitting letters of resignation at an alarming rate.

A few months later, the vice president of human resources reached out to the leadership of each program within the agency to see if we were interested in scheduling a

Teams meeting to discuss the high attrition rates they are facing and to discuss possible strategies and solutions.

Monday, September 13, Retention Teams Meeting with Leadership

Nancy was excited to be on the call, since a couple of the vice presidents and other agency leaders would be in attendance. This was the time for her to be able to express her thoughts and present research as to why attrition rate rates were high and possible solutions. Stacy, the vice president of human resources, introduced herself as others were chiming in and letting everyone know that this was an open forum and that she expected everyone to give input. If some did not speak, then she would call them out. Therefore, without hesitation, Nancy began to speak. "Good afternoon, everyone," Nancy said with a smile. "I will go ahead and give it a shot and start talking about the high attrition rates in our Head Start program and identify factors and possible solutions that we would like to implement." She continued:

My first concern is the rate of pay. Children's ABC Head Start program starting pay for a teacher with an Associate's degree with one year of experience is an average of \$15.57. A teacher entering with a Bachelor's degree with one year of experience averages \$16.25 an hour. The cost of living factors does not even factor in on the hourly rate.

Stacy stated, "Yeah, I know." Another leadership member chimed in and said, "They are leaving to the ISD's. Who wouldn't? They are paying an average of 20k more annually for a starting teacher with the same qualifications". Nancy continued, "Our teachers could easily leave us and have a better starting hourly pay at Starbucks or Bucees with an

education incentive." Nancy continued. "So, what do you propose?" asked Stacy. Nancy stated:

I propose that we start with a higher minimum wage and incentives. We could offer a hiring incentive, and then we could offer another incentive on the 90-day evaluation. In doing so, this would allow us to attract staff with higher qualifications. At the moment, we have 1.6 million that we need to spend before the budget year is over; we could also give a retention bonus since a memorandum has been issued by the Office of Head Start outlining approved ways we can use funds for retention purposes.

Mark (director of foster programs) liked the idea and started discussing qualified staff filling those positions. "How do we begin the conversation with community partners such as school districts and universities?" he asked. Stacy ended the Teams meeting by stating:

Oh, that is another conversation since we are running out of time. Nancy, please continue the discussion with Michael, Executive Director of Children's ABC Head Start Program, separately about your ideas so we can move forward. Thank you, everyone, for attending this meeting, and we will have another one since there is more to talk about.

Nancy was excited to continue the conversation about the incentives with the Executive Director and possibly initiate some of the ideas ASAP. The next day, Nancy scheduled a meeting with Michael to discuss the incentives to retain and hire staff.

Wednesday, September 15, Teams Meeting with Superintendent

Nancy and Michael met via Teams to discuss the high attrition rate, the quality of candidates applying for the teaching positions, and the possible incentive ideas to relieve

some of these issues. "Hey, Nancy! I heard the meeting went very well the other day," stated Michael. "Yes, we talked about the high attrition rates we are noticing and ideas that we can implement to relieve some of those issues," replied Nancy. Michael was defeated and replied:

Those are good ideas, but once the new budget year starts, we will not have the 1.6 million to allocate to salaries to support what we implement now. What area in the program would have to give up that amount of funding? We need more resources, and I cannot justify increasing the minimum wage at this time without a plan.

Nancy felt deflated. What could they do without additional funding? How could they attract and keep quality teachers? What did this mean to their Head Start program?

Teacher Notes

The impact of preschool-funded programs in the United States directly plays a role in the preschool's collective efforts to provide quality education and student outcomes (Karch, 2010). In Texas, a prekindergarten teacher must achieve a "bachelor's degree in early childhood education or special education," a teaching certification, and an additional high-quality certifier to meet the high-quality criteria to teach in a classroom (Education Code, 2021). According to Hart and Schumacher (2005), "teachers with higher levels of education in early childhood development can improve outcomes for preschool children" (p. 2). Although Head Start has increased the teaching qualifications, the quality of teachers and the high attrition rate continue to be a concern.

Teachers voluntarily leaving the profession at high rates in Head Start programs continues to be an issue. According to Wells (2015), poor pay, a lack of training, and

high-level responsibilities all contribute to the high turnover rates of Head Start teachers, which restricts the potential beneficial results that may be provided to the children and their families. Although Head Start has gradually increased the teaching qualifications (Office of Head Start, 2021), the rate of pay has not been maintained, and Head Start educators are aware that they will continue to live at the poverty level (Myers, 2021). The Program Information Report from the Office of Head Start Enterprise System (2022) reported that 1,484 Head Start teachers in Texas left the program. Of those teachers, 24.25% left for higher pay in a similar role, 28.32% moved to the state prekindergarten or other early childhood education program, and 48.37% changed their career field or for unrelated reasons (p.6).

Discussion Questions

1. At the beginning of the case study, it was stated that Nancy worked with the human resource department to create a job description that would attract quality applicants and contain the minimum qualifications at the same time. If the applicant pool is not expanding over time, what other programs could be implemented immediately to increase the number of candidates without compromising the quality of applicants? How will you ensure that the candidate is fully prepared to enter the classroom and begin instruction without compromising a high-quality education and a safe and nurturing environment?
2. What other ways can the agency advertise or recruit quality teachers besides using social media platforms and recruiting at the local universities?

3. What factors may influence a certified early childhood teacher to select a federally funded program, such as Head Start, with significantly lower funding than a stated funded prekindergarten program with equivalent student outcomes?
4. Suppose you were a center director facing high attrition rates with limited access to funding. What are other incentives that you could implement that could positively impact a teacher's choice of employment?

Activities

Currently, the executive director has an excess of 1.6 million, and in three months, the new budget year will begin in April. However, on April 27, 2021, President Biden signed an executive order to increase minimum wages to \$15 per hour. The executive order stated that raising the minimum wage to \$15 per hour "enhances worker productivity and generates higher-quality work by boosting workers' health, morale, and effort; reducing absenteeism and turnover; and lowering supervisory and training costs" (*The White House*, 2021, para. 8). Children's ABC Head Start program does not meet the minimum wage requirements as of yet and is not required to do so until the new grant year.

Scenario 1

Take on the role of the executive director of the program. In addition, the leadership team consists of the director of education, director of operations, director of family services, vice president of human resources, and the vice president of finance. What budgetary steps can leadership implement immediately to retain teaching staff and spend down the 1.6 million instead of refunding the amount to Health and Human Services?

Teaching Note: Students should take on the leadership team's roles and discuss the possible solutions. What would be the implications of such solutions and the timeframes? How do they plan to execute the plan?

Scenario 2

Take on the role of the executive director of the program. In addition, the leadership team consists of the director of education, director of operations, director of family services, vice president of human resources, vice president of finance. What steps can the leadership team take when planning for the next fiscal year that could assist or alleviate the lack of funding to increase the teaching staff's hourly rate? What might offset the costs? How could the executive director ensure that the other program areas, such as operations, will not lack financial support? Which areas of the program are an immediate priority?

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**Even Though Students are Getting a Head Start, Why Are They Not Finishing the
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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to identify the factors that contribute to teacher attrition in Head Start programs and to explore how leadership support and preparation can help with the retention of these teachers. **Research Method:** A qualitative exploratory case study was adopted to acquire a deeper insight with concentrated descriptive explanations of the concerns of novice and experienced Head Start center directors' real-life experiences through utilizing open-ended interview questions.

Findings: The findings revealed four significant themes and reasons for teachers leaving their positions among the participants: pay, support (training, resources, staffing, leadership coaching/mentoring), workload, and communication. **Conclusion:** The findings suggest that increased federal funding for adequately compensating teachers, onboarding programs and professional development opportunities, higher standards for center directors; mental health resources access, yearly conferences and continuous training opportunities; data-driven decision-making assistance, budgeting assistance is necessary. Furthermore, future research should conduct a two-phase study to explore the impact of leadership styles on teacher attrition rate by utilizing a quantitative phase followed by an interview-based qualitative phase involving a larger sample size.

Keywords: teacher attrition, early childhood leadership, Head Start

Even Though Students are Getting a Head Start, Why Aren't Teachers Finishing the Race?

The Head Start federal program, established in 1965, is one of the nation's most extensive early childhood education programs created to break the cycle of poverty by providing comprehensive and educational services to families in need (Office of Head Start, 2021). The program began as "an 8-week demonstration project... that provided preschool children from low-income families with comprehensive... and educational needs" given by volunteers (Office of Head Start - An Office of the Administration for Children and Families, 2021, para. 3). As the program grew, in 1975, Sargent Shriver, former Director of the Office of Economic Opportunity from 1964 to 1968 (Hudson, 2015), and a panel created the Head Start Standards to govern the program. However, the standards did not identify teacher qualifications (as cited in Office of Head Start, 2021). In the past 50 years, administrations have taken steps to improve the program by passing legislative bills to add teacher qualifications, increase funding, and implement systems to ensure the efficient use of resources, and to enhance service quality (Office of Head Start, 2021).

In an effort to improve educational service standards, the Head Start program has since been expanded and altered by legislation multiple times. In 1998, bipartisan legislation specified that by September 2003, at least 50% of Head Start educators nationally in center-based programs would obtain an "A.A., B.A., or graduate degree in early childhood education... " or related profession to improve the quality of classroom instruction (Hart & Schumacher, 2005, p. 5). According to a 2007 revision and reauthorization of Head Start, at least 50% of Head Start teachers nationwide in center-

based programs must possess a bachelor's degree or higher degree in early childhood education by September 30, 2013 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2007, para. (2)(A)(i)).

According to the Office of Head Start Program Information Report of 2022, 57.75% of the teachers in the nation have attained a B.A. in early childhood education, and 12.38% of the teachers have a B.A. in another field with "coursework equivalent to a major relating to early childhood education with experience teaching preschool-aged children" (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2022, p. 2). Comparably, on the state level in Texas, a prekindergarten teacher must achieve a bachelor's degree in early childhood education or special education, a teaching certification, and an additional qualification to meet the high-quality criteria to teach in a classroom (Education Code Chapter 29. Educational Programs, Sec. 29.167. 2021). According to Hart and Schumacher (2005), teachers with more education in early childhood development may improve results for preschool children.

Teachers voluntarily leaving the profession at high rates in Head Start programs continues to be an issue. According to Wells (2015), poor pay, a lack of training, and high-level responsibilities all contribute to the high turnover rates of Head Start teachers, which restricts the potential beneficial results that may be provided to the children and their families. Although Head Start has gradually increased the teaching qualifications (Office of Head Start - an Office of the Administration for Children and Families, 2021), the rate of pay has not been maintained, and Head Start educators are aware that they will continue to live at the poverty level (Myers, 2021). The Program Information Report from the Office of Head Start Enterprise System (2022) reported that 1,484 Head Start

teachers in Texas left the program. Of those teachers, 24.25% left for higher pay in a similar role, 28.32% moved to the state prekindergarten or other early childhood education (ECE) program, and 48.37% changed their career field for unrelated reasons (p.6).

Research Problem

The high attrition rates among Head Start teachers is the problem addressed in this study. This attrition causes a need to investigate the factors that contribute to teacher attrition in Head Start programs and to explore how leadership support and preparation can help with the retention of these teachers. The research questions for this study were:

RQ 1. What are the perceptions of novice and experienced Head Start center directors on their encounters and experiences that contribute to overall teacher attrition and retention rates in the Head Start program?

RQ 2. What do novice and experienced Head Start center directors recommend about leadership support and preparation that will help alleviate the teacher attrition rates in Head Start programs?

Definition of Terms

The following terms will guide the study:

Head Start Center Director. A child-care center director "supervises and leads their staff, design program plans, oversees daily activity, and prepare budgets" (Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2022, para. 1). The Code of Federal Regulations (2023) does not identify the qualifications of a Head Start center director. For this reason, the qualifications of a center director are outlined in the Minimum Standards for Child-Care Centers, Texas Health and Human Services (2023).

Illegitimate Tasks. In this study, illegitimate tasks, "tasks that violate norms about what an employee can reasonably be expected to do" results in teachers feeling humiliated or undignified (Eatough et al., 2015, p. 108).

Center-based. "The facilities used by a program must meet state, tribal, or local licensing requirements" (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2007, 1302.21(d)(1)).

Qualifications for a Head Start Director. Title 45 1302.91, Staff qualifications and competency requirements outlines that "(b) A program must ensure an Early Head Start or Head Start director hired after November 7, 2016, has, at a minimum, a baccalaureate degree and experience in supervision of staff, fiscal management, and administration" (Code of Federal Regulations, 2023).

School-based. "Private educational facilities that are accredited by the Texas Education Agency, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, or are a member of the Texas Private School Accreditation Commission and that operate for educational purposes for prekindergarten and above may be exempt from regulation" (Texas Health and Human Services, 2023, para. 4) .

Teacher Attrition. Teacher attrition refers to "qualified teachers leaving the profession for reasons other than having reached the age of retirement" (Kelchtermans, 2017, p.962).

Teacher Retention. "Teacher retention refers to keeping teachers in teaching" (Kelchtermans, 2017, p.962).

Theoretical Framework

This study's research questions focused on the causes of Head Start teacher attrition and the role that leadership serves to help alleviate this attrition. A framework was needed to guide this research to help connect the existing knowledge on a topic, determine the research design and address the questions of why and how (Trochim & Donnelly, 2001). In order to address the topic of teacher attrition, the human motivation theory created by Maslow (1943) was selected to support how human needs must be satisfied in the workplace to encourage behaviors such as job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and positive relationships. Transformational Leadership was also used as a theoretical framework for this study. This leadership approach provided the guidance needed in the behaviors of the teachers and the leaders. It provided a "cause and effect" analysis by determining why teachers leave and what leaders can do to help prevent this.

Human Motivation Theory

Human needs exist within a complex hierarchy, with each level needing something more than the one before it. This concept was created by psychologist Abraham Maslow (1943). He noticed that people would always start at their most basic requirements for survival, such as food and shelter. He believed this is how people should think about societal levels, rather than just focusing on materialistic things like money or status symbols, which can often come alongside healthy relationships with others. Therefore, the theory of human motivation is a significant piece of the conceptual framework for this study.

According to the theory (Maslow, 1943), the five levels of human behavior are physiological needs, safety concerns (i.e., feeling safe), social factors, which include

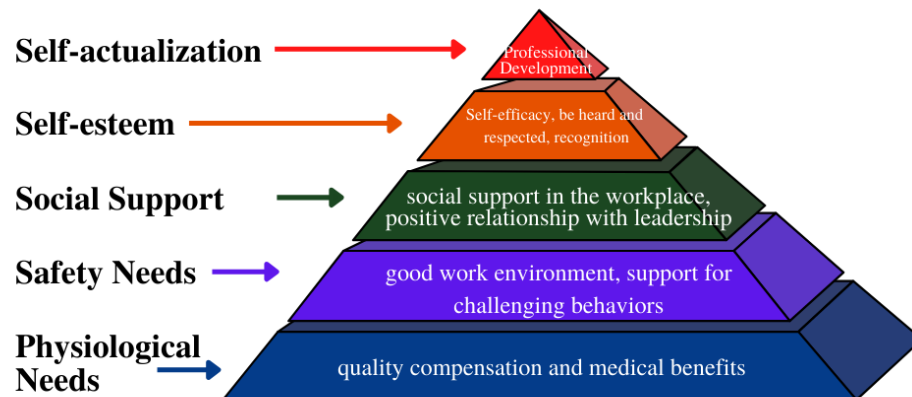
having friends around you when going about daily activities, etc.; self-esteem refers to self-respect/self-worth issues regarding oneself, and self-actualization, the longing to become better. People are driven by the desire to attain or preserve the many conditions underpinning fundamental fulfillments and goals that are more introspective. According to Maslow, when one need is sufficiently met, a subsequent need arises, and the failure to supply any of these needs results in a physiological risk.

In order to retain early childhood educators in the profession, it is imperative that leadership, meets the basic needs of individuals in the workplace. As seen in Figure 1, the first basic need is *physiological needs*. The physiological need for early childhood educators is to be equitably compensated for one's work and provided with basic medical coverage. Without this, people cannot provide food and shelter on their behalf and offer financial or medical support. The second need is *safety needs*. The ability for people to feel safe in their work environment is vital. A poor work environment and lack of support for challenging behaviors are factors contributing to the sense of job dissatisfaction.

Another basic need is *social support* (Maslow, 1943). Social factors, such as having a positive relationship with the leader are essential in determining why some teachers leave their jobs. The lack of administrative assistance or acknowledgment is one primary reason that leads teachers towards quitting school or changing careers, which often results in no resolution and contributes to more stress. The fourth basic need is *self-esteem* (Maslow, 1943). Teachers want to feel heard and respected. They need a voice in and out of the classroom that they can rely on, so it is essential for them to not only be knowledgeable, but also to express their feelings, when necessary, about challenging topics or student outcomes. Teachers not being heard leads to an internal shutdown and

an intention to quit. Teachers also want to feel valued and respected. *Illegitimate tasks*, “tasks that violate norms about what an employee can reasonably be expected to do” result in teachers feeling humiliated or undignified (Eatough et al., 2015, p. 108). The final basic need is *self-actualization*. The need for professional development is a significant source of frustration for teachers. When they lack this necessary development, it limits educators’ growth potential. It keeps them from reaching self-actualization - an ideal state where one’s talents are used to the fullest extent possible (Maslow, 1943).

Figure 1. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs Adapted to Teacher Needs



Note: The Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs Adapted to Teacher Needs above has been adapted from *CSA education*, by L. Panka, 2022 www.csaedu.com. Copyright (2023).

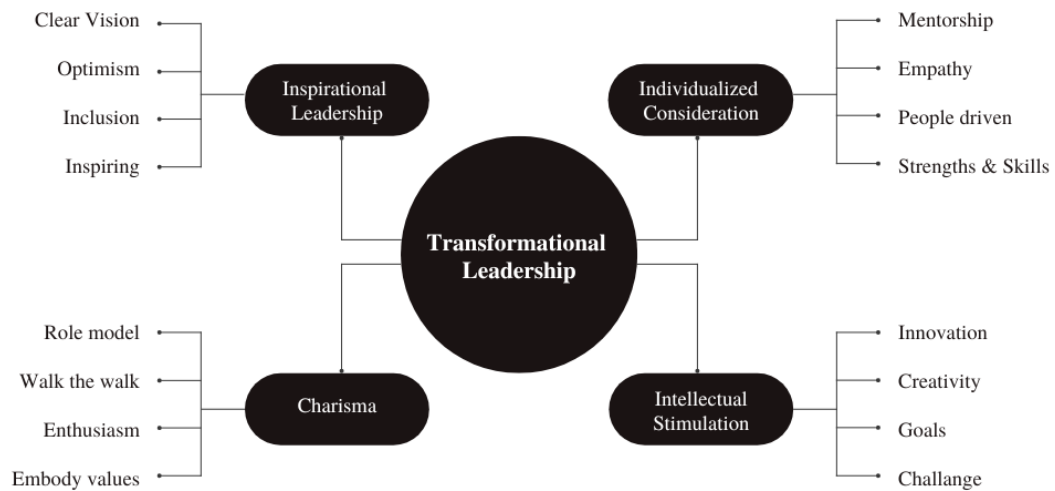
Transformational Leadership

John Maxwell (2022) asserted that “everything rises and falls on leadership... but knowing how to lead is only half the battle” (p. 1). The definitions of leadership have evolved since the 1900s, including ideas such as emphasizing “control and the centralization of power” including leadership styles such as transformational leadership (Northouse, 2019, p. 2). If leadership theories are not understood and applied improperly, leadership power can cause toxicity and be harmful to a group, or it can be a tool to

positively change an organization (Northouse, 2019). Additionally, it can be challenging for leadership to remove obstacles, such as supporting and meeting the needs of teachers, hiring qualified staff, eliminating excessive workloads and burnout, and providing staff development, while motivating and inspiring teachers to achieve high student outcomes when they are not well-prepared to lead an organization (Barnett, 2002; Brill & McCartney, 2008; Darling-Hammond et al., 2005; Hart & Schumacher, 2005).

Up until the 1970s, most leadership theories were based on traits, task-oriented skills, and characteristics. However, James MacGregor Burns, a political sociologist, produced a new paradigm shift known as transformational leadership, which he defined as “a process that changes and transforms people” (Northouse, 2019, p. 163). According to Bass (1985), transformational leadership has four primary characteristics: charisma, inspirational leadership, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation (see Figure 2). Transformational leaders consider the motivations of their followers, meet their needs, and treat them as complete individuals. Leaders utilizing this new theory lead followers through change and transformation within their organizations with a "growing self-awareness" (Bryman, 1999, p. 32) of vision and mission in mind and without controlling individuals.

Figure 2. Transformational Leadership



Note: The Transformational Leadership figure above has been adapted from *SimplyPsychology*, by C. Ugochukwu, 2023 www.simplypsychology.com. Copyright (2023).

Transformational leadership is essential in the school setting since this leadership style is constantly looking for methods to create a positive organizational culture; Transformational leaders “build trust and foster collaboration with others” and are “out front advocating change” (Northouse, 2019, pp. 178-179). Grantham-Caston and DiCarlo (2021) found that transformational leaders instill trust in their team members and foster an environment that supports their professional development. Transformational leaders provide individual support and personal attention to each teacher to allow them to reach their goals (Northouse, 2019). They provide classroom observations, give immediate feedback, and encourage goal setting to increase teaching techniques and student outcomes. In a study conducted by Brill and McCartney (2008), large class size, heavy workloads, and poor mentoring were examples of leadership inadequacy. Applying the transformational leadership concept in the early childhood setting allows the

administrator to focus on implementing a positive cultural change by creating an environment where teachers are provided pedagogical guidance, supported with challenging behaviors, and praised for their accomplishments and efforts.

Literature Review

The lack of published research on Head Start and early childhood leadership capacity and the absence of support systems, such as an early childhood leadership framework, makes it challenging to provide a solid structure to prepare and educate Head Start center directors. This study aimed to investigate the multiple factors leading to high attrition rates in the early childhood education teaching field in Head Start programs and the relationship this attrition has on the leadership capacity of the program. Studying the underlying factors influencing the high attrition rates could provide policymakers with data to support the need for immediate attention to the early childhood leadership and educator career field.

Background of Head Start Center Director

Even though various administrations have taken steps over the past 50 years to improve the Head Start program by passing legislative bills to add teacher qualifications, increase funding, and implement systems to ensure the efficient use of resources and enhance service quality, the center director's preparation and significance has been overlooked (Office of Head Start - an Office of the Administration for Children and Families, 2021). Lieberman (2017) identifies most policy change has been focused on teachers and "much less attention has been paid to leaders" (p. 5). While Head Start center directors are essentially completing the same profession as prekindergarten principals, they are not prepared nor supported similarly. Lieberman (2017) concluded

that “state licensing standards... tend to have minimal requirements for center director education and training that do not reflect the complexity of the job” (p.30).

Teacher Attrition Factors

Unfortunately, the lack of teacher qualifications is the tip of the iceberg. In a study, Jeon and Wells (2018) created a 16-item short survey that assessed a range of early childhood teacher job elements that can affect teachers' actual turnover decisions. This study employed real-time Head Start data. The study's primary goal was to examine the Early Childhood Job Attitude Survey psychometrics and its capacity to offer valuable data for early childhood education research and practice. The study's second objective was to determine if organizational-level variables could be utilized to forecast teacher turnover. Jeon and Wells stated that “knowing which organizational-level factors impact turnover can aid researchers and practitioners toward utilizing preventative strategies to decrease turnover” (p. 565). The study explored whether different aspects of teachers' attitudes were associated with teacher turnover. They studied the attitudes of early childhood education (ECE) teachers from an organizational perspective. The three characteristics of “workplace satisfaction, classroom responsibilities, and ongoing support” were explored (p. 567). Workplace contentment was the only one of the three criteria that accurately predicted early childhood teachers' actual turnover. The workplace satisfaction component captured a degree of the teacher's feelings and thoughts about the program and job. Jean and Wells (2018) discovered that a positive working connection with the director was a sign of contented teachers. Jeon and Wells concluded that one way to decrease teacher turnover is to understand the reasons for teacher turnover and to increase teachers' job attitudes and satisfaction.

In another study, Brill and McCartney (2008) addressed heavy workloads, poor leadership, and inadequate administrative support, attributing to the cause of high attrition rates in early childhood programs, and they reviewed methods of increasing teacher retention. Their research indicated teacher attrition was due to low salaries, lack of social input, and student discipline problems. Additionally, they claimed that high attrition rates had a detrimental impact on working relationships and had institutional costs, such as the funds lost for training teachers. These high institutional costs increase the fiscal budget. According to Brill and McCartney (2008):

As trained teachers leave their schools, a double loss occurs: money has been lost in training that will not be applied as a tool for improvement at that particular school, and more money has to be spent on the training of incoming teachers. (p. 753)

In terms of instruction, when teachers leave, there are negative implications for student achievement; schools in high-minority populations are hit twice.

Brill and McCartney (2008) further explained the causes of teachers leaving the profession involved class size, workload, student behaviors, leadership and administration, facilities and resources, maternity, poor mentoring, and low salary. Their solutions to the issue were increasing teacher salaries, recruiting talented teachers, improving work environments, implementing or improving professional communities, and creating or improving mentoring programs. Brill and McCartney also discovered that the interaction between new and experienced teachers was the most important aspect of induction programs. In a variety of areas, such as “pedagogy, classroom management,

lesson planning, and emotional support,” mentors provide new teachers with critical assistance and guidance (p. 767).

Job Satisfaction

Collie et al. (2012) found that "if teachers have confidence in their ability to engage students, manage the classroom, and use effective instructional strategies, the impact of student behavior stress did not appear to relate negatively to job satisfaction" (p. 1199). So, what does this mean? Collie et al. encouraged school administration to provide quality in-service training to teachers that address the tools necessary to effectively manage their classrooms. As a result, positive job satisfaction will lead to lower turnover rates.

In another study, Carson et al. (2016) conducted a study to examine "how the feelings of exhaustion throughout the day relate to the perception of end-of-day job satisfaction and quitting intentions" (p. 801). For one week during the autumn semester of school, the researchers gave 50 instructors the "Ecological Momentary Assessment," a self-assessment that gauged the teacher's daily observations of sensations of weariness three times a day. In addition to the assessment, the teachers were provided with a list of rejuvenating strategies they could implement during the day to relieve stress and if it impacted their thoughts or feelings on "job satisfaction and quitting intentions" (p. 803). As a result, Carson et al. had three significant findings. First, it was revealed that the more exhaustion teachers had by the end of the day, the less job satisfaction, and more intentions of quitting their job were true. Second, it was found that they had less job stress if teachers took advantage of the rejuvenating exercise. Finally, they found that physical and cognitive reprieve strategies were more effective than proactive

professionalism or adult communication. Carson et al. encouraged leaders to integrate activities into place and schedule time for teachers' participation.

Edinger and Edinger (2018) surveyed elementary teachers in two rural southeastern school districts in the United States. The surveys measured teacher efficacy, perceived organizational support, coworker relationships, and job satisfaction. As a result, the researchers found that "higher levels of trust... higher levels of teacher efficacy were related to significantly higher levels of job satisfaction" (p. 584). They also found that teacher effectiveness and job satisfaction are strongly related to greater perceived organizational support. The research has substantial implications for leadership, because they play a vital role in "helping teachers develop trust and job satisfaction" (p. 587).

In an international study, Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2011) examined the "relations between school context variables and teachers' feeling of belonging, emotional exhaustion, job satisfaction, and motivation to leave the teaching profession" by evaluating 2569 elementary and middle school, Norwegian teachers (p. 1030). Using the AMOS 7 program, they measured value consonance, supervisor support, relationships with coworkers, relationships with parents, time pressure, and discipline issues. Skaalvik and Skaalvik found that "both teachers' feelings of belonging and emotional exhaustion were predictive of job satisfaction while emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction were predictive of motivation to leave the teaching profession" (p. 1036). This study concluded that school administrators must focus more on teachers' job happiness, emotional exhaustion, and sense of belonging.

Challenges to Job Satisfaction. Further research led to an understanding of how federal mandates could increase the stress factors associated with job satisfaction. Jacoby and Lesaux (2017) organized a longitudinal study of Head Start teachers and how they responded to the educational mandates established by Head Start. Twenty Head Start teachers were interviewed by the researchers. The researchers found that 18 of the 20 teachers had difficulty implementing the mandated curriculum with fidelity due to daily interruptions such as the social-emotional and immediate needs of the children. They added that they felt constrained and could not meet the needs of the students in their classrooms because they were required to submit their lesson plans to their education mentors to ensure that they adhered to strict instructional mandates. This imbalance between administrative duties and classroom duties caused stress for the teachers. In addition to federal mandates, the additional workloads and tasks not associated with the job description could lead to negative job satisfaction. Eatough et al. (2015) examined illegitimate tasks and their effects on a person's well-being. They reported, "the results of two daily diary studies, one in which 57 Swiss employees were assessed twice/daily and one in which 90 Americans were assessed three times/day" (p. 108). They explained that illegitimate tasks are additional tasks outside their job descriptions assigned to employees that make them feel below their pay level. These tasks include duties such as, but are not limited to sweeping, mopping, cleaning toilets, cooking, and cleaning trash cans. As a result of the findings, Eatough et al. concluded that "illegitimate tasks were most consistently related to anger and job satisfaction" (p. 122).

Similarly, in research by Apostel et al. (2018) examining illegitimate tasks, they found that continuously assigning illegitimate tasks directly correlated with turnover

intention. Both research studies imply that management should be cautious about how many additional tasks are assigned to individuals outside their designated duties, that could cause stress, anger, and job dissatisfaction leading to a turnover.

In a separate study, Eatough et al. (2015) measured the effects of illegitimate tasks on self-esteem. These findings imply that leaders should be mindful of the possibility that some duties may be viewed as being unjustified. Managers should undoubtedly concentrate on completing the required tasks; however, they should think about the message that their assignments convey. Open instances of humiliation or indignity are frequently simple to identify and, if acknowledged, are more easily avoided or corrected.

Social Support

Thus far, attributes leading to job satisfaction have helped us understand why teachers leave the profession. Nevertheless, another factor, teacher support, was highly mentioned in many studies (Delali et al., 2020; McMullen et al., 2020; Pomaki et al., 2010). One study by Pomaki et al. (2010) examined the role of social support in turnover intention among new teachers. Seventy-one new teachers in Canada were asked to participate in a study at the beginning of the school year. The researchers discovered that teachers who received social support from mentor teachers, center directors, or other seasoned educators were less likely to quit their employment. It was also found that higher workloads would not be a significant factor for teacher turnover if it was combined with social support. It was also stated that "social support must offer the person what is needed to deal with the stressor successfully and has to come from a source that

can be helpful with that particular stressor" (p. 1344). The research concluded that programs should investigate implementing systems that foster and support teachers.

In another study, McMullen et al. (2020) examined teachers' general well-being and the implications of turnover by measuring three categories; "supportive structures, collegial relationships, and professional beliefs and values" (p. 340). The three categories were calculated by the nine senses of early childhood professional well-being in the Early Childhood Professional Well-being Model, based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. In the study, the researchers obtained a convenience sample of 218 early childhood professionals from three early childhood organizations by sending an anonymous online link via email and published in a magazine. As a result, they found that the area of supportive structures (sense of engagement, sense of agency, sense of comfort, sense of security, sense of efficacy, sense of communication, sense of contribution) in the three questionnaires submitted, resulting in less job satisfaction, and the risk of turnover was predictive. Collegial relationships were not a predictor of leaving the profession. Lastly, the third category of professional beliefs and values resulted in a feeling of autonomy, making choices, or feeling respected, which leads to more job satisfaction. McMullen et al. (2020) suggested that "the well-being of early childhood professionals is indeed a matter of quality insofar as it is associated with the risk of turnover" (p. 342).

Similarly, Delali et al. (2020) investigated the relationship between teacher emotions, emotional labor, and teacher burnout, resulting in the intention to quit in an international study. The study was carried out with a total of 628 surveyed Ghanaian teachers. They discovered variables such as deep acting, surface feelings, hiding feelings, and social support. The results indicated a mixture of results. Delali et al. found that solid

team support leads to teachers being able to cope with work stressors and the depletion of resources. However, concerning emotional labor, they stated, "respondents mostly applied the hiding emotions in the performance of their duties, followed by deep acting and faking," which is a direct correlation to burnout leading to an intention to quit (p. 136). The results indicate that leaders should focus on creating a support team, implementing coaching programs, and providing professional development to build capacity and self-regulation strategies.

Commitment and Quitting Intentions

Before teachers leave the profession, factors such as job dissatisfaction, lack of teacher support, and high stress cause an intention to quit their job. Klassen and Chiu (2011) explored "the occupational commitment and quitting intention of practicing and pre-service teachers" (p. 114). They attended a multi-district convention and asked 434 current practicing teachers and 379 pre-service teachers to participate in a voluntary questionnaire. Klassen and Chiu used a cross-sectional survey to investigate the effects of teachers' self-efficacy, work stress, and related factors on occupational commitment and quitting intentions. As a result, they found that seasoned teachers reported, "significantly lower levels of occupational commitment and higher levels of intentions to quit... coupled with overall stress" (p. 119). In the area of intention to quit, experienced teachers resulted in higher stress levels, and occupational stress was linked to a desire to quit.

Compared to pre-service teachers, the intention was directly influenced by the overall stress of teaching, the stress associated with the practicum assignment, and the self-efficacy for classroom management. The implications paint the picture of the teacher's self-efficacy and job stress factors that influence intentions to quit. A keynote in

this research implies that implementing programs by leadership and administration, such as providing quality professional development for novice teachers entering the profession, proactively implementing interventions to address stress, anxiety, and other work-related burnout issues, build on teacher's self-efficacy and providing tools to be successful in the classroom, and provide instructional tools.

Compensation and Retention

The literature review identified factors such as qualifications, job satisfaction, social support, and other attributes. Low pay and no benefits also lead to teachers leaving the profession, which, according to studies, will affect both the workplace environment and student success (Bullough et al., 2012; Cassidy et al., 2011; Hart & Schumacher, 2005). As defined in the conceptual framework, the theory of human motivation (Maslow, 1943) explains the first basic physiological need as being equitably compensated for one's work and receiving basic medical coverage. Without this, people cannot provide food and shelter on their behalf and offer financial or medical support. Thus, leading Head Start center directors and educators to find an alternate solution.

Bell (2021) wrote a summary of the critical issue of early teacher turnover and the problems of being unable to pay teachers a livable wage. In an interview with Cindy Owens, New Testament Child Development Center director and owner in Union County, Owens stated that in her area, "even fast food (restaurants) are doing sign-on bonuses" (p. 2) and that she had not always paid herself in order to pay her staff. Owens mentioned that many of her teachers live on government assistance. Owens indicated, "I think many people who make the laws and the standards do not realize what level of folks are living" (p. 3).

A study by Whitebook et al. (2014) contrasted childcare providers with preschool teachers, non-farm animal caregivers, fast food cooks, and bank tellers between 1997 and 2013; they found that "childcare workers earned less than animal caretakers in both years" (p. 16). In comparison, preschool teachers were paid 60% less in hourly wages than kindergarten teachers in 2013. Even when childcare payments more than doubled (Whitebook et al., 2014).

In another study, Cassidy et al. (2011) used the triangulation method of teachers, directors, and parents' experiences of teacher turnover. A mixed method study using data from classroom observations, interviews, teacher and director self-reports, and researcher field notes were used to better understand the dynamics "of teacher turnover and its implications" for the program (p. 2). They found that low compensation directly resulted in teachers and directors being more likely to leave the occupation. It was also found that turnover increased the workload of teachers and directors. Directors were forced to cover classrooms, which took time away from their administrative duties. The results of teacher turnover also indicated a connection to children's negative behaviors. The interviews and the responses to the survey powerfully revealed that teachers would stay in their present jobs, if salaries were increased, benefits provided, and teacher assistance was available. It was also revealed that a negative work environment and lack of support were factors in turnover. Overall, the study revealed how proactive centers could minimize the impact of turnover if they had prepared policies and procedures, a direct reflection of leadership implementing organizational procedures.

Researchers Bridges et al. (2011) conducted a 3 year longitudinal study sampling 2,783 teachers, teacher assistants, teacher aides, and child care directors of private child

care, public funding preschool, and Head Start preschools participating in California's Child Care Retention Incentive program. Due to high attrition rates in California, the incentive program was designed to provide monetary incentives and professional development to those who sought college-level courses, thus reducing job turnover. According to the study, participants in the early childhood program were less likely to leave the field after the 3-year program; however, some did get promotions or go into another ECE program that paid more. In contrast, the researchers discovered that in the first 2 years of work, the percentage of Head Start teachers quitting their jobs was substantially greater than in the private centers. This could be due to finding a higher-paying job in the ECE private or public sector. Additionally, "strongest effects on college unit completion were experienced by lower paid staff and Latina aides or teachers" (p. 1025). Finally, participants who started the program with tenure, higher degrees, and higher paying salaries (the first basic physiological need of the theory of human motivation (Maslow, 1943) were less likely to leave the profession than those with lower pay and tenure.

Researcher Bullough et al. (2012) conducted a study with 89 Head Start teachers, teacher assistants, and classroom aides to learn more about Head Start and the implications of the increased teaching qualifications. As a result, they found that most participants enjoyed their jobs; however, they commonly shared that they were unhappy with the pay level. Several teachers indicated they are passionate about serving children and feel they are giving back to the community. However, while teaching staff enjoy their jobs, many struggle financially. In the survey, they were asked if they had considered leaving Head Start, and 58% of the respondents indicated they had. Other variables for

leaving included career change, dissatisfaction with past leadership, stress, and more. Forty percent of the participants also “included financial issues as among their greatest worries, disappointments, or drawbacks related to working with Head Start” (p. 3). Bullough et al. (2012) also found that the increase in Head Start teaching qualifications makes hiring and retaining credentialed staff with low pay more difficult. Many of the young, credentialed teachers responded that they do not intend to stay teaching in the program.

Teacher Preparation and Professional Development

Teachers' capacity for growth is constrained when they are not exposed to teaching, training, and professional growth. This lack of knowledge affects their self-esteem and self-actualization. Self-actualization is the final level of Maslow's theory of human motivation. Maslow (1943), defined self-actualization as the ideal state in which one makes the best use of their gifts. The lack of professional development is a significant source of frustration for teachers. For this reason, it is crucial for Head Start center directors to provide staff with professional development throughout the year.

The early childhood education standards, curriculum, and increased emphasis on accountability are all changing quickly. Haslip and Gullo (2017) looked at how these changes are affecting professional development. They examined "the landscape of early childhood education is rapidly changing... driven by positive and negative trends" (p. 250). Financial support is lacking in the early childhood sector to sustain the rapidly changing early childhood landscape in areas such as in-service and pre-service teacher preparation, professional development, resources, staffing qualifications, meals, and more. The study concluded that early childhood leaders should be knowledgeable about

“early childhood development and best practices if they are to support and lay the groundwork for early childhood education” (p. 263).

Leadership

Quality leadership is vital and critical in any school setting, but it is perhaps most critical at the start of a child’s educational journey (Gonzalez, 2015). Head Start leaders should “lead by example, establish a clear vision, collaborate, motivate, and develop the capacity of teachers” (Gonzalez, 2015, p. 122). Kouzes and Posner’s (2003, 2007) model of transformational leadership is a strong framework for Head Start leaders because it emphasizes the leader’s ability to establish a relationship with staff by means of communication, providing feedback, listening, and sharing information. Additionally, Head Start center directors who practice transformational leadership will offer a framework that enables them to inspire their followers, cater to their needs, and treat them as whole people. Leaders utilizing the transformational leadership theory are able to guide followers through a change and transformation within their organizations with a "growing self-awareness" of vision and mission in mind and without controlling individuals (Bryman, 1999, p. 32).

In a report conducted by National Research Council et al. (2015) a comprehensive list of “knowledge and competencies in leadership in settings with children birth through age 8” (p. 344) outlined core competencies for elementary principals and center directors on what they should know in order to fulfil their roles. Such competencies include practices to help children learn, assessment of children, fostering a professional workplace, assessment of educators, developing and fostering partnerships, and

organizational development and management (National Research Council et al., 2015, pp. 344-345). A concluding statement from the chapter stated:

The complexity of childhood development and early learning and the sophisticated knowledge and competencies needed by care and education professionals have important implications for the knowledge and competencies of leadership in settings for children from birth through age 8. These leaders and administrators need to understand developmental science and instructional practices for educators of young children, as well as the ability to use this knowledge to guide their decisions on hiring, supervision, and selection of tools for assessment of children and evaluation of teacher performance, and to inform their development of portfolios of professional learning supports for their settings. (p. 347)

Leadership and Growth. Multiple factors have led to attrition rates in the early childhood profession. Research indicates numerous factors lead to a lack of early childhood leadership training, support, and pedagogical knowledge (Abel, 2016; Douglass, 2019; Modise, 2019). It is essential that Head Start center directors receive leadership training and ongoing coaching in order to give their teachers the support they require. The definition of pedagogical leadership is "supporting teaching and learning," according to Abel (2016). It involves instructional leadership, which supports teachers in their critical task of implementing the curriculum. Modise (2019) stated that pedagogical leadership necessitates a change in emphasis away from just administrative and management duties and toward teaching and learning. Giving the required support and direction requires subject-matter expertise and a working knowledge of the subject.

Modise also emphasized the early childhood leadership's role in leading, supporting teachers and positive student outcomes, and ensuring continuous progress and quality improvement by collecting data, analyzing, and updating program goals. Modise highlighted the importance of pedagogical leadership and stated that a "center manager is to ensure that she/he works with teachers to encourage high levels of classroom practice and raise the quality of teaching and learning as well as academic achievement of learners" (p. 120). The center manager or principal can implement assistance by offering communities of practice, professional development, internal and external training, mentoring, and coaching.

Douglass (2019) examined a group of 43 educators who participated in a new leadership graduate program, resulting in a 12-credit postmaster certificate. In the qualitative study, 35 of the 43 graduates elected to participate in an interview and were asked a series of questions in the categories of "participants' experiences in the program, professional and leadership goals, the impact of the program... and leadership pathways" (p. 395). One graduate stated, "many people who are making the decisions for the field are not experienced in the field...we need to get leadership from those of us who have had the experience" (p. 391). Ultimately, Douglass found that the program provided a rich foundation that increased graduate students' capacity by developing their leadership identity, establishing leadership support, and creating new leadership avenues.

Lieberman (2017) compared the state policies for prekindergarten principals and center directors in four categories—pre-service requirements, in-service requirements, compensation and retention, and efforts to encourage diversity. The Center for Early Childhood Leadership and New America's Early and Elementary Education Policy team

collaborated in gathering data from principals and center directors around the nation. Both programs searched for information on state-specific Quality Rating and Improvement Systems and childcare credential requirements on state-specific websites. The study aimed to explain how two similar roles have different qualifications. Lieberman stated that "being a strong early childhood education leader does not necessarily come naturally; it takes specialized knowledge and skills that must be developed over time" (p. 9).

Lieberman's (2017) study indicated that despite both leadership positions equally being accountable for delivering high-quality prekindergarten services, there are notable differences between them in terms of pre-service requirements, in-service requirements, compensation and retention, and diversity-related initiatives. In one comparison, it was found that "only New Jersey, Vermont, and Washington, DC require center directors to have a bachelor's degree for licensure" (p. 14), and in 27 states, a person can become a center director, "without any work experience in childcare if they had enough formal education" (p. 14). In addition, only Florida, Massachusetts, Oklahoma, and Vermont require center directors to obtain a center director credential. When data were gathered to identify joint professional development for principals and center directors, it was found that "only seven states offer" this type of opportunity (p. 20). Another area of comparison was annual formal evaluations, and it was also found that states do not require center directors to be evaluated as principals. The research also found that center directors are paid much less than principals "despite their similar responsibilities" (p. 26). The findings did not indicate that any state was actively working to increase ethnic leadership diversity among center directors.

Using information from the 2014 Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey, Alamillo et al. (2018) conducted a study on the qualities of Head Start programs, leaders, and instructors that previous research has shown were connected to classroom quality. Data-driven decision-making was cited by 76% of program directors and 46% of center directors as one of the top three areas where they needed more significant assistance to lead successfully. Program enhancement planning was the area that received the second most mentions. Additionally, at least 25% of program administrators acknowledged the need for assistance with staffing, budgeting, and collaborating with local parents.

According to developer cut points, Head Start schools receive an average score of 2.4 on a 7-point scale, which is considered low. Additionally, the report stated that most Head Start mentors visit their classrooms once a month when Head Start classrooms receive low scores for instructional support in the Classroom Assessment Scoring System observation. This results from the center directors' lack of pedagogical and/or instructional leadership. It is also noted that center directors are more likely to mentor the teachers in the classroom.

Leadership Preparation. Research indicates a leadership development shortage (Douglass, 2019; Klevering & McNae, 2018; Talan et al., 2014). Douglass (2019) conducted a systematic literature review of early childhood leadership by identifying 50 empirical peer-reviewed journals ranging from national and international studies further to explain the functions and structures of ECE leadership and identify the gaps. The studies were narrowed down to three dimensions of leadership:

- The functions, roles, and structures of leadership in ECE settings

- Factors that may support or hinder leadership and its effectiveness
- The working conditions and professional development experiences for staff in the ECE settings. (p. 24)

This analysis also identified gaps in leadership recruitment, development, and ongoing support. Douglass concluded that to have effective ECE leadership, there must be "supports for effective leadership... professional preparation and credentials... professional development... and contextual supports" (p. 25).

Similarly, Talan et al. (2014) utilized a mixed-method approach to examine a group of center directors who had completed a 10-month leadership program called Taking Charge of Change (TCC). They were interested to see how the TCC leadership program impacted center directors due to center directors entering leadership roles lacking the leadership skills needed to successfully operate the childcare centers and provide pedagogical support. As a result, Talan et al. found significant growth in self-efficacy, confidence, competence, management, leadership, and professional development. When asked to rate their level of director competency from novice to master director, 61% stated that they are at a master director level compared to their initial rating of 5%. Interestingly, when the researchers questioned turnover in their centers, the directors participating in the post-survey stated that they had little to zero teacher turnover since completing the TCC program. The implications of this formal training resulted in lower turnover rates, increased leadership capacity, improved state ratings, and higher accreditation rates.

Klevering and McNae (2018) conducted a qualitative research study in New Zealand by conducting semi-structured interviews with five teachers who had been in

leadership positions. The researchers aimed to explore their understanding of leadership in early childhood. The researchers found that the five teachers had different leadership ideas and often confused terminology with management. They all had an overwhelming understanding that there is a lack of leadership preparation for those who want to become leaders in the early childhood field. They also recognized that "their management responsibilities required much of their time, leaving little time to focus on effective leadership" (p. 12). The researchers concluded that there is evidence of distributed leadership amongst the teachers; however, they "identified a lack of training for early childhood leaders" (p. 14).

To improve the leadership capacity of childcare directors, the researchers Bloom and Bella (2005), compared two leadership training models. A master's degree in early childhood education can be earned by completing the 2-year graduate leadership program known as the McCormick Fellows Leadership Training. The 10-month TCC program offered six semester hours of college credit. Each program recruited center directors to enter the program and report the pre- and post-results. In addition, the center directors would also provide qualitative data from their staff of "observational data documented changes" (p. 33). They found that the directors felt they had a "sense of empowerment. A heightened sense of self-esteem transformed how they thought about their directorship role" (p. 33). The learned skills and knowledge allowed the directors to become reflective, make necessary changes, and communicate efficiently in their centers. Data from both programs have shown that leadership training programs positively affect leadership capacity, directly correlating to improvement in organizational climate, relationships, and culture.

Method

Research Design

This qualitative study was designed to identify the factors contributing to teacher attrition in early childhood education and explore how leadership support and preparation within these organizations can help retain teachers. A qualitative study was adopted to acquire a deeper insight into the Head Start center directors' real-life experiences (Rahman, 2016). Aspers and Corte (2019) explained qualitative research as looking at things as they are in their natural environments and trying to explain or make sense of “phenomena in terms of the meaning” that different people give to various occurrences (p. 142). This study aimed to explore the experiences of novice and experienced Head Start center directors on their encounters and affairs that contribute to overall teacher attrition and retention rates in early childhood education.

Additionally, the study will explore the directors' recommendations about leadership support and preparation that will help alleviate the teacher attrition rates. Therefore, a qualitative research strategy would better suit this topic than a quantitative method.

The data were collected from focus groups and one-on-one interviews with the participants. According to Pv and Peremans (2007), focus groups are good for bringing together homogenous groups of people who have the requisite expertise and experience on a given subject so they can provide in-depth information. (as cited in Busetto et al., 2020, p. 3). For participants who were uncomfortable with sharing their thoughts in a focus group forum, one-on-one interviews were used. According to Caruso (2022), a one-on-one interview aims to reveal information that cannot be seen, such as knowledge or emotions. The qualitative design best suited this study because of the need to understand

how the Head Start center directors interpreted their experiences. Invaluable knowledge and a deeper understanding of the Head Start center director's actual experiences in leadership was gained through interactions with these focus groups and one-on-one interviews.

Participant Population

Purposive sampling was the method chosen to collect valuable data for this qualitative study. As defined by Farrugia (2019), purposive sampling involves the conscious selection of a sample that is believed to be most helpful in addressing research problems. To ensure this, the participants were chosen based on variables affecting their contributions to the study (Farrugia, 2019). Specifically, qualified Head Start center directors were selected per the Texas Health and Human Services Minimum Standards for Childcare Centers.

The goal was to have five participants in two focus group. The first group consisted of four Head Start center directors with less than 5 years of experience in Texas programs, while the second group included two center directors with a minimum of 5 years of experience. Additionally, one director with less than 5 years' experience and two directors with more than 5 years' experience were interviewed individually. The two focus groups were created to prevent circumstances in which some participants would feel embarrassed to speak in front of others who might have greater experience (Acocella, 2011). According to Harrell and Bradley (2009), focus groups are a great way to resolve potentially contradicting data since the researcher has the direct opportunity to question about the apparent contradiction... and interviewees... value the chance to speak in person about their thoughts and experiences. These Head Start center directors represented

various nonprofit organizations, including an independent school district program. They possessed an understanding of the research topic through their extensive experience and knowledge in the early childhood and childcare sector. They also fulfilled the required early childhood education competencies mandated by Texas for their director positions. The participant description and data can be found in Table 1.

Table 1. Participant Information

Participant Name* (Pseudonyms)	Gender	Texas Region	Community	Prior experience before accepting the position	Previous leadership training	Years as a Head Start center director
ND1	Female	South Texas Plains	Urban	Head Start Family Specialist, Military Childcare/School-Age worker, Family Childcare Provider	Completed an administrator's credential training prior to starting my role	3
ND2	Female	South Texas Plains	Rural	Head Start Preschool Teacher and Mentor Teacher	Head Start required trainings and Texas State Licensing Minimum Standard trainings	4
ND3	Female	Hill Country	Suburban	Center Director at other Early Childhood facilities	Conferences, classes and on the job training	3
ND4	Female	Pineywoods	Urban	Teacher for 8 years, Principal for 8 years	Principal of a campus that had Head Start	3
ND5	Female	N/A	Rural	12 years assistant and Teacher	Pro-Solutions, Creative curriculum	1
ED1	Male	South Texas Plains	Rural	At my current position, I had about 40 years of HS Management Experience	None - On the Job Training	25
ED2	Female	Gulf Coast	Urban	Assistant Campus Manager/ Teacher	Various	15
ED3	Female	Hill Country	Urban	Childcare Family Homeowner	Associate in early childhood development and took classes in Business Management	10
ED4	Female	Hill Country	Rural	Daycare teacher	very little	10

**Note: In the pseudonyms, ND represents novice directors, and the ED represents experienced directors.*

Data Collection Procedures

To recruit participants from various regions, several methods were employed. First, an email was sent to each Head Start program in Texas through Qualtrics, resulting in a total of 207 email invites sent out. The survey request was also posted on popular social media platforms such as LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook. Through these combined efforts, 20 surveys were started, and 14 surveys were successfully finished. Upon agreement from the participants, a pre-survey was administered to gather specific demographic information, which aided in the development of the focus groups. The purpose of this pre-survey was to learn more about each participant. Collecting this information prior to the focus group allowed more time to be spent on the research and interview questions instead of gathering demographic information during the focus group. The pre-survey asked questions such as: a) How long have you been a Head Start center director? b) What did you do prior to your directorship? c) Have you experienced any teacher attrition issues? Following this, a separate email was sent via www.doodlepoll.com to the 14 participants to schedule interviews. Ten participants responded to the poll, and ultimately nine participants were interviewed.

During the semi-structured discussions, open-ended questions were used to encourage an extended exploratory conversation. Focus groups were preferred over one-on-one interviews to maximize the diversity of feelings, expertise, and experiences shared (Roller, 2020). Occasionally, probing questions were asked for clarification or to extend responses (Gillham, 2001, p. 14).

The interviews were recorded using the Otter.ai program for automated transcription and data analysis. Fountain (2005) explained that notetaking has

disadvantages due to the primary reliance on the note-taker's ability to record responses accurately and objectively. Therefore, it was "strongly recommended that interviews and focus group meetings... be tape-recorded" (p.36). Recording the discussion allowed the researcher to accurately transcribe the participant's responses and determine if another round of discussion was necessary.

Due to the dispersed locations of each Head Start center director throughout the state, the interview process was conducted online using the Zoom platform, lasting no longer than 60 minutes. For privacy and confidentiality, participants were provided the opportunity to use a unique identification number or alias during the interviews. However, the participants chose to allow their names to stay visible on each of their Zoom screens. The participants were reminded that their names would not be used in the journal. Furthermore, participants were given the choice to have their cameras on or off, but all chose to have their cameras on.

Member Checking

Participants in the study were exposed to the legitimacy of the data-gathering method through the member-checking process (Stake, 1995). This process shifts the researcher's validity to the study's participants by allowing the participants to check the transcripts and interpreted data to ensure "the credibility of the information and narrative account" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 127). During the member-checking process, participants had the chance to add or explain any additional information that would be useful in expanding their experiences. As a result, member checking ensured the qualitative study's validity and trustworthiness.

For this reason, member checking was carried out following each focus group

interview by requesting any clarifications pertaining to the interview data. After one-on-one interviews were conducted, each interviewee was asked any needed clarifying questions related to the interview data. No follow-up interviews were requested. After the conclusion of all the discussions, each participant was emailed a copy of their transcripts via Otter.ai to again check the validity of the transcribed statements and offer participants another opportunity to add or explain any additional information. A timeline of one week was given to the participants to submit new information.

Data Analysis

Data analysis began once the focus group discussions were completed and the interview transcripts from the study were analyzed using Taylor-Powell and Renner's (2003) five-step approach. The first step in this process was to get to know my data. To accomplish this step, I listened and read the transcribed recordings multiple times to better understand what was discussed. The next step was to focus the analysis by reviewing the interview objectives and questions. The transcripts were then analyzed to ascertain whether any of the conversations deviated from the intended focus of the interview questions. If any deviations were found, those sections were deleted. These transcripts were subsequently transferred and organized into a matrix on a Word document. Categorized first by the director's level of experience (novice or experienced), and then further classified according to the specific interview question.

The third step was categorizing the information. This is also known as coding the data. Data were coded when themes or patterns are found, and the data is organized into logical groups. During the coding process for this study, I identified patterns and connections within and between categories by implementing a color-coding method to

assign codes to each individual question. For instance, the first question, "Can you tell me about some of the reasons that your teachers left their positions?" revealed the recurrence of terms such as pay and compensation. Therefore, the words pay, and compensation were highlighted green. The final stage involved interpretation—bringing it all together. Through the use of color coding and thematic analysis, a comprehensive understanding of the discovered information was achieved. Upon meticulous review of the codes and subsequent categorization, four prominent themes emerged from the analysis.

Positionality Statement

According to Smith et al. (2020), a person's social identities, viewpoints, and cultural practices are intimately linked to their positionality. As a former elementary school principal and early childhood director in an independent school district that was a Head Start grantee, I am aware of the leadership responsibilities for managing a Head Start grant in an exempt program. Additionally, I have worked as an assistant superintendent of education and a regional director for non-profit licensed Head Start programs. Having worked in these two different roles, I found that Head Start center directors lacked sufficient leadership training. In order to better understand how leadership preparation affects attrition among Head Start teachers, I conducted research to learn more about the opinions of both seasoned and inexperienced center directors.

Findings

The study had two research questions. The first question focused on the perceptions of novice and experienced Head Start center directors regarding their encounters and experiences that contributed to overall teacher attrition and retention rates in the Head Start program. The second research question addressed the recommendations

of novice and experienced Head Start center directors about leadership support and preparation that would help alleviate the teacher attrition rates in Head Start programs. The following themes were discovered: pay, support, workload, and communication.

Theme #1: Pay

The analyzed collected data informed the answer to each of the research questions. The first theme that emerged was pay. Low pay is found to be correlated with attrition and retention of Head Start teachers, as they often choose to leave for organizations offering higher salaries. Additionally, the second research question revealed a consensus among Head Start center directors regarding the necessity of additional funding to raise teacher salaries and provide the additional resources needed by the program, such as professional development.

Attrition and Retention

The significance of paying Head Start teachers a living wage was the first theme that both new and seasoned Head Start center administrators stressed. During the focus group interviews, each Head Start center director agreed that inadequate pay is a major factor in staff shortages in the profession. ED1 noted that his teachers frequently cite salary as their reason for leaving. ND1 mentioned that low salary is a primary reason for teachers leaving, while ND2 mentioned that teachers have left to pursue higher-paying opportunities at other organizations. ED3 stated, “The first reason would definitely be pay”. ED4 also stated the following:

Why are McDonald's and Chick-Fil-A paying their staff members \$17.00 an hour and I have a teacher who is making \$9.00 an hour? Teachers with multiple kids making \$9.00 an hour... I don't know how they are doing it. They can't afford an apartment. They can't afford groceries. But they don't qualify for assistance.

Leadership Recommendations

The issue of funding greatly affects teacher attrition and retention, as recognized by both new and experienced Head Start center directors. An overwhelming consensus among these directors is that additional funding is necessary to increase teacher salaries. These directors understand that they have limited control over the amount of funding their programs receive. However, when asked about potential solutions to prevent teacher attrition, the directors consistently mentioned the need for increased funding by both federal and state leadership. ND1 and ND4 mentioned the lack of presence and advocacy for Head Start from state leaders. ND1 mentioned that the state leadership needs to push for increased funding. ED4 stated, “Even though we're a childcare facility under licensing, we don't get any state funding.” ED4 also stated, “I think that the state needs to reevaluate who they are giving those funds to and make it more accessible to those agencies and programs that really need them.”

Theme #2: Support

Support emerged as a prominent secondary topic from the data analysis. The lack of support is found to be correlated with teacher attrition and retention of Head Start teachers, as they feel unsupported in terms of class planning time, dealing with challenging student behaviors, lack of leadership support, and inadequate training. Additionally, the second research question revealed both new and experienced directors discussed the need for support from The Office of Head Start, such as leadership programs, coaching, mentoring, and required training.

Attrition and Retention

Support is the second issue that both novice and experienced Head Start center directors emphasized as to why Head Start teachers are quitting their jobs. The directors

consistently indicated that teachers feel under-supported in terms of class planning time, dealing with students' challenging behaviors, lack of leadership support from center directors and upper management, and training. Concurrently, the directors indicated that they have a lack of support as well. For example, ED4 mentioned that she could not provide her teachers with adequate lesson planning time due to a shortage of staff. ED4 further explained how a shortage of staffing was affecting the ability to follow directives from upper management and provided the following example:

Our nap time is two hours, and in a two-hour time, I'm supposed to give four teachers an hour each planning. I can't make two hours equal four. And so that was each day. I would need another person physically there, but we didn't have the staff to do that.

ND3 also mentioned that teachers provided her with feedback such as upper management requiring too many “demands on their time... a lack of respect... and not enough support.” ED4 also agreed with the lack of support from upper management stating, “the reasons they have been given me most have been a lack of support from upper management.”

ED1 indicated that he has observed in his years of leadership that inexperienced Head Start center directors lack the skills necessary for effective leadership and staff become discouraged. ED1 further explained why teachers are leaving by stating the following:

There are different things that motivate them. And we started doing onboarding and ironically, yes, they mentioned pay as part of the issue. But more times than not, they mentioned it because of the supervisor. They don't have the experience.

They don't know how to support us in the classroom. They have different challenges that are not being addressed. And we feel alone. When it comes to really addressing real transparent issues happening in the classroom, where their children are, they feel the children are not getting the support they need. They get frustrated, overwhelmed, and you start seeing the discouragement. Pretty soon after that, they tell us that when they see no avenue of change that they will eventually leave and go somewhere else.

ED1 continued by stating the following:

Let me give you an example. I have a director that has 40 years of experience.

And then I have one that been there two and a half. In that center where you have this very experienced director, we hardly have any turnover. And then on the flip side, you have my director who has been there two and a half years and turnovers almost like every year. We're losing staff.

According to each of the Head Start center directors, they strongly emphasized that there was a clear need for more training for both them and their teachers. ED2 stated that teachers are being placed in classrooms without receiving the appropriate training. ED2 and ND4 explained that it is difficult when they need to place a teacher in a classroom with challenging behaviors without the proper training to support the students. ED3 stated, "Another reason I will say why people leave the agency is not enough training. Just not enough training overall." ND3 provided feedback from her teachers stating, "A lot of them felt that they were having to have more and more put onto them with less training or training that was maybe not specific enough for them."

In contrast, ED3 mentioned that she entered the profession almost 20 years ago and had to search for trainings herself. ED1 stated the following illustration of the undertraining of center directors, “From my perspective... I've never really felt that from the Office of Head Start and even in programs, that they emphasize the need for developing center directors to the degree that they put on the upper management staff.”

ED 1 also stated the following:

The OHS is focused on the upper management team all the time. I understand why. They manage our service areas, but they forget... that our center directors are at the forefront. Where the rubber meets the road. Where the children are being served. Where staff need to be able to have great environment to work.

ND2 stated, “It is a lot. It does get overwhelming for everyone at the center. And the center managers I feel are overlooked because we are the ones that have to manage all that and keep the staff happy, that they won't leave.”

Leadership Recommendations

The directors of the Head Start centers listed a number of reasons as to why they and the Head Start teachers feel under-supported. The directors provided advice and potential solutions when asked about the need for support systems to be put in place to support them. One example mentioned was additional staffing. However, they reemphasized the issue of funding. If there is inadequate funding, additional staffing cannot be added.

Another recommendation provided for staffing retention by a few of the experienced directors was implementing onboarding procedures. Programs need to improve their new teachers' training, according to ED1. He went on to say that directors

want to put new teachers in the classroom immediately due to staff shortage; however, expecting teachers to perform at a high level in the classroom after receiving only the barest of training is a "formula for disaster." A measure to address the lack of training for teachers, ED1 implemented a 14-day onboarding process that focused on classroom procedures, responsibilities, children routines, transitioning, and awareness. He noticed an immediate difference. In addition to specific onboarding training, ED1 talked about investing in the professional development of Head Start center directors. ED1 provided the following example:

I took four of them, directors, to the National Head Start Association, back in May. I invested in the center so that's where the rubber meets the road for the children. They were like children in a candy store. I mean, they went to all the sessions, and they somewhat focused on leadership and management supervision and whatnot, but they also went to other areas where children with behavioral issues. They wanted to know more about what teachers are being affected with.

In addition, both new and seasoned Head Start directors discussed the need for support from the Office of Head Start. ED4 mentioned that Head Start should not expect new center directors to be placed immediately into the position without training. Even if they have been a center director in a licensed childcare facility because the Head Start Standards and student outcomes are different from state licensing. She further explained her reasoning from her own experience stating that, "It would have benefited me more to understand more about what was going on before I became a supervisor." ED4 pointed out that the Head Start Standards place more of a focus on parental involvement than on

staff and leadership support. ED4 stated, “If we were as important as our families then that would improve a lot of things.”

ED1 described the difference of requirements between Head Start teachers and Head Start center directors. One example ED1 provided was that Head Start teachers in both federal and state standards have minimum requirements for annual training. However, for Head Start center directors, there is a bare minimum of hours needed in Texas Minimum Standards to keep their credential, while there are no federal requirements in the Head Start standards. He alluded to the fact that because of this low standard, Head Start programs will be less likely to spend program funds on building leadership capacity. So, ED1 recommended the following:

The standards have to force Head Start programs to train their center directors better. They got to set the Standards... higher than what they set for teachers.

They gotta be in a multi area of leadership, supervision, and all the areas that they cover, because they become jack of all trades.

ED4 mentioned that Head Start center directors need more time to learn the Head Start Standards. ED3 concurred with needing more time for training and mentioned that the center directors need to participate in trainings with the upper management for collaboration and build teamwork. ED3 mentioned that the Head Start Standards should require Head Start center directors to have qualifications such as a degree. ND4 suggested that there should be a yearly conference or leadership retreat just for the Head Start center directors so that they can learn from others.

Another suggestion made by the directors was for The Office of Head Start to establish programs such as leadership, coaching, or mentoring to support the Head Start

center directors. The necessity of implementing such programs is explained in the following passages. ED3 mentioned that the Standards should specify a leadership support program that Head Start center directors should be required to take. ND1 mentioned that Head Start center directors do not receive direct support from The Office of Head Start and that anything she needs help with, she must search the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECKLC) website. All novice center directors agreed, pointing out that there is no assistance from The Office of Head Start. ND1 mentioned that specific training or a mentorship program for center directors is needed, and she felt that center directors get overlooked. ND2 further revealed that there are no resources, such as webinars focusing on the roles and responsibilities of Head Start center directors. ND2 stated, “We need knowledgeable, experienced leaders that we can turn to that know from experience.” ND2 also specified, “I had to find other center director... and we help each other out...or go to somebody else who's already been doing it.” ND4 mentioned that when she first started her role as a Head Start director in a school district, she felt “alone” and further explained that the Training and Technical assistant assigned to her did not provide her any direction and only directed her to the ECKLC website with no references. ND4 provided an example and stated:

If you have a brand-new director who has no clue, it would really help to send someone to come over and show you where everything is, how things should go. The Performance Standards... because every Head Start is different in terms of expectations.

ND4 also stated that she “was stressed out that first year. I almost quit because it was a lot... it was very stressful. I had no one to help.” ED2 mentioned that continuous training

is needed by the Head Start center directors. ED1 stated, “I think there's a lot that could be done in mirroring a lot of things that have been successful in the development of teachers. Translate and transfer them over to the leadership of those centers.”

Theme #3: Workload

The third common theme found in the analyzed collected data was workload. The data revealed that teachers' heavy workload, characterized by stress, excessive documentation, and responsibilities comparable to public-school teachers, is closely connected to teacher attrition and retention. Additionally, the analyzed data revealed both new and experienced directors recognize the necessity of additional funding and staff to alleviate teacher workloads.

Attrition and Retention

The following factors and effects of the severe workload on the early childhood teachers were discussed by both novice and experienced Head Start center directors. ND5 mentioned heavy workloads for both her Head Start teachers and teacher assistants. ED3 mentioned that there is always a lot of paperwork when you work with a federal program; however, the workload is extreme. The overabundance of documentation, according to ED2, is a daily occurrence for the Head Start teachers. ED4 also mentioned the workload and the massive daily paperwork for her teachers. ED4 stated that her teachers provided her with feedback stating that “we're doing the same workload and responsibilities as a public-school teacher. And some of us have to have the same education requirements, but we're not being compensated for the same work.”

Each of the directors mentioned that the workload adds stress to both teachers and the directors. ND5 stated, “It starts with a workload and then it puts stress on the center

managers and teachers.” ND2 mentioned the difficulties of returning to the centers after the COVID pandemic. An example given was due to the shortage of staff; everyone is burned out because no matter how many staff they have, the work has to be done. ND2 stated, “Somebody had to pick up... more of a workload. That is a lot of what's going into people deciding to go work somewhere else.” ND2 mentioned the workload on center directors. ND2 also stated,

We are also helping with procurements, doing bids, dealing with all the contractors, dealing with the vendors, payroll, supervising the staff, CLASS observations, purchasing, and meeting all the requirements for state licensing. I mean, just everything. On top of attending endless meetings.

ND2 continued to state, “There seems to be no limit as to what is going to be assigned to a center manager. It's just It's endless”.

Leadership Recommendations

Both novice and experienced Head Start center directors explained that the workload issue cannot be resolved without adding more funding and staff to lessen the workload. However, ND1 mentioned that it is important to meet the needs of the staff. She mentioned the value of having a mental health consultant at one of the organizations she worked for. She said that the mental health service was valued by her team.

Additionally, ND4 emphasized the value of maintaining a balance between one's personal and professional lives because many teachers take medications for stress and anxiety.

ND4 continued to explain the importance of ensuring that the teachers' needs are met in the classroom so that they “can be in a space to now teach this class.” ND4 also specified, “It's just trying to maintain a level of calm and peace and regulation by letting the

teachers know that they do not need to stress.” Whatever problem they are facing in the classroom, they will tackle it together. ND4 further explained what she does with her teachers for the first six weeks of school by stating,

Our first 6 weeks, we're just teaching the teacher how to get some sort of work life balance; how to organize their day schedule things and regulate themselves.

Then, teach the kids how to breathe, calm down and get through their day.

On the other hand, ED4 expressed her concern when center directors are forced to spend half their day as a teacher and the other half as a center director.

Theme #4: Communication

The fourth common theme found in the collected data analysis was communication. The first question revealed teachers' frustration with a lack of communication, feeling isolated from their directors, and being “left out” of crucial channels. Additionally, the second question emphasized how both new and experienced directors recognized the importance of transparency and effective communication with both The Office of Head Start and their staff.

Attrition and Retention

The lack of general communication was the fourth theme that both new and experienced Head Start center directors mentioned regarding the reasons why Head Start teachers are leaving the profession. ND5 shared that teachers leave due to the lack of communication. ED1 mentioned that teachers leave because they do not feel a connection or relationship with their directors. ED4 revealed that it is difficult to communicate with staff and answer their questions when they as directors are left out of the communication channels. ED4 also revealed that Head Start center directors do not receive pertinent information, such as who represents their location from The Office of Head Start. In one

instance, ED4 explained that there was a lack of communication with their training and technical person and stated the following:

We don't get that point of contact. If we had that point of contact, a couple times, a year or some kind of feedback directly from someone at The Office of Head Start, we would feel more in the loop and more supported because we're not getting that direct communication. And given that direct information, we don't feel like they're involved with us.

Leadership Recommendations

The Head Start center directors offered recommendations to assist with the issue of communication. ND1 mentioned how crucial it is for center directors to be transparent and communicate their accessibility to their team. ND5 proposed that center directors pay attention to the needs and wants of their teachers. ED3 clarified that she is able to establish relationships with her teachers because she has prior teaching experience, which allows her to easily communicate, relate to their needs, and provide support for them in her capacity as a director. ED1 mentioned the importance of communicating with staff. ED2 confirmed ED1's statement and added the importance of communication between the directors and executive directors by stating the following:

Continue to provide the information that's needed to the leadership team. So that they can overall ensure that we are equipped with everything that we need to be able to provide for our staff. Because if we don't have the tools that we need, then it trickles down to our staff.

ED1 stated, "We took the opportunity during this preservice to really address the communication." ED1 explained how he utilizes anonymous surveys to retrieve teacher

feedback and how he introduced teacher learning pods. This would be an opportunity for teachers to be on a Zoom call with their peers during work hours. ED1 stated, “They can network. They can share ideas, war stories, and can share solutions.” ED1 further explained that this was not created for teachers to have a gripe session, but to create a safe environment where his new and seasoned teachers could communicate and relieve stress. And in return, he will be able to provide support where needed.

Population Differences

During the interviews, most participants consistently provided a response. However, there were occasional instances of notable similarities and differences. For instance, ND4, who was part of the school-based program, emphasized the need for mental health resources for her teachers, networking opportunities, and additional resources to comprehend her responsibilities as a director. It is important to note that ND4, having previous experience as a principal and having completed a principal certification program, was not concerned about enhancing leadership capacity. Due to the school districts' multiple financing sources, the school-based director also did not bring up financial difficulties as frequently.

Moreover, all directors recognized the importance of a leadership framework and expressed the need for further support in skill development. It is worth mentioning that experienced directors highlighted their individual efforts in acquiring resources and also shared strategies to address the issue of attrition such as implementing onboarding procedures.

Discussion Summary

The high attrition rates in the Head Start programs raise severe concerns about teacher retention and leadership preparation and support within the profession. The study found that transformational leadership qualities play a crucial role in developing effective Head Start center directors. Furthermore, the factors driving Head Start teacher attrition align with the human motivation theory (Maslow, 1943). It is worth noting that while there have been policy changes aimed at teachers, leaders have often been overlooked (Lieberman, 2017, p. 5).

This qualitative case study was conducted through the lens of Head Start center directors in an effort to shed light on the issue of early childhood teachers leaving at an alarming rate. The research involved in-depth discussions with both novice and experienced directors. Insights were gathered with two focus groups, one with four novice directors and one with two experienced directors, as well as three individual interviews (one novice and two experienced). The participants provided explanations that exposed the causes of why Head Start teachers are leaving the profession and emphasized their vital role as center directors and the support they require in order to retain these essential educators on staff. The high turnover rates impact both teachers and center directors. Two theories were employed to provide the theoretical framework for this study: the theory of motivation and transformational leadership. Maslow's (1943) human motivation theory was used to correlate the motivational requirements of teachers, and transformational leadership theory was used to correlate the leadership capacity.

Discussion

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate the multiple factors leading to the high attrition rates in the early childhood education teaching field in Head Start programs and the relationship this attrition has on the leadership capacity of the program. The findings revealed four significant themes and reasons for teachers leaving their positions amongst the participants: pay, support (training, resources, staffing, leadership coaching/mentoring), workload, and communication. Addressing these themes provides valuable insights into the following research questions.

Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of novice and experienced Head Start directors on their encounters and experiences that contribute to overall teacher attrition and retention rates in the Head Start program?

The Head Start center directors generally agreed that the teachers require more assistance across the board to carry out the program's needs effectively. Primarily, the importance of fair pay cannot be underestimated. In the interviews, the participants explained how they had little control over the low pay due to the predefined federal funds provided by The Office of Head Start. However, the participants unanimously highlighted how most of the attrition problems were caused by a lack of funding.

In order to retain early childhood educators in the profession, it is imperative that the basic needs in the workplace are met, as seen in Figure 3. According to the theory of human motivation (Maslow, 1943), the first basic physiological need is to be equitably compensated for one's work and provided with basic medical coverage. Without this, people cannot provide food and shelter on their behalf and offer financial or medical support. Bell (2021) summarized the critical issue of early childhood teacher turnover

and the inability to pay teachers a livable wage. Cassidy et al. (2011) revealed that teachers would stay in their present jobs if salaries were increased and benefits provided. Researchers Bullough et al. (2012) also found that most Head Start teachers enjoyed their jobs; however, they commonly shared that they were unhappy with the pay level.

The second theme faced by Head Start teachers is the lack of support. According to the participants' discussions, the lack of support stems from factors such as insufficient planning time, dealing with students' challenging behaviors, lack of leadership support from center directors and upper management, and training. In addition, the directors stressed the significance of creating professional development and onboarding programs for ECE teachers in order to promote an environment of continual support. The experienced directors explained the change in the organization when onboarding procedures are implemented and carried out; it increases the teacher's efficacy and reduces the rate of teachers leaving the profession.

Three levels of the human motivation theory (Maslow, 1943), safety needs, social support, and self-actualization, correlate with the teacher's need for support. According to Maslow (1943), safety needs are the second level. The ability for people to feel safe in their work environment is vital. A poor work environment and lack of support for challenging behaviors are factors contributing to the sense of job dissatisfaction. Jacoby and Lesaux (2017) found that Head Start teachers had difficulty implementing the mandated curriculum with fidelity due to daily interruptions such as the social-emotional and immediate needs of the children. Cassidy et al. (2011) revealed that a negative work environment and lack of support were factors in turnover.

Social support is the third level. Social support and a positive relationship with the leader are essential in determining why some teachers leave their jobs. The lack of administrative assistance or acknowledgment is one primary reason that leads teachers towards quitting school or changing careers, which often results in no resolution and contributes to more stress. Pomaki et al. (2010) discovered that teachers who received social support from mentor teachers, center directors, or other seasoned educators were less likely to quit their employment. Delali et al. (2020) found that solid team support leads to teachers being able to cope with work stressors and the depletion of resources. Edinger and Edinger (2018) also found that teacher effectiveness and job satisfaction are strongly related to greater perceived organizational support.

Teachers' capacity for growth is constrained when they are not exposed to training for professional growth. This lack of knowledge affects their self-esteem and self-actualization. *Self-actualization* is the highest level in the hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943). Maslow (1943) defined self-actualization as the ideal state in which one uses one's gifts best. The lack of professional development is a significant source of frustration for teachers. Haslip and Gullo (2017) revealed that financial support is lacking in the early childhood sector to sustain the rapidly changing early childhood landscape in areas such as in-service and pre-service teacher preparation and professional development.

Workload and communication were the final two themes that the participants emphasized. The participants discussed how heavy workloads are put on Head Start teachers and how this contributes significantly to teachers quitting their jobs. Participants shared personal accounts of how the demanding workload causes stress and drives teachers to pursue other careers. Furthermore, the participants provided examples of

overwhelming tasks like endless paperwork and responsibilities akin to public school teachers with unequal pay. The participants also shared how inadequate communication between leadership and staff contributes to teachers leaving the profession. Additionally, the participants provided examples of how the teachers do not feel a connection or relationship with their directors.

According to the theory of motivation (Maslow, 1943), the fourth basic need is self-esteem. Teachers want to feel heard and respected. They need a voice in and out of the classroom that they can rely on, so it is essential for them to not only be knowledgeable but also express their feelings, when necessary, about challenging topics that impact student outcomes. Teachers not being heard leads to an internal shutdown and an intention to quit. Teachers also want to feel valued and respected. Jacoby and Lesaux (2017) found that workloads and tasks not associated with the job description could lead to negative job satisfaction. These tasks include duties such as, but not limited to, sweeping, mopping, cleaning toilets, cooking, and cleaning trash cans. Similarly, in a research conducted by Apostel et al. (2018) examining illegitimate tasks, they found that continuously assigning illegitimate tasks directly correlated with turnover intention.

Research Question 2: What do novice and experienced Head Start directors recommend about leadership support and preparation that will help alleviate the teacher attrition rates in Head Start programs?

Addressing the issues at hand requires several solutions. Novice and experienced center directors agree that increased federal funding is crucial for adequately compensating teachers. The directors recognize the impact of teacher pay on attrition rates and retention and emphasize the need for more funding. While they acknowledge

their limited influence, they stress the importance of strong leadership at the federal and state levels in finding a solution. The groups also urge state leadership to review funding for childcare services and improve accessibility for programs in need.

In addition to funding, the directors identify other areas that require attention. They propose onboarding programs and professional development opportunities for both teachers and Head Start center directors. Training, mentorship programs, and webinars focusing on the roles and responsibilities of center directors are recommended. While some participants focused on the benefits of having access to mental health resources, others underlined the necessity of such resources for all programs. The directors also suggest adding higher standards for center directors in the Head Start Performance Standards, emphasizing the need for qualifications, multi-skilled individuals with strong supervision and leadership abilities. The directors also suggested that The Office of Head Start implement a leadership support program for all center directors and provide them with specific training, resources, and support. Furthermore, the directors call for center director-specific yearly conferences and continuous training opportunities to enhance their skills and knowledge.

Quality leadership is vital and critical in any school setting, but it is perhaps most critical at the start of a child's educational journey (Gonzalez, 2015). Kouzes and Posner's (2003, 2007) transformational leadership model is a strong framework for Head Start leaders because it emphasizes the leader's ability to establish a relationship with staff through communication, providing feedback, listening, and sharing information. Research indicates numerous factors lead to a lack of early childhood leadership training, support, and pedagogical knowledge (Abel, 2016; Douglass, 2019; Modise, 2019). It is

essential that Head Start center directors receive leadership training and ongoing coaching in order to give their teachers the support they require.

Modise (2019) stated that pedagogical leadership necessitates a change in emphasis from administrative and management duties toward teaching and learning. Giving the required support and direction requires subject-matter expertise and a working knowledge of the subject. Modise also emphasized the early childhood leadership's role in leading, supporting teachers and positive student outcomes, and ensuring continuous progress and quality improvement by collecting data, analyzing, and updating program goals. In a study conducted by Douglass (2019), one graduate stated, "Many people who are making the decisions for the field are not experienced in the field...we need to get leadership from those of us who have had the experience" (p. 391). Lieberman (2019) stated that "being a strong early childhood education leader does not necessarily come naturally; it takes specialized knowledge and skills that must be developed over time" (p. 9).

Research indicates a leadership development shortage (Douglass, 2019; Klevering & McNae, 2018; Talan et al., 2014). Additionally, research indicates numerous factors lead to a lack of leadership training, support, and pedagogical knowledge of early childhood (Abel, 2016; Douglass, 2019; Modise, 2019). Alamillo et al. (2018) found that data-driven decision-making was cited by 76% of program directors and 46% of center directors as one of the top three areas where they needed more significant assistance to lead successfully. Additionally, at least 25% of program administrators acknowledged the need for assistance with staffing, budgeting, and collaborating with local parents.

Implications

This qualitative case study unveils two crucial implications that call for attention. Policymakers are encouraged to mobilize increased funding to support the Head Start programs. By mobilizing increased funding for the Head Start programs, policymakers can promote equity in education by empowering Head Start educators through higher salaries, increased staffing, providing staff development initiatives, and generating long-term economic benefits. Researchers (Bullough et al., 2012; Cassidy et al., 2011; Hart & Schumacher, 2005; Wells, 2015) have found that poor pay, a lack of training, a poor workplace environment, and high-level responsibilities all contribute to the high turnover rates of teachers.

The second implication is establishing a national framework of leadership standards and competencies for Head Start center directors within the Head Start Performance Standards. Creating a leadership framework and a set of standard competencies would provide center directors with a strong foundation, useful tools, and resources to support the program effectively. These resources could provide center directors with clear expectations, professional development opportunities, and guidance, ultimately enhancing program quality and outcomes for children and families in Head Start centers. Douglass (2019) determined that to have effective ECE leadership; there must be "supports for effective leadership... professional preparation and credentials... professional development... and contextual supports" (p. 25).

This study has practical budgeting, professional development, and support implications. Head Start organizations should examine the local budgets to allocate additional money for teacher salaries. By increasing teacher salaries, Head Start programs

can attract and retain highly qualified educators. Well-compensated teachers are more motivated, committed, and likely to excel in their roles, positively impacting students' learning outcomes. Additionally, adequate funding for teacher salaries may promote program stability. Provide ongoing training to target the fundamentals of being an effective Head Start center director. By providing ongoing training that focuses on the fundamentals of being an effective Head Start center director, programs can ensure continuous professional growth, improve program quality, and ultimately enhance outcomes for children and families served by Head Start. Provide support for Head Start teachers that will adequately prepare them for the daily operations and pedagogy of early childhood education. By center directors providing the necessary support for Head Start teachers, programs can ensure that they are well-prepared, equipped, and supported to deliver quality early childhood education, benefiting both the teachers and the children in their care.

The framework used for Head Start center directors is transformative leadership. This approach emphasizes developing leaders to solve complex problems through innovative solutions, collaboration, and teamwork, ultimately leading to lasting organizational change (Cox et al., 2018). In the school setting, transformational leadership plays a crucial role by consistently seeking ways to create a positive organizational culture. These leaders build trust, foster collaboration, and are at the forefront of advocating for change (Northouse, 2019, pp. 178-179).

The second framework used for the Head Start teachers is the human motivation theory. According to Maslow's theory (1943), human behavior can be categorized into five levels: physiological needs, safety concerns, social factors (such as having friends

while carrying out daily activities), self-esteem (related to self-respect and self-worth), and self-actualization (the desire for personal growth and improvement).

Future researchers should conduct a two-phase study to explore the leadership styles of Head Start directors and their impact on teacher attrition rate. The first phase should be a quantitative study that identifies the Head Start center director's leadership styles and their correlation with attrition. The second phase should be a follow-up qualitative study, investigating the perceptions of Head Start directors on a potential national framework for Head Start Performance Standards, specifically regarding the qualifications of Head Start center directors. Moreover, expanding this study to a national-level approach could involve interviewing a larger sample of Head Start directors.

I further recommend conducting a qualitative study exclusively with Head Start directors in school-based exempt programs in order to determine the similarities and differences in early childhood teacher attrition rates and leadership preparation, given that the Head Start program consists of both non-exempt and exempt programs.

Strengths and Limitations

The case study had several key strengths. By employing a qualitative approach, I was able to interview both novice and experienced Head Start center directors, gathering their insights and adding depth to the research. This qualitative approach allowed for a deeper exploration, which would have been limited in a quantitative study. In addition, the use of focus groups created a more relaxed atmosphere for the directors, as they were with their peers and secure to be open and honest in their experiences. Notably, this study gave a "voice" to a seemingly overlooked population.

This case study had a few limitations. First, I was unable to interview center directors from every region in Texas, which could have added more variety and depth to the responses. Additionally, the participants of the study were primarily from center-based Head Start programs, with only one participant representing a licensed exempt program from an independent school district. Including more licensed exempt programs could have offered different perspectives.

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